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Value Co-Creation Paradigm Framework for Integrating Evidence-Based Practices in Child Welfare

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Georgina Horton

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
2022

Abstract

Value Co-Creation Paradigm Framework for Integrating Evidence-Based Practices in
Child Welfare

by

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MSW, Loyola University, 1996

BS, Goshen College, 1986

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Social Work

Walden University

August 2022

Abstract

Although there has been increased utilization of evidence-based practice (EBP) in child welfare services, it has not been comprehensively incorporated or fully embraced by key decision makers. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore a value co-creation (VCC) paradigm as a viable framework for collaboration between stakeholders in child welfare, and to explore what attitudes are necessary to enable child welfare stakeholders. The VCC paradigm framework comprising three elements (engagement platforms, experience domains, and capability ecosystems) was used to guide the study. Data were collected from semi structured, in-depth interviews with four key decision makers in the child welfare system. Findings from coding and thematic analysis indicated there was a space for the integration of EBPs through a VCC framework to increase engagement of stakeholders through dialogue, collaborative efforts, and a supportive ecosystem, leading to co-creation of substantial programs and practices that deliver positive outcomes. Findings could be used for positive social change by increasing utilization of EBPs in child welfare settings and improve targeted contextual programs, leading to sustainable outcomes of value and improving the service provision to children and families in the child welfare system.

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Dedication

This is in memory of my mother, Abibatu Adunni Okponobi (1937–2018). She was my biggest champion and always believed I would achieve this dream. Mumsy this is for you! I also dedicate this work to my family, my sisters, Queen, Aisha, and Mariam; my brother, Ibrahim, my Uncle Tony, and my Aunty Mosun who stood by me and supported me throughout this process with patience and understanding. You have been my best cheerleaders! Thank you.

I dedicate this work to and give special thanks to my friend, Ian Murphy, for showing up, being there, and standing by me during the difficult times. You are very much appreciated.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study and Literature Review

In recent decades, there has been a substantial amount of evidence-based research informing best practices in child welfare (DuMont & James-Brown, 2015; Horwitz et al., 2014; Killos et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2015). Despite the inordinate amount of rigorous research that demonstrates and supports the viability of evidence-based practices (EBPs) in child welfare in comparison to traditional approaches, EBP methods are often overlooked by key decision makers in agencies and organizations (Bacaglioni & Rowlands, 2018; Garcia et al., 2019; Palinkas et al., 2017). The result of the limited identification and implementation of successful EBPs is seen in the number of children and families who continue to require child welfare services.

Rushovich and Malm (2019) reported that in fiscal year 2017, over 3.7 million child abuse and neglect referrals were made in the United States, of which 62% met the criteria for investigation. The number of children found to be victims of child maltreatment was 673,830, and the number of child fatalities attributed to maltreatment was 1,688. These staggering numbers indicated that more needs to be done to deliver effective and sustainable support to children and families who require intervention.

A review of the literature suggested that EBPs may improve child welfare services in areas such as prevention, protection, mental health, foster care, kinship care, youth development, and adoption, thereby improving outcomes for individuals, children, and families when effectively implemented (Clara, et al., 2017; Lederman et al., 2009). Nonetheless, across the United States, there remains a gap in translating EBPs to agencies and organizations in real-world practices (Killos et al., 2015), implying a need for further

research on how to best employ EBPs in child welfare settings. The literature also indicated that despite the work of researchers, program developers, and other stakeholders within the child welfare system, the challenges faced by the child welfare system in relation to EBPs have not been mitigated in over 3 decades (Aarons & Palinkas, 2007; Lederman et al., 2009; Milner & Kelly, 2019; Rosen, 2003; Testa et al., 2014; Willging et al., 2018). The child welfare system continues to struggle with the issues in EBP identification and implementation identified by Rosen (2003). These challenges are current and familiar across EBPs and EBP implementation literature.

There is a critical need to identify a framework that allows researchers and practitioners to collaborate in the creation of valuable, evidence-based programs that positively impact interventions with children and families. With local, state, federal, and private funders demanding more accountability from child welfare agencies and organization and placing a strong emphasis on EBP (Rand, 2016), it has become important for child welfare stakeholders to implement EBPs that show positive outcomes for children and families. In the current study, I explored a value co-creation (VCC) paradigm framework as a viable process for collaboration between child welfare stakeholders, specifically researchers/developers and key decision makers, leading to creation of programs and interventions that are contextual, relevant, effective, and sustainable in real-world settings. In addition, I explored stakeholder attitudes toward a VCC paradigm framework in the child welfare system in relation to effective development, implementation, and integration of EBPs that are applicable and sustainable in real-world settings.

The research design for this study was a basic qualitative design using in-depth, semi structured, one-to-one narrative interviews. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants who had information and experiential knowledge that could contribute to the understanding of the topic being explored (see Patton, 2015). Key decision makers and researchers in the child welfare system presented the best participant pool for this study because they have the experience and knowledge regarding the subject matter. They have rich and in-depth information to illuminate the attitudes and conditions necessary for VCC between researchers and practitioners.

Potential Positive Social Change Implications

The results of this study could be used to improve service delivery to children and families involved with the child welfare system, and to enhance how key decision makers and direct service staff view the merits of EBP development and utilization in child welfare. Social change in this study was motivated by the need to co-create EBPs that are contextually valuable, implementable, and sustainable and lead to a change in child welfare stakeholders' individual and organizational culture regarding EBPs.

Section 1 presents the problem statement, scope of the study, and the impact and importance of EBPs in the child welfare system. A review of the current challenges faced by agencies and organizations in their efforts to implement EBPs and the gaps in the current knowledge base are provided, followed by the purpose statement, research questions, nature of the study, and significance of the study. This is followed by the theoretical framework that supported the study and the VCC as a model for a shift in the dynamics of creation and implementation of EBPs within the child welfare system.

Next, I discuss the current literature on EBP utilization and implementation in child welfare. The next section identifies the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2021) values and principles that related to this area of social work practice and how the purpose of this study supported those values and principles. Finally, a review of the current academic and professional literature is provided that supports the rationale for the study.

Problem Statement

Although there has been increased utilization of EBP in child welfare services, it has not been comprehensively incorporated or fully embraced by key decision-makers (Hanson et al., 2016; Horwits et al., 2014; Zayas et al., 2011). Programs are often chosen or implemented to meet funding or mandatory requirements without justified and purposeful alignment with the needs of the client populations served (Horwitz et al., 2014, Hurlburt et al., 2014; Martin et al., 2015). The social work practice problem addressed in this study was the challenge faced by child welfare stakeholders in the successful integration of EBPs to real-world settings, the minimal sustainable implementation frameworks, and the dearth of research involving the viability of a VCC framework for EBP implementation among child welfare stakeholders (i.e., researchers, clients, and practitioners) within the system of care in the creation and implementation of sustainable practices.

Although the literature and knowledge regarding selecting and implementing EBPs exist (California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse [CEBC], 2019; Walsh et al., 2015), there appears to be inadequate practical applications in which they are used

strategically in the best interests of children and families (Wulczyn et al., 2016). A difficulty lies in determining an implementation framework that articulates the strategies necessary between stakeholders to enhance the integration of EBP that are effective and sustainable in real-world settings in child welfare (Albers et al., 2017). To achieve this, researchers must communicate directly with key decision makers in public and private child welfare organizations to determine how to translate their findings into policies and programs that are actionable (Garcia et al., 2019; Metz & Bartley, 2015).

In addition, the collaboration of key stakeholders in the process of defining and framing the focus of research studies that are actionable, effective, and sustainable is essential for programs to succeed (DuMont & James-Brown, 2015; Galvagno & Dalli, 2014). There is also a need to ensure contextual fit when considering implementation of successful EBPs (Horner et al., 2014). Context matters in implementation because the complexity and diversity of child welfare populations necessitates the understanding of ecosystems in which interventions and programs are implemented. The implementation of EBPs requires investment and commitment of all stakeholders to the process of agreeing on the problem, identifying, or creating the relevant program/intervention that positively impact population in-situ, and choosing the appropriate framework for implementation and sustainability.

Scope of the Problem

In 1988 the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), a voluntary organization, was created to gather, analyze, and make available data on child abuse and neglect in the United States. NCANDS gathers data from all 50 states, the

Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). According to NCANDS, in 2016 there were over 2.3 million reports of child abuse and neglect investigated in the United States and almost 438,000 children were placed in foster care (NCANDS, 2016). Regionally, the Midwest states (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin) saw a significant increase in the number of children placed in foster care between 2008 and 2017 (See Table 1) from 85,992 in 2012 to 102,083 in 2017 despite increased trends toward in-home preservation services (Davis, 2019) and EBPs.

These statistics are concerning considering the number of EBPs currently available that address the positive impact of preventive services, in-home services, and other successful programs that could serve to decrease the number of children placed in foster care. The Midwest continues to experience a rising rate of child and neglect reports, an influx of children into the system, and limited positive outcome-driven resources, sustainable EBPs, and support to assist children and families (NCANDS, 2016).

Table 1*Children in Foster Care in the Midwestern United States*

State	2008	2012	2017
Illinois	17,843	16,772	15,930
Indiana	11,903	11,190	20,904
Iowa	6,743	6,262	5,952
Kansas	6,306	6,002	7,753
Michigan	20,171	14,522	11,918
Minnesota	6,028	5,330	9,651
Nebraska	5,591	5,116	4,195
North Dakota	1,223	1,109	1,495
Ohio	13,703	11,877	14,961
South Dakota	1,483	1,399	1,603
Wisconsin	7,403	6,384	7,721

Note. (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2018).

In February of 2018, the federal government enacted the Family First Prevention Services Act, prioritizing funding for the preservation of families and placing an emphasis on EBPs that prevent children from becoming caught in the quagmire of the child welfare system. With these changes, there will be challenges ahead for agencies and organizations as more and more funding is allocated for EBPs, while caps are instituted for other service areas (Davis, 2019). Several states in the Midwest have created legislation to comply with the Family First Prevention Services Act (Davis, 2019), while others require additional time for capacity building. Getting ahead of the accountability requirements of federal and private funders will require a change in the approaches employed by stakeholders in the creation and implementation of programs and interventions that produce value and evidence of positive outcomes for children and families. In other words, agencies and organizations need to become innovative in their approach to interventions, programs, and EBP implementation strategies.

Problem Framing

The child welfare system is complex (NASW, 2021) and faces considerable challenges in its mandate to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children and to protect and support children and families in need. Efforts to meet this mandate involve multiple actors within multiple systems (Annie Casey Foundation, 2014; Children's Bureau, n.d.; Wessells, 2015). A shift in the program development and implementation mindset and processes is critical to address and manage the challenges faced by stakeholders. EBP development and implementation requires a collective understanding of contextual, structural, organizational, and policy issues (Saldana, 2015) if EBPs are to be co-created and implemented to provide value to the target population. Without such understanding, EBPs, processes, and practices lack value within the settings they are being implemented, thereby failing to address important client issues.

A significant aspect of EBP and a guiding principle in social work practice as prescribed by the values and principles of the NASW (2021) is working from the person-in-environment perspective; if stakeholders are to employ EBP to effect positive outcomes for clients, their ecological environment (i.e., contextual fit) should be foremost in their development and implementation (DePanfills, 2018; Horner et al., 2014). At the time of the current study, there was a dearth of research regarding a contextual perspective in implementing EBP. For EBPs to be successful, they must be developed from and for specific settings that are client and family focused (Horner et al., 2014). This means that although it is relevant to view child welfare from a broad perspective, practitioners, researchers, and key decision makers must work together to co-create EBPs

that apply to their specific practice context. In as much as there are repositories and clearinghouses of successful EBPs, they are ineffective when implemented in contexts and settings that differ from those in which they were tested.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore a VCC paradigm as a viable framework for collaboration among stakeholders in child welfare, and to explore what attitudes are necessary to enable child welfare stakeholders (i.e., researchers, practitioners, and key decision makers) to effectively develop, implement, and integrate EBPs in real-world settings through a framework/process of VCC. This study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do stakeholders describe the viability of a VCC paradigm framework process to improve the use of EBPs in child welfare practice?
2. What specific attitudes do child welfare stakeholders describe as necessary to enable the effective integration of the use of EBPs in real-world settings through a VCC paradigm framework?

Definition of Terms, Concepts, and Constructs

Adaptation: “Making slight changes to a practice while maintaining fidelity to the core elements of the intervention to improve fit with clients, organization, and/or system characteristics. Conversely, it is often the case that service systems and organizations need to adapt to the delivery standards of an evidence-based practice to support implementation and sustainment with fidelity” (Walsh et al., 2015, p. 31).

Co-creation capability ecosystem: “A meshwork of social, business, civic, and natural communities, whose structuring (leveraging) of capabilities virtualizes jointly valuable states of co-creative capacities” (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014, p. 297).

Contextual fit: Horner et al. (2014) defined contextual fit as “the match between the strategies, procedures, or elements of an intervention and the values, needs, skills, and resources available in a setting” (p. 1).

Dissemination: “The targeted distribution of information and intervention materials to a specific public health or clinical practice audience. The intent is to spread knowledge and the associated evidence-based interventions” (Walsh et al., 2015, p. 31).

EBP characteristics: The content, training requirements, certification, philosophical and scientific approach, and other characteristics of a given evidence-based practice. All these factors can impact the fit of the practice with the system, organization, providers, and clients (CEBC, 2019).

EBP organization fit: The fit of the EBP with the mission and vision of a given organization and the structure and processes used to deliver services in that organization (CEBC, 2019).

EBP provider fit: The perceived and actual fit of a given EBP with the attitudes, beliefs, needs, values, skills, and abilities of direct service providers. It is important to note that when implementing a new practice there may be a perception of poor fit until providers become familiar and skilled in the use of the practice (CEBC, 2019).

End users: The (intended) target group the solution to be co-created (Jansen & Pieters, 2017). In the case of child welfare, end users include all stakeholders within the

system, and specifically, managers, supervisors, frontline staff, and the children and families that are served by/through the child welfare system.

Engagement platforms: An assemblage of persons, processes, interfaces, and artifacts that strengthen the network resources, support the delivery of services, harness stakeholder ideas and insights, facilitate training and knowledge, and involve all stakeholders that normally interact. The common thread that runs in all engagement platforms are the four conditions of stakeholder relations, decisions, ideations, and offerings (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014).

Experience domains: The process through which VCC occurs, including individual experiences of stakeholders and their interactions through the building blocks of interaction (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014).

Frameworks: Strategic or action-planning models that provide a systematic way to develop, manage, and evaluate interventions. In addition, frameworks improve dissemination and implementation research by increasing the probability of sharing EBPs (Tabak et al., 2012).

Implementation: The process of putting to use or integrating evidence-based interventions within a setting (Tabak et al., 2012).

Implementation framework: Implementation frameworks are designed to articulate the actions and behaviors considered necessary for successful implementation of interventions, programs, and services (Albers et al., 2017)

Intervention developers: Individuals or companies that develop new programs/interventions for the child welfare population. They generally give priority to developing the most efficacious interventions possible (CEBC, 2019).

Value co-creation: The joint creation and evolution of value with stakeholding individuals, intensified and enacted through platforms of engagements, virtualized and emergent from ecosystems of capabilities, and actualized and embodied in domains of experiences, expanding wealth welfare well-being (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014).

Value in child welfare services: The “guiding child welfare value is: All children have an absolute right to a safe, permanent, stable home which provides basic levels of nurturance and care and is free from abuse and exploitation” (Rycus & Hugh, 1998, p. 40).

Original Contribution and Necessity of This Doctoral Study

I explored a VCC paradigm framework for the translation of EBP in child welfare services. A VCC paradigm for EBP aligns research, development, and implementation in the child welfare system of care. The current research not only contributed to the body of knowledge regarding EBP development, implementation, and sustainment, it also presented an innovative model for development and implementation. Additionally, this study provided insight into the perceptions and attitudes of stakeholders regarding the use of a VCC paradigm framework for the creation and implementation of EBPs.

Although the literature was inundated with multiple frameworks and models for EBP implementation, there was limited exploration of VCC as a viable option for creation, implementation, and sustainment of EBPs in previous and current literature on

in child welfare practices. Many of the frameworks that had been utilized to employ EBPs in child welfare tended to lack a holistic perspective that took into consideration the complexity of the child welfare system. A VCC paradigm framework takes into consideration the multiplicity of engagement platforms, domains of experience, and capability ecosystems that impact the provision of child welfare services (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014).

Nature of the Doctoral Project

The research design for this study was a basic qualitative design. In basic qualitative research, researchers are interested in (a) how people interpret their experiences, (b) how they construct their worlds, and (c) what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The basic qualitative researcher collects data through “interviews, observation, or document analysis[and] the analysis of data involves identifying recurring patterns or themes supported by the data from which they are derived” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 25). The characteristics of a basic qualitative research design aligned with the purpose and research questions in the current study. The study was conducted using in-depth, semi structured, one-to-one narrative interviews. Although the semi structured interviews included preset interview questions, they also allowed for open dialogue between me and the participants.

