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## Strategies Leaders of Small Businesses Use to Develop and Implement Succession Plans

Selma Daphne St. Prix  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Selma Daphne Auguste–St. Prix

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Review Committee

Dr. Denise Land, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Peter Anthony, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost  
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2024

Abstract

Strategies Leaders of Small Businesses Use to Develop and Implement Succession Plans

by

Selma Daphne Auguste–St. Prix

MBA, Australian Institute of Business, 2015

BS, City University New York (Hunter), 1992

Consulting Capstone Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

March 2024

## Abstract

The lack of succession plans can lead to organizational knowledge loss. Small business leaders are concerned with succession planning, which can lead to company closures. Grounded in Woodworth and Thorndike's knowledge transfer for succession planning theory, the purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies small business leaders use to develop and implement succession plans. The participants were two small business owners of a health sector organization in the Midwestern United States who implemented succession plans to prevent organization knowledge loss. Data were collected using the Baldrige Excellence Framework, semistructured interviews, and a review of organizational documents. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis; three themes emerged: (a) employee and leadership audits, (b) career mapping for succession planning, and (c) shadowing, training, developing, and strategic depth. A key recommendation is for organizational leaders to develop career maps for employees. The implications for positive social change include the potential for employees to fulfill organizational sustainability leadership roles, employee job retention, and thus, employee economic contribution to the community.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this study first and foremost to God, who strengthened and sustained me and made my coping mechanisms through the challenges and obstacles easier to handle. The journey would not have been possible without God. I dedicate this study also to my husband, Taddeus Shedly St. Prix, for his support and sacrifice. House chores became just a man's job throughout.

To my best friend, Keturah Donai, for her continued support, staying late nights at the office with me, being my biggest cheerleader, and believing that I could do anything. I also appreciate her assistance with some of the technological difficulties.

To my son, Shayn St. Prix, who has been expressing how very proud he is and for his support. To the CEO of Stardom for patience and professionalism throughout the consultancy. Finally, to my Walden University chair, Dr. Denise Land, my mentor, who made everything seem possible. Dr. Land was never too busy even while away on vacation.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The 2021–2022 Baldrige Performance Excellence Program (2021) was the framework for this research study related to strategies leaders of a small business use to develop and implement succession plans. As specified by Walden University's consulting capstone (Walden University, 2021), I functioned as both the researcher and consultant for this study. I focus on instituting the study's foundation in Section 1, and in Section 2, I formulate an in-depth discourse on the project.

### **Background of the Problem**

Readiness for change is inevitable, and leaders must be prepared to adapt and pass on company knowledge to upcoming leaders. According to Zhang et al. (2020), change is inescapable, and it cannot be avoided in organizations, but adaptation through strategic planning that is aligned with the vision and mission, and staff training, assists with readiness for change. New economic challenges have surprised many company leaders who did not expect the pandemic and transformation of business practices that have emerged as change for all (Kultak et al., 2022). As change persists and leaders age, sustainability planning and implementation are needed for continuance and competitive advantage (Alam & Islam, 2021). Leaders are to ensure that employees are included in the planning for successful implementation.

Leaders of small businesses have not been ready to implement succession plans, especially as many have lost businesses and closed down during the pandemic. According to Cortes and Herrmann (2020), producing and applying innovative ideas constitute a critical organizational effort to achieve superior sustainable performance.

Gnepp et al. (2020) echoed that employee production moved after a whole quarter to only 12% in the workplace. Transfer of knowledge is important, especially as new computerized devices are needed for the modern world (Hoffman et al., 2022). Some training in computerized devices may be needed for seamless productivity in the workplace (Hoffman et al., 2022). Organizational leaders, success planning and implementation are important for organizational sustainability.

### **Problem and Purpose**

The specific business problem is that some leaders of small businesses lack strategies to develop and implement succession plans. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies leaders of a small business use to develop and implement succession plans.

### **Population and Sampling**

The data were collected from two executive leaders of one purposefully sampled small for-profit business in the Midwestern United States. The company used strategies to develop and implement succession plans. The client organization, “Stardom,” with which I partnered as a scholar-consultant, needed to put strategies in place for seamless succession. The executive leaders were interviewed using a semistructured interview procedure designed to understand strategies leaders of a small business use to develop and implement succession plans. Company data and reports were also used for data and were collected using phone calls, emails, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams platforms to gather relevant information.



### **Nature of the Study**

I used a qualitative approach in this study. Using the qualitative method allowed for an explorative understanding of the circumstances for thorough assessments. Details can be accessed through probing as the qualitative researcher seeks to understand the case (Yin, 2018). Using a qualitative approach was the most appropriate method for my study as it was knowledge and experience based (see Benoit et al., 2021). Quantitative research is used for testing hypotheses, and instead of semistructured interviews, surveys are administered (Benoit et al., 2021); therefore, the quantitative method was not appropriate for this study. The mixed method approach was also not appropriate for this study as it incorporates the quantitative method with surveys and is used in experimental matters (Lester et al., 2022). The study did not include surveys and was not experimental in nature.

Qualitative researchers must make suitable design choices for their study. Qualitative research designs are inclusive of many designs, three of which are case study, ethnography, and phenomenology (Yin, 2018). In addressing the research question in this qualitative study, the specific research design was a single case study. The approach was appropriate for the study because a single case study can include semistructured interviews, reports, experiences, opinions, perceptions, and feelings to deduce in-depth information (see Yin, 2018). The research question was about strategies small business leaders use for succession planning and implementation, for which case studies work well. According to Yin (2018), the most appropriate design for research with a strategic context in organizations is case study. The single case study assisted the exploration of

the problem in depth, extracting pertinent information through documents, reports, and interviews. Qualitative ethnography researchers relate to people in the environment in which they live and explore the more cultural and social aspects of all the people in a community (Fitzgerald & Mills, 2022). Ethnography was excluded from this study as it relates to studying an entire culture and also relates to exploration of customs, which was not needed in this study (de Rond et al., 2022). Phenomenological studies are used to capture psychological events and occurrences in people's lives (Parikh et al., 2020). The phenomenological approach was also not appropriate as this study was not inclusive of lived experiences (de Rond et al., 2022). Therefore, a single qualitative case study was the most appropriate research design to explore strategies leaders of small businesses use to develop and implement succession plans.

### **Research Question**

What strategies do leaders of small businesses use to develop and implement succession plans?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What strategies did you use to develop succession plans?
2. What strategies did you use to implement succession plans?
3. How did you develop your succession plan strategies for business continuity and operation sustainability?
4. What did you take into consideration when you were planning for succession?
5. What were some of the challenges encountered in implementing the strategies?

6. How did you prepare for unexpected events while the plan was being implemented?
7. What were the key performance measures used to evaluate the effectiveness of succession plan implementation?
8. What other information would you like to share relating to succession planning strategies for business sustainability?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The theory or concept that grounded this study was knowledge transfer for succession planning. Woodworth and Thorndike (1901) studied how people learn and the mental processes for training. Woodworth and Thorndike explained the effects of enhancement of one mental function upon the competence of other functions. Building on Woodworth and Thorndike's concept of people's learning ability and mental capacity for training, Belenky and Schalk (2014) studied the psychological keenness to construct learning and transfer of knowledge with training reproductions. The concept and theory of concrete learning and transfer of what is learned fit the study as the transfer of knowledge must be receptive to the learner, who must have the ability to learn and be trainable (Pivec & Potocan, 2021). Good company culture has great effects on knowledge transfer and assists in the improvement of leadership (Pivec & Potocan, 2021). The key tenets underlying knowledge transfer theory are the creation and promotion of knowledge for growth, which people need towards business continuity (Zhang & Chan, 2020). People need to be open to the importance of knowledge sharing in the management of knowledge, for the improvement of knowledge transfer needed for succession planning

and company sustainability (Ncoyini & Cilliers, 2020). Knowledge sharing accepted by employees through a colleague or the organization leader for business continuity makes the development and implementation of succession plans achievable.

### **Operational Definitions**

The technical terms and definitions in this section will add lucidity for understanding of the study.

*Baldrige Excellence Framework:* The Baldrige Excellence Framework is a systems model used as a tool to measure and improve business processes towards excellence and sustainable success. The framework comes in the form of a booklet, and the criterion has two triads, which are leadership, strategy, and customers towards workforce, operations, and results with measurement, analysis, and knowledge management for performance excellence (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021).

*Performance system:* Processes in the Baldrige Excellence Framework consisting of six categories separated into two triads: leadership, strategy, and customers integrated with workforce, operations, and results that define all processes to attain work performance success (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021).

*Succession planning:* Processes and leadership contingency plans put in place in case of immediate change in leadership or governance in a business or program (Motoc, 2021). Business continuity relies upon the strategic planning of circumstantial placement of leaders for company survival and in the event of a loss (Li, 2019).

## **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

### **Assumptions**

I identified three assumptions that could have an influence on the results of my study. Assumptions are the processes of thinking that certain things are true when still not yet proven (Burton-Jones et al., 2021). According to Burton-Jones et al. (2021), assumptions affect the decisions researchers make regarding findings and theory formulation. In data collection and the evaluation of the performance of my client organization, my first assumption was the belief that the Baldrige Excellence Framework was the most appropriate criteria tool. The assumption was born out of the information from the Baldrige Excellence Framework and the stated history of outstanding results (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021). I also assumed that the client organization partner would be accessible and a partner with integrity and honest data responses within the data collection process. Last, I assumed that a single case study was the most appropriate design for my study. Yin's (2018) case study design has been used for many successful qualitative studies.

### **Limitations**

I found two limitations in my study. Limitations are facets of a study that took place and could not have been done differently at the time and may be different from similar studies (Harsch & Festing, 2020). Time restrictions with data collection in the consulting capstone where student schedules coupled with the organization partners' time constraints were the first limitation in the study. The second limitation was the interviewing of only one leader, as the business was small and limited participants were

available for the study. Data from one leader, though the only option at the time, could have caused biases. According to Yin (2018), biases in a study can compromise the credibility of the study. Although the risk of biases was possible, the detailed questions through the Baldrige Excellence Framework (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021) brought out information when compared with other sources that were concrete and accurate.

### **Delimitations**

There were delimitations in this study. Delimitations are defined as restrictions or boundaries set by the author in the decisions taken on the research path towards the results (Ayhan, 2019). My main delimitation was to remain with only one leader for information on the company and to get permission from only that leader to gain reports and data towards saturation. Another delimitation was deciding not to insist on seeing my organization partner to see the body language at interview dialogues for more clarity on the answers given. Yin (2018) stated that having boundaries in a case study for a research outcome means having delimitations. Respecting the boundaries of the client leader made the leader trust the consultancy relationship.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Succession planning adds value to companies, especially in this volatile, changing working environment. This study's findings are significant for leaders and governance to avoid negative consequences such as department or company closure because of the lack of succession planning (see Maheshwari & Vaishali, 2020). The documentation of

succession strategies through an implementation plan and human successors eliminates the continuous challenges many small businesses experience in succession events. Leadership succession preparedness has been lacking in many organizations (Motoc, 2021). Therefore, by being prepared for the future, through a performance system with succession planning, companies can gain continuous success. The study findings may be of value to businesses to encourage succession planning for business continuity in companies (see Maheshwari & Vaishali, 2020). Successors react positively to an environment that includes business continuity in their strategic plans (Li, 2019). Gehrke (2019) stated that to strengthen employees in line for leadership positions, there must be succession planning early for best fit and understanding of desired strategies and practices. According to Hiebert (2022), having a succession plan assists businesses to be effective by avoiding the wasting of time and resources when a leader retires or leaves the company. Before a senior leader leaves a company, their wisdom, work ethic, and knowledge should be passed on for continuous improvement and success.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Succession planning strategies identified through the results of the study can be of use to this organization and other companies to understand preparedness and governance structures for succession planning. Change comes in different ways and may include tragedy or disasters that force companies to strategize differently, incorporating corporate social responsibility (CSR) in their strategies (Gorokhova, 2020). The ability to assure business continuity is a form of CSR and can contribute to continuing services needed in

communities and value through job opportunities that enhance the local community and, in the process, result in positive social change.

### **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

To be relevant, scholarly writing requires information that is trustworthy and within a reasonable time frame. Primary data and literature published within 5 years of 2024 provide perspectives when synthesized on many aspects of the study's topic (see Narbaev, 2022). To demonstrate an exhaustive and comprehensive understanding of a topic, scholar researchers must demonstrate synthesis of a myriad of sources to convince their readers. Loose et al. (2022) stated that literature reviews are to be in depth and explicit for a critical understanding of a topic. Literature reviews must be comprehensive when analyzing problems to have a strong foundation for what is to be found (Samanta et al., 2019). Although the literature review must be comprehensive, it must have boundaries for the search in areas related to the study (Agis et al., 2021). In order to achieve professional support for a study's findings or to close gaps, structured literature reviews are to be conducted by producing relevant information from scholarly seminal sources, peer-reviewed journals, and reports (Plattfaut & Borghoff, 2022). Researchers and professional scholars conduct in-depth evaluations of the literature to have significant value and clear information for all readers (Narbaev, 2022). The literature must emphasize the need for the study and identify gaps that make the rationale more succinct (Agis et al., 2021). The purpose of this literature review was to critically synthesize and evaluate relevant and outstanding scholarship related to strategies small business leaders use to develop and implement succession plans.



