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Developing a Strategic Plan to Increase Clinical Services at a Behavioral Health Organization to Address a Growing Addiction Problem

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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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LaTasha Hudson

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
2024

Abstract

Developing a Strategic Plan to Increase Clinical Services at a Behavioral Health
Organization to Address a Growing Addiction Problem

by

LaTasha A. Hudson

MS, Martin University, 2018

MBA, Indiana Wesleyan University, 2004

BS, Indiana University, 1997

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

Walden University

February 2024

Abstract

Hiring skilled mental health professionals is critical to the success of a behavioral health organization. Exploring sustainable business strategies helps an organization assess its current business practices. This qualitative case study focused on the development of a strategic plan as a capacity-building behavioral health care approach to improve organizational sustainability while meeting the community's needs. The problem addressed in this study was the lack of skilled mental health professionals employed to deliver needed services. The development of the strategic plan focused on hiring skilled mental health professionals to assist the organization in addressing the problem. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, behavior health organizations had reported an increased number of patients utilizing substances as a coping strategy, which had led to an increased number of clients presenting symptoms of opioid use disorder. The Baldrige Excellence Framework was used to evaluate current and previous systems practices of a small behavioral health organization located in the Midwest region of the United States. Relevant data sources included the behavioral health organization's website, financial statements, government websites, marketing materials, review of scholarly articles, and interviews with organizational leaders. Findings indicated that the implementation of a 3–5-year strategic plan would address the organization's behavioral health problem. This study may create awareness of strategies available to decrease the number of occurrences of individuals utilizing substance use as a coping strategy for mental health illnesses.

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Dedication

I dedicate my doctoral study to my family and friends. A special thank you to my amazing mom, Lori MeLinda Coe Hudson, who departed her earthly life on February 16, 2014, and continues to show me love through memorable words of encouragement and her resilient ability to meet and exceed every challenge. A special feeling of gratitude to my dad, Leroy Hudson Sr., whose servant leadership serves as my life guide. And my brother, Leroy Hudson Jr., who departed this life too early on June 27, 2022, yet has left behind a true representation of the epitome of strength.

I also dedicate this doctoral study to my sons, Elijah, Zion, and Isaiah, who have shown me love and support throughout my doctoral journey. A special dedication to my best friends and family members who have been silent prayer warriors and loud cheerleaders during my highest and my toughest moments. A special thank you to those who have advocated for my vision and desire to become the first doctoral candidate in my family.

For those wondering if you should pursue your doctorate, I had dreams of becoming a “doctor” of jurisprudence when I was child, and my dreams were “delayed” when I did not understand how to accomplish this goal. So, I abandoned the dream until 2021. Through my life experiences, I have learned that dreams can change over time, and they are still possible, and I am living out a deferred dream. My I hope is that my ability to push through and accomplish my goals will be inspiration to you to “do it.” Start now!

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge and give my sincerest thanks to my clinical supervisor, who motivated me to pursue my doctorate when he stated, “three years from now you’ll be 48 years old; why not be 48 years old with a doctoral degree?” To my client organization leader who welcomed me in with open arms and truly embraced my invitation to participate in this doctoral study, thank you for collaborating with me on this personal endeavor. To my family and friends personally affected by the opioid epidemic, may the future bring love and light to the loved ones lost because of a problem that has grown beyond human reach. I would like to thank God for being a lamp to my feet and a guiding light for my life journey. He has been an ever-present resource in times of frailty, and a resounding force in times of hope. May He continue to provide me with the resources to break free from concrete.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	iv
List of Figures	v
Section 1a: The Behavioral Health Organization	1
Practice Problem	2
Purpose.....	5
Significance.....	7
Summary and Transition.....	9
Section 1b: Organizational Profile.....	10
Organizational Profile and Key Factors.....	11
Organizational Background and Context.....	15
Summary and Transition.....	18
Section 2: Background and Approach—Leadership Strategy and Assessment.....	19
Supporting Literature	21
Sources of Evidence.....	26
Leadership Strategy and Assessment.....	27
Clients/Population Served.....	30
Analytical Strategy.....	34
Summary and Transition.....	35
Section 3: Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management Components of the Organization.....	37
Analysis of the Organization	38

Workforce and Operations	39
Workforce Recruitment and Training	40
Workforce Engagement and Support	41
Workforce Communication and Improvement Process	42
Knowledge Management	43
Risk Management	43
Summary and Transition	44
Section 4: Results—Analysis, Implications, and Preparation of Findings	47
Analysis, Results, and Implications	49
Client Programs and Services	52
Client-Focused Results	53
Workforce-Focused Results	55
Leadership and Governance Results	59
Financial and Marketplace Performance Results	60
Implications of Findings	61
Impact of Positive Social Change	66
Strengths and Limitations of the Study	66
Strengths	66
Limitations	68
Summary and Transition	70
Section 5: Recommendations and Conclusions	71
Recommendations	72

Recommendations for Future Studies	76
Plan for Dissemination.....	77
Conclusion	78
References.....	80
Appendix A: Interview Questions	89
Appendix B: Analysis of the Organization.....	91

List of Tables

Table 1. Strategy Implementation Process for Organization ABC..... 74

List of Figures

Figure 1. Organizational Chart for Organization ABC..... 29

Figure 2. Concept Map for Organization ABC..... 51

Section 1a: The Behavioral Health Organization

To ensure confidentiality of the behavioral health organization examined for this study, Organization ABC will be used as a pseudonym to protect the organization's identity throughout this case study. Organization ABC is a social services organization that has been serving youths and adults since 2015 in the Midwest region of the United States. Currently, Organization ABC serves approximately 300 clients per year with fewer than 35 employees overseen by a CEO, chief financial officer (CFO), and a chief operating officer (COO). The mission of Organization ABC is to provide supportive mental health services to individuals exhibiting health challenges that may prevent them from achieving their personal goals. Organization ABC builds on the foundational principles that foster the inclusion of all people and supports youths in exploring possibilities, discovering opportunities, and achieving dreams. The program spans a wide range of offerings including fostering independent living skills, providing crisis assistance programs, and providing behavior management strategies for individuals with cognitive disabilities. Its core values include accountability, collaboration, empowerment, excellence, respect, reliability, and transparency.

Currently, Organization ABC provides behavior management services to individuals with intellectual disabilities, substance abuse treatment for individuals under the guise of supervised release, mental health therapy including grief counseling, emergency shelter care for boys age 10–15 years, and social supports for families with children in need of services. There has been an increase in the number of clients presenting with a substance abuse problem along with mental health illness at

Organization ABC. The problem addressed in this study was the lack of skilled mental health professionals employed by Organization ABC. The development of a strategic plan focused on hiring skilled mental health professionals to assist Organization ABC in addressing the problem. The strategic plan would help to reduce the number of individuals presenting with both a mental illness and substance abuse disorder.

Practice Problem

The behavioral health organization lacks skilled mental health professionals to develop treatment plans to help clients to identify and implement coping strategies that do not include using drugs and/or alcohol when faced with mental health concerns. According to the Indiana Department of Health (2021), there has been an increased number of clients presenting with a substance abuse problem along with mental health problems within the community. In 2019, over four residents died daily because of an opioid overdose (Indiana Department of Health, 2021). Six years prior to the Indiana Department of Health's report on the drug overdose epidemic, Indiana consistently had a higher overdose rate than the United States average. In 2017, out of all the U.S. states and territories, Indiana was the 14th highest state with overdose related deaths (Indiana Department of Health, 2021). According to the Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) Richard M. Fairbanks School of Public Health (2018), the number of deaths in the county of Marion related to a drug overdose is higher than the rate of similar deaths in the entire United States. Toxicology reports stated that in 2017, 37.4 people died of an overdose compared to 22.4 people per 100,000 in the United States (IUPUI Richard M. Fairbanks School of Public Health, 2018).

Researchers have explored how communities lack mental health providers to address the opioid epidemic, and Organization ABC is reexamining its process to hire skilled mental health professionals trained to meet the community's growing need (Boden et al., 2021). The behavioral health leader of Organization ABC for this study also serves as the COO for Organization ABC. The behavioral health leader stated that the organization has been experiencing difficulty obtaining skilled mental health professionals to work with the growing number of individuals who present with both mental health illness and substance abuse symptoms (personal communication, December 12, 2022). Although researchers have investigated this problem, there was no research or organizational practice knowledge on organizational structures for behavioral health centers to address the growing opioid problem. The current study focused on the development of a strategic plan as a capacity-building behavioral health care approach to improve organizational sustainability while meeting the community's needs. This study addressed the exponential growth of individuals presenting with both symptoms of mental health illness and substance use disorders in the community; the lack of skilled mental health professionals to deliver needed services; and the need to develop processes for implementing strategies to measure outcomes, evaluate successes, and evaluate areas of improvement for both employees and clients. The strategic plan was intended to aid Organization ABC in developing and implementing hiring strategies geared toward helping the organization to address the growing number of individuals presenting with mental health illness utilizing substances as a coping strategy, and to improve its processes for delivering quality mental health care for its community.

This study incorporated existing research and practice literature to address Organization ABC's organizational problem. Fuertes et al. (2019) utilized a conceptual framework to review existing research regarding an organization's approach to determining strategic processes to improve its performance. The current study provided support as to why behavioral health organizations need to develop a strategic plan that addresses their short- and long-term goals; furthermore, I explained how the implementation of strategic plan would assist Organization ABC in addressing the growing opioid epidemic in the community. Tarifi (2021) utilized a theoretical framework to establish that the elements of the strategic plan determine Organization ABC's ability to meet or exceed its performance outcomes. Organization ABC is interested in developing a plan to recruit, hire, train, and retain skilled mental health professionals, yet the organization has not determined the activities to improve its effectiveness to deliver clinical services to address the growing opioid problem.

The current qualitative case study addressed the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: How has the organization addressed the increase in referrals for the number of individuals presenting with an opioid use disorder?

RQ2: How effective is the current intake process for the clients to learn about the specific presenting problem?

RQ3: What has the organization done to strategically address the growing community need?

RQ4: What have other behavioral health organizations done to address this problem?

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the development of a strategic plan to hire skilled mental health professionals to address the growing opioid problem at a behavioral health clinic in the Midwest region of the United States of America. Organization ABC is a private practice that employs skilled mental health professionals focused on working with adults in need of mental health services, including substance use disorders. Organization ABC provides mental health services to a small population in the area, serving at least 300 clients per year.

The Baldrige Excellence Framework (National Institute of Standards and Technology [NIST], 2023) supported this study. The framework was also utilized in this study to assess current and previous processes exploring the development of a strategic plan that includes short- and long-term organizational goals. The Baldrige Excellence Framework is a critical tool for exploring sustainable business strategies. It helps organizations assess their current business practices to develop a plan for improvement as well as acknowledge the organization's success since its start date. The framework also addresses concerns and assists in exploring the development of a strategic plan for improving areas such as communication, productivity, effectiveness, and achievement of strategic organizational goals.

The practice problem in the current study was related to the lack of skilled mental health professionals employed by a behavioral health organization in the Midwest region

of the United States. Mental health professionals needed the skills and experience to address the growing opioid problem in the community. Key approaches for addressing this practice problem included gathering Organization ABC's background information, identifying when the problem began, and aiding in the development and implementation of an effective strategic plan. An effectively crafted strategic plan was intended to help Organization ABC achieve its short- and long-term goals. These approaches guided data collection including both internal and external secondary data to gather supportive information and research on best practices to address Organization ABC's problem. The Baldrige Excellence Framework (NIST, 2023) provided the outline for collecting internal secondary data from the behavioral health leader. Pertinent organizational information collected from Organization ABC's website, financial statements, government websites, marketing materials, review of scholarly articles, and semistructured interviews with the organizational leaders were helpful in addressing the organization's problems. Internal data sources such as interviews with behavioral health leaders helped me determine when Organization ABC began experiencing staffing problems. The inquiry allowed the behavioral health leader to discuss the problem from their perspective and develop recommendations for resolving the staffing problems using a strategic plan.

Internal secondary data sources included marketing materials, employee hiring processes and onboarding procedures, website information, client feedback surveys, employee feedback surveys, financial statements, and employee manuals that identified organizational processes and procedures. Another internal secondary data source included feedback from the behavioral health organization's leaders using the Baldrige Excellence

Framework (NIST, 2023) as a guide to gather their feedback for each process category relevant to organizational performance. During the initial meeting with Organization ABC, the behavioral health leader reported that the company lacked a formal strategic plan, although they had identified goals to assess organizational performance outcomes and service delivery expansions (personal communication, February 14, 2023).

External secondary data sources included data sets compiled by government and public agencies, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Indiana Department of Health, as well as review of scholarly articles. In this study, the investigation of the problem incorporated the integration of both the internal and external secondary data including qualitative interviews with Organization ABC's behavioral health leaders. The organizational problem addressed in this study was how the development of a strategic plan focusing on hiring skilled mental health professionals could assist in increasing the level of success in treating the number of individuals presenting with both a mental illness and substance abuse disorder such as an opioid use disorder.