In qualitative research, the narrative interview is considered the most used form of data collection (Jamshed, 2014). Interviewing as a data collection tool provides a means for researchers to obtain direct, firsthand data from participants through comprehensive dialogue that covers the topic of interest and allows participants to speak freely

(Alshenqeti, 2014). The information gathered is rich and detail oriented and provides the researcher with vast amounts of data to analyze (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Current interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and analyzed for thematic content using standardized content analysis and a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software.

Sources of Data

The objectives of this study and the participant pool were defined in the purpose statement, leading to the selection of purposeful sampling as the methodology. Purposeful sampling refers to the selection of participants who have information and experiential knowledge that can contribute to the understanding of the topic being explored (Patton, 2015). Key decision makers and researchers in the child welfare system presented the best participant pool for the current study because they had the experience and knowledge regarding the subject matter (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). They had rich and in-depth information to illuminate the attitudes and conditions necessary for VCC between researchers and practitioners.

Participants were selected from a population of key decision makers in public and private child welfare agencies and organizations in the Midwest and leading researchers with a focus on EBP in child welfare. Key decision makers were defined as private sector executive directors, program coordinators, program administrators with state child welfare agencies, and prominent researcher on EBPs in child welfare. Recruitment was conducted by emailing the targeted agency's decision makers and researchers. Interviews were conducted over the phone. With a qualitative study that involves exploration of

attitudes and perspectives, anywhere from five to 25 participants is recommended, and that number should depend on the saturation point (Creswell, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Significance of the Study

The concept of creating and implementing innovative EBPs through a VCC paradigm framework could revolutionize how programs are developed and implemented within the child welfare system. Results could lead to an increase in the utilization of EBPs in child welfare settings, thereby improving service provision to children and families. To accomplish the goal of utilizing a VCC paradigm framework in developing EBPs, the first step was to understand how stakeholders perceive the viability of a VCC paradigm framework and their attitudes towards the utilization of VCC in systems of care. This study could contribute to a transformational change in how EBPs are developed and implemented in child welfare practice by providing a new approach to understanding how holistic collaborative efforts can change the way EBPs impact children and families in-situ.

Although there was significant knowledge and literature regarding the benefits of research-evidence utilization in social work practice, the implementation and application of research to real-world settings has proved challenging to program decision makers and practitioners (see Bacaglioni & Rowlands, 2018; Palinkas et al., 2017). Moreover, there was limited research involving the benefits of VCC between researchers and practitioners in the field of social work. In addition, there was significant limitations in the development of programs that lead to sustainable outcomes for children and families in

the child welfare system (see Ghate, 2016). The value of this study also lay in the exploration and identification of the attitudes necessary to create valuable EBPs in child welfare services that are applicable in real-world settings through collaboration and co-creation among key stakeholders.

Identifying program/agency-relevant EBP and accessing resources to implementation present systemic obstacles for stakeholders (Barkham & Mellor-Clark, 2003; Martin et al., 2015). I explored the VCC paradigm as a viable framework for collaboration among stakeholders in child welfare by understanding the attitudes necessary for stakeholders to integrate valuable EBPs in child welfare services that are applicable in real-world settings through a VCC framework. In addition, the study filled a gap in the knowledge base of how child welfare services systems can benefit from working through a framework of VCC among stakeholders and improve the integration of EBPs in real-world settings. The study was intended to engage the child welfare system through a VCC paradigm framework that improves the creation, implementation, and sustainment of evidential programs for child, youth, and family services.

Potential Implications for Social Change

Stephan et al. (2016) defined positive social change as “the process of transforming patterns of thought, behavior, social relationships, institutions, and social structure to generate beneficial outcomes for individuals, communities, organizations, society, and/or the environment beyond the benefits for the instigators of such transformations” (p. 1252). Although this definition of positive social change came from a management research perspective focusing on integrating knowledge across platforms

of corporate social responsibility, social entrepreneurship, and “the transformational processes to advance societal well-being – that is fragmented across different streams of research in management related disciplines” (Stephan et al., 2016, pp. 1250-1252), it also aligned with the objective of the current study and how it might influence positive social change within the study participants and child welfare stakeholders. The study participants were well versed in the complexities and challenges in developing, implementing, and sustaining the use of EBPs in child welfare. The results of this study could provide an innovative way to reevaluate and restructure the process of EBP development and implementation that lead to sustainable outcomes of value in practice settings. The implementation of a VCC framework has the potential to transform how stakeholders approach developing and embedding new practices into organizations. The significance of the VCC framework lies in its primary focus of co-creation of outcomes value and how it guides stakeholders to achieve these outcomes, (i.e., the purposeful utilization of the concepts and principles delineated within the framework to meet the desired outcomes of value for the population served).

Outcomes derived from the adoption of a VCC framework could include the following:

- a higher degree of contextual consideration in development of EBPs and
- more attention paid to the engagement of stakeholders through dialogue, collaborative efforts, and supportive ecosystems, leading to co-creation of substantial programs and practices that deliver positive outcomes.

The understanding of how a VCC framework could transform the way EBPs can be developed and effectively integrated into child welfare practice setting may benefit how stakeholders begin to change their thought process on what works and how innovative practices can lead to better outcomes for the children and families who require programs and practices that are sustainable. The child welfare system needs to break from a pattern of repeating the same research processes and implementing programs that fail to address client issues. Stakeholder involvement through effective engagement platforms; dialogue of shared experiences, vision, and contextual application; and supportive ecosystems may begin to transform the delivery process for success and sustainability.

The results of this study could extend into the macro level, impacting policies in child welfare, such that there is less pressure to implement EBPs that could prove unsuccessful and unsustainable, and more support for EBP development that encourages stakeholder involvement and contextual fit in development and implementation. The result may impact the direction and approach of research by focusing on joint research with stakeholders within the context of their service area to develop programs to meet their area of service delivery.

As stakeholders in child welfare continue face the challenges to successful integration of EBPs in real-world settings and minimal sustainable implementation frameworks, an innovative approach that could lead to outcomes that positively impact their service delivery is necessary. In addition, the findings from this study may encourage child welfare funding sources to focus on funding more research that involves stakeholder engagement and is conducted within the context of service delivery as

opposed to directing public and private organizations to implement existing services that may be ineffective and contextually unsustainable (DuMont & James-Brown, 2015; Galvagno & Dalli, 2014; Horner et al., 2014).

The scope of this study was delimited by the geographical area of the research (i.e., the Midwest and the purposeful selection of participant sample and size). The stakeholders included in this study were child welfare key decision makers and researchers within the field of EBPs in child welfare. These participants, however, did not represent the full scale of stakeholders within the child welfare continuum of care, such as birth parents, youths in transition, public and private sector caseworkers, supervisors, foster and adoptive parents, state and court representative, and tribal representatives. The results of this study could create an opening for future collaborations leading to the development and implementation of practices and programs that are effective and sustainable in transforming the delivery of services to children and families.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework for the current study was derived from the theory of VCC and the co-creation paradigm framework (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014). To address the issue of EBP development, implementation, and sustainment in the child welfare system, there must be a shift in how value is framed by the system and how stakeholders collaboratively achieve that value to improve the well-being of children and families. There needs to be a move from program developer/researcher-driven models based on perceived end-user and client/community needs, to a model that is client and context

driven through the collaborative efforts of stakeholders. Interventions/programs must be relevant in-situ for child welfare practice to benefit from the value they can contribute.

Value Co-Creation

In their seminal text on VCC, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) described it as the collaboration between stakeholders to create value by co-constructing the needed service to suit their contextual needs. In other words, value is subjective. thus, Stakeholders must work together to identify the problems that exist within their specific context, then codesign and facilitate the implementation of services that impact their specific ecosystem. I sought to explore how a VCC framework could be used to enhance the creation, integration, and implementation of valuable services to positively impact children and families involved in the child welfare system.

Although VCC began as a theory in business and marketing, its dynamic theory and conceptualization has expanded to other disciplines such as health care, government, agriculture, and public service (Gouillart & Hallett, 2015; Osborn, 2018; Spano et al., 2018). Gouillart and Hallett (2015) described an initiative that took place in Malden, Massachusetts in 2012 in which a group of Democrat and Republican investors created a fund called Co-Creation Ventures to test the viability of creating a bipartisan agenda on a local scale through co-creation. With the high poverty rate in Malden, specifically food insecurity, the aim of Co-Creation Ventures was to build a new avenue of production around food. Co-Creation Ventures brought together stakeholders from the different communities in Malden and, over a 1-year period, provided workshops on two engagement platforms: a physical platform and a financial platform. Through these

platforms “stakeholders collaborate with each other by exchanging best practices, sharing staffing resources, teaming up at catering events and food truck festivals, and jointly running certification classes for new employees” (Gouillart & Hallett, 2015, p. 1). This co-creation initiative had grown into “the largest food truck hub in the Boston area, with 20 food truck businesses [and about the same number of] food product entrepreneurs.” (Gouillart & Hallett, 2015, p. 1). The application of a co-creation model to address food insecurity in Malden led to a successful and sustainable program that addressed the issues identified by the bipartisan investors.

In the health care arena, co-creation of value has been explored through service-dominant logic framework. Spano et al. (2018) studied value in health care regarding heredity angioedema; their findings indicated the importance of patient as stakeholder involvement in their health care development process through VCC and service-dominant logic. Likewise, Russo et al. (2019) analyzed the empowerment of patients to co-create value in health care by enabling “patients to apply their health competencies and resources in their co-creation” (p. 1) of personal health services. Russo et al.’s findings suggested that the sustainability of the health care system can be strengthened through the empowerment of patients and VCC. These studies illustrated the capacity of VCC in building sustainable value between stakeholders that positively impacts health care and community needs through shared interaction and engagement.

In the co-creation paradigm as envisaged by Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2014), value was described as subjective, impinging upon the extent to which value is built on the foundation of collective individual experiences consequential to a system that

continuously expands value creation. In other words, the outcomes of value experiences of any system are predicated on the experiences shared by stakeholders and how those experiences impact the system to produce results that continue to evolve. Ramaswamy and Ozcan provided a succinct definition of how stakeholders should think about co-creation: “Co-creation is the joint creation and evolution of value with stakeholding individuals, intensified and enacted through platforms of engagements, virtualized and emergent from ecosystems of capabilities, and actualized and embodied in domains of experiences, expanding wealth-welfare-wellbeing” (p. 14).

According to Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2010), in conceptualizing and embracing co-creation, the shift in thinking must involve the following components:

- jointly creating and evolving value with stakeholding individuals
- purposefully designing platforms of engagements
- affording a variety of novel, personalized interaction environments
- meshing together ecosystem capabilities
- augmenting creative capacities of enterprise architectures and management systems
- enabling and supporting individuated value creation, personally and in social, business, civic, and natural communities in which individuals’ function
- connecting with quality of actual experiences of engagement through the platform and of the outcomes of value that result
- using rapid experiential learning, insights, and knowledge to co-evolve human stakeholder experience of value

- building new strategic capital for experiences and expanding wealth welfare well-being (pp. 282-283)

Although some of these elements of co-creation exist within the child welfare system, there remains a lack of connectivity whereby they are put in place concurrently and in a synergistic structure to create value and achieve results within the system of care.

In 2011, Ramaswamy presented value as a function of human experiences, describing co-creation as the mechanism by which mutual interest is shared among stakeholders and value depends on the collective experiences and knowledge brought to the engagement platforms that result in constructive interactions and valuable results. The co-creation paradigm framework (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014) builds on previous works (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Ramaswamy, 2011), further illuminating the core constructs, principles, and structure of the VCC paradigm framework and providing a blueprint for stakeholders to co-create value within their ecosystems.

Value Co-Creation Paradigm Framework

The VCC paradigm framework (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014) provides three fundamental ways in which co-creation generates value:

- how people conceive the intensive construction of value as enactment of agency through a creative, intentional, integrative, and transformative platform,
- how people frame the nature of value being embodied in dialogue, transparent, accessible, and reflexive domains of the stakeholder experiences, and

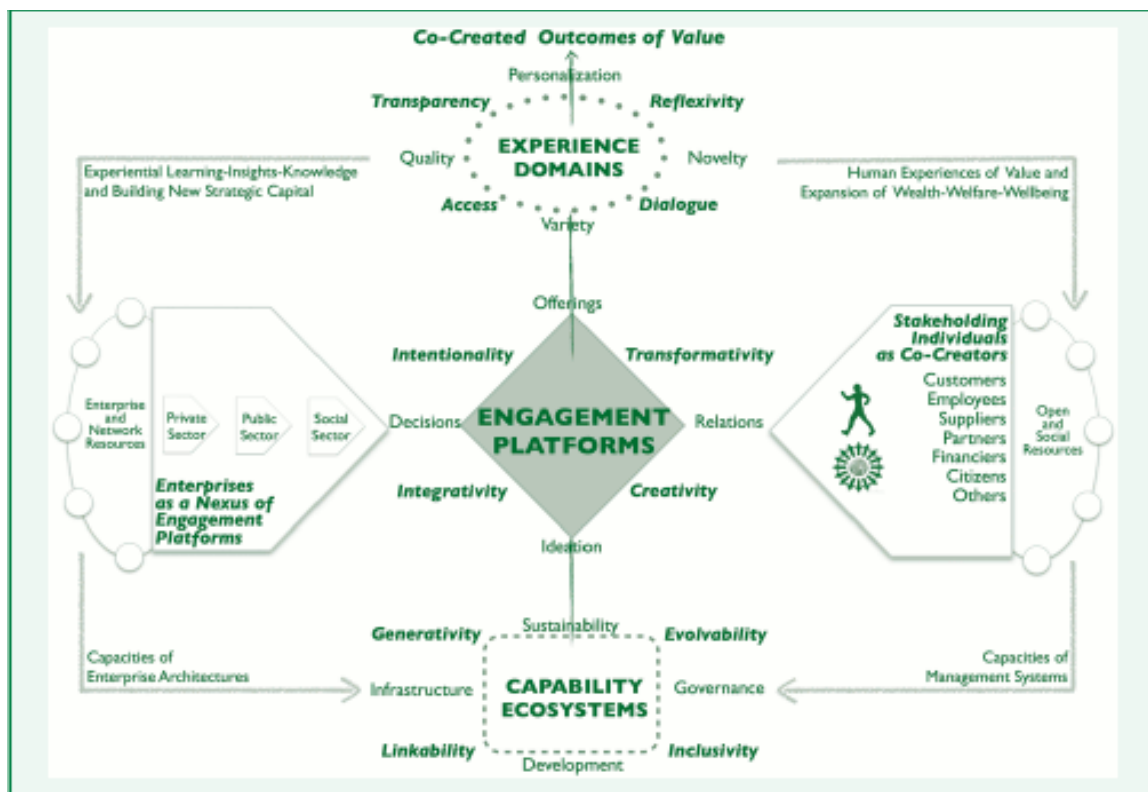
- how people deepen the virtual sources of value emerging from inclusive, generative, linkable, and evolvable ecosystems of capabilities.

As Figure 1 indicates, the VCC paradigm framework incorporates these concepts and presents a design that enables stakeholders to manage a synergistic collaboration of different perspectives to co-create outcomes of value (see Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014). To accomplish these outcomes of value, collaborators must be open to an inclusive approach in engaging all stakeholders to generate results that are innovative and valuable. Relating and managing these concepts in child welfare practice systems may deliver valuable outcomes for stakeholders and could prove invaluable in the development, implementation, and sustainment of programs and interventions for children and families.

In Prahalad and Ramaswamy's (2004) conceptualization of VCC, the three major concepts/elements in realizing co-created outcomes of value are engagement platforms, experience domains, and capability ecosystems. Organizations operate primarily on an interconnection of engagement platforms; these platforms link as well as exist within the other two elements of the organizational ecosystem (the experience domains and the capability ecosystem), which are also mutually linked (see Figure 1). For VCC to be successful, it is crucial for organizations to be strategic in their employment and deployment of these concepts. The concepts of VCC are broken down into principles that underpin these concepts, as well as tools that enable successful employment of the principles. Table 2 provides a matrix of the concepts, principles, and tools that connect and contribute to the goal of co-created outcomes of value.

Figure 1

Co-Creation Paradigm Framework (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2017)



Value Co-Creation Within the Child Welfare Service System

According to Rycus and Hughs (1998), the “guiding child welfare value is that “all children have an absolute right to a safe, permanent, stable home which provides basic levels of nurturance and care and is free from abuse and exploitation” (p. 40). This guiding value is the outcome value for which child welfare stakeholders strive. I explored the viability of a VCC paradigm framework in informing the co-creation process of EBPs in child welfare and explored the attitudes of the research community and key decision makers in child welfare practice regarding the use of a VCC framework. A VCC paradigm framework for EBP development, implementation, and sustainment would

focus on how different stakeholders (specifically key decision makers and leaders in child welfare research) may communicate, cooperate, and collaborate to operationalize available EBPs and coproduce programs that are actionable, effective, and sustainable within the child welfare system (see Agrawal et al., 2015; Galvagno & Dalli, 2014).