## **Organization and Overview of the Literature Review**

To understand the scholarship regarding strategies small business leaders use to develop and implement succession plans, I organized the literature review in the following sections: (a) literature search strategy, (b) establishment of the conceptual framework, (c) knowledge transfer, (d) strategies used by small business leaders, and (e) implementation of succession plans. The conceptual framework of knowledge transfer theory was used as a lens to analyze the research question and the purpose statement. Knowledge transfer would assist with identifying strategies facilitating leaders to relinquish power and not feel threatened or powerless in business continuity (see Conway et al., 2019). Supporting and contrasting theories were used in the study applicable to knowledge transfer theory. Small businesses for profit fit into the picture for a clear understanding of the case being studied with an analysis of sustainability and succession planning concepts.

### ***Literature Search Strategy***

The literature search strategy for this qualitative single case study revolved around literature that focused on strategies small business leaders used to develop and implement succession plans. I used Walden University Library databases as a search instrument to pinpoint and gather peer-reviewed journals and articles. The searched databases included Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, EBSCOHost, and Sage journals. These search databases were chosen for their popularity, peer-reviewed articles and journals, and practical scholarly business information, and they were recommended by Walden University's librarians. These databases were used to

locate sources from the years 2021 to 2024. To be thorough but have useful literature, researchers must search relevant literature in a methodical manner to enhance and add value to the study (Anderson & Lemken, 2023). I advanced my search by using keywords and phrases to capture relevant journals and articles. Some of the keywords and phrases used in my search were *a small business, small businesses, succession plan, succession planning, business succession plan, successor, business continuity, sustainability, knowledge transfer, knowledge transfer theory, and knowledge management*. In the search, special efforts were made to click on dates within 5 years, and only peer-reviewed documents were chosen.

A database of files for references was the best course I found to keep a trail of the information that I cited. The references were kept exactly how they would be listed in the final proposal and doctoral study reference list. I also kept manila folders in a special file bin in categories such as theories, client leader dialogues, seminal documents, new technologies, and succession plan journals and articles. All articles and journals were selected through the peer-reviewed classification in the Walden University database criteria selection area for document searches. For verification and analysis of the American Psychological Association (APA) seventh edition correct referencing for scholarly communication according to Walden University regulations, I checked [crossref.org](http://crossref.org) and [reciteworks.com](http://reciteworks.com). Sometimes, I had to check an article through Google just to verify the article's authenticity.

The articles and journals used for this study were all peer-reviewed. The Walden University Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program's consulting capstone

policy indicates that 85% of academic sources are recommended to be peer reviewed in the study (Walden University, 2021). The other 15% could be government and/or seminal sources relevant to the research question. Any publication that is not a peer-reviewed, government, or seminal source to match the policy is of less scholarly value. Among the sources used, 85% must have been published in the range of 1–5 years to attest to current credibility and applicability (Walden University, 2021). To ensure that my study was relevant and credible, I researched approximately 270 scholarly and peer-reviewed sources, out of which 179 were referenced in the proposal document. Out of the 179 referenced documents, 170 were peer reviewed, which represented 95%; eight were seminal sources, which represented 4%; and one other source was published in the year 2018, which represented 1%. This information is represented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Literature Review Source Content*

Literature review	Total	Periods	Referenced %
Peer-reviewed sources	170	2019–2023	95%
Seminal sources	8	1901, 1972, 1979 1995, 2009, 2014 2014, 2018 (Yin)	4%
Other source	1	2018	1%
Total	179		100%

### ***Application to the Applied Business Problem***

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies small business leaders use to develop and implement succession plans. Succession planning continues to be a challenge for small businesses; their preparedness for succession of leadership has been lacking (Motoc, 2021). I used the prescribed manual for the DBA consulting capstone and the Baldrige Excellence Framework to gather data, analyze the data, draw out themes, and code the data to gain opportunities for improvement and recommendations for my client leader. The data gathered for Stardom were to assist the company in developing seamless strategies to develop and implement succession plans.

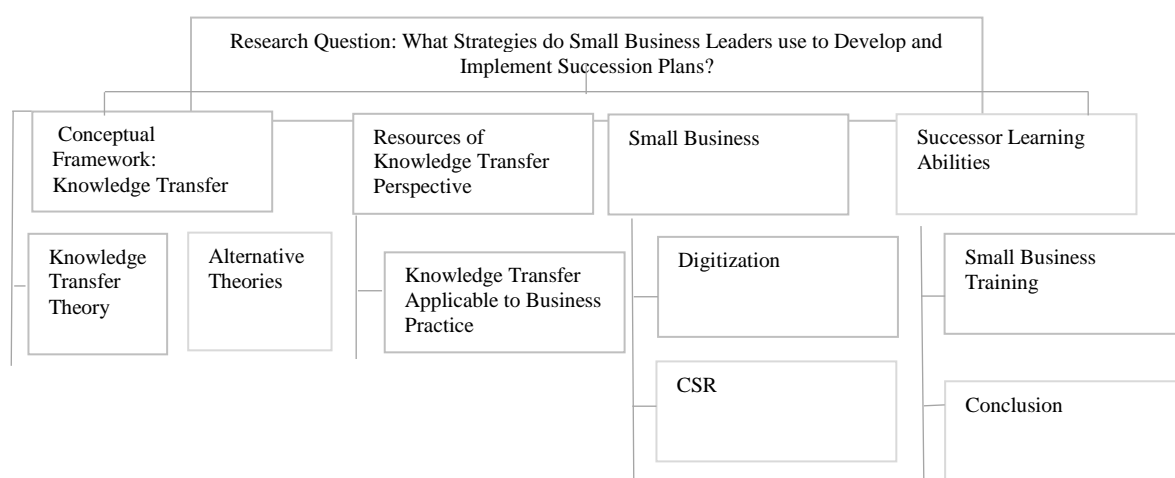
### ***Structure of the Literature Review***

With the use of seminal and 2019–2024 literature, a few areas emerged for review, analysis, and synthesis, as follows: (a) knowledge transfer theory, (b) small business, (c) new technologies and learning capacity benefits of knowledge transfer, and (d) application of knowledge transfer at other establishments. The knowledge transfer theory section details the origin of knowledge transfer and how it is used in the business world. There will also be a discussion on alternative theories considered for the study but not used. The small business section is inclusive of a definition of small business practice and their functions. The following section will include description and explanation of the technologies needed for knowledge transfer and the benefits that can be derived for people who are trainable. The last section has a discussion on the technologies that were used by other small businesses to create sustainable strategies for succession planning

and implementation of the strategies. The learning abilities of the successors, the approach required, and their CSR are also discussed. Figure 1 portrays the conclusion of the literature review, which comprises a discussion of the research question, the conceptual framework, and key inferences for future adaptation.

**Figure 1**

*Structure of the Literature Review*



### **Conceptual Framework: Knowledge Transfer**

The conceptual framework lens for the study was knowledge transfer. The conceptual framework is the lens through which the understanding of a phenomenon by discovering evidence is scrutinized using the research question, approaches, and outcomes (Nair, 2021). A demonstration of the transfer of information through innovative actions of a leader to the successor as well as skills, tacit, and experiential learning was explored to find a connection for strategy (Letonja et al., 2021; Qiu & Haugland, 2019). Knowledge transfer is a combination of information from external sources and the internal knowledge of a company to bring about innovation and continuity (Pateli &

Lioukas, 2019). Information has to be passed on earlier than later from leaders to successors to ensure that high and innovative performance is achieved by the successor (Pateli & Lioukas, 2019). The management of the knowledge passed on includes creating and organizing company information and other needed information for sharing with potential leaders (Garcia & Sosa-Fey, 2020). Close and personal interaction is inevitable for clear understanding to be achieved (Qiu & Haugland, 2019). Passing on knowledge from a company requires experience and transference skills. For the purposes of this study, there is great importance in understanding how knowledge transfer will impact business continuity and the methods to pass on the knowledge to successors for success. The need for evidence of successful successors is also key in understanding the theory of knowledge transfer.

### ***Knowledge Transfer Theory***

The conceptual framework theory that grounded this study was knowledge transfer for succession planning, which has a foundation based on the research of Woodworth and Thorndike (see Woodworth & Thorndike, 1901). These seminal authors studied how people learn and the mental processes for training. For the transfer of knowledge to take place, the successor as the recipient must be trainable and have the ability to mentally process information and implement it successfully. The authors described being trainable as the influence of improvement in one mental function upon the efficiency of other functions. Woodworth and Thorndike (1901) further explained that people learn through training in conducive situations and by aptitude. Pivec and Potocan's (2021) contribution to research on knowledge transfer was inclusive of an

organization's need to improve and develop new leaders through the increased strength of its culture. To be trained for successful leadership, individuals must be immersed in the company culture, which must be continuously strengthened (Pivec & Potocan, 2021). Strengthening the company culture through knowledge transfer must comprise managing the knowledge through systems that have seamless continuity (Ncoyini & Cilliers, 2020). Letonja et al. (2021) debated that strengthening a culture was not enough for successful knowledge transfer but experience from leaders, skills, and external knowledge made the difference. Successful knowledge transfer would have to be well managed with the many aspects involved in the implementation. Stardom's leaders are to plan in advance for succession and in planning must be open to knowledge sharing. Continuous training and coaching of future leaders have to be a mandate of the company inclusive of all departments. The mindset of acceptance of open knowledge sharing must be a crucial attribute for leadership (Ncoyini & Cilliers, 2020). When recruiting individuals into a company, these attributes must be considered as succession and sustainability should be part of the company's vision. That kind of management propels companies into sustainable management strategies.

How well knowledge transfer is managed depends on who is involved and how it is handled. Knowledge management is very important as some people in businesses may not be open to the importance of knowledge sharing (Ncoyini & Cilliers, 2020).

According to Qiu and Haugland (2019), teams of workers with common views should be linked together with their networks to form alliances for boundary spanning. Boundary spanners are the ones who convince teams to accept cultural norms, as not all workers

adapt to cultures in companies (Qiu & Haugland, 2019). Most previous researchers concentrated on collecting and processing information; however, recent scholars suggest that individual mental capacity, personality, and skills are essential for absorbing and implementing transferred information (Qiu & Haugland, 2019). Ncoyini and Cilliers (2020) and Qiu and Haugland (2019) believed that the best way forward for the future in knowledge transfer is to have external alliances to safeguard against information leakage and know what other firms are doing; without this, an organization's competitive edge will suffer. For Stardom organization leaders, experience, company knowledge, skills, cultural expertise, and external information are not the only tools and preparation needed in knowledge transfer succession. There must be awareness of what is going on externally with organizations, and there must be associations and networks that safeguard companies' ability to be competitive and continuous. The use of knowledge transfer in this study reinforced the assessment of training and development embedded in culture and internal and external needs to develop strategies for small business leaders to develop and implement succession plans.

**Knowledge Transfer of Succession Plans.** Stardom's succession planning must be inclusive of leaders training potential leaders as well as potential leaders training their subordinates. Stardom's leaders encourage the training of successors at every level. Succession planning means having replacements for people who by accident or by design have to leave a company. Readiness mitigates risk and allows for seamless business continuity. The aim of this study was to provide guidance for Stardom in management strategies for succession planning. For succession plans to be successful, there is a need



for levels of knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing is needed for strategic company growth and business continuity (Ncoyini & Cilliers, 2020). Woodworth and Thorndike (1901) used knowledge transfer in evaluating how people receive knowledge and the mental capacity in readiness to receive training. Ncoyini and Cilliers (2020) used knowledge transfer to understand how to cultivate a culture to be supportive of knowledge sharing. Ncoyini and Cilliers further stated that the transfer of knowledge, when managed well, improves learning outcomes to achieve continued company growth. Making training part of the work culture ensures continuous business success (Ncoyini & Cilliers, 2020). Letonja et al. (2021) revealed that there is a correlation between knowledge transfer and the innovativeness of successors. When leaders train and develop the skills of new potential leaders, they pass on their experience and hands-on practical knowledge of their successes (Letonja et al., 2021). This training and development assist the successors to continue the legacy that kept the business thriving. The culture of a company must incorporate good communication habits for ease of transferring knowledge.

Leaders must pay close attention to communication, as it is crucial when considering knowledge transfer. According to Zhang and Chan (2020), ambiguity causes confusion when creating or transferring knowledge. Communication must be consistent and clear in written practice and verbal messages. Knowledge being brought forward does not add value to a company; the value is added when the transference of the knowledge is clear and effective (Nair, 2021). Coherent knowledge is essential in organizations so that when new staff or successors are recruited, the information passed

on can be followed by anyone (Nair, 2021). The lines of communication must be clear so that there is no uncertainty in the transference of knowledge. Communication is an important aspect needed to achieve success in transferring knowledge, but having the right resources is an aspect that cannot be ignored.

**Knowledge Transfer Achievement.** To achieve successful knowledge transfer, there is a need for human resource capabilities and company resources. There must be a tacit impact for the successor from the experienced leader for invention and work productivity (Villa et al., 2022). There is value in passing on the successes and innovative ideas that kept a company competitive and thriving (Villa et al., 2022). A substantial amount of time must be allotted and spent for interaction and transference of skills to be transferred effectively (Hutasuhut et al., 2018). The more time that is spent in training and demonstration for knowledge transfer the clearer the understanding of the understudy becomes for success (Zhang & Chan, 2020). It is also recommended that older employees be matched with younger employees to share experiences that are company best practices (Villa et al., 2022). According to Villa et al. (2022), mentoring employees assists the company in more than one way by the mentee growing in light of career progress and by the improvement of company processes. The mentor also envisages a legacy and potential for sustainability of the policies and strategies (Villa et al., 2022). The learning process has to be in a mode that is also relatable for the legacy to continue. Technology is constantly changing, and companies are to always consider in coming technology.