Significance

This study is significant in that research showed that there is an opioid use epidemic in the community Organization ABC serves, and the organization reported a lack of skilled mental health professionals on staff to assist with addressing the growing problem. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020), the leading cause of death for Indiana residents is heart disease, yet 36.7 residents die because of drug overdose per 100,000 residents. Chervoni-Knapp (2022) reported that

staffing challenges have led to understaffing in the health care industry, and health care organizations are developing short-term solutions to address staffing problems to meet the needs of the patients. The trend demonstrates an increase in the number of individuals presenting with mental health problems and symptoms of an opioid use disorder. Nearly 50% of individuals diagnosed with severe mental illness present symptoms of substance abuse (Robinson et al., 2023). The current study explored a behavioral health approach to develop a strategic plan to increase the number of skilled mental health professionals on staff at a behavioral health organization in the Midwest region of the United States.

The development of a strategic plan may assist the behavioral health organization in recruiting, hiring, training, and retaining skilled mental health professionals to address the opioid use epidemic in their community. The opioid epidemic is a nationwide problem, yet during the initial meeting, the behavioral health leader reported that clients do not share that they are experiencing symptoms of substance abuse, which suggested a need to examine the presenting problem further to develop an effective treatment plan (personal communication, December 12, 2022). The current study may increase awareness locally and nationally that may help to decrease the prevalence of opioid use disorder diagnoses. Examining the processes and procedures for onboarding skilled mental health professionals, and best practices for treating the growing problem, may benefit both behavioral health centers and the communities they serve. This study may contribute to positive social change by providing resources to the community that increase awareness of symptoms that lead to opioid use disorders. The study may also address the growing problem by reducing the number of occurrences of individuals

presenting with both mental health problems and substance uses disorders in the community.

Summary and Transition

Although researchers have investigated this problem, there was no research or organizational practice knowledge on how behavioral health centers can address the growing opioid problem that has occurred in a post-pandemic era with a lack of skilled mental health professionals in the community. Recent research indicated how communities lack mental health providers to address substance abuse problems, as well as how communities are reexamining the steps to create professionally trained providers to meet the community's growing need. Organization ABC stated that they have been having difficulty obtaining mental health providers to assist the growing number of individuals who present with a mental health problem complicated by substance abuse disorder symptoms. The current study addressed the problem by exploring how the development of a strategic plan that includes short- and long-term goals for recruiting, hiring, training, and retaining skilled mental health professionals may address both the needs of the community and that of Organization ABC.

Section 1b: Organizational Profile

The practice problem for this study was the lack of skilled mental health professionals within the behavioral health organization to assist clients with mental health illness and opioid abuse in the community. Two key approaches for addressing this practice problem included gathering background information as to how the problem originated and exploring the development of an effective strategic plan to aid Organization ABC in meeting and exceeding its short- and long-term goals. These approaches guided data collection, including both internal and external secondary data to identify best practices to address Organization ABC's behavioral health problem. Both the internal and external secondary data collected in this qualitative case study, along with qualitative interviews with Organization ABC's behavioral health leaders, addressed the following RQs:

RQ1: How has the organization addressed the increase in referrals for the number of individuals presenting with an opioid use disorder?

RQ2: How effective is the current intake process for the clients to learn about the specific presenting problem?

RQ3: What has the organization done to strategically address the growing community need?

RQ4: What have other behavioral health organizations done to address this problem?

Organizational Profile and Key Factors

Including the behavioral health leader, other key stakeholders included both internal and external citizens. Internal stakeholders included the owners of the business, the leadership team and administration staff, and Organization ABC's employees. According to the behavioral health leader, external stakeholders included program partners and vendors as well as Organization ABC's clients and their families (personal communication, December 12, 2022). During the initial meeting, the behavioral health leader for Organization ABC shared that the organization began with four employees and fewer than 25 clients in need of behavior management services in 2015 (personal communication, December 12, 2022). Organization ABC has since grown to serve approximately 300 clients a year with a small, impactful staff of skilled individuals dedicated to human services work. The behavioral health leader expressed that Organization ABC has a goal of serving approximately 1,000 clients per year (personal communication, December 12, 2022).

Organization ABC's behavioral health leader reported that Organization ABC is a small business with fewer than 35 employees, including nine therapists who explore the client's presenting problem as well as other factors leading to drug or alcohol use as a coping strategy (personal communication, December 12, 2022). The therapists use a collaborative approach in which they collaborate with the clients to develop comprehensive treatment plans focused on managing the internal and external triggers that lead to drug use. Behavioral health organizations reviewed in scholarly articles indicated that the lack of mental health providers prevents clients from accessing skilled

mental health professionals who can help them to develop coping strategies to live a positive, healthier life. According to Boden et al. (2021), the number of mental health providers available and their ability to provide necessary mental health services improves quality of treatment for clients. Organization ABC's lack of skilled mental health professionals prevents the organization from providing continuity of care to address both the mental health and substance abuse problems occurring in the community.

The behavioral health leader noted that Organization ABC needs skilled mental health professionals to deliver both mental health services and substance abuse treatment (personal communication, December 12, 2022). The behavioral health leader shared that Organization ABC is torn between hiring more contract employees or choosing to hire salaried individuals (personal communication, December 12, 2022). The current study explored the development of a strategic plan to identify available options and best processes for implementing strategies to measure outcomes, evaluate successes, and evaluate areas of improvement for both employees and clients.

Organization ABC has a growth plan to diversify its business to meet the needs of its community, yet it lacks the skilled mental health professionals to address the opioid problem in the community, and also lacks experienced direct support staff. The behavioral health leader reported that Organization ABC is in the process of raising the hourly wages to encourage individuals with direct service experience to apply for positions within the division that serves youths in need of emergency residential placements (personal communication, February 14, 2023). A strategic plan would serve as a capacity-building behavioral health care approach to help the behavioral health

leader with determining necessary steps to address the staffing problems while meeting the community's needs.

According to Bundy et al. (2016), a crisis management approach to decision making threatens an organization's performance and prevents it from reaching its maximum performance. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Kelly et al. (2020) indicated that health care organizations have adopted new processes to meet the needs of the community because the dynamic of health care services has changed. Review of scholarly articles suggested that behavioral health organizations have increased their technological systems that meet health care needs while also supporting health safety such as social distancing (Kisicki et al., 2022). An effectively crafted strategic plan would aid Organization ABC in exploring behavioral healthcare approaches to delivering safe and effective health care when faced with crisis (Kelly et al., 2020).

A qualitative approach is commonly used to collect and analyze secondary data (Tarifi, 2021). I used this approach because the RQs were focused on collecting both internal and external secondary data to gather information and research best practices to address a behavioral health problem. The information collected about the service offerings of Organization ABC, as well as information about its mission, vision, values, and core competencies, would aid in developing the purpose and expectations for the strategic plan, while clarifying the organization's mission, vision, and core values as they apply to the problem statement. An effective strategic plan would rely on the alignment of Organization ABC's mission, vision, and core values to the organizational goals to achieve its desired performance outcomes. In addition, by aligning the internal data to the

problem statement, the strategic plan would provide guidance to the behavioral health leader and ensure that organizational goals would relate to the study project outcomes. Also, critical assessment of Organization ABC and its mission, vision, and core values would influence the support of the behavioral health leader and Organization ABC's internal and external stakeholders. This support would help to reduce the resistance to change and encourage input from the leadership team and its key stakeholders regarding the strategic plan. Stakeholder support would acknowledge that the plan would not be a detriment to the success of Organization ABC and would increase opportunities for advocating for the plan (see Elliott-Engel et al., 2021). Jafari et al. (2021) reported that effective participation of key stakeholders to formulate the strategic plan is a key requirement for effective implementation.

Using the Baldrige Excellence Framework (NIST, 2023), I gathered two key findings during the meeting with Organization ABC's behavioral health leader: (a) the organization is in process of acquiring its own building to enlarge its mental health services offerings for youths and adults and (b) the organization is in process of remodeling a residential facility for children in need of long-term residential placement until they reach the age of 18 years (personal communication, February 14, 2023). Both findings provided insight into the practice problem. In addition, Organization ABC is working toward its Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) accreditation. The CARF accreditation would evaluate Organization ABC's performance and help it to improve both its employee processes and patient outcomes (CARF

International, n.d.), and Organization ABC would be showing its commitment to improving its ability to meet the needs of its community.

Organizational Background and Context

The behavioral health leader reported that Organization ABC had experienced an increased number of clients presenting with both a mental health illness and a substance abuse problem (personal communication, December 12, 2022). According to the IUPUI Richard M. Fairbanks School of Public Health (2018), the number of overdose deaths in the most populated county that Organization ABC serves is higher than the rate of similar deaths in the United States, which emphasized the need for skilled mental health professionals in the community. The behavioral health leader for Organization ABC reported that the organization has a diverse clientele that ranges from infants to older people (personal communication, December 12, 2022). The service delivery methods include emergency shelter care, home-based family services, behavior management services, and therapeutic services. Organization ABC has four divisions that serve the needs of the community, and the organization is interested in growing its therapeutic services division to include clients presenting with mental health problems and/or symptoms of substance abuse disorder.

The behavioral health leader for Organization ABC reported that they had conducted patient surveys and performance reviews internally and externally to improve their ability to deliver quality services. Kucmanic and Sheon (2017) applied a framework that revealed the conditions that require input from clients and mental health providers to improve service delivery. Kucmanic and Sheon addressed procedural fairness in decision

making, which considered whether organizational leaders utilize experimental evidence in their decisions pertaining to clients. In addition, Kucmanic and Sheon reviewed the leader's ability to avoid epistemic injustice, which addressed concerns of leaders making decisions without having relevant details that may support leadership decisions.

Organization ABC's behavioral health leader shared that the organization had acquired four residential homes, an office building, and a large residential facility as assets (personal communication, February 14, 2023). The commercially zoned, large residential facility was once a nursing home, and Organization ABC is planning to use the facility as a long-term residence for boys until they turn 18 years of age. This asset demonstrates the organization's desire to expand its service offerings to adolescents in need of service. Organization ABC is the process of acquiring a long-term residential license.

The behavioral health leader also shared that Organization ABC adheres to federal, state, and local laws pertaining to behavioral health services, including mental health and addiction treatment (personal communication, February 14, 2023).

Organization ABC also adheres to the regulations of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS, n.d.). The regulation requirements of the CMS provide the organization with guidance on how to deliver services and request payment. The CMS also provides the organization with clinical standards and qualities to ensure that its clients receive the best quality care. Organization ABC is a community mental health center and must renew its certification biannually to be a provider of mental health and addiction services via the Division of Mental Health and Addiction (Family and Social

Services Administration, n.d.). Organization ABC adheres to the requirements of the Family and Social Services Administration for mental health services under the Indiana Administrative Code overseen by the Indiana Attorney General (n.d.). Failure to comply with federal, state, or local laws regarding standards of care could affect Organization ABC's ability to receive reimbursements for services rendered.

According to Howard et al. (2022), collaboration improves quality of care and is most effective in helping organizations in solving community problems, learning best practices, being intentional and purpose driven, and increasing innovating approaches to care. The behavioral health leader also shared that they have providers/partners who have complimented their team on their effectiveness and their overall performance in improving the lives of those referred to Organization ABC for mental health services and treatment (personal communication, February 14, 2023). These efforts have also contributed to the increased number of potential clients referred to Organization ABC.

Organization ABC's partnerships and their ability to collaborate with their partners help them to identify gaps in care, develop innovative ways to assist community members, and adopt best practices to address community problems. Regarding the problem statement for this study, the behavioral health leader shared that the number of referrals for individuals with mental health problems had drastically increased; therefore, Organization ABC needed to increase the number of skilled mental health professionals on staff to meet the growing demand (personal communication, December 12, 2022). The behavioral health leader also reported that they had experienced an increased number of referrals in which the individuals had shown symptoms of mental illness and substance

abuse. Therefore, exploring the development of a strategic plan to address the behavioral health organization's staffing problem would help to ensure that Organization ABC would be able to meet the needs of the community.

Summary and Transition

The behavioral health leader for Organization ABC shared that their ability to provide quality services sets them apart from the competition (personal communication, February 14, 2023). The behavioral health leader reported that Organization ABC had been able to generate new business because of its ability to deliver quality health care services in alignment with their core values (personal communication, February 14, 2023). Organization ABC's core values include accountability, collaboration, empowerment, excellence, respect, reliability, and transparency (personal communication, December 12, 2022). As a result of their ability to deliver quality services and meet performance standards, Organization ABC had received an increased number of referrals for behavior management services, substance abuse counseling, mental health therapy, emergency shelter care, and home-based services for families with children in need of services. However, the demand for services had resulted in a significant need for skilled mental health professionals, which the current study addressed. This study explored a behavioral health approach to developing a strategic plan to hire skilled mental health professionals who can help to address the number of individuals presenting with mental health illness utilizing substance use as a coping strategy.