Values and Ethics

The social work practice problem studied was the research-to-practice implementation of EBPs in child welfare through a VCC paradigm framework. A recurring problem in EBP integration is determining a framework that involves the collaboration of researchers and practitioners to enhance the translation of EBP into real-world settings in child welfare. To achieve this, researchers must communicate directly with key decision makers in public and private child welfare organizations to determine how to translate their findings into policies and programs that are actionable (Garcia et al., 2019; Metz & Bartley, 2015). Ethical considerations are a significant part of the process when conducting any type of research and are especially important when the research involves human participants. Key ethical concerns in the current study were issues of informed consent, transparency, confidentiality (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016) and trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004).

In addition, the NASW (2021) Code of Ethics Section 5.02 addresses evaluation and research in social work practice, asserting that researchers are ethically bound to do no harm in the process of research and practice interventions, programing, and methodologies. When EBPs are implemented in settings where they are not a fit for the client and client environment, there is a probability of indirectly placing children and

families at considerable risk. Full disclosure (i.e., transparency) is also important to successful collaboration in co-creating value among stakeholders.

Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The professional and academic literature review provides the research process; background information on EBP; main concepts/theories and framework that underpinned this study; seminal contributions that were made by researchers, developers, and academics; previous studies that showed success in EBP implementation, as well as studies that indicated a need for more research, dissemination, and improved implementation frameworks.

Literature Search Process

Databases searched in the research process for this study included SAGE Journals, Sage Publishing, EBSCO, Thoreau multidatabase, PsycINFO, Science Direct, MEDLINE, Taylor and Francis Online, Social Work Abstracts, and SocINDEX with a focus on articles dated from 2014 to 2020, except in cases of seminal work. Key terms used in database searches were *EBP*, *EBP knowledge*, *understanding EBP in child welfare*, *child welfare*, *child welfare stakeholders*, *child welfare research*, *evidence-based practice*, *attitudes*, *perception*, *implementation frameworks in child welfare practice*, *implementation science*, *value co-creation*, *DART model*, *service ecosystems*, *public service systems*, *EBP sustainability*, and *transformative interventions*. The databases, search engines, academic/scholarly articles, and key terms used were chosen based on their relevance to my area of interest. The years searched were from 2000 to 2020

because it was important to capture a full picture of the subject matter it evolved over the years.

Synthesis of Current Literature

Although the medical discipline traces EBP as far back as Florence Nightingale in the mid-1800s, the current conceptualization of EBP was first introduced by Cochrane in the early 1990s through the publication of several articles leading to “an ongoing trend of defining, implementing, and improving what is now called Evidence-based Practice” (Bower & Nemeec, 2017, p. 14; Shah & Chong, 2009). The Institute of Medicine (2001, as cited in CEBC, 2019) defined EBP as “a combination of the following three factors: (1) best research evidence, (2) best clinical experience, and (3) consistent with patient values” (CEBD, n.d). The CEBC (2019) adopted the medical definition and built on its foundation to include family and client values in its application to child welfare. A child welfare definition of EBP should clarify the domains in which stakeholders research, develop, and operationalize EBPs, taking in a holistic perspective in relation to client and system needs.

A common definition of EBP in child welfare provides a foundation and goal direction for academics, practitioners, and key decision makers when they participate in the collaboration and co-creation of successful EBPs. A common definition also contributes to “collaborative decision making, cultural sensitivity, empowerment, and informed consent with clients; and skills to evaluate practice decisions and improve the course of intervention as needed” (Parrish, 2018, p. 408). The Child Welfare Information Gateway (2012) suggested that “evidence-based practice involves identifying, assessing,

and implementing strategies that are supported by scientific research” (p. 1). There is value in understanding what EBPs means to stakeholders in the context of social work in general, and child welfare in particular if stakeholders are to successfully disseminate and implements them successfully within the multifaceted system of care.

The child welfare system is complex and hindered with complex problems (Charest & Gagne, 2019; NASW, 2021), and complex problems often require a detailed synthesis of knowledge and engagement from multiple actors, resources, and processes to define, frame, and produce the EBP programs that appropriately and positively impact these problems (Annie Casey Foundation, 2014; Bammer, 2019; Children’s Bureau, n.d.; Wessells, 2014). Although EBPs have demonstrated some promise in the improvement of programs and interventions for children and families (Charest & Gagne, 2019; Mattox & Kilburn, 2014), the literature suggested that certain key factors remain underdeveloped and/or lacking from the overall identification, dissemination, and implementation process (Myers et al., 2020; Novins et al., 2013; Pinna et al., 2015; Walker et al., 2020) leading to sustainable results.

Rosen (2003) identified five factors that challenged the adherence to EBP in child welfare: the characteristics of knowledge to be used, characteristics of the practice situation and setting, characteristics of the practitioner, attributes of the medium through which knowledge is communicated, and the sociocultural context in which utilization takes place. A review of the literature indicated that after 37 years, the field of child welfare continues to struggle with the issues identified by Rosen (Garcia & DeNard,

2017; Killos et al., 2015; Metz & Bartley, 2015; Milner & Kelly, 2019; Willging et al., 2018).

Integration of EBP Into Child Welfare Services

As practitioners, organizations, and agencies continue to experience obstacles and challenges in implementation and sustainment of EBPs in their practice settings to create value and positive outcomes for children and families, there has been a tendency to resort to the use of programs that are not evidence based (Garcia & DeNard, 2017; Okpych & Yu, 2014). In the decades since the adoption of EBPs into child welfare services, the field has been inundated with discussions, training, research, program development, theories, implementation frameworks, and measured outcomes on EBPs (Garcia et al., 2019; Metz & Bartley, 2015; Milner & Kelly, 2019; Willging et al., 2018). “The quest has been to understand what works, for whom, and under what conditions is critical and will help us better serve children, youth, and families” (Milner & Kelly, 2019, p. 1).

An important aspect of EBP implementation missing from current studies is a dynamic framework that includes the involvement of stakeholders in the development and implementation of EBPs that focus on outcome values, such as context, collaboration, and sustainability, leading to successful implementation in real-world settings (Gambrill, 2016; Horwitz et al., 2014). While program developers continue to conduct research that they believe will positively impact outcomes for children and families, these programs fail in-situ because of challenges including a lack of stakeholder identification, collaboration and engagement, and system capacity building (Albers et al,

2017; Willging et al., 2018), lack of contextual value (Baumann et al., 2015), and unsustainable implementation frameworks (Tabak et al., 2015).

In 2006, the CEBC was launched as a source of information on evidence-based and non-evidence-based practice in child welfare. Its mandate is to serve as a resource for child welfare professionals, researchers, policymakers, staff of public and private organizations and academic institutions, and others who are committed to improving outcomes for children and families (California Department of Social Services, 2016). The resources of the CEBC are available to agencies and organizations across the United States and internationally, yet the identification and implementation of appropriate EBPs continue to challenge child welfare stakeholders. As a resource for EBPs, the CEBC is invaluable, reviewing all programs and information within their registry to accurately inform practitioners and organizations on the ratings and strengths of registered EBPs (California Department of Social Services, 2016).

In April 2016, the CEBC had a registry of 340 EBPs available to child welfare professionals; in addition, their website provides training kits, information on identifying EBPs, implementations processes, and numerous sources of additional information to stakeholders in the EBP process (California Department of Social Services, 2016). Examples of programs in the CEBC registry supported by research evidence include Family Foundations, for expectant fathers and mothers; SafeCare, for parents at risk for child neglect and/or abuse and parents with a history of child neglect and/or abuse; Triple P – Positive Parenting Program System, for parents and caregivers of children from birth to 16; and Better Futures for youths and young adults in foster care. Multiple innovative

ideas, concepts, and theories have been advanced to improve the care and support for children and families, including rigorous research, models, programs, and implementation frameworks; however, sustainability remains elusive. Findings in the literature suggested that program registries that serve as a resource for EBPs would be beneficial to agencies if they provided information that guided how program outcomes are impacted by “context-specific implementation factors” (Horne, 2017, p. 407) and “offer more complete information on dissemination readiness and implementation support to users” (Buckley et al., 2020, p. 1).

Implementation of EBP in Child Welfare Services

The implementation of EBPs have proved challenging since it was first introduced into child welfare practice system (Chaffin & Friedrich, 2004; Garcia et al., 2019). While some policymakers, practitioners, and researchers viewed EBP as a concept that would revolutionize how programs are developed and implemented to improve the lives of clients (Drisko & Grady, 2015), others misunderstood its premise or regarded it as counter intuitive to the way social workers provide services for their target populations (Drisko & Grady, 2015). Proponents of implementation have long held the view that employing implementation science can improve the use of EBPs in child welfare (Nilsen, 2015), however, implementation frameworks have been shown to lack clarity with regards to the constituents involved in the process (Albers et al., 2017).

Implementation frameworks and models have been developed to address the most effective ways to implement EBPs to better serve children and families. Tabak et al. (2012) defines a framework as “strategic or action-planning models that provide a

systematic way to develop, manage, and evaluate intervention” (p. 338). In their scoping review of implementation frameworks, Albers et al., (2017) identified 8 distinct implementation frameworks reported by 33 of the studies they reviewed. These implementation frameworks have been applied in child, youth, and family service settings across the United States.

The eight implementation frameworks identified by Albers et al., (2017) included: The Active Implementation Frameworks (AIF) developed by the National Implementation Research Network; The Availability, Responsiveness and Community Organizational and Community Intervention Model (ARC) designed at the Center for Behavioral Health Research at the University of Tennessee; The Community Development Team (CDT) developed by the California Institute of Mental Health; The Consolidated Framework for Research (CFIR) developed with the aim of consolidating existing constructs found to be essential to implementation and support implementation researchers in theory development and verification; The Exploration, Preparation, Implementation and Sustainment (EPIS) framework developed to support the implementation of EBPs in publicly funded child and family service settings; The Getting to Outcomes (GTO) framework designed to assist practitioners, managers, and evaluators in designing and describing strategies used to plan, implement, and evaluate programs and policies in community services; The Integrated Systems Framework (ISF), targeting practitioners, funders, and researchers involved in implementation processes in community services; and The Practical, Robust, Implementation and Sustainability

Model (PRISM), developed as a tool for health care researchers and decision-makers to monitor and assess program adoption, maintenance, reach, and effectiveness.

In reviewing the above frameworks, Albers et al., (2017) found that there was a range in their use, from innovative practices (GTO, PRISM) to fully operationalized interventions (PRISM, AIF, ARC) to fully manualized programs with specific fidelity requirements (EPIS, CDT, ISF). The analysis of the frameworks suggested several limitations: few of the identified frameworks were based on rigorous research designs, common strategies used within the frameworks included staging implementation, key influences, e.g., competencies, organizational factors, and leadership, stakeholder identification and engagement, and capacity measurement and building. Rarely were these approaches theoretically grounded or fully developed additionally, limited information was provided about their characteristics, development, or interconnectedness (Albers et al. 2017, p. 1). The persistent issue presented by multiple implementation frameworks was the confusion it creates when EBPs are randomly, rather than strategically chosen, and improperly applied to research evidence.

Equally, Boaz & Metz (2020) stressed the importance of stakeholder engagement in the implementation process, providing several rationales for this view, “ranging from the practical (to improve implementation practice), to the ethical (because they have a stake in the outcomes of implementation) and the normative (because it is how we do things)” (p. 8004–8007). The experiences and knowledge of stakeholders in the creation and implementation practice of EBPs are invaluable and should be linked to the process of integration into real-world settings (Boaz & Metz, 2020).

Despite all the research evidence available, the field of child welfare continues to lack a clear understanding of EBPs and strategies for their implementation (Garcia et al., 2019; Parrish, 2018; Albers et al., 2017). In a two-year study facilitating the implementation of the Triple-P parenting program Charest & Gagne (2019) examined provider' initial attitudes towards its adoption and subsequent program use. The study confirmed previous works that emphasize the significance of individual and contextual factors (Horner et al., 2014) playing an important role in EBP adoption. The study also highlighted the importance of leadership to support organizations in addressing barriers to implementation.

Collaboration, Cooperation, and Coordination

Collaborative efforts of research-practice are not a novel idea within the child welfare system, examples of such efforts as described by Chamberlain, et al., (2012) include the Rolling Cohort Model, England; the Cascading Dissemination Model, San Diego; and the Community Development Team Model, 53 California and Ohio counties (Jones et al., 2012). These collaborative efforts showed great promise, providing the capacity for addressing system-level challenges, through consultation between stakeholders. Chamberlain et al. (2012) found that the three models of collaboration were a result of, “a common policy priority or gap in existing services provided the backdrop for the opportunity to introduce evidence-based intervention, and community stakeholders either co-designed or were highly involved in the initial planning process for the projects” (p. 15).

The collaboration between research and practice allowed for the mitigation of barriers usually created by complex multi-level systems factors while ensuring the key components of the interventions expected to improve outcome measures. These examples are evidence of the importance of research-practice collaboration if EBPs are to succeed. A missing part of above models, however, is a theoretical framework that underpins the process (Chamberlain et al., 2012). A framework ensures that the collaboration and VCC process remains in alignment with the vision of the research-practice implementation goal.

To explore the issue of lack of a clear understanding of EBP processes, Garcia et al., (2019) in their recent qualitative study documented the insights of scholars and directors who were considered experienced in EBPs to gain their understanding of the process. The study utilized one-on-one interviews to clarify the factors, conditions, and interactions that influence the implementation of EBPs and to understand how they have addressed barriers and challenges. Their results indicate how critical it has become for academics and practitioners to “communicate and collaborate” and a necessity for “scholars to integrate science with evolving local knowledge and expertise from workers and directors, (p. 328). Furthermore, they emphasized the importance of “integrating experiences and input from all stakeholders and key actors” as a direction towards improving the success of EBPs in child welfare (p. 328).

Numerous authors have recognized the obstacles and challenges faced by the child welfare sector in embracing, identifying, and implementing EBPs that are effective and sustainable within practice setting (Milner & Kelly, 2019; Willging et al., 2018).

Issues of capacity building within agencies to sustain EBPs intensifies the frustration of organizational leaders who are tasked with adoption and implementation of EBPs. For example, in a study conducted by Willging et al. (2018), they examined the perspectives of managers of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) in two states, on the elements that influence the sustainment of EBPs in child welfare, they found a consensus on collaboration, partnership and cooperation as vital elements in implementation and sustainment of EBPs in child welfare.

Similarly, Winters et al. (2019) in their exploration of the role of capacity, collaboration, and readiness for change in the implementation of system wide change in child welfare and behavioral health, found a direct relationship between these constructs and the implementation and sustainment of EBPs. In a study conducted by Green, et al., (2016) examining the role of collaboration in sustaining EBPs to reduce child neglect, the researchers found a correlation between sustainability of the EBP of SafeCare for parenting skills to high levels of collaboration between stakeholders. Green et al., (2016) found that recurring factors in the sustaining agencies “included shared vision, building on existing relationships, academic support, problem solving and resource sharing, and maintaining collaborations over time” (p. 1). The importance of collaboration in sustaining EBPs is evidenced by the above studies. Collaborations require intentionality and discipline, stakeholders need to be empowered to co-create value (Kelly, 2019) in programs and services that benefit the children and families they protect.

Adaptation of Existing EBPs. A critical part of the implementation of EBPs is fidelity to the original intervention as intended by the developers/researchers. Adaptation

which is described as “making slight changes to a practice while maintaining fidelity to the core elements of the intervention in order to improve fit with clients, organization, and/or system characteristics” (CEBC, n.d.) is a practice/process that allows stakeholders to adjust and implement EBPs with relevance to their specific ecosystem (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2019; & Brownson, Colditz et al., 2019).

In a qualitative study conducted by Lengnick-Hall et al., (2019), they sought to “understand how implementers and researchers talk about adaptation during the implementation of SafeCare” (p. 1). As previously discussed, SafeCare is one of many EBPs aimed at improving parenting skills to manage child abuse and neglect (Green et al., 2016). The study by Lengnick-Hall et al., (2019) found that adaptations are not an easy process in discussions, participants did manage to raise concerns regarding barriers to structural and safety issues in the adaptation process, and finally, they discussed the process of adaptation during implementation. The study highlighted the importance of dialogue between stakeholders in EBP creation, translation, and implementation for developers, agencies, and organizations.

The results of the Lengnick-Hall et al., study supported previous research by Baumann (2015) where 4 EBP interventions: Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), The Incredible Years (IY), Parent Management Training-Oregon Model (PMTO), and Positive Parenting Program (Triple P) were examined through a systematic review of 610 articles. The results of the systematic review showed that there was minimal attempt to document evidence of a cultural adaptation process and only two articles tested the efficacy of the implementation strategies. In conclusion Baumann et al., (2015) suggest a

necessity for more research in understanding adaptation of parenting EBPs to cultural context and a need for rigorous examination of implementation practices.