For knowledge transfer to be relatable in this technological environment technology has to be taken into consideration for easy communication methods. In

ensuring communication is fast and easily accessible technology assistance is inevitable. Hahn and Lee (2021) stated that effective communication for implementation requires information systems (IS) for quicker responses and faster production of work. Cross domain knowledge in technology is the development of business through technology and it assists with quicker sharing of information (Hahn & Lee, 2021). Problem solving in companies needs speed for the competitive edge and information systems help to facilitate quick communication (Hahn & Lee, 2021). Ncoyini and Cilliers (2020) argued that knowledge management systems are essential for information sharing and therefore, technology can improve the chances of achieving better transfer of knowledge. Gong et al. (2022) debated that there has not been much literature to support innovation activity in business groups and with emerging technological trends companies should encourage talent and knowledge sharing. Frequent communication improves knowledge between leaders and subordinates, assisting subordinates to understand autonomy and decision making for future reference, especially through technology (Gong et al., 2022). The use of technology makes knowledge transfer more accessible and faster to retrieve from leaders to successors. New technology also encourages innovation and new ideas, especially with people who are eager to learn.

Though there are different ways to transfer knowledge the receivers must have absorptive capacity and willingness to learn. Castro and Moreira (2023) debated that in order for there to be a successful transference of knowledge there has to be resources, and absorptive capacity from the successor, with willingness from both the leader and subordinate, inclusive of technological and infrastructural capability. Pivec and Potocan

(2021) argued that it is really the strength of a company's culture that makes knowledge transfer a success. Other scholars believe that different types of training and being trainable is the key for knowledge transfer to be achievable, and technology, culture, and communication alone will not suffice (Castro & Moreira, 2023; Letonja et al., 2021). The different scholars confirmed that a myriad of information and different attributes must be gained in order to achieve successful knowledge transfer (Castro & Moreira, 2023; Gong et al., 2022; Hahn & Lee, 2021; Villa et al., 2022). A holistic approach is needed to have continuous success in company continuity, especially successors' capacity to be trained. By starting from recruiting staff and incorporating soft questions on innovation and being trainable, Stardom could benefit from that strategy for long term trainability and innovation.

Being trainable is very important as it is the first step towards encouraging learning and innovation. In being trainable there is more than one aspect that needs to be recognized for successors' success. Philbin et al. (2022) argued that innovation through digitization assists in sustainability and a company's financial stability. For financial stability to be continuous leaders and potential leaders must have skills and qualifications that meet company needs and present day demands for a competitive edge (Philbin et al., 2022). The resources needed for enabling small businesses must be put in place to facilitate learning to meet those demands (Philbin et al., 2022). Production strategies must be enhanced through people and technology to augment efficiency for competition (Philbin et al., 2022). According to Hoffman et al. (2022), technology is about both a product and a service the learners are to be able to adapt to the new technologies for

business continuity. Technology matures over time therefore maintenance of resources for the time could be costly affecting businesses (Hoffman et al., 2022). Ali et al. (2021) argued that resistance to adapting to change and learning, as well as lack of resources, avert knowledge transfer achievement. Business continuity means a change of attitudes, continuous upgrades, and a change of resources. Stardom moved to strictly technological digitization and online activities during the Covid-19 pandemic and realized that work was faster. Noticeable also was the capabilities of staff members as some were more prone to technology than others. During that time, another leader emerged to bring the number of vice presidents from two to three. The correct choices of individuals must be made for business continuity as well as research purposes.

### *Alternative Theories*

In research, when theories must be chosen, more than one must be assessed to ensure the correct one is chosen. Researchers and scholars who consider the qualitative approach choose conceptual frameworks that are aligned with their research objectives and research problems and questions (Yin, 2018). There are many theories that can be chosen as a lens for research, but the most suitable one must be used to have the most successful outcomes and recommendations. Zellweger and Zenger (2022) relayed that alternative theories must be looked at in research as they give evidence of value exhibiting the best choice for research. Theory usefulness to a study is also portrayed when alternative theories are examined (Zellweger & Zenger, 2022). Sann et al. (2023) stated that theory choices must be sustainable to a study when analyzed. I assessed the learning organization theory and the resource-based view (RBV) theory before choosing

the knowledge transfer theory for strategies for small business leaders to develop and implement succession plans. In my assessment, the alternative theories were applicable only to some aspects of the study, making them inappropriate for my study. The following descriptions of the alternative theories will give evidence for their elimination from the study. The alternative theories are systems thinking theory inclusive of learning organizations theory and resource-based view.

**Systems Thinking Theory.** The systems thinking theory was one of the alternative theories deliberated on for the conceptual framework for this study. Von Bertalanffy (1972) conceptualized the systems thinking theory in which having order and success in the world meant better sequence, patterns, and mental stability made everything work. Von Bertalanffy believed that working with situations and work matters in a system needed internal scientific exploration, alignment of principles, technological knowledge, and the mental stimulation of people for collaboration. Using science and technology to measure work and solve problems is a psychological human ability for coping with and sustaining livelihoods and life (von Bertalanffy, 1972). Van Assche et al. (2019) stated that von Bertalanffy broadened the concept of mental capacity for order, so people can have resilience and adapt to change. Stardom leaders believe that high level thinkers are needed for the best results in systems, and these are the individuals that should be recruited and trained for leadership roles in companies. The best leaders emerge from learning organizations where continuous learning opportunities exist.

***Systems Thinking and Learning Organizations.*** Learning in organizations takes place in different ways, but there must be mentors and mentees, by having one or more

people teach and recipients learn. Senge et al. (2014) were one of the first scholars as it relates to business to develop and relate systems thinking to organizational learning. The authors believed that the best way to channel learning and innovation is through communities bringing ideas together and producing effective implementation. Hsu and Lamb (2020) stated that Senge maintained that restructuring thoughts by simplifying concepts harmoniously encourages clear understanding for individuals in groups. According to Hsu and Lamb, Senge contributed to the body of learning knowledge in 1990, explaining that learning in organizations must include the harmonious joining of individuals to organizations for expansion. Stardom has a great recruitment policy that takes into consideration learning and contributing knowledge from the onset of employment. There are more than two interviews done to recruit thinkers and employees who are trainable and look forward to passing on knowledge.

Learning organizations must have employees who are thinkers and willing to be trained and to train others. As a business pioneer, Senge clarified the difference between learning organizations and traditional companies (Bui, 2020). Senge simplified complex knowledge of systems thinking by breaking down the concept and restructuring thoughts to absorb what is taught (Bui, 2020). Senge used his book titled *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization* to explain the learning organization in terms of business management and the way working teams should think (Bui, 2020). According to Bui (2020), Senge's philosophy is based on systems thinking and self-examination to understand change and one's placement in the organizational team. Many organizations that exist have had to deal with system change especially as globalization

has increased competition around the world (von Bertalanffy, 1972). In order for business continuity to happen seamlessly, companies must adjust to environmental changes to accomplish their missions (Grezes et al., 2020). A learning progression is developed, aligned, and joins internal knowledge with external knowledge to have a competitive edge on a continuous basis (Grezes et al., 2020). Grezes et al. (2020) considered continuous performance to be the ultimate goal for businesses to thrive. Learning must not just consist of training for performance as a standalone but added to a social concept it becomes a success (Subramanian & Suresh, 2022). For a company to prosper it is important for external knowledge to be a part of the strategy that propels it. This theory concentrates on systems and the learning organization and does not capture the external aspects of knowledge transfer. Though this concept is a good one for succession planning group information the concept still needs an experienced leader who knows company secrets and has worked many years in the company to pass on the knowledge. This theory could not be the theory of choice as leadership experience coupled with other aspects of value added is absent. In order for employees to engage in systems thinking they must first practice self-efficacy to transfer value to the team.

***Self-Efficacy-Community Learning.*** Self-efficacy is the reflection and the belief in oneself to execute high performance. The learning organization must become individualized before it becomes a team effort as culture affects the team performance (Hsu & Lamb, 2020). Hsu and Lamb (2020) clarified Senge's 1990 explanation of learning organization validity in which he stated that bureaucracy must be removed for learning organizations to be effective. Mak et al. (2020) stated that Senge referred to



learning organizations as people increasing their capacity to contribute better results, especially when working in a team. Mak et al. stated that Senge believed that new growth is experienced when individuals learn together in a collective manner. When people examine their capacity and capabilities and enhance themselves to better their work contributes to the team, it develops the team and community and increases company value. Other added value apart from bringing knowledge to the team, stems from individuals bringing their cultures to the community. When communities learn together it is easy to understand societal needs as a whole and what is happening at the time. Community learning according to Subramanian and Suresh (2022), means understanding the community in terms of needs like greening in the environment and interacting with other companies and interested people. Teams work together to sensitize the company and others encourage behaviors that complement organizational learning (Subramanian & Suresh, 2022). Organizations should have a societal view of the mutual mission which attracts the loyalty of clients (Subramanian & Suresh, 2022). According to Hsu and Lamb (2020), Senge stated that organizations are more successful when they collaborate and encourage workers to share information and join in growth for the development of the learning organization. The learning organization is continuously upgraded through knowledge of societal needs intertwined with cooperation from staff and their expertise. The mission and vision of the company are being met and continued with collaborative efforts. My study was not about self-efficacy or community learning but about choosing successors and passing on pertinent information for leadership succession, therefore this theory is not appropriate.

The learning organization theory is a theory used by researchers for collaborative efforts and upgrades that include environmental and societal learning to ensure the company has loyal clientele. Hsu and Lamb (2020) and Mak et al. (2020) explained that the learning organization was for more harmonious working environments. Stardom needed succession planning strategies for the passing down of knowledge, experience, what worked and did not work directly, and other environmental knowledge for harmony. Stardom needed company secrets for continuous sustainable advantage to know how to cope when senior leaders move on. The learning organization theory for this reason was not appropriate for this study.

**Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory.** The RBV theory is another alternative theory studied for the conceptual framework for this research study. The origin of the RBV concept was introduced by Penrose (2009) who argued that a company's growth is propelled through its resources. Other authors have since used Penrose's concept to further develop the RBV theory. According to Babelyte-Labanauske (2022), Penrose's work pioneered and presented the RBV conceptual framework that elucidated utilization of a company's resources must be efficient for continuous successful operations. The RBV theory is based on how companies grow and how they develop into organizations that transform into circular economies for sustainable futures using recycling and other resources including the use of technology (Subramanian & Suresh, 2022). To execute strategies, inner resources with outer resources must be combined for successful business continuity (Babelyte-Labanauske, 2022). Sustainability in RBV means human, physical, financial, and technological resources that must be used to create growth and continued

opportunity through the use of unique resources (Babelyte-Labanauske, 2022). Lau and Michie (2022) stated that the growth and continuity of a company depends on the exclusive resources belonging only to a particular organization that cannot be imitated. Lau and Michie (2022) stated that their findings were similar to those of the pioneer Penrose. These distinctive resources must be used in a unique manner to give organizations a competitive edge over others (Lau & Michie, 2022). This theory supports business continuity in having workers use and develop assets given to them or found in the workplace. RBV also supports using the inner assets to compete with other companies in the market that lack their advantage. RBV does not support my study in its entirety. Though it is efficient for business continuity and competitive advantage, passing on knowledge from leaders is not included.

***RBV Competitive Advantage.*** Extension of resources enhances a company's place in the market and keeps it sustainable. To be sustainable maximization of resources is essential for business continuity especially when implementing strategy (Nayak et al., 2023). Researchers and scholars use RBV to increase financial means for sustainable operations which is great for any organization's successful continuity (Makhloufi et al., 2021). Differentiation is another aspect in which researchers and businesses thrive using the RBV framework to compete in market share for sustainable business (Makhloufi et al., 2021). Because business environments change constantly and at a rapid pace, businesses must stay tuned in to the environment for continuous improvement (Grezes et al., 2020). De Sousa et al. (2021) argued that Penrose's theory concentrated on innovation inclusive of technology to maintain competitive advantage and business

continuity. The use of research and development and business in-house processes to improve heterogeneous and inimitable capabilities is a company's best route to competitive business continuity (de Sousa et al., 2021). Organizational knowledge is included in the competitive edge but must be learned from processes and capabilities (de Sousa et al., 2021). Using resources to produce superior value in a market for competitive advantage is a positive procedure that may be done differently by individuals (Davis & DeWitt, 2021). Companies have different niches which make their missions vary and their resources can be unique. When using resources some companies may have the edge but sometimes innovation is what is needed when the resources are the same.

***RBV Successes.*** Researchers have documented many successes through research findings but have not proven successes in the implementation of RBV for strategic management and business continuity (Davis & DeWitt, 2021). According to Davis and DeWitt (2021), organizational theorists have rarely aligned themselves with the RBV theory. Miller (2019) argued that RBV is more of a research program and has not proven itself to be organizationally worthy on its own. Miller stated that a knowledge-based view (KBV) would have to be added to stimulate behavioral change for the implementation of innovative practices. Miller further stated that tacit knowledge is key to the implementation of processes for conciliation and creativity. Other authors, such as Grezes et al. (2020), de Sousa et al. (2021), Babelyte-Labanauske (2022), and Nayak et al. (2023) have argued that further research is needed for decision making processes and more implementation roles of innovation and action. These authors stated that RBV is somewhat more digital with emerging technologies and controversial and incomplete for

making physical things happen. Therefore, ensuring reliability for my client organization would not be successful for active succession planning. RBV was not the appropriate conceptual framework for my study.

### **Resources of Knowledge Transfer Perspective**

Apart from learners having to adapt to new technologies to continue businesses successfully, there is a need for leaders to provide the necessary resources for succession. Ali et al. (2021) argued that incessant change is critical for a company's sustainability and acquiring modern information systems is a necessity. To pass on innovation and strategies for work the business industry requires certain software and IT related resources for survival (Ali et al., 2021). Some European companies did not adapt, and failure cost them more than the resources needed (Ali et al., 2021). Other assets needed for knowledge transfer could be applicable to location, land equipment, and raw materials depending on the business and its processes as well as ethics (Valentinov, 2021). It is important to remember that it is not only training and passing on of information that makes knowledge transfer work but different resources applicable to the specific company. Some businesses have values and missions that give clues as to what resources companies need.