Section 2: Background and Approach—Leadership Strategy and Assessment

Organization ABC provides an array of services that assist individuals with mental health concerns, including behavior management services to individuals with intellectual disabilities, substance abuse treatment for individuals through a partnership with community corrections, individual mental health therapy sessions for those presenting with symptoms outlined in the DSM-5, an emergency shelter care for boys age 10–15 years as a result of neglect or abuse, and social supports for families with children in need of services. The current study addressed Organization ABC’s organizational problem by exploring how the development of a strategic plan focused on hiring skilled mental health professionals will help the organization meet the needs of the community.

The problem addressed in this study pertained to the exponential growth of individuals presenting with symptoms of mental health illness and substance use disorders in the community; the lack of skilled mental health professionals to deliver needed services; and the need to develop processes for implementing strategies to measure outcomes, evaluate successes, and evaluate areas of improvement for employees and clients. This study focused on exploring the development of a strategic plan as a capacity-building behavioral health care approach to improve Organization ABC’s sustainability while meeting the community’s needs. The strategic plan was intended to aid Organization ABC in developing and implementing hiring strategies geared toward helping the organization address the growing number of individuals presenting with mental health illness utilizing substance use as a coping strategy and improve its processes for delivering quality mental health care for its community.

According to Huebner and Flessa (2022), organizational leaders are often managing their operations without strategic direction; however, having a strategic direction is an important part of Organization ABC's sustainability. Long-term strategy assists an organization in focusing on outcomes over time as opposed to present circumstances (Huebner and Flessa, 2022). Strategic planning is important to the success of Organization ABC, and it is the responsibility of the organizational leaders to develop a plan to assess the organization's processes for achieving short- and long-term goals (Huebner and Flessa, 2022).

Organization ABC's organizational problem that the current study explored was the development of a strategic plan focused on hiring skilled mental health professionals who can address the growing opioid problem in the organization's community. I used the Baldrige Excellence Framework (NIST, 2023) to collect information from the behavioral health leader for Organization ABC as well as existing research and practice literature to examine how to implement strategies that would address the organization's practice problem, which would help to assist the number of individuals presenting with mental illness and opioid use disorder. The RQs explored through this study included how many individuals present with an opioid use disorder and referred to other organizations due to lack of skilled mental health professionals, how would a strategic plan would assist Organization ABC with hiring enough skilled mental health professionals to address the problem, and what the behavioral health organization has done thus far to address the problem. The problem addressed in this study was the lack of skilled mental health professionals employed by Organization ABC and how the development of a strategic

plan focused on hiring skilled mental health professionals could assist the organization in addressing the problem. In response to a post-pandemic era, behavioral health leadership organizations have implemented new processes to meet the needs of the community and changes in delivery methods for health care services.

According to law enforcement, the number of pills containing the drug fentanyl drastically increased between 2018 and 2021 (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2022). The reports stated that the number of pills seized in 2018 was 290,304, whereas the number of pills seized in 2021 nearly reached 10 million (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2022). The extent to which the illicitly manufactured powder fentanyl increases the number of individuals who have access to opioid drugs contributes to the overdose problem. The current study focused on the need for Organization ABC to develop and implement an effective strategic plan that addresses the problem that the organization lacks skilled mental health professionals to decrease the growing opioid problem in the community. The Baldrige Excellence Framework (NIST, 2023) was the conceptual model used to examine effective business strategies that Organization ABC needs to implement to improve its performance in the areas of leadership, staffing, operations, client need, and organizational goals.

Supporting Literature

Scholars explored how communities lack mental health providers to address substance abuse issues as well as how the community is reexamining the steps to recruit and hire skilled mental health professionals to meet the community's growing need (Boden et al., 2021). The behavioral health leader for Organization ABC stated that they

had been having difficulty obtaining skilled mental health professionals to work with the growing number of individuals who present with a mental health concern complicated by a substance abuse issue (personal communication, December 12, 2022). Keywords used to investigate the practice problem and recent empirical literature were *qualitative methods, strategies/strategic plan, mental health providers, behavioral health, organization effectiveness, mental illness, fentanyl, overdose, and opioid epidemic*.

The Walden University Library databases and Google Scholar provided peer-reviewed scholarly articles published between 2016 and the present. The following databases generated the most relevant articles for this study: MEDLINE with Full Text, which includes top biomedical and health journals; Academic Search Complete, which provides access to peer-reviewed journals; Complementary Index, which contains journal articles, books, and information from publishers; American Psychological Association PsycInfo, which indexes records focused on behavioral and social sciences; and Cumulated Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL) Plus with Full Text nursing and allied health articles. The searches revealed existing research addressing the importance of a strategic plan to manage the operational processes of a behavioral health organization. The research and practice literature provided insight into the practice problem and presented recent, peer-reviewed articles that justified the need for Organization ABC to explore sustainable business strategies. The strategies included the development of a strategic plan focused on hiring practices for skilled mental health professionals to address the increased number of clients presenting symptoms of opioid use disorder and mental health concerns.

The search results provided further insight into the need to explore the development of a strategic plan to hire skilled mental health professionals to address the growing opioid problem in the community that Organization ABC serves. Behavioral health organizations have been facing an increased number of clients presenting with mental health illness and substance abuse symptoms. Research was limited pertaining to the growing opioid problem in a post-pandemic era. Current literature addressed the practice problem regarding the lack of skilled mental health professionals employed by behavioral health leadership organizations and how the development of an effective strategic plan focused on hiring skilled mental health professionals addresses Organization ABC's problem. The literature revealed modalities to implement processes and strategies to address the growing opioid problem in the community by supporting the need to develop effective hiring practices for skilled mental health professionals to improve the delivery of quality mental health services.

Data collected indicated that the opioid epidemic has been creating universal challenges for communities leading to an increased need for skilled mental health professionals. The onset of the opioid epidemic began when Purdue Pharma marketed inappropriate information that did not disclose the dangers of the oral narcotic OxyContin (Egilman et al., 2019). According to Alonso (2021), had Purdue Pharma adhered to bioethical standards and laws in place to protect consumers, the misuse of the pain medication could have been prevented and the public would have been made aware of the dangers and risks associated with abusing the medication. According to the Indiana Department of Health (2021), nearly 1,700 people died from a drug overdose in 2019,

over four people a day. Three of those deaths involved an opioid (Indiana Department of Health, 2021). Since 2013, the state of Indiana has demonstrated a statistically significant increase in drug overdose deaths annually and ranks higher than the United States average number of drug overdose deaths (Indiana Department of Health, 2021).

According to Chervoni-Knapp (2022), understaffing has become a challenge for health care organizations, and they have been unable to address the community's need; therefore, organizations have sought short-term solutions to improve the long-term results for quality care among their patients. These data aligned with the practice problem and the need to explore the development of a strategic plan that included short- and long-term goals for recruiting, hiring, training, and retaining skilled mental health professionals to address the community's need. Furthermore, these data supported the behavioral health leader's concern regarding the lack of skilled mental health professionals in the community.

According to Fuertes et al. (2019), current literature pertaining to strategic management involves multiple concepts, which determine the organization's approach, development, processes, implementation, and evaluation of business goals. The organization's strategy then aligns with the desired performance goals for the organization. Organization ABC lacked a formalized strategic plan, and the behavioral health leader reported that the organization utilizes roadmapping to formulate business strategies and determined that the process lacks sustainability for the organization in the long term. Behavioral health leaders who manage their operations without evaluating the impact of not having strong strategic direction lack sustainability (Huebner and Flessa,

2022). An effectively strategic plan creates a framework of fundamental elements that align the employees with the mission and vision of the organization, motivating them to deliver quality services to the clients and improving sustainability.

The Baldrige Excellence Framework (NIST, 2023) is helpful in examining the operational systems of a behavioral health organization and identifying areas of strength and gaps in activities in need of improvement. The logical connections between the framework presented and the nature of the current study included using the framework as a guide to gather data relevant to this project. To address the behavior health problem in this study, emphasis was placed on Section 2 (Strategy) for strategic development and implementation, as well as Section 6 (Operations) for work processes and operational effectiveness of the Baldrige Excellence Framework (NIST, 2023).

A semistructured interview model aided in the collection of data for this study. This model allowed me to share the purpose of the study; establish rapport with the leaders; and connect the problem statement to the mission, vision, and core values of the organization. According to DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019), semistructured in-depth interviews aid in the dialogue between the researcher and the client. These interview techniques included follow-up questions, prodding, and the collection of open-ended information that would be useful for exploring the development and implementation of the strategic plan (see DeJonckheere and Vaughn, 2019).

Staff retention is important to addressing the opioid epidemic. Mannion and Davies (2018) examined how culture affects quality improvement and performance in health care organizations. According to Mannion and Davies, understanding an

organization's cultural perspective shapes the administration, policies, and decision making about the workforce, assets, and regulatory environment. Fisher et al. (2021) discussed a framework for screening and matching individuals to open positions with less bias, which improves the organization's ability to hire the most qualified candidates. Existing research and practice literature provided data aligning with the current study and exploring how the development of a strategic plan focusing on hiring skilled mental health professionals can assist in increasing the level of success in treating the number of individuals presenting with both a mental illness and a substance abuse disorder such as an opioid use disorder.

Sources of Evidence

Interviews with the behavioral health leader for Organization ABC was critical to developing an understanding of how Organization ABC performs its work in alignment to its mission, vision, and core values. The data collected during these interviews aided in understanding the benefits of the development of a strategic plan with short- and long-term goals for recruiting, hiring, training, and retaining skilled mental health professionals to address the community need. Information collected from internal secondary data sources including Organization ABC's website, financial statements, and brochures about program services also served as sources of evidence for this study.

The semistructured interviews with the behavioral health leader included questions that engaged them in a discussion about the practice problem, its effect on the performance of Organization ABC, and the organization's ability to meet its goals. Asking questions developed using the Baldrige Excellence Framework (NIST, 2023) led

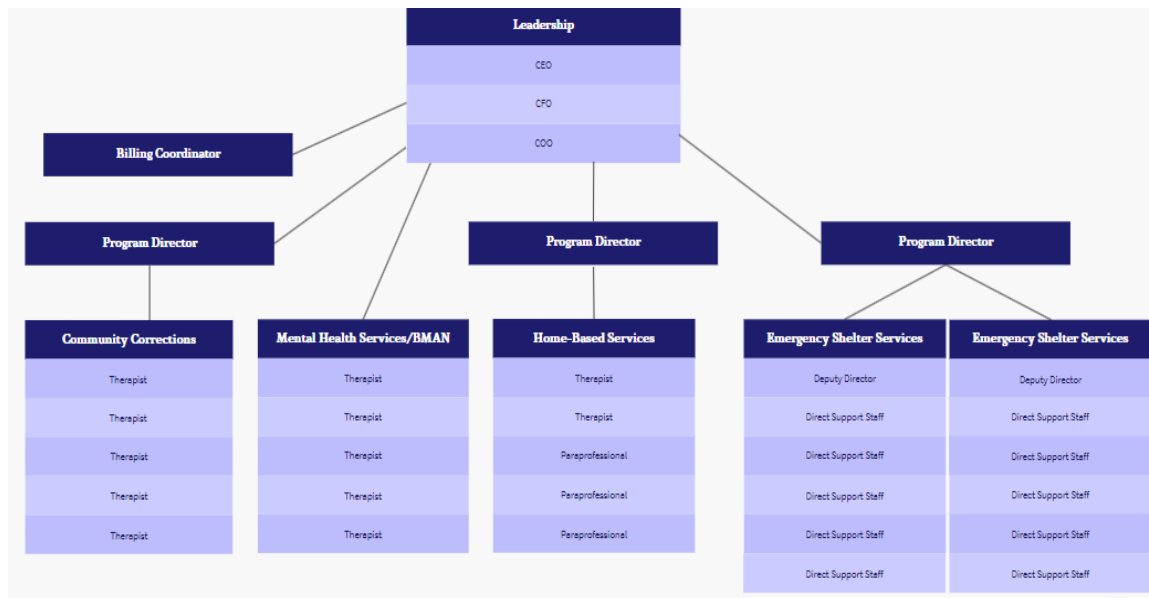
to a comprehensive understanding of the client's perspective of the practice problem, attempts they had made to resolve the problem, what has worked, what has not worked, and next steps for addressing the problem. The data collected and examined provided insight into Organization ABC's need for a strategic plan that includes short- and long-term goals for addressing the lack of skilled mental health professionals staffed within the organization. The triangulation method helped me identify themes from all data sources to enhance the validity and credibility of the findings and reduce the presence of research biases during the study.