Rational for Selection of Concepts

This study does not diminish nor negate the invaluable work that has been done in the effort to research, develop, implement, and evaluate programs or the frameworks that have been developed to implement in the past and currently with the aim of improving outcomes for children and families in the child welfare system. However, the literature indicates that despite the works of researchers, program developers, and other stakeholders within the child welfare system, the challenges faced by the child welfare system in relation to EBPs have not been substantially altered in over three decades (Aarons & Palinkas, 2007; Lederman et al., 2009; Rosen, 2003; Testa, et al., 2014). Evidently, stakeholders need more investments in sustainable practices and the system requires a sustainable framework that focuses on the concept of VCC among stakeholders within the context of the targeted populations to advance the value of EBPs in child welfare.

These challenges are current and disturbingly familiar across EBPs and EBP implementation literature today. According to Sanders (2020) of the Annie Casey Foundation, “Despite decades and dollars spent on improvements, it is now clear that our current approach to child welfare is flawed, and full-scale transformation is required...Transformation in child welfare requires a fundamental change in the way child protection agencies currently operate” (p.1). Sanders (2020) also stresses a need for change in how we approach interventions, with a view and a goal for prevention

and eventual elimination of child abuse and neglect. While this is a lofty goal for the system of care, it is one that should guide stakeholder intentionality in development, implementation, and sustainment, and more importantly providing support to families to mitigate long-term engagement with the child welfare system. This study explored the viability of VCC framework between stakeholders and attitudes of stakeholders towards a VCC framework. A VCC framework is a paradigm that has been successful in the business, marketing, (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014), governments (Gouliart & Hallett, 2015), and health care (Spano et al., 2018) arenas. VCC's innovativeness and comprehension in addressing complex systems presents a novel avenue in the transformation of service delivery in child welfare and integration of EBPs into agencies and organizations.

Value Co-Creation Concepts and Principles and Their Application to Child Welfare

The complexity of the child welfare system and the many entities involved in service delivery often makes it difficult to coordinate the explicit collaboration of stakeholders working together for a common outcome of value. However, by adopting a framework of VCC, child welfare stakeholders can begin to effectively transform the way EBPs are envisioned, created, and implemented with a contextual mindset and reflection towards a sustainable process. Transformation within complex systems require a collective recognition of the problem, a call to action, an openness to innovative approaches to change, and a willingness to participate in the change dialogue and process to create sustainable outcomes of value. The child welfare system must embrace transformation to meet the needs of children and families effectively.

As discussed in the theoretical framework section Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2014) describe VCC as “the joint creation and evolution of value with stakeholding individuals, intensified and enacted through platforms of engagements, virtualized and emergent from ecosystems of capabilities, and actualized and embodied in domains of experiences, expanding wealth-welfare-wellbeing” (p. 14). Translated within the child welfare system, with regards to EBPs, stakeholders can understand the VCC paradigm as the blueprint for joint creation, implementation, and sustainment of EBPs that lead to effective and sustainable permanency outcomes of value for children and families. The collective creation of value depends on the reinforcement and implementation of systems of practice through platforms of engagement within the child welfare system, generated from the ecosystems of capabilities within the system, and acted out and substantiated in the domains of experiences of the stakeholders involved in the process of ensuring outcomes of value for children and families.

The VCC paradigm framework is comprised of three major elements; the engagement platforms, the experience domains, and the capability ecosystems, working in concert to realize *co-created outcomes of value* for organizations and stakeholders. As previously discussed in the theoretical framework, Ramaswamy & Ozcan (2014) state that “co-creation expands value creation as a paradigm in three fundamental ways:” (p.40)

- how we conceive the intensive construction of value: Value as enactment of agency through creative, intentional, integrative, and transformative engagement platforms.

- how we frame the actual nature of value: Value as being embodied in dialogue, transparent, accessible, and reflective domains of stakeholder experiences; and
- how we deepen the virtual sources of value: Value as an emerging from inclusive, generative, linkable, and evolvable ecosystems of capabilities.

The section below provides a matrix (Table 2) of the VCC paradigm framework and a breakdown of its applicability to the child welfare system of care.

Table 2*Value Co-Creation Paradigm Framework Matrix*

Concept/construct	Definition	Principle	Tool
Engagement Platform Provides the interaction experience and enables interaction between internal and external stakeholders (Steinus, 2015), where value creation activities between stakeholders are “enacted” and “intensified” (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014). The common thread that runs in all engagement platforms are the four conditions of stakeholder relations, decisions, ideations, and offerings	An assemblage of persons, processes, interfaces, and artifacts that strengthen the network resources, support the delivery of services, harness stakeholder ideas and insights, facilitate training and knowledge, and involve all stakeholders that normally interact.	Creativity Intentionality Transformativity Integrativity	Persons Processes Interfaces Artifacts
Experience Domain Concerned with the individual experiences and the building blocks of interaction, DART	The process through which VCC occurs. Emphasizes individual experiences of stakeholders and their interactions through the building blocks of interaction.	Dialogue Access Reflexivity Transparency	Personalization Novelty Variety Quality
Capability Ecosystem The context in which stakeholders, exist and their collective capacity to impact the perceptions of the interaction environment to create value.	A meshwork of social, business, civic, and natural communities, whose leveraging of capabilities virtualizing agential capacities in value creation.	Generativity Evolvability Linkability Inclusivity	Sustainability Governance Development Infrastructure

Engagement Platforms

The Engagement Platform is “an assemblage of *persons, processes, interfaces, and artifacts*, whose engagement design affords environments of interactions that intensify agential actions in value creation” (Ramaswamy and Ozcan, 2014, p. 34).

Ramaswamy & Ozcan (2014) suggest that organizational systems should design their engagement platforms taking four principles into account: *creativity; intentionality;*

integrativity, and transformativity. These principles are intended to be defined within the context ecosystem for which the co-created outcomes of value are to be experienced and apply to all individual that will be engaged within that platform (Ramaswamy and Ozcan, 2014). These principles will be interpreted and operationalized within the child welfare system vis a vis the setting that apply to the system.

Creativity

Is reflected by action. In the creativity process, child welfare stakeholders apply inductive and exploratory actions (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014) to contribute and actively express their knowledge and skills to the value proposition or question they are trying to answer within the context of their agency (Metz & Bartly, 2015; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014). For the creativity process to work, all stakeholders must actively participate and express their views, thus, contributing to the process and being vested in the value being created (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014). While it would prove impossible for all stakeholders in child welfare to be at the table, Ramaswamy & Ozcan (2014) suggest that to ensure the participation of key stakeholders, “tools” must be utilized. For child welfare, case notes, case histories, and technology would be considered “tools” in the child welfare system.

Intentionality

The principle of intentionality is about stakeholders engaging with a sense of purpose and working with connectedness of intentions. Intentionality involves the “beliefs, hopes, and judgement” (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014, p.39) of stakeholders, recognizing that these elements are present in all stakeholders and impact their

contribution. Stakeholder intentionality is directed towards the common goal of as directed by the outcome of value being sought.

Integrativity

The Integrativity principle emphasizes the integration of routine process, activities, and of the ecosystem with the engagement platform (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014).

Transformativity

Ramaswamy & Ozcan (2014) consider the transformativity principle to be an essential factor in the success of VCC framework. Transformativity is how the engagement platform converts the meaning of value and relationships between stakeholders into valuable outcomes.

The common thread that runs through all engagement platforms are the four conditions of how stakeholders relate to each other; the decisions that are generated from these relationships; the ideas that spring from communication, dialogue, and collaborations; and offerings that stakeholders bring to the engagement platform through their experiences and knowledge and skills (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014).

Experience Domains

Experience domains are enabled by the conceptualization and design of the engagement platform. The platform allows child welfare stakeholders to bring their individual experiences to the table through dialogue, access, reflexivity, and transparency within the VCC process. It emphasizes individual experiences of stakeholders and their interactions (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014).

Dialogue

The dialogue principle involves engaging child welfare stakeholders in active communication based on their context and experiences to share knowledge and skills regarding the needs of the ecosystem they are trying to impact and improve through VCC. Successful dialogue is influenced by an understanding of social, cultural, and emotional factors between stakeholders and is fundamentally connected to the communications between stakeholders (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014). Areas of the dialogue process for Child welfare stakeholders should include, a) agreement on a common definition of EBP, b) a joint understanding on the nature of the problem that exists within their collective context and work strategically to explore/create interventions that generates value for all stakeholders. When stakeholders agree on the nature of the problem that needs to be addressed, research evidence becomes more relevant to real-world practice settings.

Access

All stakeholders come with a toolkit skills and experiences. The access principle relates to the capacity to access the toolkit of expertise, knowledge, skill, and information provided by the collective stakeholders to create value. Access to this shared knowledge allows individual stakeholders to compare their own experiences with that of their fellow stakeholders. Access has the potential to alter the meaning of value and broaden the scope of service needs and delivery of outcomes of value (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014).

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a key skill in social work. In the VCC paradigm, reflexivity motivates stakeholders to critically analyze how they enable the desired value outcomes and the engagement platform. These reflections then form a loop back to the engagement platform to allow the engagement platform and stakeholder experiences to develop with ongoing interactions (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014). The “tools, information, insights, recommendations, meanings, lived experiences, and valuable creations of others” (p.56), through reflexivity are essential to the engagement platform.

Transparency

Transparency requires communication, openness, and accountability within the VCC paradigm. Transparency creates trust between stakeholders enhancing the flow of information, events, and actions that strengthen the assemblage and opens new value sources (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014).

Capability Ecosystems

Ramaswamy & Ozcan (2014) define the capability ecosystem as “a meshwork of social, business, civic, and natural communities, whose leveraging of capabilities virtualizing agential capacities in value creation” (p. 83). Capability ecosystems can be translated as the context in which stakeholders, exist and their collective capacity to impact the perceptions of the interaction environment to create value. The four principles identified by Ramaswamy & Ozcan (2014) are generativity, evolvability, linkability, and inclusivity (p.82, 87-89). These principles underpin the capability ecosystems.

Generativity

Generativity relates to the social and organizational capacity of the interactions within the environment/ecosystem, i.e., the nature of the capability ecosystem when internal and external conditions are altered to facilitate the inclusion of human experiences, thus, providing flexible integration for and between new engagement platforms (Ramaswamy and Ozcan, 2014).

Evolvability

Evolvability of the capability ecosystem, as with generativity also addresses flexibility within the ecosystem. Evolvability is about change and enables the use of stakeholder capabilities currently and in future context with acceptability of change within the ecosystem.

Linkability

Linkability is about connectedness and addresses the significance of connections across engagement platforms and within the ecosystems that lead to opportunities to create value. (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014). As new information surfaces child welfare stakeholders must be able to share that information across the multiple entities within the engagement platforms. New information and new participants create new connections that bring new capabilities and capacities to the ecosystem. Child welfare stakeholders come with rich individual skills, thoughts, ideas, and innovations. Linkability enables the connections to share these skills through networks across the ecosystem.

Inclusivity

The inclusivity principle presents the opportunity for all stakeholders within the ecosystem to express their views thus maintaining the heterogeneity and diversity of the ecosystem and including the perspectives of all participants (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014).

The VCC paradigm provides a framework that can guide child welfare stakeholders in focusing and directing how programs are developed and how interventions are implemented and sustained. Engagement platforms, experience domains, and ecosystems of capability when strategically employed can drive the momentum necessary to advance outcomes of value within the child welfare system to better serve children and families. The VCC framework could provide a viable option for the creation, implementation, and sustainment of EBPs in child welfare. An apt explanation of how a framework of co-creation can impact child welfare is that “it allows for an explicit focus on assessing and understanding how various actors and groups must build trust and pathways for the use of research evidence to improve outcomes for populations of concern” (Metz, 2015, p.2).

Studies Related to Value Co-Creation in Child Welfare

Currently, there is limited exploration of VCC as a viable option for creation, implementation, and sustainment of EBPs in previous and current literature on child welfare practices. According to Metz, Boaz, & Roberts (2019), “evidence to support co-creation (and indeed co-production) as a knowledge mobilization intervention remains thin on the ground; as a potential strategy for transforming relationships between

knowledge producers, policy makers, practitioners, and publics...” (p.1). Metz & Bartley (2015) conducted a secondary analysis to explain the role of leveraging relationships in supporting the use of EBP in child welfare. They considered the role of co-creation and mutual consultation as vital to the success of sustaining EBPs in child welfare, identifying the act of co-creation as an “active involvement of stakeholders in all stages of the production process” (p. 117). Metz and Bartley (2015) created a visual representation (process model) of co-creation between and “among public agencies, policymakers, researchers, intervention developers, practitioners, communities and families” (p.117). This process, Figure 2, was viewed as innovative, however, while the process model incorporates all major stakeholders within the child welfare ecosystem, it complicates the process of interactions and emphasizes a top-down driver, (i.e., from research-supported evidence to the child welfare system of care, rather than a mutual interaction and co-creation process.

Figure 2

Co-Creation and the Use of Evidence (Metz & Bartley, 2015)



The benefit of the co-creation model as presented by Metz & Bartley (2015) is in the delineation of stakeholders in the system of care and its exploration of processes to

leverage stakeholder relationships and the conditions that enable stakeholder participation in research utilization. The results of the study by Metz & Bartley (2015) concluded that,

- dialogue is needed among public agencies, model developers, and providers to effectively create a shared space, or “hub,” for evidence to be contextualized and sustained.
- mutual consultation processes among stakeholder groups can change and improve over time for all stakeholder groups.
- the intensity and the structure of interactions can hinder or support mutual consultation.
- higher levels of mutual consultation are associated with the development of products or processes to use research evidence more than lower levels of mutual consultation (p.133).

While the results of above research contribute to the understanding of how stakeholders can work together to “integrate, optimize, and sustain the use of research evidence in child welfare” (p.133), and provides a foundation for leveraging relationships between child welfare stakeholders to improve and sustain the use of EBP, the study focuses on the building blocks of interaction Dialog, Access, Reflectivity, and Transparency, and omits the other concepts and principles of VCC and their direct application in practice settings. In addition, the focus of the research does not include a specific framework to engage stakeholders through the process.

Conversely, the concepts and principles of a VCC paradigm based on the principles of the VCC paradigm framework (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014), clearly

present a blueprint that delineates the process of creating outcomes of value through the co-creation process. The framework explicitly describes the platforms of engagement, experience domains, and the capability ecosystems that enable the process of value creation. The framework allows for flexibility in its application, in that, it can be context, stakeholder, client, community, and organizationally specific. Additionally, it provides a space for stakeholders to be mutually respectful and supportive in their contributions to the VCC of EBP that are effective and sustainable, thus minimizing barriers and resistance to implementation.

In their work to further explore the how co-creation supports the use of evidence in policy and practice change, Metz, Boaz & Roberts (2019) gathered contributions from a range of researchers involved in collaborative, transdisciplinary, and teams' activities that engage in solution building. Metz, Boaz, & Roberts (2019) had a view to focus on co-creative capacity building which is defined as "the deep involvement of a range of key stakeholders across scientific, governance, and local practice boundaries to create the infrastructure and context that enables and sustains the use of evidence in practice" (p. 2). This perspective of co-creation and co-creative capacity presents an avenue for child welfare stakeholders to emphasize the utilization of VCC as a transformative means of building and implementing sustainable EBPs through engagement, infrastructure building and contextual practices.

Nicholas et al., (2019) present a framework of critical systems heuristics to explore and understand the motivations and boundaries of co-creation and found that factors such as dialogue, engagement between multiple stakeholders with diverse

experiences, and inclusivity are necessary as a part of the co-creative process and are often “taken for granted” (p. 367) in the research-practice arena. The study purports that “viewing of co-creation as a unique research approach will provide a basis for critical reflection, ongoing improvement, and a platform for debate on ethics, legitimacy, and quality of co-creation approaches...” (Metz et al. 2019, p. 2). This view aligns with the purpose of this study which is exploring the concept of VCC as a viable framework for creating, implementing, and sustaining EBPs in child welfare, underpinning the view that stakeholder engagement in co-creation results in sustainable outcomes of value.

In their study of a co-creative partnership between Aboriginal services, researchers, policymakers, and clinicians, Sherriff et al., (2019) present a successful real-world experience of how co-creation can lead to improved outcomes of value. The Study of Environment on Aboriginal Resilience and Child Health was a partnership established to co-create and co-translate research among stakeholders to address social issues within the Aboriginal communities (Sherriff et al. (2019). The partnership has “successfully contributed to enhanced children’s access to specialist clinical services..., used to redesign the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service and new models of mental health for Aboriginal children and adolescents ...” (Sherriff et al., 2019, p. 374). The above study resonates with the purpose of the current study in that the question of how to improve quality of services to children and families is at the crux of the exploration of VCC as a viable option leading to improves outcomes of value. Sherriff et al., (2019) demonstrates how co-creation between stakeholders can lead to successful creation, implementation, and sustainment of interventions within communities.