The mission of a company would dictate the resources most pertinent for the organization. Valentinov (2021) debated that leaders with their strategic plans would bring significance to what instruments are needed for organizational sustainability and brand loyalty. Clarke and MacDonald (2019) stated that both physical and imperceptible assets are essential for producing and implementing organizational strategies. The assets

needed include company secrets, property, equipment, inventory, company brand, and pecuniary assets (Clarke & MacDonald, 2019; Rizomyliotis et al., 2021). As it relates to ethics as a resource for knowledge transfer, many organizations have a code of conduct as an obligation to sustain the company's good name (Babri et al., 2021). One of the controversial aspects of having highly capable and ethical workers is the high risk of losing them at any time (Galperin et al., 2020). Galperin et al. (2020) debated that the commitment of highly skilled and capable workers tends to be much less to the organization as they have more options. Galperin et al. stated that less effort is expected from these workers which makes the company's future vulnerable, although those same employees pose an advantage for the company's competitive edge. Human resource is an asset when they are highly capable but loyal. According to Ng and Salamzadeh (2020), highly capable and ethical employees though assets for business continuity in capability and adaptation must be given incentives to remain loyal. Loyalty has a price that depends on the employee. Companies seek knowledgeable and skilled employees to add to the competitive edge, but those employees are also wanted by other companies which encourages a different type of competition. Incentives and recognition for workers assist in them remaining loyal.

Employees sometimes seek employment that is incentivized and has recognition in their standard operations. Employees are human resources and companies need their human resources to be loyal. The new generation of workers expects more in relation to pay and recognition for their qualifications, skills, and allegiance (Ng & Salamzadeh, 2020). Resources, whether physical or through human resources, can be costly for

knowledge transfer. Weinberger and Lusch (2023) argued that having resources is not enough, but identifying resources, their cost, and their relevance to the company is important. Organizational success is dependent on identifying and creating resources relevant to a company for sustainability (Weinberger & Lusch, 2023). Zhang and He (2020) referred to smart technologies as the driving force of success for the 21st century, some directly applicable to knowledge transfer for information and learning techniques. Appio et al. (2021) recommended innovation through digitization for continuity as a competition among companies formalize new technologies inclusive of digitization. Luedtke (2022) added to the body of knowledge when he stated that in working practices companies must adopt new technologies for sustainable visions. Wijerathna and Hewapathirana (2022) debated that knowledge transfer is more about knowledge and employee training than resources. According to Wijerathna and Hewapathirana, to be a powerful leader, employees must have a myriad of knowledge and have the right attitudes, motives, and beliefs to ensure successful knowledge transfer. Attributes that have worked in successful leadership are inclusive of their values and character traits. Though there is a need for attitude, skills, and knowledge there must be resources and expertise for the powerful leader to work and have prosperous business continuity.

### ***Knowledge Transfer Applicable to Business Practice***

Business continuity is the practice of what works in knowledge transfer for businesses and the preparation of strategies for processes to be implemented successfully. To gain a competitive advantage Wijerathna and Hewapathirana (2022) stated that equipping successors with power known as knowledge is the most valuable strategy.

Further, Wijerathna and Hewapathirana argued that leadership power is weak when businesses do not take the hidden forces that erode knowledge transfer seriously. Societal norms, lack of ethics, and political forces are the enemies of knowledge transfer for sustainable business (Wijerathna & Hewapathirana, 2022). Babri et al. (2021) stated that ethics guide corporate behavior and are essential for company sustainability. In Valentinov's (2021) study, business ethics meant economic and social sustainability. Other authors like Magd and Ruzive (2021) and Bressan et al. (2023) argued that organizations that want to continue to be valid and competitive forget to consider new trends like the pandemic Covid-19 in preparedness strategies. During the Covid-19 pandemic businesses were forced to use new methods to survive. New trends, especially those that negatively affect companies, must be taken into consideration as opportunities for improvement.

New trends are not only for some companies to observe as globalization has changed how business organization's function. Opportunities for improvement (OFI) must be sought after as globalization and natural disasters have profoundly affected organizations (Gorokhova, 2020). The changes and expectations from communities are great in pressuring leaders to assist with natural disasters which compels companies to action more than laws and operational standards can (Gorokhova, 2020). In business being sustainable and continuously successful means considering a myriad of aspects that may make or break a company. Successors are to be aware of these facets and leaders are to be cognizant in ensuring they have a comprehensive strategy to pass on the company legacy. Knowledge transfer was the most suitable framework for this study as it is



inclusive of many facets relating to company resources, training of employees, transference skills of leaders, capabilities, and capacities of both employees and leaders, and preparation for change whether negative or positive through company gap analysis and assessment for successful business continuity. The goal of this study was to explore strategies small business leaders use to develop and implement succession plans.

Through knowledge transfer, comprehensive all-inclusive strategies are to be developed beneficially for researchers, scholars, and companies with human, physical, financial, and social capital. The blueprint though tailored for Stardom will suit small business companies with similar for-profit cultures and structures for sustainability. According to Raffaelli et al. (2022), businesses are different, and leaders may have different visions that can be fused to form a unique blueprint for success. Pavez and Laszlo (2022) argued that continuous economic wealth is through culture enhancement and shared value in the form of corporate social responsibility (CSR) integration. When organizations minimize harm in societies, they attract loyal customers for sustained business. Competitive advantage is linked to CSR as Solovida and Latan (2021) stated that profitability is intertwined with organizational and social accountability. A company's image is enhanced when CSR is applied and small businesses must find ways to incorporate the strategy for sustainability (Belas et al., 2020). Aversano et al. (2020) argued that though CSR is important for business there must be societal impact for success. Studying many characteristics for successful succession planning strategies brought the realization that my client organization Stardom would have to have a thorough plan for the transference of knowledge.

Stardom began making plans to prepare upcoming vice presidents in its senior team of leaders to take over the business in ten years. Stardom's CEO put aside financial savings to assist the business continuity. Stardom established its niche of mental health counseling and therapies in strategic locations and set up online information and platforms for unforeseen external forces. Stardom leaders also work with lawyers and have the advantage of ensuring legal strength for efficient succession. Although there are certain aspects of succession that are in place, the successors must understand all aspects through knowledge transfer. Woodworth and Thorndike (1901) studied how people learn and the mental processes for training. Being able to use the mind to create continued efficiency of business functions. Stardom needed more extended assistance to ensure continued and successful strategies for leadership succession of the organization. Therefore, for this study, knowledge transfer was the preferred and most appropriate conceptual framework.

### **Small Business**

Small businesses must find innovative ways to sustain themselves and have continuity. Small businesses need continuity and sustainability of their operations as they rely on their ability to grow and maintain loyal customers (Nimfa et al., 2021). In this study, the small business is related to a for profit organization. Globally most companies account for being small or medium but are essential in creating employment opportunities (Nimfa et al., 2021). In order to keep small businesses thriving there must be strategic planning and management of procedures and processes in place (Nimfa et al., 2021). Mitter et al. (2022) believed that having a business means acquiring risk. Businesses are

exposed to many different types of risks including financial, environmental, operational, and strategic risks (Mitter et al., 2022). When company members do not understand what risks they take or misjudge the risks, bankruptcy or poor reputation can ruin the company (Mitter et al., 2022). Many small businesses are owned by families who practice good business and seek processes and policies that allow for longevity and succession. Because small businesses are more vulnerable than large organizations, innovative strategies must be sought for survival purposes. The company Stardom, though owned by a family, has potential successors who are the vice presidents of that company.

### ***Small Business Succession***

Because my topic is strategies small business leaders use to develop and implement succession plans, understanding the succession of small businesses is important. Small businesses look for continuity through different avenues. One of these avenues is succession planning. Organizational performance is greatly affected when leaders leave and the successors' performance is not in keeping with the company's mission and vision (Li et al., 2019). Having successful leadership succession in small businesses is critical to the business's survival (Li et al., 2019). New challenges and new crises emerge leaving some small businesses struggling to survive and fraught with proper leadership (Dabic et al., 2023). During the Covid-19 pandemic, many small businesses closed their doors as leaders met their death or left. Though there are disruptions when a leader moves or retires, that move should not devastate the company, there should be an improvement in performance, new information, and organizational learning (Li et al., 2019). Leadership succession is a multifaceted progression that

involves not only passing on the baton or torch but also how the replacement comprehends, relates to, and strategically responds to environmental opportunities and limitations (Li et al., 2019). There are also company secrets and specific ways in which the company was run that only can be gleaned from a leader's experience. Characteristics of successors, their ability to learn, and how they learn are critical to successful business succession (Woodworth & Thorndike, 1901). Consideration is to be given to the steps taken for leaders to pass on the needed information to the successors and whether the leaders understand all that is needed for the successors to be successful. There is also the matter of transference of the leader and willingness to pass on the knowledge and experience for successful business continuity.

**Business Succession Planning.** When business strategies are decided and written with the aim of planning for successors to take over key leadership positions, this means succession planning is taking place. Basu (2019) stated that succession planning involves a myriad of activities that involve planning and learning for a seamless transition to replace key leadership roles. Succession planning is not readily accepted by all leaders in a company. Conway et al. (2019) stated that some leaders, especially family leaders, are unwilling to have succession plans and retire from leadership roles in a timely manner. These attitudes must change for continued seamless generational succession processes. According to Gehrke (2019), it is important to have early candidates for the best fit inclusive of desired culture, strengths, and a strategic plan to mitigate succession negative outcomes. Halsne (2019) studied the process of recognizing and developing selected people who can replace critical positions when leaders have left. Halsne (2019) further

stated that readiness was an important element of business continuity and clear lines must be present for a succession of key positions. Li et al. (2021) debated that if the successor reacts positively to the environment with an active strategic orientation, good performance after succession may emerge. Though there are learning opportunities that assist leaders in their roles, other attributes are needed. A positive outlook with strategic planning is needed for the replacement of leaders in an organization to ensure successful business continuity.

The lack of positivity and strategic succession planning can result in poor leadership, business instability, and possible failure. Maheshwari and Vaishali (2020) studied an organizational history in which there was a lack of succession planning. According to Maheshwari and Vaishali (2020), a company experienced the death of a leader with no succession plan in place. The result was that the leader died and the unit the leader was responsible for had to be closed, and a new business plan and company structure had to be put in place (Maheshwari & Vaishali, 2020). Motoc (2021) studied the effects that the lack of knowledge of critical traits and processes has on succession planning in small businesses including family businesses. Motoc deduced that the lack of knowledge of critical traits and processes results in fairness and credibility resulting in rivalry, failure of succession processes, and poor governance structure for immediate change to the lack of a succession plan within the organization. Passing on company trade secrets which are assets that make a company successful is essential.

Researchers have deliberated on individual and organizational contributions toward succession planning. These researchers have conscientiously studied the different

ways and means of leadership succession and company performance; some stated that performance becomes innovative and others argue that it disrupts work routines depending on how the process is presented to successors (Li et al., 2021). The individual perspective takes into consideration characteristics, attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions (Brock, 2022). Brock (2022) stated that what really matters is for communication, trust, and respect to take place at the right time for successors and leading consultants, and succession planning for the individual will be fruitful. On a group and business level, Brock et al. argued that financial planning is the key to the successful passing of the baton. With a family-owned company, financial stability in succession planning is even more important as some family members are not well educated or trained. When the business is being succeeded by people who are not family, business valuations are expected (Brock, 2022). Sometimes family successors may not even have an interest in the company. Taking a look at succession planning in different ways assists organizations to be prepared for the future.

Succession planning also has other areas related to finances. Taxes and acquisitions must be considered in terms of profits and retirement offerings for the leader as well as for the continuity of the company (Brock, 2022). Researchers constantly look at economic models for productivity, fairness, and separation to focus on a human-centered strategy (Gatto, 2020). This approach was the concept considered for long term business development (Gatto, 2020). According to Gatto (2020), groups and teams engaged that approach calling it innovative work with an inter-generational approach to change related to developing human beings incorporating sustainability ideologies (Gatto,

2020). This aspect of development raised for succession planning has the potential to increase worker abilities (Gatto, 2020). Halsne (2019) stated that identifying the right individuals for training and development is pertinent to the replacement of critical leadership roles. Gehrke (2019) argued that organizational strategy and success are highly impacted by the choices of successor leaders. When successors are to be chosen there must be similar characteristic traits for leadership and close relationships for development and understanding of company practices and norms. In very successful companies the practices and norms are to be passed down through experience and teaching.

In family-owned small businesses practices and norms though passed on are sometimes rejected. Sometimes family leaders do not want to change traditions and the new generation of successors do not accept the family customs (Meier & Thelisson, 2021). On the other hand, other family businesses thrive through generations of successors and grow. Buscombe and Creed (2023) explained that by embracing change and moving with the times also including robust succession models assist companies in gaining competitive advantage. Odiachi et al. (2023) also stated that sustainability and competitive advantage are accomplished by businesses that include survival strategies and active succession programs. Stardom's leaders decided to have their successors be leaders other than family members to ensure the succession was not forced or rejected. The plan for family members is to have them decide if they want to be a part of the business and leave room for them to plan their own future careers. Wash (2023) stated that a critical driver of excellent business performance is to incorporate strategies that include human resource development programs that are voluntary and seamless. When

employees are genuinely motivated to adapt company strategies sustainability is easy to attain. Strategic planning adds value to organizations.