Leadership Strategy and Assessment

According to the behavioral health leader, Organization ABC opened its doors in 2015 after a conversation between its owners to assist individuals with cognitive and intellectual disabilities with support to thrive in the community in which they live and work (personal communication, December 12, 2022). Since its operations began, the behavioral health leader shared that Organization ABC has grown to four divisions that serve the needs of the community (personal communication, December 12, 2022). The behavioral health leader for Organization ABC reported that the organization is interested in growing its therapeutic services division to include clients presenting with mental health problems and/or symptoms of substance abuse disorder (personal communication, December 12, 2022).

During an interview with the behavioral health leader using the Baldrige Excellence Framework (NIST, 2023), there were two key findings regarding Organization ABC's governance and societal responsibilities. The first key finding

shared by the behavioral health leader was that the organizational leadership structure consists of a CEO, CFO, and COO and they govern Organization ABC as an executive team (personal communication, March 23, 2023). Secondly, Organization ABC's behavioral health leader stated that they have been having difficulty obtaining skilled mental health professionals to work with the growing number of individuals who present with both mental health problems and substance use symptoms in its community (personal communication, March 23, 2023). The behavioral health leader reported that both the CFO and COO report to the CEO, and the COO oversees the program directors for the substance abuse treatment program, emergency shelter care for boys ages 10-15 years old, and the home-based program connected to providing support for children in need (personal communication, March 23, 2023). The COO oversees the contractors who provide behavior management services because it is a small percentage of the overall service offerings. The behavioral health leader shared that Organization ABC is interested in growing the behavior management division, and when it reaches a profiting threshold, the executive team has plans to hire a program director to oversee the department (personal communication, March 23, 2023).

Figure 1*Organizational Chart for Organization ABC*

According to the behavioral health leader, Organization ABC lacks a formalized organizational chart, and the executive team relies on the expertise of one another as it applies to the administration of the organizational structure (personal communication, March 23, 2023). According to Wang and Zhou (2019), Organization ABC's failure to evaluate and assess the relationship flow in an organizational structure design may lead to unsuccessfulness and inability to meet performance outcomes. During a semistructured interview, the COO shared that Organization ABC's executive team are evaluating the need for a part-time human resources coordinator (personal communication, March 23, 2023). The behavioral health leader reported that they also manage the hiring process, and they were forthcoming when sharing that they lose potential qualified applicants because the process is lengthy and there is inadequate communication with candidates in between steps due to the behavioral health leader's busy workload (personal

communication, March 23, 2023). The behavioral health leader also shared that Organization ABC's leadership team is interested in exploring whether a deputy director would benefit the organization in an effort to relieve the COO of some of their tasks which has increased tremendously due to the organization's rapid growth (personal communication, March 23, 2023).

When asked about governance, the behavioral health leader reported that the executive team uses a roadmapping approach to determine the steps needed to meet and exceed organizational goals (personal communication, March 23, 2023). According to Siebelink et al. (2021), firms, agencies, and governments that use a roadmap approach to determine activities for strategic development overcome challenges that hinder organizational success. The behavioral health leader shared that the leadership team makes decisions based on Organization ABC's core values, which include accountability, collaboration, empowerment, excellence, respect, reliability, and transparency. Organization ABC's behavioral health leader shared that the organization must adhere to the local, state, and government regulations that apply to working with individuals with mental health symptoms, and they are governed by applicable policy and procedures pertaining to their partnerships and vendors to achieve its mission of providing supportive mental health services to individuals and their families (personal communication, March 23, 2023).

Clients/Population Served

Organization ABC is a behavioral health clinic in the Midwest region of the United States of America that serves a metro area population of nearly two million people

(Macrotrends, 2023). Organization ABC provides mental health services that supports individuals with mental health concerns. Services include behavior management services for individuals with intellectual disabilities, substance abuse treatment for individuals served through a partnership with community corrections, individual mental health therapy sessions for those presenting with symptoms outlined in the DSM-5-TR, an emergency shelter care for boys ages 10–15 years old as a result of neglect or abuse, and social supports for families with children in need of services.

The behavioral health leader shared that less than 10% of all clients receive behavior management services, 25% of clients receive substance abuse treatment, 15% request mental health services, 35% are boys who reside in the emergency shelter, and 15% are clients who receive social supports for their children and families (personal communication, February 14, 2023). The behavioral health leader reported that 100% of Organization ABC's clients experience mental health concerns (personal communication, February 14, 2023). The lack of skilled mental health professionals prevents the staff of Organization ABC from efficiently serving its clients with treatment plans that would improve their ability to live their best lives. The hiring of additional skilled mental health professionals may improve the processes of Organization ABC. Currently, the organization's behavioral health leaders reacts to problems, and according to the Baldrige Excellence Framework (NIST, 2023), the organization is in the infancy phase of creating mature processes in response to organizational needs. A structured strategic plan would move the organization's behavioral health leaders to the next phase, assisting the organization in entering an early systematic approach. This phase would help the

behavioral health leader of Organization ABC in creating repeatable processes, including steps for evaluating and improving organizational processes. This phase would also include well-defined strategy and quantifiable goals for Organization ABC to engage clients and manage relationships that align to the mission and vision of the organization.

The behavioral health leader for Organization ABC reported that their billing specialist tracks client information with a web-based case and matter management system (personal communication, March 23, 2023). The case management system is also used to bill for services rendered to ensure payment is collected from the different partner agencies. The system is also used for documenting client services, including progress notes and monthly reports which are then used to determine whether the clients have met treatment plan goals. The management system also allows the program directors to manage employee workflow and measure client performance. According to Joo and Huber (2019), case management creates a collaborative process for improving the quality care of the clients and has shown to significantly improve patient satisfaction. The behavioral health leader reported that the staff implemented the new system in May of 2022. The behavioral healthcare leader reported that the implementation of the web-based case and matter management system has improved their billing reimbursements because it allows program directors to determine how many services are delivered at a glance and monitor program performance (personal communication, March 23, 2023).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2021), the Diversity Index for the state of Indiana has increased by 7% since 2010, indicating a surge in people of color. Furthermore, 76% of the population represents adults over the age of 18 years old (U.S.

Census Bureau, 2021). The data gathered suggested that individuals of color face barriers such as transportation, access to healthcare, education, careers, employment, training services, increasing the poverty and opportunity gaps for this population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021).

- 20% more U.S. adults have reported experiencing symptoms of anxiety or depression between 2019 and May of 2020 (Kaiser Family Foundation [KFF], 2021).
- Nearly 29% of adults in Indiana reported experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression in comparison to over 31% of US adults (KFF, 2021).
- Approximately 15% of U.S. adults reported experiencing a new or increased symptom of substance use due to pandemic related stress (KFF, 2021).
- Death by suicide continues to increase over time, making it a critical public health concern, and its often connected to underlying mental health conditions as well as a combination of other factors, such as isolation, relationship management, lack of finances, lack of stable housing, and medical concerns (KFF, 2021).

The number of deaths due to drug overdose increased from 72,000 in 2019 to 93,000 in 2020 and disproportionately affects many people of color (KFF, 2021).

According to KFF (2021), 33.6 per 1000,000 deaths in Indiana were due to a drug overdose. Individuals exposed to a range of traumatic events during childhood are most at risk of being diagnosed with a substance use disorder in their lifetime (Jahan and Burgess, 2022). Culture plays a significant role in shaping individuals' health behaviors.

For high-risk individuals, a “triggering” event causing shame or despair may increase the need for mental health services. Systemic and structural barriers also contribute to an individual’s inability to seek effective mental health care as well as lack of connectedness to supportive individuals, such as family members, and social supports like community agencies and other social institutions. The behavioral health leader discussed their hopes of collaborating with the clients to help them develop critical thinking skills that would aid them in addressing obstacles that hinder them from living their best lives. The development of proactive and reactive strategies may address challenges such as relationship problems, work complications, financial adversities, legal difficulties, access to healthcare providers, and feelings of hopelessness. These challenges as well as perceived racial discrimination and judgement along with social and economic hardships may lead to having no hope for the future, which increases a person’s risk for mental health concerns.

Analytical Strategy

My role in this study of Organization ABC was that of a research scholar behavioral health leadership organization consultant. The objectives of this study as a qualitative researcher were to gain an understanding of the behavioral health organization’s mission, vision, and core values and applicable data pertaining to Organization ABC’s inability to serve the growing number of clients presenting with mental health and substance abuse needs of the community. Throughout this study, I was the primary instrument in the qualitative study research process.

The triangulation method approach helped to identify themes collected from all sources to enhance the validity and credibility of research findings, data analysis included thematic coding for each interview with the behavioral health leader. I utilized a semistructured interview process approach to collect data about Organization ABC's service offerings, client needs, mission, vision, core values, leadership strategies, operational performance, and strategic development plans with the assistance of the Baldrige Excellence Framework (NIST, 2023). To reduce the presence of any research biases of this project, the information collected from secondary-data sources were manually coded.

Summary and Transition

The problem statement for Organization ABC included exploring the development of a strategic plan to address a growing opioid epidemic problem in the community that has caused a lack of skilled mental health professionals in the area. This study addressed the exponential growth of individuals presenting with both symptoms of mental health illness and substance use disorders in the community; the lack of skilled mental health professionals to deliver needed services; and the need to develop processes for implementing strategies to measure outcomes, evaluate successes, and evaluate areas of improvement for both employees and clients. This study's primary strategy for collecting pertinent data about the problem statement utilized the Baldrige Excellence Framework (NIST, 2023). The research data obtained for the purpose of this study utilized a semistructured interview approach (see Appendix A) with the COO of Organization ABC, who served as a key behavioral health leader informant. The data

collected from the behavioral health leader's responses were thematically coded and analyzed as justification for support of secondary-data and theoretical concepts found in existing research. The behavioral health leader identified additional individuals pertinent to the problem statement in this study based on their roles as stakeholders in the behavioral health organization (personal communication, December 12, 2022). The behavioral health leader welcomed me into the organization to learn more about the problem statement addressed in this study, and thoughtfully accepted consent to participate in this qualitative research study. Although researchers have shown interest into the staffing crisis many behavioral health organizations are facing, there is no research or organizational practice knowledge on organizational structure designs for behavioral health centers to expand its staff resources to address the growing opioid problem in our communities during a post-pandemic era. Preliminary findings suggest that exploring the development of a strategic plan would address the organization's behavioral health problem.

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

Organization ABC is a behavioral health leadership organization that has been serving youths and adults since 2015 in the Midwest region of the United States. The mission of Organization ABC is to provide supportive mental health services to individuals exhibiting health challenges that may prevent them from achieving their personal goals. Currently, Organization ABC services approximately 300 clients per year with fewer than 35 employees, including nine skilled mental health professionals. There has been an increase in the number of clients presenting with a substance abuse problem along with mental health illness at Organization ABC. Organization ABC's therapeutic division was examined in the current study to gather data pertaining to operational processes to determine steps to hire skilled mental health professionals to address the growing opioid problem in the community.

The problem addressed in this study was the lack of skilled mental health professionals employed by Organization ABC and how the development of a strategic plan focused on hiring skilled mental health professionals could assist the organization in addressing the problem. The Baldrige Excellence Framework (NIST, 2023) was used to guide the discussion with Organization ABC's COO to gain a deeper understanding of the organization's current and previous systems practices to explore sustainable business practices to address the problem. Data were collected from Organization ABC's website, financial statements, government websites, marketing materials, review of scholarly

articles, and semistructured interviews with the organizational leaders to address the problem in this study.

Analysis of the Organization

Organization ABC provides behavior management services to individuals with intellectual disabilities, substance abuse treatment for individuals under the guise of supervised release, mental health therapy including grief counseling, emergency shelter care for boys age 10–15 years, and social supports for families with children in need of services. Organization ABC had experienced an increased number of referrals for clients presenting with a substance abuse problem along with mental health illness. The behavioral health leader of Organization ABC reported that they lacked skilled mental health professionals expressed interest in exploring how the development of a strategic plan focused on hiring skilled mental health professionals could assist the organization in addressing the problem.

The behavioral health leader of Organization ABC showed interest in developing innovative ways to assist community members and adopting best practices to address community problems. This study addressed the practice problem in which the number of referrals for individuals with mental health problems had drastically increased in the post-pandemic era. Organization ABC needed to recruit, train, and hire an increased number of skilled mental health professionals to meet the growing community needs. Exploring the development of an effective strategic plan to address the behavioral health organization's staffing problem would ensure that the organization could meet the needs of the community.

Workforce and Operations

When asked about Organization ABC's workforce profile using the Baldrige Excellence Framework (NIST, 2023), the behavioral health leader shared that they had several challenges with hiring and retaining experienced skilled mental health professionals (personal communication, December 12, 2022). Since its inception, the organization had increased its services and was serving approximately 300 clients per year with fewer than 35 employees, including nine skilled mental health professionals. Under the supervision of a licensed clinical addictions counselor, Organization ABC's skilled mental health professionals explored the presenting problem as well as other internal and external factors that lead to the client's desire to use drugs or alcohol.