Transformation and change within complex systems require commitment to and investment in developmental and innovative initiatives. The process of change can be fraught with resistance and skepticism and requires dedicated effort among stakeholders to embrace new methods of advancing the goal of positive outcomes of value for the children and families they serve. Stakeholder engagement is the key factor in the consideration and effectiveness of a VCC framework, particularly in the child welfare system of care. Several researchers have identified specific tools that may be useful in facilitating further understanding and implementation of co-creation between stakeholders. Bammer (2019), suggests that in utilizing co-creation to understand and address complex systems and issues, an Integration & Implementation Science framework would be a useful tool to facilitate interaction between stakeholders, while Zurbbrigen & Largo (2019) provide a Roadmap used in Uruguay to enhance the co-creation in a public innovation lab project. The emphasis on the roadmap is placed on inclusivity and mutual consultation between stakeholders through a continuous feedback loop that allows for share ideas that improve the co-creation process.

Embracing a VCC framework to improve the integration of EBPs into real-world setting could prove to be the transformative factor that begins to move the child welfare system out of the quagmire it has been caught in for decades. Metz (2015) suggest that moving from a mindset of a “gap” between research and practice to one that embraces the co-creative process that engages stakeholders could be significant in improving outcomes for children and families. The understanding and strategic utilization of the concepts and

principles that underpin the VCC process present an opportunity for stakeholders to begin to move the child welfare system into the 21st century.

Summary

The development and implementation of EBPs in child welfare remains an ongoing challenge for the stakeholders within the vast system of care. The focus of government policies on funding social service programs has shifted in the last decade to prioritizing programs that utilize EBPs, there is a prioritization on accountability, outcome measures, and EBP implementations. According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway (n.d.), “State child welfare agencies and community-based organizations are increasingly aware of the need to focus their resources on programs that have demonstrated results, especially for achieving outcomes as measured in the Federal Child and Family Services Review process” (para.1). In addition, legislative and private funders now expect the use of EBP models from the agencies they support financially (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n. d.).

In 2018, the Family First Prevention Services Act was signed into law with the aim of focusing child welfare services on prevention. The Act re-directs Title IV-E fund to agencies utilizing EBPs in the prevention of children and families from entering the foster care system. Given these mandates from funding sources, a transformative and sustainable framework for developing, implementing, and sustaining practices that demonstrate an increase in positive outcomes for children and families is urgently required by the child welfare system. In a system as complex and urgent as the child welfare system, where stakeholders operate in a near constant crisis mode and where

resources are limited, there must be a prioritization for funding that addresses context specific EBPs. Development, implementation, and sustainment of EBPs need to be community-based and co-created by stakeholders within their specific ecosystem. EBPs are laden with challenges and obstacles when they are universally developed and expected to succeed contextually.

The lives and wellbeing of children and families are threatened daily by the lack of effective and sustainable interventions and supportive services that produce positive outcomes within the child welfare system. While stakeholders realize the level of crisis facing the child welfare system, they are stymied by the question of what practices are suitably effective and sustainable.

The effective and sustainable application of EBP in child welfare has never been more important. Public and private child welfare agencies need a framework that facilitates the creation and implementation of EBP that address the challenges and barriers to implementation that have existed over the past decades. There must be a synergy between problem definition and creation of value outcomes that address client success within a specified ecosystem/locus. The use of EBP in child welfare can be optimized by addressing the issues previously cited from Albers et al., (2017) through a VCC paradigm framework.

A VCC framework employed by stakeholders can begin to move stakeholders towards an innovative, transformative, and sustainable method of developing and implementing EBPs in child welfare. The principles of the VCC paradigm provide

explicit guidelines for creating outcomes of value and these principles can engender change in how stakeholders collaborate to co-create value.

The next section, Research Design and Data Collection will delve into the research methodology that was utilized in this study, the method for data collection and data analysis, as well as describe the operationalization of the concepts and construct that were explored in this study. Additionally, participant selection, ethical procedures, issues of rigor, trustworthiness, and anonymity and confidentiality are discussed and expounded upon.

Section 2: Research Design and Data Collection

A review of recent and older academic and professional literature demonstrated the effort of researchers and developers in increasing evidence-based research informing best practices in child welfare (DuMont & James-Brown, 2015; Horwitz et al., 2014; Killos et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2015). However, despite the inordinate amount of rigorous research that demonstrated and supported the viability of EBP in child welfare in comparison to traditional approaches, EBP methods are often overlooked by key decision makers in agencies and organizations (Bacaglinni & Rowlands, 2018; Garcia et al., 2019; Palinkas et al., 2017). Notwithstanding the ubiquitous nature of the literature on EBPs in child welfare, including development and implementation, effectiveness and sustainability remain elusive in practice settings. More work needs to be done to create EBPs that are valuable in-situ and provide sustainable results that improve the lives of children and families. I explored the viability of a VCC framework to address this practice problem.

Section 2 presents the research design and how it aligned with the research problem, as well as the methodology, including the prospective data, participants, and instrument utilized. Next, a discussion of ethical considerations is provided, including the data protection method, process of data collection and analysis, and informed consent procedures. The section concludes with a summary of the data collection and analysis process.

Research Design

The social work practice problem addressed in the current study was the challenge faced by child welfare stakeholders in the successful integration of EBPs in real-world settings and the dearth of research on the viability of a VCC framework for EBP implementation between child welfare stakeholders, (i.e., researchers and practitioners) within the system of care in the creation and implementation of sustainable practices. I sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do stakeholders describe the viability of a value co-creation paradigm framework process to improve the use of EBPs in child welfare practice?
2. What specific attitudes do child welfare stakeholders describe as necessary to enable the effective integration of the use of EBPs in real-world settings through a value co-creation paradigm framework?

The research design for this study was a basic qualitative design (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to explore and understand how key stakeholders perceive the viability of VCC in implementing and sustaining EBPs into real-world settings in child welfare. Basic qualitative research seeks to “understand the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). I sought to explore how key stakeholders perceive a VCC framework (the phenomenon) and its viability in the integration of EBPs in child welfare practice. I conducted in-depth, semi structured, narrative interviews with questions and an interview guide designed by me. Although the semi structured interviews came with preset interview questions, they also allowed for open dialogue with participants and improved the comprehensiveness of data collected (see Ravitch &

Carl, 2016). In qualitative research, the narrative interview is considered the most used form of data collection (Jamshed, 2014). Interviewing as a data collection tool provides a means for researchers to obtain direct, firsthand data from participants through comprehensive dialogue that covers the topic of interest and allows participants to speak freely (Alshenqeeti, 2014). The information gathered is rich and detail oriented and provides the researcher with vast amounts of data to analyze. Additionally, interviews enabled the researcher to use prompts that allow participants to clarify their responses and provide further information (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The flexibility of the semi structured interview allowed an in-depth exploration of attitudes and perceptions, gave me the opportunity to probe, and gave participants the opportunity to share experiences, opinions, and a range of ideas regarding the subject matter (see Barclay, 2018). The semi structured interview method was an appropriate choice for this study because it aligned with the purpose and research questions and enabled the use of an inductive approach geared toward gathering data through dialogue with participants, focusing on themes and patterns, and interpretation of the rich data gathered (see Liu, 2016) regarding the subject matter.

The research design selected for this study was in alignment with the purpose and research questions under exploration. The selection of a qualitative, semi structured interview process using an interview guide enabled me to collect narrative data regarding the attitudes and perceptions of participants. According to Sutton & Austin (2015), qualitative research allows the researcher to “attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of study participants” (p. 226).

Methodology

The adoption of a qualitative method of semi structured interviews enabled me to explore the attitudes and perceptions of child welfare stakeholders (key decision makers, researchers, and program developers) regarding the use of a co-creation paradigm framework for the creation, implementation, and sustainment of EBPs in child welfare practice. Key decision makers and researchers in the child welfare system presented the best participant pool for this study because they had the experience and knowledge regarding the subject matter. They had rich and in-depth information to illuminate the attitudes and perceptions of the viability of a VCC framework among child welfare stakeholders. Regarding this critical review of interviewing as a data collection method, Alshenqeeti (2014) discussed several aspects of the interview process, including allowing the natural flow of the process and the gathering of rich details from the interviewees, and specified the importance of researchers listening during the interview process. I used an interview guide to encourage the flow of the interview process, allowing for prompts to encourage detailed responses (see Appendix. Institutional review board approval was received before the study began (approval number 10-25-20-0740854).

Operational Definition of Key Aspects of the Doctoral Project

The constructs explored in this study were attitudes and perceptions of key stakeholders toward a VCC framework for developing and implementing EBP in child welfare. Attitudes and perceptions are latent and intangible constructs (Bahamonde-Birke et al., 2017); therefore, it was necessary to be specific in their definition and

operationalization within the context of the subject matter under exploration (i.e., VCC, EBP, and child welfare).

Attitudes

Attitude can be defined as an “evaluative judgement about a stimulus object” (Maio et al., 2019, p. 4) that is founded on cognitions, affective reactions, and behavioral intentions. These judgments further influence the cognition, affective responses, and future intentions and behaviors toward the stimulus object (Leippe & Zimbardo, 1991). The current study was conducted to explore the attitudes of stakeholders toward VCC as viable framework for the implementation of EBP in child welfare.

According to Maio et al. (2019), there are several models of attitude, with the most influential being the multicomponent model or CAB model. The CAB model conceptualizes attitudes from a cognitive, affective, and behavioral perspective. For purposes of the current study, the CAB model was the operationalizing model for attitude measurement. The component definitions of CAB model include

- affective (feelings or emotions linked to an attitude object),
- behavioral (past behaviors or experiences regarding an attitude object), and
- cognitive (the beliefs, thoughts, and attributes associate with an object).

Perceptions

For purposes of this study, perception is defined as an individual’s reaction to a target stimulus, i.e., VCC as a viable framework process to improve the use of EBPs in child welfare practice. According to Saks & Johns (2014, p. 80), there are three components to perception:

1. The Perceiver, the person who becomes aware about something and comes to a final understanding. There are three factors that can influence his or her perceptions: experience, motivational state, and finally emotional state. In different motivational or emotional states, the perceiver will react to or perceive something in different ways. Also, in different situations he or she might employ a perceptual defense where they tend to see what they want to see.
2. The Target. This is the concept that is being perceived or judged. “Ambiguity or lack of information about a target leads to a greater need for interpretation and addition.
3. The Situation also greatly influences perceptions because different situations may call for additional information about the target, i.e., context.

While latent constructs such as attitudes and perceptions can be difficult to measure (Miller, Reynolds, Ittenbach, et al., 2009; Sechrest, 2005), the use of semi-structured interviews using an interview guide enabled this researcher to explore and gather in-depth elements (Carl & Ravitch, 2016) of participant attitudes and perceptions toward VCC in child welfare. According to Given (2008), ...interview guides may contain elaborate specifications to ensure that the researcher’s topics of interest are thoroughly covered” (p. 470). Interview guides summarize the content of what the researcher wants to explore and assist the researcher in exploring, and “drawing out the participants own account” (Given, p. 470).

Prospective Data

An interview guide was developed to explore and gather information from key stakeholders regarding their attitudes and perception of VCC viability in the creation and implementation of EBPs in child welfare. Data was collected over the telephone and interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and analyzed for thematic content using standardized content analysis. Moreover, consent for recording was obtained from participants before the interviews began. In addition, prompts were used to elicit more detailed information regarding the principles identified for VCC. Interview notes were also be taken by this researcher with the consent of participants.

Data was collected until I concluded that a point of saturation has been reached. Data saturation for purposes of this study represent the point where this researcher concludes that the information being provided by participants has reached what Francis, et al., (2010) refer to as “informational redundancy” (p. 875). Grady (1998) describes this as the point where, “new data tends to be redundant of data already collected...when the researcher begins to hear those same comments again and again, data saturation has been reached” (p. 26). The purpose and research questions posed by this study aligned with this conceptualization of data collection saturation.

Participants

A participant frame was created by selecting participants from key decision makers in public and private child welfare agencies and organizations in the Midwest and leading researchers with a focus on EBP in child welfare. Key decision makers are defined as private sector executives, program coordinators, supervisors, and program

administrators with state and private child welfare agencies. Recruitment was conducted by emailing key decision-makers in public and private agencies and developers and researchers with a focus on EBP development and implementation in the Midwest. Interviews were conducted over the phone and recorded.

The knowledge and experience of the selected participants provided rich data that served to further the research questions posed by this study. The research questions lent themselves to the choice of purposeful sampling as the method for this study. Purposeful sampling refers to the selection of participants who have information and experiential knowledge that can contribute to the understanding of the topic being explored (Patton, 2015). Purposeful sampling aligned with the objectives, research questions and purpose of this study, in that, the participants had direct knowledge, experience, and information regarding development and implementation of EBPs in child welfare, thus, provided rich data that addressed the questions of attitudes and perceptions towards a framework of VCC regarding EBP development and implementation in child welfare.

With a qualitative study of this nature that involves exploration relative to attitudes and perspectives, research suggests anywhere from 5-25 participants and recommends that number should ultimately depend on the saturation point (Creswell, 2006, & Morse, 1994). Guest, Namey, & Mitchell (2013) argue that while sample size guidelines exist in qualitative research, there is no empirical evidence to substantiate the exact number, and “saturation is the status quo by which non-probability sample size should be determined...” (p. 59). This study followed the guidelines prescribed by the

research which focuses on point of saturation as the key indicator for sample size limit (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Burkholder, Cox, & Crawford, 2016).

Instrumentation

Based on the concepts and principles of the VCC framework and the current state of EBPs in child welfare, I developed a semi-structured interview guide. The guide explored attitudes and perception of participants towards a VCC framework in child welfare practice, focusing on the utilization of the concepts of experience domains, engagement platforms, and ecosystems of capability. These concepts were broken down into an interview question guide that opened an avenue to explore the co-creative principles/dimensions of within the concepts. These dimensions include a) dialogue, access, reflexivity, and transparency; b) creativity, intentionality, transformativity, and integrativity; and c) generativity, evolvability, linkability, and inclusivity. These dimensions make up the VCC framework leading to outcome of value.

The use of an interview guide was to assist the researcher in eliciting focused insight into each participant's perspectives. The instrument (interview guide) was used "to organize and guide the interview" and "included specific tailored follow-up questions within and across interviews (Morris, 2015; Ravitch and Carl, 2016, p. 154)." Probing and follow up questions were guided by individual participant responses as well as questions added to the interview guide.

Data Analysis

An inductive approach and thematic content analysis was used to evaluate the notes and transcribed interview content. An inductive approach enabled the researcher to

derive thematic contents from the transcribed data collected from participants and “this approach aims to generate meanings from the data set collected in order to identify patterns and relationships...” (Dudovsky, n.d., para. 1). This method aligned with the current study which sought to explore how participants perceive VCC in EBP implementation and their attitudes towards the use of VCC as a viable framework in EBP integration in child welfare.

I reviewed the interview transcripts literally and inductively assigned codes to emergent concepts and themes. In analyzing the data collected from participants, saturation was conceptualized from the perspective described by Urquart (2013), as “the point in coding when you find that no new codes occur in the data. There are mounting instances of the same codes, but no new ones” (p. 194). There is a consensus from other researchers that point of saturation in data analysis occurs when the researcher finds that there are no new themes emerging from continued data analysis (Given, 2016; Birks & Mills, 2015). To aid in thematic analysis, the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software, ATLAS.ti was utilized. The ATLAS.ti software was used for the analysis of unstructured text, audio recordings, interview transcripts, and notes. The software is designed to ask critical questions of data, identify patterns, and find connections, and find common themes and insights from the data collected (ATLAS.ti, n.d.).

Chronological Steps in the Analysis Process

This study followed the steps suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006) in their research on the use of thematic analysis in psychology, including, familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and writing up.

Familiarization

Familiarization is described as the process of familiarizing oneself with the notes and transcribed data collected from the interview. I read through the transcribed notes and hand notes taken during the interview. Braun and Clarke (2006) described familiarization as being important to “immerse yourself in the data to the extent that you are familiar with the depth and the breadth of the content” (p. 16), through a process of active and repetitive reading, “searching for meanings and patterns” (p. 16). Notes were taken at this stage of the process and I began to generate initial ideas seen within the data.

Coding

The coding process allowed me to organize and “break data down into manageable segments, and identifies or names those segments” (Schwandt, 2015, p.30). This process included highlighting different sections of the text, such as phrases or short sentences, and using those to generate initial codes from the data. The data was semantically coded, i.e., derived from the literal text of the interview data, rather than latent derivations. The aim was to code the entire data set in alignment with the research questions and purpose of the study. When coding the data, it was important to look for “repetition in and across various data items; strong or emotive language; agreement between individuals; concepts that are not discussed or commented on; disagreement

between individuals; and mistakes and how/if they are solved” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p.251). It is important to bear in mind that the codes retrieved from the data are dependent on the lens through which the researcher views the data, the nature of the research and the methodology utilized (Saldana, 2016).