The quality of a company is what is at stake when there is no practical planning. Besel et al. (2021) referred to succession planning as mindset stability planning through the use of new technologies. According to Besel et al. sessions for learning must be engaging, technological, and digitized, and include tactical and practical strategies for constant change. Leaders in organizations must always plan for unexpected absences. Information sharing is essential for organizational continuity, especially through technology (Ncoyini & Cilliers, 2020). There have been many organizations on an international level, which do not practice intentional succession planning (Besel et al., 2021). The lack of strategic planning for successors is the demise of many companies (Maheshwari & Vaishali, 2020). This lack of proactive continuity practices is a result of a lack of funding (Besel et al., 2021; Brock, 2022). Stardom is a successful Profit Company, where new technologies can be embraced and where contingency funds have been put aside for business continuity. Stardom has plans for succession planning but there was a need for opportunities for improvement to ensure a seamless transition in 10 years. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Stardom was forced to work remotely and have all services online. Technological upgrades had to be made to ensure specific services continued in new innovative ways for business continuity. Digitization would enhance Stardom's work and processes through the computer.



### *Digitization*

Digitization assists with technological upgrades making things happen faster and more efficiently. Improvement in the 21st century has been labeled with technologies that embrace digitization and artificial intelligence (Hoffman et al., 2022). Whether it is a product or service technology continues to evolve and changes the way in which work processes take place (Hoffman et al., 2022). Different interactions, better data access, innovative sales and products, and advanced frameworks. As the world changes leaders must change with it and not leave things to chance. Small businesses sometimes are not as wealthy to install the highest technology, but they can collaborate with other organizations to show resilience. Hoffman et al. (2022) stated that new frameworks that include new technologies improve decision making. Raffaelli et al. (2022) argued that leaders with differing visions should work together to generate unique ideas for the future. These new ideas according to Luedtke (2022), foster sustainability together with digitization and new business models will emerge. These vision-based technologies assist with long term success giving companies options for flexibility, return on investment, and resilience (Luedtke, 2022). There are other ways in which collaborative efforts can assist businesses to be sustainable and one of them is through corporate social responsibility (CSR). When businesses embrace CSR, they accept community and societal problems, which causes people to be loyal to business leaders who choose to participate. According to Belas et al. (2020), organizations that use CSR have seen changes that give them a competitive advantage. Companies like Stardom must know the benefits of CSR and

incorporate it into their strategies including succession planning. As long as CSR brings profitability and continuity it should be a part of a company's long-term goals.

### ***Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)***

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) assists companies in gaining the loyalty of clients and stakeholders. CSR is a concept that embraces community and societal issues together with the people in that society (Belas et al., 2020). Belas et al. (2020) stated that CSR becomes a tool that profits the company involved as well as the society. The practice of environmental and environmental responsibility in organizations encourages loyalty from society and the company is seen as a friend and not a profit-making entity (Belas et al., 2020). As the world became closer through globalization values, norms, and mindsets changed to embrace a more solidarity minded economy (Gorokhova, 2020). Gorokhova (2020) further expanded on harmonious thinking and argued that societal pressure has a greater impact on business decisions than policies and laws. Implications of the value of the brand were forced to the surface as customers showed preference towards organizations that were associated with environmental and social ills (Gorokhova, 2020). Society's expectations from companies continued to grow as well as their loyalties towards the organizations that complied.

**Benefits of CSR in Society.** CSR has been linked through research to show a great connection between customer satisfaction and loyalty. Increased research on the value of CSR in business was pursued and findings were produced to demonstrate the impact on patient satisfaction and customer loyalty (Hossain et al., 2020). Organizational implementation plans and training sessions began to include environmental requirements

and scholars and researchers added CSR to their mandates (Zhang & He, 2020). The relationship between the triple bottom line and community performance grew and became almost synonymous (Solovida & Latan, 2021). In order for companies to survive the new changing world, the academic community, scholars, researchers, and policymakers advised the use of CSR for impact (Aversano et al., 2020). May et al. (2021) advised that new environmental thrusts like greening even brought more stabilized sustainability to companies and assistance to communities. Alam and Islam (2021) argued that image and competitive advantage increased tremendously when organizations aligned themselves with environmental CSR. A myriad of transferring of knowledge and learning has to take place in companies when succession is to take place. External information such as CSR as well as internal information has to be gleaned to know what is best for a company's successful continuity.

### **Successor Learning Abilities**

For successful business continuity, knowledge must be gleaned internally and externally. First, there are to be potential candidates qualified for the key positions (Basu, 2019). Basu (2019) further stated that the approach must be systematic for the training and development of the right candidates for the opportunities. The successors must be able to fill in the knowledge gaps through learning coaching or experience gathering (Basu, 2019). Favorable candidates are usually those in senior positions who have knowledge of the company. According to Wayman (2020), training an internal person gives the company an advantage as they should already have favorable qualifications and have great knowledge of the company culture and work. Learners who are on the job are

there working with the plan and not an outsider coming in (Hoff & Smith, 2020). Further Hoff and Smith (2020) stated that the learner must be willing to be developed and work with leadership perspectives of experiences and trade secrets. Training and secrets are to be passed on to learners who are to be receptive as sometimes top executives leave (Elias & Bassam, 2020). Elias and Bassam (2020) further explained that whether successors are from inside the company or outside, successors must be able to be willing to grasp concepts and readily learn soft and hard skills for leadership in the particular organization. Tacit knowledge gives companies a competitive sustainable advantage and must be passed on to learners who must adopt the winning knowledge (Elias & Bassam, 2020). Tacit knowledge is rare and usually tailored to fit company profiles and cultures.

The strategy to have the successor learn for the successful replacement of leadership roles must be inclusive of business and technical skills, trade secrets, troubleshooting best practices, experiences during change, collaboration efforts, digitization, CSR information, and any practice that kept the business successful. This preparation according to Lee (2019), assists with the smooth transitioning and sustainability of successive leadership. Learning management systems within a company can be used to assist learners to improve their performance in innovative leadership (Li et al., 2019). Internal training does not only prepare successors for leadership roles that can be exited but to be able to train others who may take their place.

Individuals who are highly capable in characteristics as well as qualifications and imitate best-fit leadership roles may be at high risk to companies. The reason these individuals may be high risk is because they are highly marketable and have many

options making them flight risks (Galperin et al., 2020). As a result of flight risk, more than one successor should be trained to retain skills and capabilities in organizations (Galperin et al., 2020). Harry and Malepane (2021) argued that though employees are skilled and knowledgeable for jobs they also need coping skills for change and adaptability to the globalization unpredictability and jobs are not as stable as before. Strong individuals are needed for leadership roles and these roles are evolving and not easy to acquire (Harry & Malepane, 2021). With all these areas of training and attributes needed for successive leaders' succession planning must be strategic and include small business training.

### ***Small Business Training***

Small businesses have been changing the way they do business as the business arena has had to deal with survival through the COVID-19 pandemic as well as competition. Bressan et al. (2023) and Chikweche and Bressan (2020) stated that businesses need advisors as laws, technology, and diversity in ethnicity have changed the way small businesses operate. The new volatile environment has shaped and changed service demands to being diverse as new needs surface (Bressan et al., 2023; Chikweche & Bressan, 2020). Some leaders have gone through the new changes and survived while others have not. The changing needs are to be taught through the transference of knowledge that includes trust, reliability, and experience (Bressan et al., 2023; Chikweche & Bressan, 2020). Training is a necessity for successors to understand all the internal trade secrets processes and survival approaches used in businesses that survived volatile environments. Training and knowledge transfer are also necessary to understand

the external aspects that shaped survival and all the new ways in which collaborative efforts made a difference. Productivity through volatile situations is difficult to accomplish and leaders are to show characteristics of resilience during these times.

After a catastrophe business continuity is inevitable and a working document with training is necessary for the leaders as well as the staff compliment. Dosi et al. (2019) argued that the transference of business continuity methods coupled with training is essential for leaders to pass on to their successors. Dosi et al. further debated that training not only helped with competition pressure but also with productivity intensities in the workforce. The aspect of financing of the training is critical for the organization and internal training generates less strain (Dosi et al., 2019). When companies continuously dedicate selected periods for on-the-job training with coaching from leaders with a myriad of experience, the training augers well for knowledge transfer and business continuity. Harry and Malepane (2021) also stated that leaders are to be prepared for challenges in this ever-changing global environment. Harry and Malepane further stated that learning and adaptation must take place, and new skills and business competencies must be understood. Though strategies in companies may be similar for business adaptability many of the skills and strategies are homegrown and pertain to the specific needs of companies (Harry & Malepane, 2021). Experienced business leaders that look to exit must examine the internal and external environment and set training for the successor accordingly.

Identification of successors begins with the qualifications and attributes to take over the business. Depending on the skills and qualifications possessed by the successors

training is tailored to suit the gaps (Elias & Bassam, 2020). The training must include the organizational mission and vision, the experience of the leader, and external factors that affected the company and will affect the company in the future (Elias & Bassam, 2020). Hoffman et al. (2022) stated that new technologies must not be left out in training as a practice, as global knowledge and industry are inclusive of new technologies. There must also be enough time allocated for learning to take place for the benefit of the predecessor and the replacement to be able to impart the myriad of information for the successor to absorb and understand (Elias & Bassam, 2020). Because a lot of the information that is to be taught is internal, the leaders who are exiting are the best fit to pass on the experiences and training (Wayman, 2020). The internal leader knows what to teach and is the best fit for the position they themselves were suitable for and could mentor and coach the successors to be as successful or close (Hoff & Smith, 2020). Apart from passing on the specific small business training specific to the business, the other areas that the researchers are stating that are essential for small business continuity must be taught as well. Digitization and CSR were two areas specified by researchers and scholars as strategies that should be incorporated for business continuity and should be emphasized as critical for successors to adapt (Hoff & Smith, 2020; Hoffman et al., 2022; Hossain et al., 2020; Wayman, 2020). Apart from understanding small business processes, other strategies beneficial to the growth and continued success of a company must be taught to successors.

## **Literature Review Conclusion**

This literature review on strategies small business leaders use to develop and implement succession plans comprised a broad range of information on looking at the conceptual framework chosen. Nair (2021) showed that knowledge transfer theory represents lens through which succession plans can be activated and implemented. Knowledge transfer is the need for evidence of the work experience of leaders to successors to be successfully passed down. The knowledge that is passed down must be part of the culture of the company, techniques, experiences, new technologies, and successful strategies which includes training and development (Letonja et al., 2021; Qiu & Haugland, 2019). The communication mediums must be transparent and practical for the succession to be seamless. The successors must be qualified and have learning and absorptive mental capacity to be successful as a replacement. The leader in turn must be a good coach and mentor and take enough time to transfer the knowledge effectively. The use of technology for new generation training and development is paramount (Pateli & Lioukas, 2019). Through knowledge transfer, comprehensive all-inclusive strategies are developed and beneficial for researchers, scholars, and companies with human, physical, financial, and social capital.

The other theories explored were not as suitable as knowledge transfer for this study as specific learners for succession are not identified. A group approach is used in learning organization theory. The preparation of individual successors is not included. The RBV theory approach is to demonstrate the maximization of the competitive edge of a company by using the resources available. Business continuity is sometimes



accomplished by companies with competitive advantages but not through deliberate succession planning. RBV was not suitable for my study.

There were other suitable aspects relevant to knowledge transfer and applicable to succession planning. Small business training is a needed aspect for knowledge transfer in this study according to Bressan et al. (2023), because laws and technology keep changing therefore advice is needed. Successors must also have learning abilities to ensure that the right candidates are chosen as their successors (Basu, 2019). When systems are being put in place CSR must be considered for customer satisfaction and loyalty (Hossain et al., 2020). New opportunities must be sought to reach potential donors and stakeholders which would include digitization (Hoffman et al., 2022). Hoffman stated that digitization is necessary for 21st century businesses to survive, these trends make for faster business processes (Hoffman et al., 2022). These essential business components needed as strategies small business leaders use to develop and implement succession plans, must include specific company resources to ensure continuous competitive advantage.

### **Transition**

In the basis of the study, which is Section 1, the single case study's purpose was identified as the exploration of strategies small business leaders use to develop and implement succession plans. The research method and design of a qualitative single case study consecutively were identified and described. The population to be studied was small business leaders using successful strategies to develop and implement succession plans. Knowledge transfer theory was the conceptual framework as the lens for the study with a critical analysis of the peer reviewed and scholarly data captured on the subject for

credibility and transferability. Information was given on the decision-making process to use knowledge transfer as the preferred conceptual framework. Alternative theories were also studied to ensure that knowledge transfer was the most appropriate. The theories assessed were learning organization theory and resource-based view (RBV) to ensure justice for the knowledge transfer theory was sound. The two alternative theories were used in similar research studies inclusive of learning outcomes, but they were not suited or aligned with my research question. I analyzed international scholarship and literature revealing how knowledge can be transferred and the avenues needed for portable and effective transference. I also gave an account of the research that supported successful strategies to develop and implement succession plans. Examples were given of small businesses lacking business strategies and the negative impact that followed. Lastly, I brought forth evidence through the research demonstrating the alignment of the new strategies to my business problem. Knowledge is derived from information through training, experience from others, and research. Knowledge brings enlightenment and insight to people.

The outline of Section 2 begins with the problem and purpose statement followed by a synopsis of the role of the researcher in relationship to the topic, participants, and me. The section continues with research methods and design, population and sampling, and ethical research. Details are provided on data collection instruments, data collection techniques, data organization techniques, and data analysis. Additionally, reliability and validity are thoroughly explained by using the qualitative synonyms credibility,

transferability, and confirmability for emphasis and depth. The project ends with a summation of data saturation and a transition and summary of key points of Section 3.