The nine skilled mental health professionals currently on staff collaborate with the clients to develop treatment plans to manage triggers that lead to drug use, yet problems related to the clients' lack of access to providers who can help them limited clients' ability to develop coping strategies to live a positive, healthier life. The skilled mental health professionals are contract staff members and may have as few as two clients or as many as 35 clients in their caseload. According to Boden et al. (2021), staff productivity contributes to the ability to provide effective mental health services, and access to mental health providers improves quality of treatment for their clients. Some staff expressed burnout and had declined new referrals, which led to Organization ABC experiencing a lack of skilled mental health professionals to provide quality care to address the needs of the community.

Workforce Recruitment and Training

The discussion of organizational growth led the behavioral health leader for Organization ABC to acknowledge the need to improve and implement intentional strategies for meeting the staffing demands to address the problem statement. The behavioral health leader reported that they had benefited from word-of-mouth hiring for many years, and they had begun using an online recruiting tool (personal communication, December 12, 2022). They found that this tool was more effective. According to Dietsch et al. (2019), word-of-mouth hiring may lead to bias in the hiring process and may prevent the company from hiring the right person for the position. The behavioral health leader shared they were initially concerned about the potential for adversity when using word of mouth as a hiring process and understood the importance of hiring the most talented candidates for the organization's open positions (personal communication, February 14, 2023). The behavioral health leader reported that they were receiving quality candidates by word-of-mouth hiring as well as the online recruiting tool, yet the time frame between the candidate applying and getting through the hiring process had presented its challenges (personal communication, February 14, 2023). The behavioral health leader reported that the organization needed a more streamlined process for hiring potential candidates to ensure that candidates did not lose interest if the organization took too long to follow up in between the interview, background checks, and orientation processes (personal communication, February 14, 2023).

The behavioral health leader reported that the organization uses a part-time staff member to assist with the onboarding process for new employees, including completing

background checks; verifying required documents, education, and experience; and conducting orientation (personal communication, February 14, 2023). The COO shared that they provide on-the-job shadow opportunities, and they observe the staff during client encounters to provide coaching and feedback (personal communication, February 14, 2023). The COO also reported that they provide time off for professional training and continuing education, as well as training opportunities to ensure that the employees are following local, state, and federal regulations for mental health professionals (personal communication, February 14, 2023).

Workforce Engagement and Support

Organization ABC's behavioral health leader shared that the organization partners with local, state, and government vendors to achieve its mission of providing supportive mental health services to individuals hindered from achieving their personal goals (personal communication, February 14, 2023). Currently, the organization receives referrals for individuals with intellectual disabilities approved by the Bureau of Developmental Disabilities to receive behavior management services. The organization also partners with United States Federal Probation who refers individuals for substance abuse treatment who are awaiting trial or released from prison on supervised release as a part of community corrections. Further, Organization ABC partners with the state's department of child services who refers individuals and families in need of mental health therapy, emergency shelter care for boys ag 10–15 years, and social supports for families with children in need of services.

The behavioral health leader shared that these partnerships are beneficial to the organization, and they are necessary for the organization to achieve its mission and organizational goals (personal communication, February 14, 2023). The behavioral health leader reported that they partner with organizations with similar missions and can refer individuals who are a good fit for the organization and align to its mission, vision, and core values (personal communication, February 14, 2023). The organization builds on the foundational principles that foster the inclusion of all people and supports youths in exploring possibilities, discovering opportunities, and achieving dreams. Its core values include accountability, collaboration, empowerment, excellence, respect, reliability, and transparency. It is these principles and values that drive the organization's business model and community partnerships. The behavioral health leader reported that the program managers attend provider fairs to build rapport and generate new business as well as contact their liaisons to discuss any challenges with their partnership regarding the achievement of business goals (personal communication, February 14, 2023).

Workforce Communication and Improvement Process

Organization ABC's workforce and operations are dependent on its partnerships and the behavioral health organization's ability to collaborate with community partners to identify and fill gaps in mental health services. Organization ABC's behavioral leaders shared that they have biannual meetings with their partners to discuss what is working, what is not working, and information pertaining to recommendations to sustain their partnership for the future (personal communication, February 14, 2023). The behavioral health leader reported that the program directors for each of the four divisions gather data

to make improvements as needed to achieve their departmental goals (personal communication, February 14, 2023). Once the data was collected and synthesized, the program directors report their findings to the behavioral health leader and the organization's leadership team. Pertinent information is also gathered from Organization ABC's partners to ensure that they are meeting and exceeding the goals and expectations outlined in their partnership agreements. The behavioral health leader expressed a pressing need for skilled mental health professionals who can address the increasing number of individuals presenting with mental health illness and utilizing substance use as a coping strategy (personal communication, December 12, 2022).

Knowledge Management

Organization ABC has four divisions that serve the needs of the community and understands that each client presents their own set of challenges. The organization's hope is that each staff member applies the organization's core values of accountability, collaboration, empowerment, excellence, respect, reliability, and transparency to the care and well-being of its clients. The organization is interested in growing its therapeutic services division that includes clients presenting with mental health problems and/or symptoms of substance abuse disorder and has shown that it will apply the organization's core values to the operational performance of growing this division within the organization.

Risk Management

Organization ABC adheres to the regulations of federal, state, and local laws pertaining to behavioral health care services to ensure compliance on how to deliver

clinical services that guarantee clients receive the best quality care. The organization's failure to comply with the federal, state, or local regulations regarding standards of care could affect Organization ABC's state and federal licenses, which would affect the organization's ability to receive client referrals or payment reimbursements for services rendered. Currently, the organization uses a roadmap to determine measures to meet and exceed its organizational goals and to assess the organization's approaches to delivering quality client services.

The behavioral health leader reported that the leadership team consisting of the CEO, CFO, and COO oversees the fiscal management of Organization ABC. Although the CFO is responsible for managing the overall budget of the agency, the CEO and COO assist in managing agency costs to ensure that the organization is meeting and exceeding its profit margin goals. Organization ABC utilizes third-party vendors for expenses such as office cleaning, building maintenance, information technology services, purchasing office supplies, recruitment, and personnel training. The agency prides itself on safeguarding sensitive information and maintaining the confidentiality and privacy of its employees, clients, and partners by utilizing a virtual private network, web-based case and matter management system, and cloud-based human capital management system.

Summary and Transition

The behavioral health leader for Organization ABC expressed challenges with not having enough skilled mental health professionals to address the growing opioid problem in the community. The analysis provided in the current study provided supplemental information necessary for the development and successful implementation of a strategic

plan that would provide tools to help Organization ABC meet the needs of the community. This technique was advantageous for mapping out the purpose of the organization and providing greater insight into the problem addressed in this study. This analysis was effective in pursuing the organization's mission with definitive objectives and community needs.

Organization ABC has built a strong organization that aligns with the mission, vision, and core values of the leadership team's goals when the agency first opened its doors. The organization understands that people contribute to the success of the organization. Over the last 3 years, the organization has improved its ability to provide a safe, secure, and accessible environment for its employees, clients, and their families. The behavioral health leader for Organization ABC shared that the leadership team utilizes a roadmap to discuss strategies for developing approaches to quality client care, and they expressed interest in exploring how a formalized strategic plan would improve the operational performance of the organization in meeting the needs of the community. The behavioral health leader of the organization demonstrated an understanding that the needs of the community will not be addressed effectively if the agency does not change and improve its organizational systems. The organization demonstrated that it has a solid foundation of experience because it would not have experienced the exponential growth in the last 3 years if it had not been able to have conversations pertinent to the day-to-day challenges the organization faces in response to the growing opioid problem in the community.

A behavioral healthcare approach to exploring sustainable business strategies would address the challenges that were hindering the organization from meeting and exceeding its organizational goals. Organization ABC would benefit from the strategic planning process because it would provide the organization with a detailed outline of the steps necessary to improve its process. Organization ABC had proven its ability to achieve the mission, vision, and core values of the organization in its current work, yet the organization lacks a detailed and focused strategic plan that would support the organization in assessing its current and future needs.

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

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the development of a strategic plan to hire skilled mental health professionals to address the growing opioid epidemic occurring in the community served by Organization ABC. The COO of Organization ABC served as a key behavioral health leader informant and the sole participant for this study. The development of an effective strategic plan emerged from this study because it had the ability to serve as a capacity-building behavioral health care approach for Organization ABC to improve the organization's ability to meet the needs of the community.

Organization ABC has been serving the community since 2015 and has a reputation as a well-performing behavioral health organization in the Midwest region of the United States. The organization has recognition as a thought leader for the community due to its advocacy for those who are unable to speak for themselves. Organization ABC has demonstrated itself as an effective behavioral health care organization. The behavioral health leader for Organization ABC reported that they had served approximately 300 clients in 2022, reaching their full capacity for serving individuals in need of services. As a result, the behavioral health leader recognized the organization's need to grow its therapeutic division and expand its infrastructure to accommodate the exponential growth. Therefore, the leadership team acquired a 5,400 square foot facility, quadrupling the office space previously held by the organization. Organization ABC's behavioral health leadership team also identified the organization's challenges of needing

to hire skilled mental health professionals to address the growing opioid problem in the community.

During this study, I reviewed the organization's operational processes, including its workforce, leadership team, governance, and societal responsibilities as well as its ability to meet and engage clients in services. The presenting problem in this study was identified when the behavioral health leader expressed a significant need for skilled mental health professionals to address the number of individuals presenting with symptoms of mental illness and substance use disorders. The behavioral health leader shared that the organization's growth had posed challenges, and I determined that every area of the business required a review to ensure that Organization ABC could meet the needs of the community.

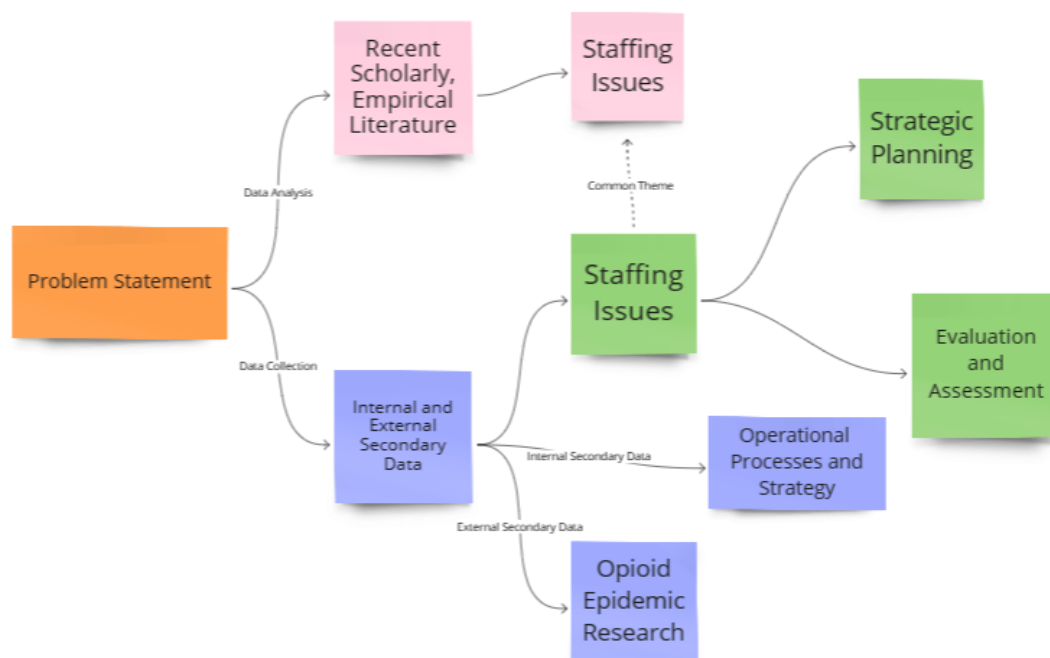
Research to address this problem began with identifying topics on strategies/strategic planning, mental health providers, behavioral health, organization effectiveness, mental illness, fentanyl, overdose, and opioid epidemic. The next step included database searches for peer-reviewed scholarly articles including recent, empirical literature on these topics. Semistructured interviews with the COO of Organization ABC assisted in gathering pertinent data, and review of organizational information including marketing materials, employee hiring processes and onboarding procedures, website information, client feedback surveys, employee feedback surveys, financial statements, and employee manuals that identified organizational processes and procedures aided this study.

Analysis, Results, and Implications

The triangulation method (Noble and Heale, 2019) was used to identify themes from all data sources to enhance the validity and credibility of the research findings and to reduce the presence of any research biases during the study. This behavioral health case study received IRB approval #06-29-23-1124310. According to Campbell et al. (2018), methodological triangulation includes multiple methods to study a phenomenon. In the current study, semistructured interviews with the behavioral health leader, review of recent empirical literature, and analysis of the organization's website and marketing materials were used as multiple methods. Several data sets were identified from semistructured interviews with the behavioral health leader to explore the organization's ability to deliver behavioral health services and meet the needs of the community.