Generating Themes

The next phase of the process was the second cycle of coding which was utilized in the generation of concepts and themes across the study participants (Laureate Education, 2013). In particular, the codes generated in the previous phase were analyzed and categorized in a way that informed “how different codes may combine to form an overarching theme” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.19). Theme generation may be advanced through use of “visual representations” such as “tables, mind-maps...” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.19) I used a thematic matrix to depict the themes and sub-themes along with their associated codes. Once this second round of coding has been completed, I reviewed the themes generated from the process.

Reviewing Themes

The step of reviewing the themes generated involved the fine-tuning of the themes and sub-themes identified in the previous step. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), there are two stages in this process, first, the researcher needs to “review all the collated extracts for each theme and consider whether they appear to form a coherent pattern” (p.20). Next, the process was repeated in relation to the entire data set, i.e., to code any additional data within the themes that may have been missed in the earlier coding stages. As stated by Braun & Clarke (2006), “The need for recoding from the data set is to be

expected as coding is an ongoing organic process” (p.21). This step ensured the thematic usefulness and accuracy in the representation of the data. The data within themes should correspond together meaningfully, while there should be clear and identifiable distinction between themes. The end of this step provided a clear picture of the different themes, how they fit together, and the overall story they tell about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Defining and Naming Themes

Once a satisfactory thematic matrix/mapping of the data had been completed (previous section), the step of defining and naming the themes began. This step involved “identifying the essence of what each theme is about (as well as the themes overall) and determining what aspects of the data each theme captures” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 22). During this phase, the themes were described, and the story told by the themes was identified. It was also the phase where names were given to each theme that concisely provides the reader with an appreciation of what they represent.

Producing the Report

The write up from the thematic analysis provided a clear understanding of the data collected in a way that “convinces the reader of the merit and validity of your analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 23), and aligned with the study purpose and research questions. Each theme was addressed individually and explained with reference to the data collected and what it meant within the scope of the research study purpose and questions.

Issues of Rigor

Qualitative researchers must work intentionally to ensure quality in methodological process, one way to do this is by selecting participants with knowledge/experiences on the topic they are researching and using appropriate instruments to gather precise information being presented by the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Shenton (2004) discussed several methods to ensure trustworthiness and substantiate rigor in qualitative research; these include credibility, dependability, transferability, transparency, and confirmability. The purposeful sampling methodology of this study ensured that intentionality was used in the selection of participants for this study, i.e., key decision makers and researchers who were well versed in the subject matter.

Credibility

Credibility involves ensuring that the findings presented accurately represents the information gathered from the participants during the interview process and effectively interprets the views provided by the participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To ensure credibility, I followed a repetitive process in reviewing the recordings, transcripts and notes taken during the data collection. In addition, transcripts were provided to participants for corroboration of the data collected.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research refers to the “stability of findings over time” (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 121). To ensure dependability, an accurate and detailed description of the research design and methodology was provided, including “sampling,

research materials adopted, and emergence of findings” (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 122), and information on the data collection process, including transcripts, notes, and memos. According to Moon et al., “Researchers should document research design and implementation, including the methodology and methods, the details of data collection (e.g., field notes, memos, the researcher’s reflexivity journal) ...” (p. 2). The design and methodology for this study was accurately presented to allow others to understand and follow the process of the study.

Transferability

Transferability refers to how much the research can apply to other context and settings. Qualitative researchers must be able to describe and discuss their result in rich narrative so that the results of the data gathered generates some meaning and relatability for others. According to (Korstjens & Moser, 2018), the responsibility of the researcher in ensuring transferability is to provide as much descriptive information as possible regarding “setting, sample, sample size, sample strategy, demographics, socio-economic and clinical characteristics, inclusion and exclusion criteria, interview procedure and topics, changes in interview questions based on iterative research process, and excerpts from the interview guide” (p. 122). These steps were explained and utilized in the process of this study to ensure that researchers can conduct studies related to the current or similar studies in other settings and the audience can judge the level of transferability.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the importance of the researcher minimizing their personal biases and objectively presenting the results/finding, focusing on the narrative

provided by the participants. The use of memos, reflexivity, and understanding one's positionality can help in mitigating the influence of subjectivity in the presentation of accurate data and results (Ravitch & Carl, 2016,). The confirmability of this study is shown in the data gathered directly from the responses, transcripts, and notes taken during the research process, this study ensured that these issues were addressed individually throughout the research process to mitigate any challenges they may present.

Ethical Procedures

Ravitch & Carl (2016) specify several concepts considerations, and actions that improve rigor in qualitative research, including, a) developing and engaging in research design that seeks complexity through the structure and strategic sequencing of methods and the mapping of research methods onto the guiding research questions; b) maintaining a fidelity to the participants' experiences through engaging in inductive (or what we think of as emergent design) research that is responsive to emerging meanings while at the same time ensures a systematic approach to data collection and analysis; c) seeking to understand and represent as complex and contextualized a picture of people, contexts, events, and experiences as possible; and d) transparently addressing the challenges and limitations of your study (p. 389-390). Detailed attention to the above considerations addressed the ethical procedures that must be at the forefront of the research design, methodology, data collection, data analysis, and result presentation.

This study was conducted with human participants; therefore, additional procedures were followed, including, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, and transparency in allowing participants to review the interview transcripts,

ensuring that participants understand that participation is voluntary (Ravitch and Carl, 2016). Furthermore, informed consent is important in the research process, as it speaks to “transparency and honesty” which are “central to ethical and valid research” (p. 360). One aspect of consent that is noteworthy is the suggestion by Ravitch and Carl (2016) that consent forms do not always have to be constructed with rigid formality. “They can be warm and made personal in a variety of ways even as they cover specific information that is mandatory” (p. 360). This idea was helpful in providing some flexibility in how I asked the questions in the interview protocol, allowing me to follow the flow of the participants’ train of thought and moving back and forth through the interview questions.

Confidentiality

I discussed confidentiality with participants prior to the start of data gathering. To ensure confidentiality, identifying information such as names and job titles are excluded from the data, results, and final study document (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Data Protection

Participants were also informed of steps that would be taken to protect the information gathered during the interview process. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016) data protection in the current age of technology can be complicated, depending on how the information is gathered and analyzed, i.e., recording devices, transcription software, and thematic analysis software. Thinking about these issues prior to gathering the data and putting systems in place to mitigate these issues at the beginning of the research process is critical. Data security measures that were used include mechanisms to allow or deny access to data; storing data in a way that prevents unauthorized access, i.e.,

password access, firewall systems, antivirus, and anti-malware systems; and protecting paper notes (Wilms, 2019). All materials have been placed under lock and key for a minimum of 5 years in accordance with Walden University policy.

Summary

To address the challenges faced by child welfare stakeholders in the successful integration of EBPs to real-world settings and the dearth of research involving the viability of a VCC framework for EBP implementation between child welfare stakeholders, this study employed a qualitative research methodology using semi-structured interviews with child welfare stakeholders in the Midwest. An interview guide was developed to enable me to explore how stakeholders perceive the viability of a VCC paradigm framework process to improve the use of EBPs in child welfare practice and what specific attitudes do child welfare stakeholders describe as necessary to enable the effective integration of the use of EBPs in real-world settings through a VCC paradigm framework.

Interviews were recorded, and I took notes as well, with participant consent. Recordings were literally transcribed using the REV system and organized through a precoding process. Next the data was coded using an inductive approach and thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Attention was paid to ensuring that ethical issues concerning human participants were addressed, especially informed consent. I followed steps to mitigate limitations that might diminish the rigor of the research methodology by paying attention to issues such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Finally, I ensured confidentiality by engaging in secure data storage

procedures, as well as, excluding identifying information from the discussion of results and the final document.

Upon receipt of IRB approval – number 10-25-20-0740854, I conducted the research study and presented the findings in the following section. Section 3 includes the data collection method, data analysis techniques, a summarization of the validation procedures, and any limitations or challenges encountered while conducting the study. Lastly, the findings are summarized as related to the focus of the research questions and purpose of the study.

Section 3: Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore a VCC paradigm as a viable framework for collaboration between stakeholders in child welfare, and to explore what attitudes are necessary to enable stakeholders to develop, implement, and integrate EBPs in real-world settings through a framework of VCC. To satisfy this purpose, I sought to answer two research questions:

1. How do stakeholders describe the viability of a value co-creation paradigm framework process to improve the use of EBPs in child welfare practice?
2. What specific attitudes do child welfare stakeholders describe as necessary to enable the effective integration of the use of EBPs in real-world settings through a value co-creation paradigm framework?

VCC can be defined as a collaborative development of new concepts, solutions, and services by stakeholders. It refers to the interplay that occurs between stakeholders resulting in valuable solutions that can be implemented and sustained for the targeted populations they serve.

I conducted in-depth, semi structured, narrative interviews with participants using 13 questions in the interview guide that was designed by me (see Appendix). Participants were scheduled for interview appointments by email. The interviews were conducted over the phone and recorded by me. I also took notes during the interviews to document salient points to be used to elicit more information from the participant through prompts. The interview guide proved useful in introducing new interview sections related to the three main concepts of VCC and in keeping the interview focused. The guide also

provided the opportunity to deep dive into the sentiments and attitudes of the participants, thereby improving the comprehensiveness of the data collected.

Section 3 includes a description of the time frame for data collection, the recruitment process, and the response rate of potential participants. This section also includes a description of how the data were analyzed and used in the study, the validation process, and limitations or obstacles encountered while conducting the study. Next, I report the findings from the data analysis by describing how they answered the research questions, including any unexpected phenomena. The section concludes with a summary of the findings as related to the practice-focused research questions.

Challenges and Subsequent Revisions

This study presented many challenges and obstacles.

Recruitment Difficulties

It was difficult to recruit participants for this study. A total of 40 invitations were sent out through LinkedIn to candidates identified as researchers in the child welfare/EBP space and key decision makers in the child welfare field and located in the Midwest. The adult informed consent form was also sent with the invitations. There was no response to the invitations for over 2 months. Finally, I received a consent response from a researcher working with EBP and child welfare. The first interview lasted for 1 hour 50 minutes. Although it was comprehensive and provided rich data, the participant informed me that the length of the interview was daunting when she first received the invitation. She also felt that the amount of time referenced on the consent form would be a deterrent for other

potential participants. This led to the next obstacle that needed to be addressed the number of questions in the interview protocol.

Length of Interview Protocol

It was necessary to reduce the number of questions in the interview protocol due to the 1 hour 50 minutes it took to complete the first interview. Reducing the questions without compromising the quality of data related to the research questions and theoretical framework was challenging but accomplished.

Technical Difficulties

Ten months into data collection and analysis, I lost all my relevant data due to a catastrophic system crash with my laptop. I was unable to retrieve any of the data from the first 12 participants. New letters of invitation had to be sent out, and I had only five candidates respond. One dropped out before the interview due to timing issues. I made the decision to proceed with the four interviews that had been scheduled.

Data Analysis Techniques

There were four participants in the study, and the interviews lasted 35 to 50 minutes. The constructs explored in the study were attitudes and perceptions of key stakeholders toward a VCC framework for developing, integrating, and implementing EBP in child welfare as well as the attitudes necessary for this to occur. The participants consisted of four key decision makers. Although recruiting two to three more participants would have provided a more robust data set, by the fourth participant I had reached a point of saturation for the questions being explored.

Data analysis began with the transcription of all the recordings using Rev, an audio and video to text software. Once the audio files were transcribed, I followed the steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) in their research on the use of thematic analysis in psychology. These included familiarizations, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and completing the write-up. I began by reading through each interview transcript several times to familiarize myself with and understand the content of the interview. I then reviewed the transcripts again to begin identifying patterns and themes in the responses of participants.

Following the familiarization process, I conducted the first cycle of coding using the ATLAS.ti software. Over 500 words were generated across the transcripts of the four participants. I reviewed the 500 words and coded 102 words that were relevant to the subject matter. These words were entered into the ATLAS.ti software, and participant responses were identified to create categories in alignment with the research questions and the concepts of the framework of VCC.

Next, a second review of the data was conducted using the results of the first cycle of coding. Each code was assigned to the three principles of VCC: engagement platform, experience domains, and ecosystems of capability. From the second cycle of coding, I identified and documented patterns and themes within the data across the four participants. The iterative nature of the review was useful in digging deeper into the similarities of responses among the four participants. The coding was conducted in line with the interview questions asked of participants, and a comparison was made of the responses of the participants. The transcripts were scrutinized for strong or emotive

language, agreement among participants, and disagreements on the question responses. All four participants received a copy of their interview transcripts for purposes of validation.

Findings

In analyzing the data collected, I used the concepts specified within the framework of VCC (i.e., engagement platforms, experience domains, and ecosystems of capability) to examine the themes/patterns present within the participant responses to the interview questions regarding the viability of a VCC framework for collaboration between stakeholders in child welfare. I also examined what specific attitudes were suggested as necessary to enable stakeholders to develop, implement, and integrate EBPs in real-world settings through a framework of VCC. There were seven emergent themes that provided insight into the attitudes and perceptions of the participants toward VCC as a viable framework for the integration of EBP in child welfare. The data analysis revealed four themes related to RQ1: How do stakeholders describe the viability of a value co-creation paradigm framework process to improve the use of EBPs in child welfare practice? Three themes also emerged for RQ2: What specific attitudes do child welfare stakeholders describe as necessary to enable effective integration of the use of EBPs in real-world settings through a value co-creation paradigm framework? Table 3 presents the questions and themes.

Table 3*Research Questions and Resulting Themes*

Research question	Theme
How do stakeholders describe the viability of a value co-creation paradigm framework process to improve the use of EBPs in child welfare practice?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What's in a name? 2. Collaborations exist in small silos within the system. 3. Evidence-based programs, sustainability, and contextual fit. 4. Quality of practice vs. state and federal protocols.
What specific attitudes do child welfare stakeholders describe as necessary to enable effective integration of the use of EBPs in real-world settings through a value co-creation paradigm framework?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Follow through on collaborative efforts. 2. Compatible agendas. 3. Leadership buy-in and support.

The following sections provide a description of each emergent theme including direct quotes from participants as evidence of the theme. The direct quotes provide evidence of the participants' perceptions and attitudes regarding the subject matter. The names of participants were changed to maintain confidentiality.

Research Question 1

How do stakeholders describe the viability of a VCC paradigm framework process to improve the use of EBPs in child welfare practice?

Theme 1: What's in a Name?

The introductory question asked of the participants was to find out if they had any knowledge of the VCC framework. The name of the theory and its reference as a framework to integrate EBPs in child welfare practice was received guardedly by three of the four participants. Although the words VCC framework was new to all participants, the concepts, definitions, and tools were very familiar. There was an initial sense of VCC

being the same old evidence-based program they had seen recycled and implemented in their years as social workers and administrators given a new moniker. Three of the participants responded to their familiarity with some of the concepts within the framework:

- “It’s interesting because I think it sounds similar to some actual evidence-based processes like Wraparound... That kind of concept of bringing stakeholders together to work towards a common goal and implement some steps towards change that they have equal accountability for.” (Annie)
- “Well, the way you put it, not the words that you used. The fact that the value co-creation paradigm, those words, no, we didn’t use that. But the things about it, the engagement platform, the experience domain, it’s just new words. Pretty much the same thing that we’ve been doing in social work. And that’s gathering a group of people, stakeholders, for a particular person, trying to come up with a particular program that would match the service component for our families and get the children back home in a timely fashion.” (Susan)

Crystal concurred with Susan and Annie, stating, “Not the name itself... But what it is that it actually does-... Is what we do every day. Value co-creation was just a name. It’s just a title.”

Understandably, the child welfare system is inundated with EBPs from various researchers and program developers and many of these programs follow the same principles and the actual interpretation of implementation is often similar. Child welfare administrators become frustrated when new frameworks are presented that are no

different from previous frameworks that have either failed or been abandoned in the past. It is important to note however, that the VCC framework is unique in its wholistic nature. Upon further explanation of the parameters of the VCC paradigm frame, participants became more open to the possibility of its success, as described in toward the end of this section. The framework requires all its concepts to be applied and work in concert with each other systematically to create the value outcomes needed for success and sustainability (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014).

Theme 2: Collaboration Exists but in Small Silos Within the System

Participants agreed that collaborations do exist within the system however, they exist in small silos within the system. According to Annie, these collaborations do involve researchers working with agencies and Family Services:

- “I think that the child welfare systems do. There’s many of them that already do partner with researchers and academics, and really do take a look at best practices. I think where things fall apart is the department’s ability to then implement... So, I think that there’s research that gets done, there’s training that gets done, there’s continuous evaluation over time, so there’s this longitudinal perspective. I know in Illinois they had even created a simulation training for investigators. ... and so, there’s a lot of those kinds of pockets of things that happened with that collaboration. But I feel like unless the department can fully embrace and utilize what’s learned from that around evidence-based practices, it becomes a challenge to effectively implement. So, the sustainability then becomes the issue, right?”
(Annie)

Sustainability has generally been an issue in child welfare evidence-based programs. For multiple reasons, including those discussed in this study, such as contextual fit, program support and consistent follow-up efforts EBPs fall short in the long run. Susan explained that there are some programs in place, stating that, “There’s definitely a space for that. It’s being done with DCFS in conjunction with the FCURP team, which is foster care utilization review program that is done through University of Illinois.”