Section 2 comprises an in-depth depiction of the blueprint and design in the data collection process of this qualitative study. Peer reviewed and seminal sources will be used to give a synopsis of the role of the researcher in relation to the topic, participants, and myself. Ethics had to be a part of the role of the researcher as the primary instrument ensuring confidentiality and prevention of harm to the participants in the study was critical. Also presented is *The Belmont Report*, a key document used as it highlights many areas of protocol for prevention of harm and equity. I will also identify a plan for the achievement of data saturation and justification for the methodology of the study. Last of all an elucidation of the data collection techniques is presented, the instruments to complement the techniques, the organization of the techniques, and how throughout the study credibility and stability were maintained.

The Baldrige Performance Excellence Program (2021) for excellent leadership and high-performance practices will be used in Section 3. It is a holistic method to apply the small business Stardom's standards to measure success and find opportunities for improvement. The assessment of Stardom was centered on dialogue with Stardom's main leadership team. Most of the conversation was with the leader and owner of Stardom. I present the triangulation method used to develop the organizational profile inclusive of organizational description, the environment, the organization's situation, and the competitive environment. There is a presentation of the leadership triad and its alignment with the processes of the results triad is found. Also, the presentation of the triads with

analysis and exploration of the leadership processes for excellence through performance.

Finally, I present the conclusion of the data collection, research, and results preparation.

Coding, analysis, and strategic themes are summarized, and outcomes and recommendations are revealed.

## Section 2: The Project

The outline of Section 2 begins with the problem and purpose statement, followed by a synopsis of my role as the researcher in relationship to the topic, participants, and myself. The section continues with research methods and design, population and sampling, and ethical research. Details are provided on data collection instruments, data collection techniques, data organization techniques, and data analysis. Additionally, reliability and validity are thoroughly explained by using the qualitative synonyms credibility, transferability, and confirmability for emphasis and depth. The project ends with a summation of data saturation and a transition and summary of key points of Section 3.

### **Purpose Statement**

The specific business problem is that some leaders of small businesses lack strategies to develop and implement succession plans. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies leaders of a small business use to develop and implement succession plans.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Critical to the role of the researcher is the understanding of the relationship between the scholar-consultant student researcher, the participants, and the research topic. In this case study of the DBA consulting capstone, the participant was also known as the client organization leader. As the primary instrument, the type of relationship is dependent on the researcher's attitude and specific approach to data collection (Yin, 2018). According to Yin (2018), the researcher, as the primary instrument, must in an

unbiased process determine the method and design; decide who the participants will be; create a trusting, comfortable atmosphere; identify interview questions; demonstrate ethical responsibility; engage in validation; perform document analysis; confirm data saturation; and present the findings. Stake (1995) identified researcher activities to be inclusive of a need for permission and access, observation, interviewing, conceptualizing, and reviewing of documentation to reveal findings. I acted as the primary instrument in this single case study, gleaning data from an organization in which I also served as a business scholar consultant. According to Yin, data collection methods that capture information in a real-world context are case studies. The collection is done through people and business organizations with application to day-to-day work. This is a great way to retrieve rich practical data.

In the collection of the data, the Consulting Capstone Research Checklist and Handbook (see Walden University, 2021) was used, as well as the Baldrige Excellence Framework (see Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021). The Baldrige Excellence Framework was used specifically to gather and analyze information from my client organization leader to formulate a seamless plan in exploring strategies leaders of a small business use to develop and implement succession plans. The Baldrige Excellence Framework also gave me the edge I needed to have a thorough extraction of the necessary information from the client.

As a professional, I have had experience in assisting donor funding organizations and companies in fulfilling their mandates on project implementation and strategic sustainable visionary goals, but this was a new client and experience. Being a general

manager of a company with multiple departments and extended affiliations with regional and international partners over 20 years afforded me the advantage to be able to spot opportunities for improvement.

Ethical aspects are also to be considered when there is research being undertaken. In qualitative research, researchers must include ethical considerations when research is being conducted (Bagis & Ardic, 2021). When researchers are dealing with human beings, they must be careful in consideration of people's rights, including those involved in behavioral interviewing. According to Saunders and Kulchitsky (2021), specific codes of conduct are to be used toward respondents in the data collection experience. The Belmont Report is specific and defines three main areas of ethical principles for researchers to follow, which are respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research [NCPHSBBR], 1979). Some of the conforming guidelines include informed consent and assessment of risks and benefits (NCPHSBBR, 1979). As the researcher in this study, I ensured that the research was done in depth, fairly, and with no harm or disregard to the participants.

Walden University also has specific codes of conduct that must be adhered to by researchers. The student handbook highlights the areas and mandates ethical requirements for Institutional Review Board (IRB) compliance (Walden University, 2021). To gain approval for the research, I had to study seven areas of ethics through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI), five of which were compulsory with a 60% passing grade. I made it with 91%, and after passing, a certificate was given with

the passing information that had to be emailed to the IRB as part of the requirements for research approval.

There are also biases that can surface, which a researcher must mitigate against. Yin (2018) specified that biases can surface in any research being done at any stage and affect the credibility of the study. Avoiding bias means using multiple sources of evidence for credible justifications (Sridharan, 2021). Using multiple sources means achieving methodological triangulation through a variety of methods leading to data saturation (Yin, 2018). I had to use sources from client interviews, public data, and documentation forwarded from the client leader to ensure triangulation and, in turn, credibility. There was also the need for close inspection of inconsistent responses done by member checking.

I developed an interview protocol for further mitigation against biases. Interview protocols are effective in ensuring that interview questions are in keeping with the research study and structure (Van Assche et al., 2019). The interview protocol also assisted with following the outlines and questions in the Baldrige Excellence Framework to remain on cue with the seven areas of focus as outlined in the handbook. There was a robust interview protocol specific to Stardom followed with the partnership (see Appendix). These meetings consisted of a strict topic information schedule adhered to by the partners to discuss the Baldrige Excellence Framework topics.

### **Participants**

The Walden University consulting capstone policies offer doctoral students the opportunity to partner with organizations to assist in finding opportunities for



improvement and research question results. The participants form the most significant part of the study for gaining the right data (Soeker, 2020). “Participants,” according to the case study design, refers to the interviewees (Walden University, 2021). The participants in this study were the leader and owner of Stardom, whom I interviewed to gain data on opportunities for improvement and seamless transition for strategies leaders of a small businesses use to develop and implement succession plans.

To be eligible for this consulting capstone case study, the client leader was engaged in a thorough process for selection inclusive of IRB requirements and a confidentiality agreement from Walden University. The client organization had to have opportunities for improvement and a need ready for consultancy. After I was introduced to the organization leader, I gained approval from the IRB, and soon after, I began official interaction with the client leader. The research to be performed for the participant had to be relevant to a need and compatible with the research question. In the beginning stages of the data collection for the study, in dialogue with the leader and CEO of the organization, I established the need for succession planning. The leader shared preferences and was adamant that no one else be interviewed for the research.

Rapport has to be established to gain a trusting relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. When there is trust, there is an easier path to rich and thorough information about the participant’s experiences (Yin, 2018). Trusting relationships are cultivated through good rapport and listening skills (McGrath et al., 2019). I introduced myself first through an email in response to my faculty’s introduction of the client, and for the first dialogue with the Baldrige Excellence Framework

questions, I used the telephone. The interviews began with phone calls, and after many weeks, I asked the client partner to consider Zoom as the sessions would be easier to record and for safekeeping. The sessions were scheduled through a request email I would send, and daily scheduled dates and times would be sent by the partner for mutual suitability 2 months at a time. After the days and times were confirmed through emails, the topics would be forwarded through emails or discussed after a recorded session. The opportunity to observe behavioral cues such as body language and facial expressions was not an option because the leader of Stardom preferred to stay off camera. I depended on tones, laughter, and change of pitch in the partner's voice to know how to respond for great interviews. Before each session, I asked about the well-being of the client, and at the end, I closed by saying thank you and asking whether the client had anything more to add. As trust grew with the client, more information was gathered, and sessions included more laughter and personal information about the company.

## **Research Method and Design**

### **Research Method**

A qualitative research methodology was used for this study. The most applicable research method for a study is critical as it ensures a proper framework for the research design and for data collection (Yin, 2018). The research question specific to a phenomenon must be addressed appropriately through the methodology (Yin, 2018). There were two other research methodologies that could have been chosen for the study, which were quantitative and mixed methods. The qualitative method allows for an explorative understanding of circumstances for thorough assessments (Yin, 2018). A

qualitative approach was appropriate for this study because it was a single case study and it included semistructured interviews, reports, experiences, opinions, perceptions, and feelings to deduce in-depth information. Yin (2018) stated that details can be accessed through probing as the qualitative researcher seeks to understand the case. Understanding the case takes leaders to social and cultural spheres that enable communities to be transformed, improving their resources and services for a sustainable environment (Stanley, 2021). Change in societies for a researcher is the ultimate goal to be achieved. Researchers can add value through different forms of CSR to contribute to their services and communities.

I did not use the quantitative or mixed method approach in this study because they were not the most appropriate. A qualitative approach was the most appropriate method for my study as it was knowledge and experience based (see Benoit et al., 2021). On the other hand, the quantitative method is used for testing hypotheses, and instead of semistructured interviews, surveys are administered, and numerical statistical data and measurements are applied (Benoit et al., 2021); therefore, it was not appropriate for this study. The mixed method approach was also not appropriate for this study because mixed method researchers incorporate the quantitative method along with the qualitative approach, including surveys and integrating experimental matters (Lester et al., 2022). The study did not include surveys and was not experimental in nature, which is another reason the qualitative method was used for this study.

The qualitative methodology was the most applicable for strategies used to develop and implement succession planning. The main reason is the development of an

in-depth understanding and appreciation for the strategies used by the partner organization. I used semistructured interviews, internal documentation, and publicly accessible data to support my qualitative choice.

### **Research Design**

Qualitative researchers must also make suitable design choices for their study. Qualitative research designs are inclusive of many designs, three designs of which are case study, ethnography, and phenomenology (Yin, 2018). In addressing the research question in this qualitative study, the specific research design was a single case study. Single case study researchers can include semistructured interviews, reports, experiences, opinions, perceptions, and feelings to deduce in-depth information (Yin, 2018). The research question for this study was about strategies small business leaders use for succession planning and implementation, for which case studies work well (see Yin, 2018). According to Yin (2018), the most appropriate design for research with the strategic context in organizations is case study. The single case study assisted in the exploration of the problem in depth, extracting pertinent information through documents, reports, and interviews.

On the other hand, ethnography and phenomenology were not appropriate for the research question and design of this study. Qualitative ethnography relates to people in the environment in which they live and explores the more cultural and social aspects of people not included in this study (Fitzgerald & Mills, 2022). Researchers using ethnography have to wait for extended periods to gain rich information and a deep understanding of the experiences of groups (Fitzgerald & Mills, 2022). There is the

observational aspect of ethnography, as the researcher being present regularly and for long periods can be costly in time and pecuniary status (Yin, 2018). The possibility of me being present to implement that kind of research with the geographical distance and design of the DBA consulting capstone was remote.

Another design sometimes used in qualitative studies is phenomenological design. Phenomenological studies are used to capture psychological events and occurrences in people's lives (Parikh et al., 2020). Phenomenological researchers deal with people's personal experiences and their views of their experiences (Parikh et al., 2020). A clear example of phenomenological studies according to experiences is the way people see things that cause them anxiety (Parikh et al., 2020). This perspective is one's own point of view, which is not related to factual accounts or unbiased interpretations. According to Yin (2018), when researchers use their own perspective to explore lived practices, they are using a phenomenological design. Phenomenological design was not in alignment with my study as my research question was intended to deduce strategies and develop plans for processes for human resources to have business continuity. The study was not undertaken to gain personal perspectives and assumptions of people's lived experiences. Therefore, the ethnographic and phenomenological approaches were not appropriate for this study regarding strategies used to develop and implement succession planning.

In this qualitative case study, data saturation played a critical role in ensuring that the research was credible and reliable (see Yin, 2018). Data saturation through triangulation assists in building reliable and credible details for a study (Sridharan, 2021). Data saturation helps a researcher defend the credibility of qualitative research as the

results are not easy to duplicate (Pearse, 2021). This does not mean that if it is done in the correct way that the correct and similar results will not materialize. Data saturation occurs when there is triangulation in the form of multiple sources and no new themes or data occur in the research, rendering it redundant (Chitac, 2022). Asking the same questions in different ways can assist with data saturation. Also, having a small sample size but the skill to extract rich information motivates participants to share more experiences and knowledge (Chitac, 2022). The development of themes came about as similar answers were revealed in the interviews and the reports and data from the website pages. Data saturation means the end of collecting information to get ready for analysis (Fofana et al., 2020). The credibility of research can be heightened through data saturation as unnecessary data are avoided (Mwita, 2022). Circumvention of unnecessary data saves time, energy, and money (Mwita, 2022). The triangulation methods of using reports, public data, and in-depth open-ended questions of my client leader partner brought me to data saturation status.

### **Population and Sampling**

The data were collected from a purposely selected executive leader of one purposefully sampled small for-profit business in the Midwestern United States. The company executive leader used strategies to develop and implement a succession plan. The client organization Stardom, with which I partnered as a scholar-consultant, needed to put strategies in place for seamless succession. The executive leader was interviewed using a semistructured interview procedure designed to understand strategies that leaders of a small business used to develop and implement succession plans. Company data and

reports were also used for data and were collected using phone calls, emails, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams platforms to gather relevant information. During data collection, participants must be eligible, and therefore specific criteria must be used. Purposeful sampling requires a specific criterion with certain attributes suitable for qualitative researchers (Shen et al., 2022). The purpose of engaging specific participants in succession planning is to gain information about their experience for an in-depth understanding of the research topic (Shen et al., 2022). This is the reason an experienced leader was chosen for the study.