Phase I of the study focused on gaining an understanding of the behavioral health problem and included an interview with the behavioral health leader using the Baldrige Excellence Framework (NIST, 2023). Phase II of the study involved reviewing secondary data to learn more about the organization, its operational process, and its performance goals. Phase III included a search to investigate the practice problem and review recent empirical literature in which qualitative methods were used to explore topics. The final phase included an analysis of the findings and providing Organization ABC with recommendations to address its problem by developing an effective process for hiring qualified, skilled mental health professionals to address the growing opioid problem in the community.

According to Van Hees et al. (2022), a concept map is a helpful tool in demonstrating common ideas among stakeholders. The concept mapping approach combines qualitative data collection into a structured conceptualization method (Van Hees et al., 2022). This approach was used in the current study to facilitate data collected from internal and secondary data sources and recent empirical literature pertaining to the problem addressed in study. In Figure 2, the concept map indicates that the prevalent problem was relevant to similar behavioral health organizations lacking skilled mental health professionals to address the growing opioid problem in their communities.

Figure 2*Concept Map for Organization ABC*

The problem addressed in this study was the lack of skilled mental health professionals employed to deliver needed services. The development of a strategic plan focused on hiring skilled mental health professionals who could assist the organization in addressing the problem. I collected internal and external secondary data and recent empirical literature to determine that the staffing issued faced by Organization ABC had also affected similar behavior health organizations. In the post-pandemic era, behavioral health organizations have reported an increased number of patients utilizing substances as a coping strategy. As a result, communities also reported an increased number of clients

presenting symptoms of opioid use disorder and a lack of skilled mental health professionals necessary to manage the problem.

Client Programs and Services

The program and service offerings for Organization ABC were discussed during semistructured interviews with the behavioral health leader as well as a review of the organization's website and marketing materials. The COO stated during one of the semistructured interviews that Organization ABC "provides an array of services pertaining to mental health and well-being" (personal communication, December 12, 2022). The COO also reported that the organization provides behavior management services to individuals with intellectual disabilities, substance abuse treatment for individuals under the guise of supervised release, mental health therapy including grief counseling, emergency shelter care for boys age 10–15 years, and social supports for families with children in need of services. When asked about the organization's corporate structure, the behavioral health leader stated that Organization ABC is "a private LLC [limited liability corporation] and the leaders do not report a board of directors or shareholders" (personal communication, March 23, 2023). The COO further reported that the organization is "owned and operated by the chief executive officer and chief financial officer" (personal communication, March 23, 2023).

During the initial meeting, the behavioral health leader for Organization ABC shared that the organization began with four employees and fewer than 25 clients in need of behavior management services in 2015 (personal communication, December 12, 2022). Since 2015, Organization ABC has grown to serving approximately 300 clients a

year. Client services are documented using a web-based case and matter management system. The organization uses a billing specialist to track organization performance and services rendered. The behavioral health leader expressed that Organization ABC is on track to serve 300 individuals in the current calendar year, and their hope is to serve 1,000 clients per year (personal communication, December 12, 2022).

Client-Focused Results

The concept of integrative care provided insight into Organization ABC's behavioral health care problem. Researchers defined the concept of integrated behavioral health care as a team of individuals using an effective patient care approach to address both the medical and mental health needs of the patient (Bowen et al., 2020). This form of care also includes the patient and their families and addresses both mental health and substance abuse concerns as well as health symptoms pertaining to life crises and stressors. According to Bowen et al. (2020), integrated health care is based on six essential elements: (a) evidence-based research, (b) outcome measurements, (c) collaboration, (d) population focus, (e) patient-centered care, and (f) accountability. However, it has taken 20 years to adopt these integrated approaches and implement them into practice for populations who need access to effective patient care (Bowen et al., 2020). This information is important to the behavioral health care problem addressed in the current study because it is essential for Organization ABC to adopt innovative strategies to meet the needs of the clients they serve. This includes evidence-based integrated behavioral health care approaches focusing on both mental and physical health symptoms to provide more treatment plan opportunities to the patients. This research was

also helpful because it addressed the importance of medical providers being aware of mental health concerns to meet the holistic needs of the patients.

When asked how the organization measures client results, the behavioral health leader shared that “the organization performs an exit interview with each client to glean [Organization ABC’s] strengths and weaknesses pertaining to client service delivery” (personal communication, February 14, 2023). These data were unavailable for review due to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (n.d.), the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 protects the patients’ health information to ensure their privacy. The behavioral health leader for Organization ABC shared that the client surveys include relevant information about the individuals completing the survey that may not protect their individual privacy (personal communication, February 14, 2023). The COO stated that “the organizational leaders discuss client concerns and compliments as they occur rather than asking the clients to complete a survey” (personal communication, February 14, 2023), which suggests that the organization lacks a formative evaluation process. The behavioral health leader also shared that during the intake process, the staff provides the clients with a list of patient rights and responsibilities and provides details on how to file a grievance if they feel their needs are not being met (personal communication, February 14, 2023).

The behavioral health leader of Organization ABC reported that the organization is a small business with fewer than 35 employees, including nine therapists who explore the client’s presenting problem as well as other factors leading to drug or alcohol use as a

coping strategy (personal communication, December 12, 2022). The behavioral health leader shared that the therapists use a collaborative approach in which they collaborate with the clients to develop comprehensive treatment plans focused on managing the internal and external triggers that lead to drug use, and the skilled mental health professionals report patient goal achievement using the case matter system. The behavioral health leader reported Organization ABC has experienced an increased number of clients presenting with both a mental health illness and a substance abuse problem (personal communication, December 12, 2022).

Workforce-Focused Results

The behavioral health leader for Organization ABC shared that the organization has had several challenges with hiring and retaining experienced skilled mental health professionals (personal communication, December 12, 2022). Since 2015, the COO reported that the organization “has increased its service offerings over the last four years and now serves approximately 300 clients per year with less than 35 employees, including nine skilled mental health professionals” (personal communication, December 12, 2022). According to the behavioral health leader for Organization ABC (personal communication, February 14, 2023), Organization ABC partners with local, state, and government vendors to achieve its mission of providing supportive mental health services to individuals hindered from achieving their personal goals. The behavioral health leader reported that these partnerships are beneficial to the organization, and they are necessary for the organization to achieve its mission and organizational goals (personal communication, February 14, 2023). The organization engages partners and employees

who build on the foundational principles of Organization ABC that foster the inclusion of all people and support youths in exploring possibilities, discovering opportunities, and achieving dreams. Its core values include accountability, collaboration, empowerment, excellence, respect, reliability, and transparency. It is these principles and values that drive the organization's business model, community partnerships, and employee hiring practices.

The COO for Organization ABC reported that the organization “provides time off for their staff to participate in professional training opportunities and complete the required continuing education credits” (personal communication, February 14, 2023).

The behavioral health leader shared that these training opportunities ensure that the employees are following local, state, and federal regulations for mental health professionals (personal communication, February 14, 2023). According to the behavioral health leader (personal communication, September 21, 2023), the organizational leaders have not addressed the breakdown in their intake process that addresses both mental health concerns and medication concerns. The behavioral health leader also shared that they understand that their systems and processes need to be reviewed to ensure that they are providing quality care for their clients. Although clients complete an intake before services begin that include an authorization for release, clients do not wish to include their primary care provider in their mental health services. According to Thapa et al. (2021), the increased number of individuals presenting with behavioral health concerns are linked to the disconnection between behavioral health conditions and medical care. My findings suggest that patient care is improved when mental health and medical

services are integrated. According to Huggard (2020), primary healthcare is the entry point for mental health care. Huggard (2020) further reports that the prevalence of mental health needs has exponentially grown to nearly two-thirds of patients not receiving adequate care for their mental health concerns. A partnership with local primary care providers would increase patient outcomes and improve the quality care for Organization ABC's clients and increase support for skilled mental health providers to obtain the professional training they need to address their clients' mental health concerns.

One specific example on how this evidence converges in this study includes learning that the behavioral health leader was interested in learning how to resolve the organization's staffing problem. The behavioral health leader expressed their awareness of multiple approaches on how to address the issue, yet research findings suggest that the best solution is an effective strategic plan. The behavioral health leader reported that the organizational leaders have adapted roadmapping as their approach to strategically thinking about the needs of the organization, yet current qualitative case study research in this project consistently refers to creating and implementing an effective strategic plan to improve Organizations ABC's business performance. Therefore, the research that I have shared in the study and will present to the behavioral health leader in the near future, is consistent with the idea of aligning their business practices up to the behavioral healthcare approaches used by similar organizations. According to Figueroa et al. (2019), after reviewing current, recent literature, the authors discovered that challenges and emerging needs are consistent amongst behavioral health leader organizations. The authors shared that the role of healthcare managers are changing, including the

evolution and expansion of business capabilities to meet the needs of clients, and adapting to the post-pandemic climate as to how healthcare is delivered (Figueroa et al., 2019). These findings are consistent with other evidence shared in this study that Organization ABC needs to adopt a strategically, effective behavioral health care approach to address the lack of skilled mental health professionals within the organization.

When asked about some of the key factors attributed to lack of skilled mental health counselors employed with Organization ABC, the behavioral health leader for Organization ABC reported that “some of the therapists had expressed burnout and were declining new referrals because of the dense caseloads” (personal communication, February 14, 2023). According to Ensari (2021), there are diverse sources of burnout for skilled mental health professionals. One source of a skilled mental health professional’s burnout is too much focus on the client while neglecting their own mental health (Ensari, 2021). A second is imbalance such as when the skilled mental health professional has too many patients to manage (Ensari, 2021). A third source of burnout is experiencing too many demands from stakeholders that may be contradictory or ethically conflictual (Ensari, 2021). A fourth source of burnout is lack of support from others which may lead to isolation and frustration as well as poor interpersonal relationships (Ensari, 2021). Another source of burnout is when a skilled mental health professional experiences perceived unfairness such as inequity in caseload, rate of pay, value, or favorability (Ensari, 2021). The influx of client referrals has led Organization ABC to explore new processes for hiring skilled mental health professionals. The behavioral health leader for

Organization ABC is interested in developing a plan to recruit, hire, train, and retain skilled mental health professionals, yet the organization has not determined the activities to improve its effectiveness to deliver clinical services to address the growing opioid problem.

Leadership and Governance Results

The behavioral health leader for Organization ABC reported that the organization lacks a formalized organizational chart. During this study, the behavioral health leader shared that “the executive team relies on the expertise of one another when making critical decisions on behalf of the organization” (personal communication, March 23, 2023). The information gathered from the behavioral health leader further suggests that an effective organization chart would assist the leadership team in making decisions for each department as it applies to the administration of the organizational structure. The behavioral health leader for Organization ABC shared that the organizational leadership structure consists of the CEO, CFO, and COO and they govern the organization as an executive team (personal communication, March 23, 2023). The behavioral health leader reported that both the CFO and COO report to the CEO, and the COO oversees the program directors for the substance abuse treatment program, emergency shelter care for boys ages 10-15 years old, and the home-based program connected to providing support for children in need. The COO oversees the contractors who provide behavior management services because this service is a small percentage of the overall service offerings. Organization ABC has four divisions that serve the needs of the community, and the behavioral health leader reported that the organizational leaders are interested in

growing its therapeutic services division that includes clients presenting with mental health problems and/or symptoms of substance abuse disorder.

During a semistructured interview with the behavioral health leader for Organization ABC, the COO shared that “the organization lacks a formalized strategic plan, and the leadership team uses roadmapping to determine steps to meet and exceed organizational goals” (personal communication, March 23, 2023). The behavioral health leader shared that the leadership team makes decisions based on Organization ABC’s core values, which include accountability, collaboration, empowerment, excellence, respect, reliability, and transparency. Organization ABC’s behavioral health leader shared that the organization must adhere to the local, state, and government regulations that apply to working with individuals with mental health symptoms, and they are governed by applicable policy and procedures with their partnerships and vendors to achieve its mission of providing supportive mental health services to individuals and their families (personal communication, March 23, 2023).