According to Crystal there is room for the collaborative efforts, however, it would require some changes in the laws currently in place to accommodate new ideas on how to generate data and how rules and laws regarding child welfare are enacted:

- “So, it (VCC) can work, but it would take major collaboration, major change of rules. Actually, some laws being made to change the old laws or updated laws, but some new laws too. Yeah. And I think there has to be a space for researchers to interact with the families, because this is where you should be able to get your data to now create your programs.” (Crystal)

Sam agreed with Annie and Crystal, her perception being that “I feel as though it can be done. I feel as though things can be resolved, but I feel as though people got to learn to work out of the box.” (Sam) Collaborative efforts are a critical part of the child welfare system and have been for decades. The challenge comes when stakeholders are at odds in the value outcomes of collaborations or when the results are not supported by the ecosystem within which they are developed.

Theme 3: Evidence-Based Programs, Sustainability, Contextual Fit

As discussed in Sections 1 and 2, contextual fit is a significant indicator of whether a program will succeed with a target population. This issue was addressed at length by Susan:

- “The Casey foundation goes everywhere. It’s Chicago based, but it goes everywhere, and they try to find programs that may fit in Chicago. And then DCFS try to implement them. And nine times out of 10, they always fail ... Getting back to evidence-based programs. I would say most of our programs that we do are evidence-based, but they were not surveyed and tracked and built in the state of Illinois for the state of Illinois families and children. It’s like a cookie cutter. If it works in Wyoming, it’s definitely going to work in Illinois. First of all, we don’t look like the people in Wyoming. We don’t act like them. Our neighborhoods are not like them. Our mental health state budget is not like theirs. Our substance misuse budget is not like theirs. The program, what’s good for the goose is good for the gander.” (Susan)
- “It wasn’t made for Chicago. The research wasn’t done in Chicago, so the clients don’t respond the way they’re supposed to. And the caseworkers are frustrated. So, with value co-creation, all stakeholders come together in that platform. That engagement platform could be at the research facility. It could be at a DCFS office. It could be a private agency office. It could be any one of those places. So those are the engagement platforms where this is where they begin to work.” (Susan)

- “You can take a pilot and see where the pilot impacts your population, or if it doesn’t at all, right? And then from there, there may be some good practices or best practices that you would want to employ, but then you have to take the rest of those elements in the context, I think. Because that’s the biggest complaint with researchers, right? Is that they’re not inclusive of all possibilities of participants. And so, research that works well for this small population here may not translate well anywhere else. So, I think that the data that’s collected, any data that you collected is valuable if you take it within the context of your environment and what you’re trying to achieve.” (Susan)

Sam’s response to the contextual fit of EBPs involved adaptation of EBPs to meet the needs of the targeted population, bring up the issue of fidelity to the program:

- “That’s adapting the program to the context of the population. So, when you can do that, sometimes it works because you’ve tweaked it to your population, but when you try to go back and say, Yeah, we’re using evidence-based practice, they’ll be like, no, you’re not, because you’ve tweaked our program. This is not the program we sent you. You done changed this, changed that, changed that. It’s no longer EBP, but it’s a program that works for that population, and based on that population using it, then it becomes evidence-based practice for that population.” (Sam)

Although EBPs have been created from rigorous research there remains the question of adaptation to the target population and the contextual fit for that community.

There is no doubt that maintaining the fidelity to any proposed EBP is important but there

has been research that show that the question of adaptation is an important part of successful implementation (Annie E. Casey, 2017; Faulkner & Parish, 2018; & Rushovich & Malm, 2019). When EBPs are not designed around and for a specific population within their environment, funders, both private and public should allow some adaptations for contextual fit.

Theme 4: Follow Through on Collaborative Efforts

The recurring responses regarding collaborations that happen on Engagement Platforms and how the experience domains are used as a tool to create a space for interaction and dialogue was, (a) lack of follow through on the part of the participants either because of lack of organization or, (b) loss of interest because other issues take precedence. For example, Susan has been part of several engagement platforms. She describes the last:

- “Maybe about four months ago we had virtual collaborations with the court system, the public defenders, the state’s attorneys, ...the judges, with the community stakeholders that provide services for our families, individual family counseling, parenting, also foster parents. We just had a virtual collaboration when we all got together, and we talked about what were the needs of the children? What were the needs of the parents? What type of services for different communities that was needed? Another stakeholder that was added to the collaboration was workers, supervisors, and administrators at the private sector in group homes. So, we had a little bit of everybody, and it was an agreement that

we should get together at least quarterly and try to come up what is needed in particular areas, in different counties for our families.”

- “... So here we go again. We was up and running. Everybody was excited. For three days straight we had community collaborations. I’m talking about every two hours for three days straight, we met with all these different stakeholders. It was like a marathon. Everybody was excited. It’s like, oh, if you guys really implement this collaboration with all these community stakeholders, with these foster parents, with these workers, supervisors, with the court system, this could really work. Because it’s giving everybody a jolt of happiness. Like, oh, we can do this. We can do this. Never happened. And that was in September. We’re in February. It just got put to the wayside.” (Susan)

This lack of follow through and lack of continuity cripples any attempt at collaborative efforts amongst stakeholders. Sam had the same experiences with collaborative efforts.

- “Right, because I guess because I done been to a platform or something like that and sitting and hearing what they got to say, and then at the end of the day, it’s just walking out with another theory or something. Nothing came out of it. Anyway, that’s the only thing I got about some of the platforms, is because it’s like okay, we’re discussing it and we know what the problem is. At the end of the day, after I done been here, nobody’s stated how this should move forward.” (Sam)

Sam had also participated in several meetings where stakeholders were brought together to review EBPs and work towards implementation. The difficulty she found lay in the fact that a lot of the EBPs were not structured to meet the needs of the target population she represented. She adds this:

- “I do think it (collaboration) should be just kept to a minimal, you know what I’m saying? If you’re going to have... because when you have too many people come together, that’s a bigger problem. Really have the people... I don’t think you need to discuss that. I understand the importance of having different stakeholders in there, but you really need a number of stakeholders. When you start having a large number of people, it’s just more disagreements. It’s just more... everybody has their ideals, and everybody wants to be heard. It’s like keep it down to a minimal. I don’t think you need a whole bunch of people. Of course, you need the case worker, but maybe just have a case worker there, in there that really is a good case worker, been probably employed as a case worker for X number... you pull somebody in that’s been working 10 or 15 years, they should be able to bring something to the table.” (Sam)

For Annie, although she acknowledged the presence of pockets of collaborative efforts, her perceptions were centered around the intentionality behind these collaborative efforts and the lack of support from the ecosystem:

- “And so, there’s a lot of those kinds of pockets of things that happened with that collaboration. But I feel like unless the department can fully embrace and utilize what’s learned from that around evidence-based practices, it becomes a challenge

to effectively implement. Yeah. I think the key there for me is that it's intentional in that you have to come to a place of agreement. So, whenever you try to create a collaboration, you always have to get people to get on the same agenda. Right?"

(Annie)

Sam concurred with Annie's view, stating, "there's a number of universities right now that do these different components of working with the Illinois child welfare system. And the question becomes are the leaders in child welfare asking for the right stuff from the academics?" (Sam) This again questions the support of the ecosystem of capability. Susan responded to the question of collaboration from a different approach, describing a collaborative effort she was involved with,

- "We cannot do our work if we're not a team if it's not a collaboration. Anything you do in life; you have to collaborate. Just like with the sex abuse investigative team with the Children Advocacy Program, the State Children Advocacy Program, that's an evidence-based program because it's called the medical model. You have the doctors on staff. You have the advocates on staff. You have the police officers on staff. You have the states attorney on staff. And then you have the DCFS investigators. You also have the forensic interviewers." (Susan)
- "I know one agency was very, very creative because we were talking about getting back to, number one, DCFS needs to do better with their... Publicity is not a good word. But we are not the loving, caring agency that we used to be. So, we got real bad PR. DCFS need to get back to doing public relations... Right. Utilizing the hospitals that are closed in these communities and converting them

into group home settings. I mean, everybody, these people were really, really creative. We were also talking about; we have a lot of families that are on public aid. Why do they have to come to the attention of DCFS when the public aid representative can refer them to parenting classes, to individual and family counseling, to substance abuse programs, to sex abuse programs? Why does it have to get to DCFS? So, we were talking about how all our entities are lacking, and they're just putting all the work on DCFS, and stretching DCFS." (Susan)

When I asked what happened to this group Susan responded very sadly that,

- "Well, it didn't go anywhere. And the reason why it didn't go anywhere, because the first part of it was, was gathering information. Then the second part of it was creating a report. And then the third part of it was implementing these work groups with these people, with all these different stakeholders. It never got off the ground because here we are in February, it was put on hold because most of the people that were a part of it on the DCFS side, they're no longer at the department. They're either retired, or they got let go." (Susan)

The need for successful collaborations within the child welfare system seems like a given, we shouldn't question its value and its necessity. Yet, it seems to be elusive and lacks the support of organizational leadership, as described by participants in the study.

Research Question 2

What specific attitudes do child welfare stakeholders describe as necessary to enable the effective integration of the use of EBPs in real-world settings through a value co-creation paradigm framework?

Theme 1: Compatible Agendas

The importance of compatible agendas was one of the first issues discussed by participants in relation to the questions of attitudes of stakeholders necessary to enable effective integration of EBPs in real-world setting. Annie proposed the need for intentionality on the part of stakeholders and the difficulty in merging agendas when actors are coming in with different outcome values in mind.

- “Yeah. I think the key there for me is that it’s intentional in that you have to come to a place of agreement. So, whenever you try to create a collaboration, you always have to get people to get on the same agenda. Right? ... It’s difficult because it’s such an emotional system as well, and everyone has this hyper ... When you put together a collaboration, I think everyone comes with an agenda, you know? Unless everybody in the system has that agreement, it becomes a challenge ... And then we have the issues of the federal agenda being different from the state agenda. So, you get one kind of information from the federal government, and then when you try to translate it within the state, they have other guidelines and principles they want you to follow, so that creates a problem as well. (Annie)

Sam added the issue of transparency and respect between stakeholders saying, “I think transparency does need to be there. I think as far as the communication, it needs to be effective communication, and please, let’s have some respect for each other’s ideas on this part, here, on this level.” (Sam) For practice frameworks to succeed, stakeholders must come to the table with compatible agendas. The agendas do not have to be identical;

the engagement platform and experience domain allows stakeholders to come to the table for meaningful dialog leading to successful outcomes of value for the target population being served.

Theme 2: Leadership Buy-In and Support

The second theme revealed in this section was the lack of buy-in and lack of leadership support for innovative programs and EBPs. The attitude of openness to innovation and buying into the new EPBs and strategies was paramount to whether the research and programs developed were effective and sustainable. According to Annie:

- “So, depending on who’s in a leadership position, and if they accept and buy into the research and things that happen, then it might move. But if they don’t, then the leadership can crush that in a second, so it doesn’t become sustainable...if they’re looking at evaluating something that is currently happening, but not necessarily looking to innovate or really work towards a process to implement an evidence-based practice, then are you really utilizing that resource most effectively to improve your system? (Annie)

Crystal also spoke of the need for top-down leadership in ensuring that the standards set for EBP success is not always quantitative. In the child welfare, qualitative data matters most, we work from client perspective and how to best help them meet their needs, not by focusing on meeting arbitrary numbers generated by government funding requirements. According to Crystal,

- “First thing, how do you expect an entity to go along these guidelines when it’s not being pushed from the top down? For instance, all these issues that we saw

with various cases, and I mean with new standards now, you have to be more quantitative. But you have to be qualitative. It's not just about quantitative anymore. It's the quality of what you do." (Crystal)

Theme 3: Quality of Practice vs State and Federal Protocols

A recurring theme amongst the participants was the struggle between state and federal protocols as it impacts quality of practice. Annie felt that the attitude of focusing on protocols rather than family dynamics misses the point of delivering needed services to families:

- "And I think as a department, I think that the department really needs to look at practice and look at quality of practice more so than the focus on protocol... Protocol alone is, is not going to train your staff to understand the dynamics of what happens in families and how to best hear them, to serve them, to bring them together and get them what they need." (Annie)

Crystal concurred with this feeling, "So, you expect a worker to engage these parents, these children, families, foster parents, a certain way, okay. Federal standards are different from Illinois standards." (Crystal) Susan also felt that the time frame given to implement EBPs and get results was inadequate in relation to how families work through and engage new programs.

- "The problem in Illinois is we'll try something, but we don't try it long enough. Because of the politicians, they only give us a small window... The fed said, we're going to give you \$2 million for this program for two years." That's not even

enough time to see a result of an evidence-based program. It usually takes four, minimum.” (Crystal)

The attitudes presented by the participants are a part of the VCC framework. When there is a positive attitude from the top regarding innovative programs, it equally translates to enthusiasm towards implementation and has a chance to be successful and sustainable.

Viability of a VCC Framework to Improve the Use of EBPs in Child Welfare

Practice

Across all 4 participants, there was a clear agreement that the concepts within the framework of VCC, when implemented as indicated by the framework could be successfully utilized to improve the use of EBP’s in child welfare real-world settings. While all participants have current or previous experience with EBP, their level of participation differed. Two of the participants had direct involvement with adoption and implementation while one was involved in the evaluation process. The last participant was primarily involved with ensuring federal and state EBP protocols were being adhered to. None of the participants were satisfied with the EBPs they had been involved with especially as it related to the context of their target populations and the timeframe allowed for program success.

There was some consistency in the overall reception of the use of VCC as a framework for integrating EBPs into child welfare practice, however, it was followed to skepticism about the follow through and support for it. Annie was excited about the framework and its utility within the community she works with outside of the child welfare system, stating that:

- “This is a great framework to take into a community and work with the leaders in the community to consider some of the things that are happening within their community about how to look at change and really using this kind of a framework, from the very beginning, to start, start with that... You’ve got to allow yourself to be there. And again, and I think that ecosystem, too, you have to be able to be in a situation where you can create the values around innovation, and newness, and change in order for any of it to happen. So, for me, I really like this, and I would look to adopt it in other ways, and maybe smaller scales. But I like the framework a lot.” (Annie)

Crystal concluded that VCC as a framework can help with EBPs but thought it would be a challenging process requiring a change of mindset and culture from top level management.

- “It can work but, in our day, and time, it’s not going to. It may get half done, but it’s not going to be a hundred percent compliance. It can’t be the way things are... There’s definitely a space for that. There’s space in the system to support it, but can it happen? There’s room, but again, that’s a lot of mind-altering, that’s a lot of changing the culture. Certain situations it can happen. Other situations it can’t, it won’t happen.” (Crystal)

According to Susan, “I think it’s necessary. We cannot do our work if we’re not a team if it’s not a collaboration. Anything you do in life; you have to collaborate.” (Susan) Sam on the other hand, having been part of several stakeholder engagement platforms where collaboration was difficult and follow through was missing felt that indeed

collaborations are important between stakeholders, however, limiting the number of stakeholders to those vital to issue being address and having a focused agenda were important to the process. She said,

- “Well, I do feel as though, like I say, that yeah, we have to come together, and all the important stakeholders need to come together in order to be in that platform. I’m definitely for the platforms, but just bring about... I just need the people who is very instrumental in making it happen. I don’t need everybody to just be invited to the platform and sit around and throw out your ideas. You may have people there that may have been doing this, came into doing this business only five years. You don’t know nothing. You know what I’m saying? So, I don’t need to hear from you, because you just... especially if you came in during the COVID system, you really don’t know nothing about the business here. That’s how I feel about the platform. I just need the vital people to be there and be able to be very open to what’s going on and be ready to resolve that... I think during that platform, I do think that it should be a very strict agenda to go by to discuss this matter.” (Susan)

The viability of a VCC in integrating EBPs in child welfare practice settings is evident from the findings, and the concepts, principles, and tools, when implemented in the space of working towards outcomes of value for the populations being served can be sustainable.

Attitudes Necessary for Stakeholders to Develop, Implement, and Integrate EBPs in Real-World Settings Through a Framework of Value Co-Creation

The participants were clear about the attitudes necessary to achieve effective development, implementation, and integration of EBPs into child welfare practice. The study revealed that the consistent attitudes mentioned by participants were:

- respect between stakeholders, allowing others to share their ideas,
- deliberate intentionality when entering the engagement platforms,
- communication within the experience domain.
- transparency amongst people involved in the Engagement Platforms
- defeatist in the sense that their experience with the child welfare system did not reveal any room for transformation anytime soon.
- some areas of the system work but overall, there needs to be a system overhaul for change and openness to adopting a framework such as the VCC.

How Findings Relate to the VCC Framework Concepts

I reviewed the findings in relation to the VCC concepts of engagement platforms, experience domain and ecosystems of capability, the correlations to the findings indicate the following:

Engagement Platforms

While participants reported limited engagement platforms where researchers and stakeholders convene to share information, knowledge, and work on roads to positive outcomes of value, they all agreed that there were small silos throughout the child welfare system where these platforms exist, and work is being done with positive results.