A case study was used as a design for the population with the head CEO and owner of Stardom. The sample was not randomly chosen for the specificity of knowledge and experience according to the research question (see Patil et al., 2020). The sample could not be chosen randomly because the consulting capstone at Walden University requires specific participants to solve challenges for an organization and to seek out opportunities for improvement (OFI). The consulting capstone at Walden University criteria is that two to three leaders must be interviewed through the organizational partnership. The owner and CEO of Stardom and her partner are the decision makers and the ones with the most information, knowledge, and experience of the company's vision and plans. I had the CEO forward a schedule that was comfortable and convenient and chose days that were compatible with my schedule. A new schedule will be formulated for an interview with Stardom assistant leader. To attain data saturation, I asked similar questions in different ways and triangulated them through reports, interviews, and public website information (see Yin, 2018). The interviews were once a week and subsided to

every other week then once a month as time went by then monthly. Interviews went on until no new information was being gleaned.

Interviews must be conducted in conducive settings for the comfort of retrieving relevant data. The fewer distractions the better the atmosphere to encourage understanding and trust to disclose needed data (McGrath et al., 2019). I began the interviews on the telephone at a time when the participant had no one around and made sure I did not as well. I later began using the zoom platform as the recordings were seamless. Though the leader preferred no camera, the clear communication with no disturbances and the trust through tones and professional questions from the Baldrige Excellence Framework and research that was prepared with questions brought out needed information for the study. Some of the needed information included succession planning data for the future of the company. The interviews were scheduled weekly, bi-monthly, and monthly as the questions became fewer and the client's answers began to be repetitive. According to Chitac (2022), when information becomes redundant data saturation has occurred. During the interview sessions, the client leader used to refer back to statements made in previous dialogues.

### **Ethical Research**

In ethical research, there are important rules to be adhered to specifically when dealing with people. Ethical anxieties are warranted when the cohort for the study includes human subjects (NCPHSBBR, 1979). The researcher is responsible for applying rudimentary ethical principles to protect participants and address concerns when accomplishing research duties involving human subjects (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018)



identified five actions researchers take to protect the rights of their participants: use of informed consent, do not conduct out actions that may cause harm, protect confidentiality and privacy, guarantee unbiased sampling, and protect defenseless and vulnerable groups. Lee (2023) posited that integrity in research is critical for discovery, fact-finding, and mitigation against harm to participants. Integrity is a critical ethical principle that has been highlighted through the modifications of codes of conduct (Fatemi et al., 2020). To guarantee ethical conduct in research is adhered to when human subjects are involved, institutions establish an IRB to protect the rights and well-being of human subjects from risks during research and to assist researchers with compliance with government regulations (Fatemi et al., 2020). Having integrity in research adds value to the researcher's activities, assists with their decision making, and mitigates risk. Exhibiting integrity supports participants feeling safer, and the likelihood of researcher work making a great addition to the body of knowledge being researched.

Walden University expects the highest level of integrity. Before formal interaction with my client organization, approval was obtained from the IRB demonstrating that the DBA case study was in keeping and within the parameters of the Walden University DBA Program Consulting Capstone and standards. I used the consent form and service order agreement form to ensure that the client leader understood clearly what the collaboration entailed. The form was inclusive of the terms of confidentiality and the ethical code of conduct for the consulting relationship. This form detailed protection for the client, and discussions between the client leader and me included the understanding that signage meant agreement to the terms and conditions of the project

proposal. I completed the mandatory online certification of ethics through the CITI and forwarded the results to the IRB. I also applied for research approval from the IRB gaining a positive response. The IRB approval number is 07-19-22-1135679.

After the IRB approval process, I began official interactions with my client leader organization to collect and analyze data from one of two senior leaders. To comply with the consulting capstone guidelines, I emailed my client partner organization the informed consent and service order agreement form. The Belmont Report authors laid out the requirements for the informed consent between partners, which had to be clearly articulated and understood giving participants the choice for agreement (NCPHSBBR, 1979). The agreement was discussed on a Zoom call to ensure the participants' rights were clear with the knowledge that questions were allowed, they were informed, they understood, and they volunteered knowing they could withdraw at any time without consequences by contacting the researcher or university leadership (see NCPHSBBR, 1979). The participants were reminded that they could exercise their right to withdraw from the study at any time because it was their right to do so, it was explained to them before and during the interviews (see NCPHSBBR, 1979). The two leader participants consented in response to the informed consent in the affirmative. The client organization leaders trusted the process as Walden University was seen as dependable and credible and had negotiated a previous agreement with the school. There was also the CITI Program through Walden University to ensure knowledge of the ethical standards upheld by the university. Through CITI, there were seven ethical modules to learn and be quizzed upon for certification. History and ethical principles, assessment risk, informed

consent, privacy and confidentiality and unanticipated problems, and reporting requirements in social and behavioral research, were the five required CITI modules. The Belmont Report and its principles and international research were the two electives that I chose. According to Mejia (2021), researchers must avoid intimidation and adhere to ethical codes portraying moral constraints so that the research is not biased.

In this study there were no incentives for coercion, the consulting services were all that was agreed upon and provided during the data gathering period. For efficient and successful research studies, Tosun et al. (2022) stated that at the beginning of the research, there should be a well inscribed protocol document. Apart from the written agreement with Stardom, an interview protocol document (see Appendix) was agreed upon to ensure seamless participation, and to iterate the process was voluntary. I maintained confidentiality throughout the relationship with the client organization, getting them to relax and share openly with no fear of a breach.

Conversations and interviews were conducted on the telephone and virtually through the Zoom platform. I was always alone to ensure privacy was maintained. Having an exclusive office to protect participants' confidentiality is part of ethical standards in research (Angelas-Llerenas et al., 2022). Being in a private office both at home and work also minimized distractions and maximized confidentiality. I asked for permission to record the participants and they agreed. I recorded and transcribed dialogues and interviews to ensure accuracy and credibility. Participants developed trust in the partnership and so reviewed a few transcripts for verification purposes. For further confidentiality to protect my client organization and participants from undue harm, and to

comply with the consulting capstone code of ethics, I allotted the pseudonym Stardom to the client partner organization, assigned pseudonyms to each participant, Participant 1 and Participant 2, and referred to them as participants or client leaders. I also redacted all personally recognizable information from the data before final storage. Any report, publication, or presentation related to this study was generally described with no specifications from the data. I redacted any information that possibly identified the individuals and partner organization. For further protection for Stardom and the client leaders, the hard copy documents were locked away in a private filing cabinet and the electronic files in the cloud were password protected. All information and documentation on Stardom and the client leaders will be destroyed after 5 years.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Data collection in qualitative studies has a special way in which it is carried out. In qualitative research studies, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection (Yin, 2018). Researchers act as the primary data collection instrument (Yin, 2018). I was the primary instrument for this qualitative single case study. I followed the guidelines and ethical standards for the collection of data. The main focus for researchers is to collect data with reliability and validity in mind (Yin, 2018). The sources that are used to collect data must be credible. The responsibility for how the data is collected and how relevant the data is lies with the researcher (Yin, 2018). Multiple sources must be used to ensure the validity and reliability of the data is suitable for tone setting and ensuring trustworthy outcomes (Moore et al., 2021). I collected data by using semistructured interviews, publicly available documents on the internet, and documentation exploration from my

client organization for transparency and to mitigate bias. Roberts (2020) stated that semistructured interviews are an effective way of collecting data. Roberts further discussed that guidelines for the interviews create a structure that enhances the collection of rich data. Having structure assists the researcher to ask questions that lead to follow-up questions that encourage more information for rich data (Roberts, 2020). There are many sources of data and a variety of data available for collection (Moore et al., 2021). Researchers must be careful not to compromise the quality of the data during the collection phase (Moore et al., 2021). Using multiple sources assists in strengthening the credibility and dependability of data (Moore et al., 2021; Yin, 2018). Quintão et al. (2020) also stated that dependability and reliability can be achieved by using multiple sources of evidence, member checking, and data triangulation. The format of semistructured interviews and organizational documents was used with permission from stardom leaders.

Using the Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework (see Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021), I interviewed the main client leader and later another leader using purposeful sampling. The interviews took place on the telephone, via Zoom, and through emails. The interviews lasted on average between 30 minutes to 60 minutes each. Not having excessive timelines for interviews helps ensure better attentiveness to accuracy in participants' answers (Moore et al., 2021). For quality not to be compromised, using clear concise questions that avoid vagueness in data collection is key (Moore et al., 2021). Clear language encourages trust from the participants. Stardom, my partner organization shared their articles of cooperation, employment statistics, and

strategic plans in strict confidence with me. To gain trust, there must be reliability and validity in the research being done for the company.

Studies are reliable when the research processes and findings can be replicated by anyone. Multiple sources used by researchers give their work better reliability (Quintão et al., 2020). Having the use of audio recordings in client interviews and transcription of those recordings are procedures that enhance the reliability of research studies (Coleman, 2021). The process I followed was arduous, recording all interviews and transcribing them in detail. I provided transcripts to my client organization leader to verify and check the information's authenticity which was validated. The transcribed material was then organized and stored in manila files and electronic files accessible when needed.

The interviews began with specific interview protocols (see Appendix). The interview protocol included a script for the interview process, a repeat of the research question, and contained consent procedures and other verification measures. There were eight semistructured interview questions after protocol procedures were completed. The Appendix is noted at the end of the Table of Contents. Preceding the interviews, I provided the participants with information regarding the goals of the research, the topic, and their rights to be a part of the interview or decide whether they wanted to continue or leave the interview (see NCPHSBBR, 1979). A consent form and service order agreement form were used to ensure the participant rights were documented and signed. I also asked the client's permission to record the interview sessions which had to be transcribed. The transcripts and summaries had to be sent to the client leaders for transcript review and member checking, which assists with ensuring there was structure

but not compromising the quality. Roberts (2020) believed that though interviews should have high quality there should be flexibility to ensure participant satisfaction. People are more eager to participate if they feel a sense of comfort or trust.

Researchers present transcripts for review to client leaders to allow for verification and accuracy. The accuracy checks give participants the opportunity to see that the researcher's work is credible. I checked the transcripts to see if there were separate dialogues to distinguish speakers and for accuracy. The process of cleaning and screening assists researchers in minimizing inaccurate information and missing data as well (Moore et al., 2021). Moore et al. (2021) insisted that researchers must never underestimate risk in data quality. Yin (2018) also stated that protective measures must be applied to data collection so that decision makers can trust the data. I made quality checks and reviewed the transcripts through member checking, giving my client organization leader summaries of the transcripts to verify the information (see Yin, 2018). This was in preparation for the analysis and coding of the interview information.

Member checking while assisting with accuracy, reduced researcher bias and ratified data saturation. Moore et al. (2021) stated that screening data and taking the quality of research seriously confirms data saturation. I provided the client leaders with transcripts of their responses to ensure accuracy. The Stardom staff verified that the information was authentic. There was also further discussion on recommendations agreeable to the participants. The participants also shared their satisfaction with the pseudo name stardom which would be perfect for one of their service niches.

### **Data Collection Technique**

After receiving IRB approval and the approval number 07-19-22-1135679 official interaction began with the client leader to collect data in a qualitative study. The interaction was to explore strategies small business leaders use to develop and implement succession plans. Using the Baldrige Excellence Framework (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021), I interviewed my client leader and explored the organization Stardom's strengths and opportunities for improvement. I further continued the exploration using semistructured interviews, publicly available documents, and organizational reports approved and provided by the client organization leader. The use of semistructured interviews, public data, and company documentation support rich dialogue and data, assisting with ease of continued rapport, which encourages seamless comprehension for successful results (Brown & Danaher, 2019; Stake, 1995). An interview protocol was established for the interview to enhance understanding accuracy for transcription and validation of the data collected (see Appendix). In the Consulting Capstone as a researcher, I followed the processes and goals in the DBA Manual for the Consulting Capstone (see Walden University, 2021) and the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program (2021), which were the first steps.

In this study, purposeful sampling was used to guide the selection of two senior leaders for the semistructured interviews. Data collection interviews were recorded through a consent and service order agreement form and the consent agreement form was signed. Interviews provide opportunities for rich data about a phenomenon for studies receiving firsthand information from participants (Yin, 2018). I preferred semistructured



interviews for this study to obtain rich data. The researcher can gain a deep understanding from interviews and follow-up discussions (Biemer et al., 2022; Yin, 2018). Although the advantages of firsthand information and rich data work well in qualitative studies, there are disadvantages as well.

One of the disadvantages of semistructured interviews is that incomplete, partial, and inaccurate information could be passed on from participants and negatively impact study findings (Kaliber, 2019). Another disadvantage is that interviewees can have a biased point of view (Yin, 2018). I was able to mitigate these risks by utilization of data triangulation and member checking techniques. The interviews were via telephone and Zoom conferencing and the client leader preferred to eliminate camera participation. Thunberg and Arnell (2022) recommended the use of audio and visual communication for researchers. Not being able to see the body language was a disadvantage. Both internal and external documentation were used in this qualitative single case study to ensure credibility and transferability (see Yin, 2018). The public data and company reports assisted in addition to the interviews, as well as member checking for accuracy. After recording the interviews, they had to be reviewed for validity. I analyzed the transcripts for initial codes and themes, then sent interview analysis summaries from the recorded interviews to the client participant who validated and approved the dialogue for the member checking process. Open-ended questions used in this study also assisted in gathering unlimited rich data (see Stake, 1995). Having a remote collection of data cannot replace face-to-face interviews, but it does reduce the cost of the study by

remaining in one space (Reñosa et al., 2021). Last of all, there was trust, if trust were not achieved, the participants would not be willing to share information.