Financial and Marketplace Performance Results

The behavioral health leader reported that the leadership team consists of the CEO, CFO, and COO and they collectively oversee the fiscal management of Organization ABC. Financial reports were unavailable during this study, information was solely provided by the behavioral health leader during semistructured interviews. When asked about the organization’s current financial standing, the behavioral health leader for Organization ABC shared that the organization is in “a profitable position and the leadership team has begun to review current hiring needs, compensation trends, and asset

expansion opportunities” (personal communication, March 23, 2023). The behavioral health leader further reported that “the CFO is responsible for managing the overall budget of the agency, the CEO and COO assist in managing agency costs to ensure that the organization is meeting and exceeding its profit margin goals” (personal communication, March 23, 2023). According to the behavioral health leader (personal communication, March 23, 2023), Organization ABC utilizes third-party vendors for specific expenses such as office cleaning, building maintenance, information technology services, purchasing office supplies, recruitment, and personnel training. The behavioral health leader shared that the “agency prides itself on safeguarding sensitive information and maintaining the confidentiality and privacy of their employees, clients, and partners by utilizing a virtual private network, web-based case and matter management system, and cloud-based human capital management system with the assistance of an outsourced team of information technology experts” (personal communication, March 23, 2023).

Implications of Findings

The strategic planning process is advantageous for the success of Organization ABC because an effective process would outline the steps necessary for the organization meet and exceed its organizational goals. The behavioral health leader reported that Organization ABC has proven its ability to achieve the mission, vision, and core values of the organization in its current work and shared that the organization has experienced rapid growth over the last 3 years. An advantage of the strategic planning process is helping the organization to improve its processes to address the challenges Organization ABC has experienced because of its exponential growth. Strategic plans are generally at

least 5 years in length; a 5-year plan would support Organization ABC's goal of being a notable behavioral health organization in the community it serves. A detailed and focused strategic plan would support the executive team's desired program outcomes and aid them in assessing the current and future needs of Organization ABC. Another benefit of an effective strategic plan allows the behavioral health leader and the leadership team to establish desired outcomes with improved processes and strategies, detailed action plans, and techniques for evaluating planned projects to meet the organization's future goals (Bryson et al., 2017).

One of the most critical components of the strategic planning process for Organization ABC is the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (S.W.O.T.) analysis (Topor et al., 2018). The behavioral health leader for Organization ABC has expressed the Organization ABC is faced with the challenge of not having enough skilled mental health professionals to address the growing opioid problem in the community. The S.W.O.T. analysis process gathered data supporting the development and successful implementation of a strategic plan to address the organization's staffing problem.

In addition to the S.W.O.T. analysis, the technique for mapping out the purpose for the organization is helpful for creating a clearer picture of organizational needs and definitive objectives to address community needs. The purpose map would identify the specific connections between cause and effect as it correlates to what the organization is planning to accomplish in the future (Bryson, 2018). The purpose map would also align the organization's goals and expected outcomes to the mission of the organization.

The Appreciative Inquiry (AI) analysis is also a helpful tool in the strategic planning process, as it assessed Organization ABC's strengths in building sustainable relationships; establishing and maintaining effective partnerships; and developing a plan to achieve organizational goals and improving its processes to meet client needs (Armstrong et al., 2020). The AI 4-D framework includes an analysis of the following phases - discovery, dream, design, and destiny – and supports a comprehensive approach to supporting an organization in achieving its goals. This framework is advantageous for Organization ABC during the strategic planning process because it evokes positive change when the behavioral health leader and Organization ABC's leadership team works together to achieve organizational goals, which includes supporting a formalized organizational structure. According to Damawan and Aziziah (2019), this experience improves trust, links the employees to the organization and its mission, improves the desire for them to connect, and shows credibility. The AI analysis would assist in addressing the factors that may lead to resistance, lack of support, and noncommitment from the leadership team and the staff.

Successful development and implementation of a strategic plan for Organization ABC would include support from the organization's executive team. According to Damawan and Aziziah (2019), there are two reasons why the resistance to change may emerge: a) the financial implications of change are greater than the return and b) the organization's strategic direction does not align with employee personal goals, which tend to be selfish in some cases. The behavioral health leader for Organization ABC shared that they have a committed employee base, and the executive team understands

that the organization is only as good as the employees who are responsible for the tasks and activities that help the organization to meet its performance goals. The behavioral health leader shared that feedback from the employees stated that information is not given to them in a timely manner, and they are often responding to situations utilizing a knee jerk reaction. Unfortunately, this adversely affects staff morale and support for new initiatives and program ideas. The lack of timely communication also creates a challenge for contract employees to connect to the organization or adapt to changes when they do not receive timely communication.

Both the S.W.O.T. analysis and the AI 4-D framework contributes to the development of Organization ABC's strategic plan and create an opportunity for the implementation of a communication plan for addressing organizational challenges, proposing new activities to overcome setbacks, and adjusting approaches to objectively meet organizational goals. The process of addressing challenges in an ongoing basis, allows the organization's leadership team to utilize the strategic plan in its day-to-day operations, while also communicating necessary changes to internal and external stakeholders during every phase of the plan from the development phase through full implementation. An evaluation plan increases leadership and employee engagement, in turn, decreasing resistance to change.

The principal element of the strategic planning process is the phase in which the organization shows evidence of readiness for change and begins thinking about the planning process (Bryson, 2018). The steps in which the organization initiates and agrees on a strategic planning process includes input from the executive team and key

stakeholders. This element then leads to developing the purpose and expectations for the strategic plan, while clarifying the organization's mission and values (Bryson, 2018). This element is pivotal for helping Organization ABC to achieve optimal results because the strategic planning process is essential to the success of the organization. Strategic plans are about 3 to 5 years in length; a focused and intentional plan would also include desired outcomes, processes/strategies, actions, evaluation plans, and assessment (Bryson et al., 2017). Both a S.W.O.T. analysis and an AI analysis provides guidance to the leadership team and ensures that Organization ABC's organizational goals aligns to its mission and vision without making decisions that may be detrimental to the success of the organization.

The findings from this study suggest that exploring the development of a strategic plan would address the organization's behavioral health problem. According to the behavioral health leader for Organization ABC (personal communication, December 12, 2022), the increased number of clients presenting with a substance abuse problem along with mental health illness has created a staffing shortage of skilled mental health professionals. Upon learning that the team was turning away individuals in need of services, the behavioral health leader expressed interest in growing its therapeutic services division to address the clients' needs. Thorough examination of Organization ABC's processes and procedures for onboarding skilled mental health professionals suggests that the development of a strategic plan as a capacity building behavioral health care approach would improve organizational sustainability while meeting the community's needs. Implementation of a formalized strategic plan that includes short-

and long-term goals would address the organization's problem and create opportunities for the organization to hire skilled mental health professionals to address the growing opioid problem.

Impact of Positive Social Change

This study contributes to positive social change by increasing community awareness of the opioid epidemic and providing a behavioral health care approach to addressing the growing problem in the community. Data collected aided in understanding the benefits of how the development of a strategic plan with short and long-term goals for hiring skilled mental health professionals would address the community's need. The exploration and development of an effective strategic plan to address community needs would contribute to efforts of reducing the number of occurrences of individuals presenting with both mental health illness and substance uses disorders in the community.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

This study utilized a qualitative research process, which eliminated a linear approach to this study (Baur, 2019). The data collection process included a circular and open-ended approach and is informed by an epistemological stance. This approach allowed me to gain an understanding of the organization's mission, vision, and core values, its strengths, and its barriers to meeting the needs of the community it serves during this study.

Strengths

The strengths of this study were guided by the expectations outlined in the study manual for the behavioral health leadership capstone project by Walden University. The

purpose of the research standards provided me with a guide to complete the study and a clear plan for understanding the purpose and outcome for the project. The expectations outlined by Walden University were used to introduce me to the behavioral health organization, learn about the practice problem, discuss the purpose of the study, and learn more about the study's significance to social change. The study adhered to ethical standards and focused on minimizing the presence of any research biases during the project and enhanced the validity and credibility of research findings.

Another strength of this study is that the Baldrige Framework of Excellence (NIST, 2023) was utilized in this study to assess current and past processes of Organization ABC to explore how the development of a strategic plan that includes short- and long-term organizational goals would improve organizational success. The framework is a nationally recognized model for assessing behavioral healthcare organizations and their operating systems (NIST, 2023). The framework aided in identifying concerns and evaluating the need for developing a strategic plan for improving organizational areas such as communication, productivity, effectiveness, and achievement of strategic organizational goals. The Baldrige Excellence Framework (NIST, 2023) helped to assess Organization ABC's strengths and opportunities for improvement in the areas of effectiveness, approach, results, and innovation to address the community's needs.

In reviewing the problem statement for the organization, I considered the shortcuts some organizations would take to fulfill a need. An issue of concern regarding ethics and the project's outcomes is upholding the principles of beneficence and

nonmaleficence. The outcomes for this project may not be desirable for the organization as it required them to ensure that they uphold the principle of beneficence and nonmaleficence. The principle of beneficence states that the organization is obligated to act and support the rights of the clients, whereas the principle of nonmaleficence requires the clinicians to choose the best treatment plan for the client which may require their focus and attention to the client (Varkey, 2021). The research conducted may require the organization to not only examine its lack of staff as an issue but other processes within the organization in order to recruit, hire, train, and retain staff who conduct themselves in a manner that is helpful at addressing the growing problem in the community. To reduce research bias, prevent the misinterpretation of information provided by the organization's leaders, and promote truth to minimize error, scholarly articles were utilized to support the presenting problem for the organization to reduce biases to what the leaders think is happening in their community.

Limitations

Limitations to this study included its generalizability given the sample size as it could weaken the internal and external validity of this study. The COO of Organization ABC served as a key behavioral health leader informant and the sole participant for this study, which may not correlate to the thought, experiences, and actions of other behavioral health leaders. Another limitation is the risk associated with my professional relationship with the behavioral health leader and Organization ABC. I examined potential conflicts and implicit bias that may have influenced the interviewee's responses. The triangulation method was utilized to gather data from internal and external

secondary-data sources which prevented the endangerment of intersubjectivity and objectivity improving accuracy, accountability, and utility of findings to reduce research bias.

The behavioral health leader reported that the organization implemented a web-based case and matter system in mid-2022, and data prior to the implementation of this system is limited. Data does not exist pertaining to the number of referrals (potential clients) turned away due to lack of skilled mental health professionals. The behavioral health leader reported that the organization's program directors shared that they have declined several referrals due to lack of skilled mental health professionals. The organization's mental health intake form lacks key data for learning more about the triggering behaviors that have led to clients utilizing substances as a coping strategy. According to Pashak and Heron (2022), collecting data pertaining to the client's concerns should be intuitive and automatic and the intake process is as important as the therapy sessions. Incomplete assessments are invalid, and the lack of data collected affects the relevance, meaningfulness, usefulness, and utility of information necessary to create an effective treatment plan for clients.

Currently, the organization uses roadmapping to implement strategic goals. According to Siebelink et al. (2021), this technique causes an organization to seek multiple routes for reaching its organizational goals, adversely the roadmapping technique may lead to behavioral health leaders looking at their operational processes from a narrow view. The recent S.W.O.T. and AI analyses were helpful in creating a clearer picture of the organizational processes for Organization ABC and assessing my

approach for addressing the problem statement (see Appendix B). As both analyses generated information necessary for the development and successful implementation of short- and long-term strategic plan.

Summary and Transition

This study examined the operational processes of Organization ABC. Access to historical agency reports and employee surveys posed a limitation for this study. While this information is relevant to the agency and conducive for this study, the data collected was biased to Organization ABC and not necessarily generalizable to similar behavioral health agencies. These limitations were assessed utilizing the Baldrige Excellence Framework (NIST, 2023) and addressed further in the recommendations and conclusions section of this study. The information gathered supports my approach to exploring a behavioral health care approach to developing a strategic plan to increase the number of skilled mental health professionals to address the staffing problem at the behavioral health organization. The behavioral health leader expressed an understanding that analysis of the organization is an ongoing process, and this study recommends that the staff meet quarterly, at least four times during each year of the strategic plan to review their effectiveness and make changes as needed.

Section 5: Recommendations and Conclusions

According to the behavioral health leader of Organization ABC, the organization demonstrates compliance with local, state, and federal regulations when performing services related to behavioral health services. The organization utilizes a roadmapping process to influence strategy formulation and implementation. Although this approach alleviates some challenges faced by Organization ABC, it does not eliminate them.

According to Siebelink et al. (2021), roadmapping can be advantageous, but it can also be a hinderance to success when top managers promote their views, interests, and agendas over others, which could lead to biased decisions and unfavorable courses of action.

Therefore, a formalized strategic plan that assesses the organization's ability to achieve short- and long-term goals would serve as a more beneficial tool for Organization ABC.

The behavioral health organization offers an array of services that assist community members with presenting problems pertaining to mental health concerns. Service offerings include behavior management services for individuals with intellectual disabilities, substance abuse treatment for individuals through a partnership with community corrections, individual mental health therapy sessions for those presenting with symptoms outlined in the DSM-5, an emergency shelter care for boys age 10–15 years as a result of neglect or abuse, and social supports for families with children in need of services. Organizational performance is measured by the number of client referrals based on documentation entered into the web-based case and matter management system. Then client discharge summaries as well as records of payment reimbursements for services rendered for each division are reviewed to measure performance outcomes.