However, there needs to be an increase in the number of platforms that are working on EBP projects with successful and sustainable outcomes.

Experience Domains

Participants reported success within the experience domains and the hopes for collaborative efforts amongst the stakeholders, there were disappointments when the collaborative efforts were suddenly terminated, there was no move forward, due to either lack of administrative support or lack of resources. The work that was done with the engagement platform was not supported by the ecosystems of capability. There was also some concern within the engagement platforms of stakeholders with conflicting agendas and too many stakeholders at the table at once.

Ecosystems of Capability

The disparity between federal standards, state standards, and the reality of the processes within child welfare was discussed by three out of the four participants in the study. Also present was the lack of support from higher ups in implementation and execution of programs or to embrace innovative ideas developed through the collaborative process. This creates an issue when we analyze the function of the ecosystems of capability and its usefulness in the framework of VCC to integrate evidence-based practice in child welfare practice. There was a defeatist attitude regarding the support that could be gained from the ecosystems of capability in bringing providing the necessary tools for sustainability, governance, development, and infrastructure. For the ecosystem of capability to be successful it must prove to be open and willing to support outcomes of value. For the VCC framework to be successful conceptualizing and

embracing the three main concepts as a mindset is important and acting within that mindset is imperative.

Summary

The results of this study were gathered from four key decision makers in the child welfare system who have had some experience in development and implementation of EBPs and they had experience in arenas such as those suggested by the VCC framework. In the initial steps, this researcher encountered challenges with recruitment of participants, the length of the interview, and technical difficulties leading to loss of data. Once the data was collected, coded, and analyzed, seven themes were revealed from the interview data in relation to the research questions.

Four of the resultant themes provided insight to RQ1 which explored the questions of the viability of VCC in the integration of EBP into child welfare settings. There were three themes related to the question of stakeholder attitudes necessary to enable the effective integration of EBPs in real-world settings through a VCC framework. While participants agreed that there was a possibility for the VCC framework to work within the child welfare system the road ahead would be challenging due to issues such as differing agendas, lack of support and lack of follow through. The participants also viewed attitudes such as transparency, respect, and intentionality as necessary for the use of VCC to integrate EBPs into child welfare practice settings. Chapter 4 will discuss the application of the findings of this study to professional practice in child welfare, the relationship with the ethics of the discipline, its resultant impact to the broad knowledge of social practice and its capacity for social change.

Section 4: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Social Change

The purpose of this qualitative study was to find out whether a VCC paradigm framework was viable for collaboration between stakeholders in child welfare, and to explore what attitudes are necessary to enable child welfare stakeholders (i.e., researchers, practitioners, and key decision makers) to develop, implement, and integrate EBPs in real-world settings through a framework/process of VCC. I wanted to find out how stakeholders describe the viability of the framework and what attitudes as necessary to integrate EBPs in real-world settings through a VCC paradigm framework.

Section 4 includes the presentation of key findings that may inform the child welfare system and EBP. I describe the application to professional practice and the implications for social change. I also describe the ways in which the findings extend knowledge within the discipline. Finally, I include recommendations for future research.

Summary of Key Findings and How They Inform Social Work Practice

The key findings in this study indicated that although there is a space for the utilization of a VCC framework in the integration of EBP in child welfare practice, some challenges and obstacles must be overcome. The themes generated from the data allowed me to understand those challenges and obstacles. The themes generated were as follows: (a) What's in a name? (b) collaborations exist but only in small silos within the system; (c) lack of follow through on collaborative efforts; (d) conflicting agendas; (e) evidence-based program, sustainability, and lack of contextual fit; (f) leadership buy-in/lack of support; and (7) quality of practice vs state and federal protocols. These seven themes emerged from the analysis of interview data.

Participants initial perception of VCC was that it was yet another framework that they had seen before with a new title. When the different levels of the framework were explained, participants felt that it was something they could work but there had to be buy-in from upper management for it to succeed. Participants felt that the idea of collaboration between researchers and key decision makers is something that happens but only in small silos within the system and not nearly enough to provide lasting change. Some participants lamented the lack of support from state and federal actors when it comes to resource allocation to ensure the success of EBPs and had a surprisingly defeatist attitude regarding the idea of change in the system within their current tenure with their respective agencies. One area to note is the possibility of unconscious bias as it relates to the participants having worked within the child welfare system for many years.

How Findings Extend Knowledge in Social Work

These findings extend knowledge in the development, implementation, and sustainability of programs intended for children and families in the child welfare system. The findings showed that there needs to be a concerted effort among stakeholders to work together on problem definition, to communicate and collaborate on methods of problem solving, and finally to ensure that there is an ecosystem of capability to support the enactment and implementation of EBPs that result from these collaborations. The EBPs must be contextual and supported by the infrastructure in which they were created (see Horner et al., 2014). Cohen (2019) in a study of what decision makers want from EBPs had similar findings that indicated the contextual fit is a significant concern in the development and use of EBPs. The need for a successful framework such as the VCC

paradigm should be explored further through rigorous research and practice to determine its value to the discipline.

The key areas within the current findings that require attention are the need for follow through on decisions made through the engagement platforms. For this to happen, support and advocacy from higher management is imperative. Additionally, support is needed from state and federal governments through resource allocation, excluding unattainable requirements and allowing organizations enough time to fully implement the funded EBPs so that the programs can be successful and sustainable.

Application to Professional Ethics in Social Work Practice

The social work practice problem addressed in this study was the challenge faced by child welfare stakeholders in the successful integration of EBPs in real-world settings, the minimal sustainable implementation frameworks, and the dearth of research involving the viability of a VCC framework for EBP implementation among child welfare stakeholders (i.e., researchers, clients, and practitioners) within the system of care in the creation and implementation of sustainable practices. The NASW (2021) provided a set of values and principles to guide social workers in their professional conduct.

The first ethical standard by the NASW (2021) related to the current study is the social workers' ethical responsibility to clients, specifically the area of cultural competence. When research, program development, and program services are adopted by agencies, it is imperative that they are culturally specific to the target population they serve. When there is a lack of contextual fit, EBPs are not sustainable, leading clients to become frustrated with the child welfare system (Ferguson et al., 2020; Merritt, 2021).

The second ethical principle that applied to the current study is the social workers' ethical responsibilities in practice settings. This section underpins the responsibilities of administrators to advocate for the clients they serve through resource development within and outside the agency. This advocacy should be in place at the mezzo and macro levels of social work. There should be deliberate actions on the part of administrators to challenge EBPs that are not sustainable for their clients and push for reasonable timelines to move children and families through the process of practices that prove hopeful. Accepting whatever is dictated by state and federal protocols does not improve the circumstances of the target population or lead to positive outcomes of value.

The findings of the current study may impact social work practice in such a way that it begins to rethink the alignment of EBP research, development, and implementation in practice settings according to the code of ethics as prescribed by the NASW (2021). Findings may show the importance of such alignment as part of the process to decrease the amount of harm to clients by implementing EBPs that clients are unable to follow because of incompatibility.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice

The findings of this study suggest that more research needs to be done to further the knowledge and understanding of how a VCC framework can be beneficial to the practice of child welfare as well as social work. The strategies used in current research and practice need to be more client centered, and research, practice, and policy must be synchronized with a focused outcome of value for the client population served. Advocacy at the state and federal levels is required for change to occur within the overburdened and

complex child welfare system. There must be room for adaptation of EBPs to fit the context and environment of the client even when it infringes on the fidelity of the EBP. The cookie cutter approach does not result in valuable outcomes for the client population.

The results of this study have given me a new way of thinking about how research and practice should be conducted with respect to individuals, families, groups, and communities to attain the best outcome. The VCC framework is applicable in any area or discipline where there is interaction among people. When implemented properly, the VCC includes all stakeholders and addresses complex issues with strategic planning that results in outcomes of value for all stakeholders. I use this framework in my current work as a leader in a nongovernmental organization, and it has proved to be a useful framework.

In current ecosystem of work, engagement platforms are more virtual which makes it easier to communicate and be inclusive of all actors within the forum. Having the same desired outcome of value is our biggest step forward in the process, next is the support of the ecosystem in helping us achieve the outcomes for our target populations. Ideas are important in any major exchange, but they do not move forward without resources and a supportive infrastructure.

Transferability

The participants in this study were 4 key decision makers in child welfare agencies. The limited number of participants in this study makes transferability difficult to assess. Despite that there is useful knowledge in the research and its finding to suggest that further research on the framework of VCC will yield a strong result that benefits the

social work discipline and provides a wholistic view of how stakeholders in child welfare should work synergistically to improve the value of practice with clients.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study rest with the sample size which was not enough to assess transferability. Furthermore, the participants were key decision makers in child welfare. I was unable to get the perspectives of any researchers to further enhance the results of the study. I believe the response of the researchers would bear some correlation with those of the key decision makers but through a different lens. A final limitation of this study could be the background of the participants and their lack of experience in the relationship and challenges between policy and practice.

Dissemination

The findings of this study will be particularly useful in addressing the way EBPs are integrated in child welfare practice settings. I have a platform to disseminate this information through the different forums I belong to such as the Golden Key Society, the National Association of Leadership and Success, the National Association of Social Workers, and the National Coalition of Independent Scholars where I can share the finding of this study. I will also be submitting a shorter version of this study to several academic journals for possible publication. Additionally, I attend several conferences and meetings on child welfare where members can present their works and I intend to create a short presentation of the findings at several social work conferences. I am also a member of ResearchGate, where I will have the opportunity to present my work in various ways.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this study reflect the importance of the interaction of stakeholders through engagement platforms that combine collaboration, communication, and cooperation as well as a supportive ecosystem to effect an impactful positive social change. Kezar (2014) indicates that there is the possibility of change through our interactions with others. Walden University (2015) defines positive social change as “a deliberate process of creating and applying ideas, strategies, and actions to promote the worth, dignity, and development of individuals, communities, organizations, institutions, culture, and societies. Positive social change results in the improvement of human and social conditions” (Walden University).

This definition of social change encompasses what the child welfare system and its stakeholders should be striving for in caring for the children and families they serve. However, the disconnect between all levels within the system, the lack of support and the limited vision into how to restructure the system make it difficult to move forward from its past and plan strategically for an innovative system that is inclusive for the future.

At the micro level, this study showed that there is a need to begin research and program development from the client’s perspective and within their environment. Clients and their caseworkers need to be part a of the stakeholders involved in the engagement platforms, the experience domains, and the ecosystem of capability to achieve the outcome of value to client service needs.

At the mezzo level, administrators and the child welfare research community need to use the VCC framework to understand the contextual needs of their populations.

Framing of the problem, research studies, program development should be a concerted effort between stakeholders. There must be a desire to build relationships among stakeholders, relationships where their agendas, goals, and objectives are comparable and compatible.

The macro level of integrating EBPs into child welfare settings present some serious challenges. The study shows that there is a disconnect between the needs of clients, and the agendas of actors at the macro level. The understanding of service needs is often at odds with the programs and protocols established at the state and federal level. Funding allocation for EBPs are often based on KPIs that are unreasonable when translated and implemented at the micro level.

In the child welfare system, programs are often adopted without consideration for the client base, timeline for effective implementation, resources within the client's catchment area, and the environment. When these programs fail funding is cut off from the agencies and clients suffer the consequences. Sankaran (2020) supports this by saying 'For too long, child welfare professionals have allowed the benevolence of their motives to blind us to the system's failing.' More needs to be done at the macro level to change policies that are dysfunctional and harmful to clients within the child welfare system. According to Dreyfus (2018),

- “The challenge ahead will require that everyone – from the public to the private sector – come together to create and implement a thoughtful and carefully planned blueprint for change... Achieving a vision of a 21st century model for child welfare will require a realignment of the practice, policy, regulatory and fiscal

mechanisms to our desired goals and values at the local, state, and federal levels.”

(Dreyfus, 2018, para 3)

The issue becomes how willing and able are the actors at the macro level to impact real change within the child welfare system. The research shows that EBPs that are culturally sensitive, contextual, impactful, and sustainable work (Honer, Blitz, and Ross, 2014) The intentionality behind proposed programs however is often questionable. The child welfare system has continued to experience the same issues, challenges, and obstacles when it comes to providing successful and sustainable EBPs strategies to support children and families in need (Honer, Blitz, and Ross, 2014). Over thirty years ago Rosen (2003), described the challenges to be expected with EBPs if they are not developed and implemented appropriately. Unfortunately, we continue to face those same challenges today.

Summary

There is no doubt that the current relationship between the child welfare system and EBP implementation has been limited in its ability to improving the lives of the countless children and families it serves successfully. However, there are some successful pockets of EBPs that have proved successful and sustainable such as parent training. The child welfare system must make room to engage with stakeholders at the micro, mezzo, and macro level at the outset before research and program development begins. There needs to be an understanding of the needs of the children and families of targeted populations before simply providing available EBPs that lack contextual fit and assuming the families have failed because it did not work.

There must be a radical shift in mindset on how to approach the integration and implementation of EBP in child welfare practice settings. While systemwide restructuring and building new infrastructure may take time, it must be done to improve interventions with children and families. The study results indicate that renaming a program and changing a few aspects does not change its outcome. There is a desperate need for support from the federal and state level to understand what happens at the micro level before making decision on funding and what programs to fund. The study also suggested that there is a wide disconnect between what is needed by the clients, what is administratively supported and what resources are available at the state and federal level. There is a dissonance between needs and actions.

A VCC framework brings all actors to the table and holds all stakeholders accountable. It embraces the idea of communication, collaboration, and cooperation among stakeholders, and it provides a framework where the infrastructure supports the outcome of value that has been created by the stakeholders. When stakeholders are involved, there is a vested interest for success, actions take place and outcomes of value are achieved.

The view of positive social change as “the process of transforming patterns of thought, behavior, social relationships, institutions, and social structure to generate beneficial outcomes for individuals, communities, organizations, society, and/or the environment beyond the benefits for the instigators of such transformations” (Stephan et al, 2016) is relevant to how the VCC framework is accepted as an innovative mechanism in addressing the development, implementation, and integration of EBPs into child

welfare. This definition also speaks to the objective of this study and how it might influence positive social change with and for child welfare stakeholders.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol/Research Questions Form

Time of interview: _____

Date: _____

Interviewer: Georgina Horton

Interviewee ID Code: _____

Researcher or Key Decision-maker: _____

Project Description:

The purpose of this study is to:

- a) Explore the *perceptions* of key child welfare stakeholders towards the *ability of stakeholders to work successfully together using a Value Co-Creation (VCC) framework* in the creation, implementation, and sustainability of evidence-based practices (EBPs) in child welfare.
- b) Explore the *attitudes* of key child welfare stakeholders towards the *use of a value co-creation framework* in the creation, implementation, and sustainability of EBPs in child welfare.

Section I: Opening Questions

- Are you involved with EBP research or program *adoption, development and implementation* of EBP?
- In your experience, how would you describe *successful* outcomes in child welfare practice?

Section II: EBP in Child Welfare (Key Decision-makers)

- What are your views on the prospect of collaborating with researchers and other academics in the field of EBP in child welfare in the development of successful and sustainable programs and practices?
- In your opinion, are researchers considered to be a part of the stakeholders within the child welfare continuum of care?

Section III: EBPs in Child Welfare (Researchers)

- What are your views on the prospect of collaborating with key decision makers in the development of programs and practice within their specific context for service delivery to their target populations?

Section IV: Value Co-Creation (VCC)

- Were you familiar with the Value Co-Creation paradigm framework before this research study?

Section V: Engagement Platforms

- What are your thoughts on the concept of engagement platforms as a space for bringing child welfare stakeholders together in innovative methods to collaborate in the advancement of evidence-based practices?
- How would you envision or describe such spaces that are intentionally created to allow for collaborative efforts between researchers and key decision makers in child welfare to share knowledge, vision, experiences, and expertise?
- How can these spaces be executed in a way that results in stakeholder engagement and contextualized to produce outcomes of value for organizations, targeted populations, and communities?

Section VI: Experience Domains

- What are your thoughts on the idea that dialogue, access, reflexivity, and transparency can be applied to the way research and practice collaborate to create valuable programs that positively impact practice implemented in real-world practice?

Section VII: Ecosystems of Capability

- What is your opinion on the capability of the child welfare ecosystem to support the introduction of a VCC framework?
- Is there a space for such a mutual collaboration between stakeholders, especially field experts and research experts to collaborate on different engagement platforms through experience domains? If yes, how do you see envision these collaborations? And if not, what challenges do you see?

Section VIII: Conclusion

- How do you feel about the three concepts that underpin the value co-creation paradigm? Engagement Platforms, Experience Domains, and Ecosystems of Capability.
- What are your thoughts on implementing the value co-creation framework in the future as you work on research and development of new programs and policies in EBP child welfare practice?

We have come to the conclusion of our interview. I appreciate you taking the time to participate in this study. Before you leave, do you have any questions or anything else you would like to add for the study?