Analysis of the data collected during this qualitative case study has led to the following recommendations.

Recommendations

During this study, two themes emerged from the semistructured interviews with the behavioral health leader, the COO of Organization ABC. The first theme was exponential growth and lack of skilled mental health professionals to deliver needed services, and the second theme was the lack of a strategic plan that would help Organization ABC to develop and implement strategies to measure outcomes, evaluate successes, and evaluate areas of improvement. The behavioral health leader reported that the organization had experienced an increased number of clients presenting with both a mental health illness and a substance abuse problem. Therefore, Organization ABC needed to recruit, train, and hire an increased number of skilled mental health professionals to meet the growing community needs. The current study suggests that the development of a strategic plan would address Organization ABC's behavioral health problem of not having enough skilled mental health professionals to address the growing opioid epidemic in the community. Recommendations based on findings include exploring strategic planning as a capacity-building behavioral health care approach to improve organizational sustainability while meeting the community's needs. I recommend the following for Organization ABC:

1. Utilize existing data captured in the web-based case and matter management system from 2020 to 2022 to determine a baseline for program outcomes based on division.

2. Create a team of internal and external stakeholders to analyze the data and develop a short- and long-term plan of 3–5 years to improve the areas of communication, productivity, effectiveness, and strategic organizational goal achievement.
3. Develop a communication plan that includes who, what, when, where, and how performance updates should be shared.
4. Track operational performance monthly, communicate outcomes to key stakeholders, evaluate performance, and make changes as needed.
5. Improve quality of care for clients by adopting a process to expand systems of integrated care that address clients' mental and physical health concerns. Adoption of an integrated approach to behavioral health care would improve the standard of care for Organization ABC's clients (Schrager, 2021).

I recommend that Organization ABC's leadership team develop a 3–5-year strategic plan, implement the plan in phases over 12 months, and monitor the plan every 90 days thereafter. The recommendation led to the strategy implementation process (see Table 1) to transform Organization ABC from operational performance to full capacity serving the needs of the community.

Table 1*Strategy Implementation Process for Organization ABC*

Phase	Task	Time line
Phase 1	Identify champion for strategic plan	Month 1
Phase 2	Determine baseline for program outcomes	Month 2
Phase 3	Formulate a group of stakeholders	Month 3
Phase 4	Develop a strategic plan	Months 4–5
Phase 5	Develop a communication plan	Month 6
Phase 6	Implementation of strategic plan	Month 7
Phase 7	Evaluate first 90 days of plan implementation	Month 10
Phase 8	Make changes based on evaluation	Month 11
Phase 9	Track and communicate performance ongoing	Months 12, 15, 18, 21, 24, then annually for 5 years

In Phase 1 of the strategy implementation plan process, Organization ABC's behavioral health leader will identify a staff member who will lead the strategic planning process. The staff member will be a champion of the organization and will have the skills necessary to support the organization and its staff through the change process (see Cullen et al., 2020). The role of the champion for Organization ABC is someone who is influential in the behaviors of the skilled mental health professionals. According to Morena et al. (2022), the champion for the organization helps to reduce barriers that may disrupt the implementation of an effective strategic plan, thereby improving the program outcomes by advocating and supporting the behavioral health leadership organization's implementation efforts.

After a champion of the organization has been selected by the behavioral health leader, the organization would move to Phase 2 of the implementation process of an effective strategic plan. George et al. (2019) reported that the examination of

organizational performance and ongoing review of data collected to measure performance has positive effects on the consequences of organizational performance. The champion of the process would then determine the baseline for the program outcomes using existing data from 2020 to 2022 in Phase 2.

In Phase 3, the champion would create a team of internal and external stakeholders to analyze the data and develop a short- and long-term plan of 3–5 years to improve the areas of communication, productivity, effectiveness, and strategic organizational goal achievement. According to Morciano et al. (2020), the decision-making process for the formulation of an effective strategic plan involves both internal and external stakeholders. The champion's role in this process is to promote the changes anticipated within the organization, serve as a liaison between the organization and the stakeholders, and aid in reducing barriers that may prevent the implementation of an effective strategic plan (Shea, 2021).

Phase 4 includes the development of an effective 3- or 5-year strategic plan. The team including the champion of the organization and key internal and external stakeholders would have 60 days to successfully develop a strategic plan for Organization ABC and garner support for the plan from the organization's behavioral health leaders before the implementation phase. In Phase 5, the champion and team of stakeholders who developed the strategic plan would create a communication plan to introduce the plan to the staff, share initiatives of the plan, inform the team of the outcome measurements, and discuss the time line for reviewing progress. This phase of the process will aid in minimizing the resistance to change and involve everyone in the change process to ensure

that they know what to expect and what strategies will be implemented to move the organization forward.

Phase 6 is implementation of the plan, and Phase 7 is evaluation of the plan after it had been implemented for 90 days. Phases 8 and 9 include evaluation and assessment of the plan and include strategy reporting; after the plan is placed into action, Organization ABC's leadership team and the champion of the organization leading the strategic planning process will track performance goals and evaluate plan progress every 90 days after implementation. During the evaluation phase, Organization ABC's team will adapt strategies as necessary to ensure that the organization is meeting its outcomes as outlined in the strategic plan. This strategy implementation process will initiate Organization ABC's plan to grow its therapeutic division and lay the groundwork for developing a strategic planning framework that will serve the organization for years to come.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Utilizing the Baldrige Excellence Framework (NIST, 2023), I was able to gather pertinent information to address the practice problem in this study. The practice problem in this study was the lack of skilled mental health professionals employed by a behavioral health organization in the Midwest region of the United States. Although recent empirical literature was available, there is an opportunity for further research to address the gap in mental health treatment and the effects of an emergent crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Bowen et al. (2020), future research activities to advance integrative behavioral health services are also needed. The implementation of integrated

care processes would improve the quality of care and delivery models for Organization ABC's clients. The concept of integrative care provided insight into Organization ABC's behavioral health care problem. Researchers defined the concept of integrated behavioral health care as a team of individuals using an effective patient care approach to address the medical and mental health needs of the patient (Bowen et al, 2020). This form of care also includes the patient and their families and addresses both mental health and substance abuse concerns as well as health symptoms pertaining to life crises and stressors. This information is important to the behavioral health care problem addressed in this study because it is essential for Organization ABC to adopt innovative strategies to meet the needs of the clients they serve, which includes evidence-based integrated behavioral health care approaches focusing on mental and physical health symptoms to provide more treatment plan opportunities to the patients.

Plan for Dissemination

The plan for dissemination of this study includes a well-organized presentation that includes a summary of the research, findings, and recommendations for Organization ABC. The behavioral health leader of Organization ABC will have an opportunity to ask questions about the study and seek clarification regarding the findings outlined as well as the recommendations for the organization. The presentation will include an executive summary summarizing the purpose and problem addressed in this study as well as pertinent data sources examined that led to the research findings and recommendations for the organization.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the development of a strategic plan to hire skilled mental health professionals to address the growing opioid epidemic at a behavioral health clinic in the Midwest region of the United States of America. Using the Baldrige Excellence Framework (NIST, 2023), I evaluated current and previous system processes for a small behavioral health organization located in the Midwest region of the United States. Pertinent data were collected from internal and external secondary data sources including the organization's website, financial statements, and marketing materials, as well as semistructured interviews with the COO of the behavioral health organization and review of recent empirical studies.

The current study addressed the exponential growth of client referrals presenting with symptoms of mental health illness and substance use disorders. Additional examination included the lack of skilled mental health professionals available to deliver services, which led to the exploration of developing processes for creating strategies to measure program outcomes and an evaluation process of current services to improve organizational sustainability. Findings indicated that the development of a 3- to 5-year strategic plan and successful implementation of the plan within a year would address the organization's behavioral health problem, including a review and evaluation of the plan every 90 days after implementation. Recommendations based on findings include exploring how strategic planning as a capacity-building behavioral health care approach improves organizational sustainability while meeting the needs of the community.

This study may contribute to positive social change by examining the system processes and operational procedures for hiring skilled mental health professionals and creating awareness of strategies available to decrease the number of occurrences of individuals utilizing substance use as a coping strategy for mental health illnesses. Although review of recent, empirical literature was available regarding strategies/strategic planning, mental health providers, behavioral health, organization effectiveness, mental illness, fentanyl, overdose, and opioid epidemic, there was limited research available for behavioral health organizations developing a strategic plan to address mental health concerns in the post-pandemic era. Therefore, there is an opportunity for further research to address the gap in mental health treatment and the effects of a pandemic.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What is the primary concern/issue you would like to address together during this project study?
 - How often have you received a referral for a client presenting with an opioid use disorder in the past 6 months/year?
 - During intake, what has the client identified as the triggers that lead to drug use?
 - How many clients have presented themselves with mental health concerns as well as substance use disorder symptoms?
 - How many skilled mental health professionals are currently on staff?
 - How many clients does each skilled mental health professional have in their caseload?
 - Have you spoken with other behavioral health organizations about this issue? If so, what have you learned?
2. What outcomes do you expect from this study?
3. What have you already tried to resolve this problem?
4. Who participates in the decision making and execution of this study process?
5. Tell me about strategic plans in place for the developing plans to address healthcare changes and assess the impact on meeting community needs.
6. What resources are available to implement strategies to address problem?
7. How prepared is the organization to make changes?
8. How soon would the organization like to implement changes?
9. How will you measure outcome success after you implement changes?

10. What evaluation process will the organization utilize to measure organizational success and need for future changes?

Appendix B: Analysis of the Organization

The strategic initiatives for Organization ABC are:

- Providing emergency shelter care for up to sixteen boys ages 10-15 years of age in safe and secure residential homes per month, in partnership with the department of children services.
- Delivering substance abuse treatment services for one hundred clients per month referred by the United States federal probation unit.
- Facilitating behavior management services to up to twenty-five consumers per month with approved waivers by the Bureau of Developmental Disabilities Services.
- Accepting up to twenty-five families in need of services because of abuse or neglect in the form of family preservation services, supervised visitation, parent education, skills training, or therapeutic services.

The S.W.O.T (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis findings explore the organization's ability to meet the community needs, the financial health of the organization, its ability to deliver quality services, and need for the development of a strategic plan.

Strengths

- Organization ABC is a notable agency that provides behavioral management services which are effective across all divisions.
- Organization ABC has access to community resources to wrap-around healthcare services.

- Organization ABC cross trains its staff to work across all divisions to meet the demands of the exponential growth.
- Organization ABC's current staffing model includes employees with clinical and professional experience as well as direct support experience.
- Organization ABC has proven community partnerships and exhibits that it has strong community support.
- Organization ABC utilizes road mapping as a strategic process when determining activities to achieve organizational goals.
- Organization ABC tracks client information utilizing a web-based case and matter management system.

Weaknesses

- Organization ABC lacks skilled mental health professionals capable of delivering clinical services to adolescents and adults to address a growing clientele.
- Organization ABC lacks a formalized organizational chart although it has a depiction of the organization's hierarchy and the roles of senior leadership positions.

Opportunities

- Develop a group of employees as a focus group to discuss accomplishments, challenges, and resources needed to improve delivery service model.
- Increase the number of skilled mental health professionals on staff to deliver quality services.

- Evaluate the potential for diversifying revenue when implementing new program services.
- Evaluate the increased costs for additional resources to hire, train, and manage current and fresh staff members.
- Identify strategies to increase the number of community partnerships and manage ongoing community engagement.
- Strengthen support for delivering quality healthcare and assess impact on meeting community needs.
- Evaluate organization's ability to promote and examine adherence to ethical behaviors and responsibilities.
- Develop a communication plan to deliver updates on organizational performance and strategic activities for reaching organizational goals.

Threats

- Meeting the growing mental health needs of the community with current organizational resources.
- Having to turn away clients due to lack of staff affecting profit margins.
- Potential for employee burn-out due to increased caseloads.
- Managing internal stakeholder resistance and lack of employee support.
- Monitoring fiscal responsibility to meet organization budget goals.
- Evaluating and assessing lack of resources to support current and future healthcare services.

- Communicating program needs and evaluating organizational goals to implement changes to deliver client-centered services.
- Developing a plan to anticipate future changes in state, local, and federal policies, and procedures, and formulate a process to examine the ability to deliver quality care in adherence to community need and regulatory requirements.

The Appreciative Inquiry 4-D cycle analysis for Organization ABC includes the following phases:

- Discovery – recognizing who the internal stakeholders are and how they contribute collectively to the organizational goals.
- Dream – what is Organization ABC doing, the perception of the organization’s work by others, and organizational goals for the employees and leaders in the future.
- Design – actions necessary to meet Organization ABC’s future goals, and defining the organizational structure, such as processes, systems, culture, and leadership roles.
- Destiny – identify employee’s individual commitments for assisting Organization ABC in reaching its goals.