Organizational documentation was also collected about the client's organization. Yin (2018) insisted that firsthand information from the documentation of client leaders is critical for rich data. Organization documentation was not always forthcoming. I received some documentation from the client, details on department staff, and their job descriptions. Even the company registration document was shared, but they were not willing to share financials which was a disadvantage for deep knowledge on a financial and competitive vantage point. On the other hand, discussing the financial profits and savings was beneficial.

### **Data Organization Techniques**

Organized data is critical for long-term use if reused. Data is easy to analyze especially when preserved for other researchers (Palsdottir, 2021). The research data for this qualitative study was securely organized for safety, easy retrieval, and analysis. The data was sourced from interviews, company information both on and off of the internet, and peer reviewed journals. Researchers use data management plans to preserve data and for ease of access, throughout the research period (Antonio et al., 2020). I recorded the interview sessions with the client leaders using an iPhone and later Zoom platforms. I also had manual notes properly labeled for retrieval purposes and for comparison of electronic data to add to the accuracy of the information. The information was secured in a database filed in folders in the cloud and hard copies in manila files locked in a cabinet. According to Senagi and Tonnang (2022), researchers minimize risk to participants when

they secure the storage of data, especially electronic data. I transcribed the information with the speaker dashboard software after a few were recorded so that I would not get overwhelmed with the data. I also did member checking by forwarding summaries for proper scrutiny of the transcripts. This was done with the participants to confirm accuracy of the information collected. Qualitative researchers must have active insightful attitudes and interpretive mindsets as the primary research instrument to accurately represent the truths emerging from the data collected (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). The use of MAXQDA software made it easier to organize the incipient data from the research and made it easier to store, review, and assess when needed.

Furthermore, a copy of the data was stored on an encrypted hard drive for easy access, protection of the participant's information, and additional security. I assigned pseudonyms to each participant (Participant 1 and Participant 2), produced a fictional name for the organization (Stardom), and redacted all personally recognizable information from the data before final storage. According to Walden University IRB requirements, research data must be stored for 5 years after completing the doctoral study (Walden University, 2021). After 5 years, I will destroy the data by shredding and burning any hard copy material and permanently erasing electronic files and the hard drive information through reformatting.

### **Data Analysis**

Methodological triangulation and multiple methods or sources of information are used by qualitative researchers performing case studies to cultivate a rich understanding of a phenomenon. To have rich interpretation and great transference of knowledge for

readers a practical data analysis approach is best (Cooksey & McDonald, 2019). Various tools are used for the analysis and interpretation of the data by the researcher (Yin, 2018). The involvement of different methods using triangulation for analysis improves the study and adds value in the form of credibility (Liu et al., 2021; Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) stated that data analysis is for deciphering data in a study and connecting it to a result. This study was inclusive of methodological triangulation through company documents, interviews, and public online documentation to add credibility and for validation of the research outcomes. I also cross validated the data provided by the client and included member checking together with the methodological triangulation for data analysis.

To enable credible research there are multiple qualitative analysis processes in data analysis. Yin (2018) recommended a 5-step approach for data analysis which included: (a) putting the information together, (b) making a table of categories, (c) examining data with visual displays, (d) tabulating data frequency events, and (e) putting information in order. This approach is a thematic analysis approach that allows researchers to find common themes relevant to the selected research study plan (Humble & Mozelius, 2022). For this study, I utilized the thematic approach to identify the common themes and patterns, as well as coding, grounded in the study's conceptual framework of knowledge transfer for succession planning and to ensure data saturation. I adapted Yin's 5-step approach in this study to ensure a thorough investigation of emerging themes.

Gathering the information was the first step in the data analysis. Organizing the information for coding, categorization, auditing for frequency, and then putting the

information in order made data analysis effective (Yin, 2018). The use of computer assisted software enables data analysis from numerous sources and further coding to be more concrete and succinct (Dalkin et al., 2021; Mattimoe et al., 2021; Taifi, 2022). Dalkin et al. believed that choosing the right computer software for coding assists in theory generation and future reflections involving the data. MAXQDA was the coding software I used for data analysis after putting it in order. I then saved them in Microsoft files in password protected databases and a hard drive.

Before the commencement of the coding of the data, a review of the notes, recordings, and transcripts assisted with deeper rich comprehension of the content. After coding the data which includes recognizing, deducing, and certifying the developing recurring patterns and themes, new features and connections emerged for model development led by the thematic analysis bringing more context to the data researched (Grodal et al., 2021; Taifi, 2022; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). I correlated key themes to the existing literature including recent studies on succession planning, corporate education, and sustainability (see Kemp & Flanagan, 2022; Kpinpuo et al., 2023; Wash, 2023). I also correlated themes to the conceptual framework to develop strategies for Stardom's competitive advantage.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Qualitative research has been criticized on whether its rigor is sound. Comparisons have been made to the extent that quantitative research exudes more rigor than qualitative research (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) further debated that qualitative research, when done well, is dependable and minimizes biases and errors. Reliable studies include

significant potential for enhancing comprehension for researchers and decision makers (Coleman, 2021). In this study, adequate attention was paid to reliability and validity to ensure high quality and utmost rigor for reliable results.

### **Reliability**

Reliability is attained when a study's processes can be replicated, and the same results occur. The tenets of reliability are with the reliability of repeated outcomes (Yin, 2018). Peterson (2019) referred to reliability as dependable measuring, deducing, and assessing the study evidence consistently. Several sources of evidence coupled with triangulation and member checking give credibility to research studies (Quintão et al., 2020). I ensured the dependability of the study through a consecutive process that included purposeful sampling, methodological triangulation, and member checking. The process of qualitative case study development is inclusive of first selecting interviewees using purposeful sampling. I ensured reliability by following a rigorous process of scheduling interviews, audio consented recordings, transcribing and note taking of details, providing summaries of the interviews for the participants to validate, and storing of data electronically and physically but securely. I also used MAXQDA software to analyze and code the study data consistently. Reliability projects consistency from data collecting to interpretation and results (Peterson, 2019). I had regular weekly meetings with the client leader, which became twice a month as needed. These meetings were calendar scheduled. There were also summaries of the transcripts from the recorded meetings sent to the participant for member checking.

## **Validity**

During the research process validity is attained when outcomes match study assertions. Yin (2018) posited that the appropriate use of tools, data, and processes that adequately answer the research question represents validity in qualitative research. Yin further expanded validity by explaining three types, (a) construct validity for accuracy in the measurement of a case study in connection to a theory, (b) external validity which represents the analytical context outside of the study, and (c) trustworthiness within the causal context of relationships. Findings must be sound and of reputable standards for other researchers and decision makers. Hayashi et al. (2019) debated that aiming for soundness in research methodology means following all laws and standards that are associated with qualitative research. Triangulation assists with the dependability of research (Singh et al., 2021; Yin, 2018). Using different sources for data collection and interpretation strengthens the quality of the research results.

I used methodological triangulation in this research and took physical notes and transcribed audio sessions for seamless transferability. Coleman (2021) and Mwita (2022) stated that the quality of data is critical, and it enhances a study's diligence. In using triangulation bias was avoided achieving trust for the study. Triangulation in studies adds credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Coleman, 2021; Singh et al., 2021). To ensure the three types of validity were met I took suitable measures to address the processes, design, and implementation of this study. Member checking was also done to achieve validity.

### ***Credibility***

To augment the credibility of this qualitative case study, I used methodological triangulation. I also compared responses received from the client leaders during member checking to corroborate themes that emerged during thematic analysis. Yin (2018) posited that in order for credibility to be achieved there must be professional study methods to assist in mitigating bias in research. Qualitative researchers accomplish credibility when other researchers can replicate similar results following the identical design, the results are authentic and accurate (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019; Hayashi et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2020). I recorded and transcribed all the interview dialogues and forwarded summaries of the analyzed discussions to the participants to assess and confirm the information for accuracy.

### ***Transferability***

Organizational leaders seeking research to suit their needs must evaluate the data accordingly. Qualitative studies verify transferability by producing rich and clear comprehension of the research study for other researchers proving external validity (Ferrando et al., 2019). I demonstrated transferability by providing clear information through an interview protocol and the interview questions to the client leaders and allowed them to evaluate the interview dialogues. Providing the context of the study is critical, this enhances the transferability of the research as an application is made by each researcher (Johnson et al., 2020). When research is contextual it increases reader utility, is transferable, and adds value and quality to the research. Woodworth and Thorndike (1901) stated that the transfer of knowledge was the influence of improvement in one



mental function upon the efficiency of other functions. Researchers use the information in other research studies and for organization leader decision making. By providing context future users of this study can make their own transferability conclusions.

### ***Confirmability***

Participants are to confirm that the dialogues they participate in when transcribed, represent their words and standards. There must be proper representation and interpretation of participant verbal and transcribed data (Hayashi et al., 2019). I proved confirmability by using methodological triangulation, member checking, and probing the client leaders in dialogues and interviews. The client leaders were given a chance to certify that the data collected and developed represented them well. Examining data must be part of the process of the research to ensure quality and sustainability (Yin, 2018). Apart from examining the data I compared research outcomes with the data collected and through documents cited to verify a connection.

### ***Data Saturation***

To culminate data collection there must be a capacity repetition of information which assists a researcher to data saturation. It is crucial for researchers to be aware of saturation in their study so that there is avoidance of myriads of useless data collected (Mwita, 2022). To achieve data saturation, studies must have quality data collection sessions, innovative interpretation of data, and methodological triangulation (Mwita, 2022; Stake, 1995). When respondents in a study have similar responses, data is sufficient for researchers to replicate a study, and no new information is coming forth from the data, saturation is achieved (Benozzo & Gherardi, 2019). There must always be

alignment in research studies and planning for the achievement of data saturation aligned with interview questions in this qualitative case study. This elevates the quality of the study. I achieved data saturation prior to the data collection process.

### **Transition and Summary**

In Section 2, I included my role as a researcher and presented a comprehensive overview of the design and process for this qualitative single case study. As the primary data collection instrument, there are potential biases that tend to emerge and must be mitigated against. To mitigate against biases means enhancing the reliability and validity of the study. To accomplish this, I incorporated the use of an interview protocol, transcript review, member checking, and data triangulation. Further, I included the research method, research design, population and sampling, and ethical research. I also included details on the data collection instrument and techniques, data organization techniques, and data analysis. The Baldrige Performance Excellence Program played a pivotal role in guiding the collection of data. Part of the conclusion of Section 2 included the qualitative topics of reliability and validity, which are credibility, transferability, confirmability. I concluded the section with data saturation.

In Section 3, I will present an evaluation and findings for my client organization Stardom, based on application of the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program (2021), company documents, and interview questions. The following topics will be presented: (a) introduction, (b) presentations of the thematic findings, (c) key factors worksheet, (d) leadership triad, (e) results triad, (f) collection, analysis, and preparation of results, (g) project summary, (h) contributions and recommendations, (i) Application to professional

practice, (j) implications for social change, (k) recommendations for action, (l) recommendations for further research, (m) reflections, and (n) conclusion.

### Section 3: Organizational Profile

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies leaders of a small business used to develop and implement succession plans. In exploring the strategies for leaders, the Baldrige Excellence Framework was used to capture data through a client organization partner within the DBA consulting capstone. The Baldrige Excellence Framework is a performance criteria tool for excellence with criteria that come in the form of a handbook that assists companies in measuring their performance status and gaining an in-depth understanding of the organization's operations (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021). At Walden University, one of the DBA doctoral capstones is a consulting capstone, in which student researchers, known as scholar-consultants, use the Baldrige criteria to assist organization leaders to identify opportunities for improvement (Walden University, 2021). The consulting capstone handbook is used by the DBA scholar-consultant students to assist in conducting research aligned to the Baldrige Excellence Framework (Walden University, 2021).

According to the Baldrige Excellence Framework, the organization profile is completed first to initiate learning about the organization and how it functions (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021). The following components include the evaluation of my company partner, Stardom, using the key factors worksheet, the leadership triad, and the results triad standards from the Baldrige Excellence Framework. The organizational profile content begins with the organizational description inclusive of the environment, relationships, and situation (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021). Because Stardom leaders needed a succession plan, I used knowledge transfer to

categorize themes and coded opportunities for improvement through the analysis. For further validation, I also used methodological triangulation and thematic analysis and three themes emerged: (a) employee and leadership audits, (b) career mapping for succession planning, and (c) shadowing, training, developing, and strategic depth.

### **Key Factors Worksheet**

#### **Organizational Description**

Stardom is an organization based in the Midwestern terrain of the United States. Stardom is a health care-based company, set up with staff to look after the mental well-being of families. Though Stardom is a for-profit organization, the company is inclusive of a CSR arm, and the organization's leaders are nonprofit board members for similar organizations in the community. The company service providers reach out to families and schools mainly based in seven locations where mental wellness assistance is needed.

The reason for the organizational description is to understand the company to explore strategies leaders of small businesses use to develop and implement succession plans for Stardom's organizational continuity following leader transition. To implement the mental and behavioral well-being strategies, many qualified staff are engaged at different locations and could offer services online, in office as well as through home help face-to-face services. Because the wellness assistance from Stardom is extended to children, permission through the state where the service is to be given is required.

#### ***Organizational Environment***

**Product Offerings.** Stardom is a government-recommended counseling company audited yearly to ensure that therapists maintain licenses and uphold government

standards. Stardom's services are inclusive of but not limited to mental wellness for family challenges, marriage counseling, depression assistance, children support services, anger management, anxiety therapy, emotional stress assistance, change adjustment, and therapy for other mental and behavioral challenges that families and individuals face. Volunteer services for nonprofit organizations in the way of governance are offered through the leadership. Also, information to schools and other government bodies is offered for knowledge on mental health. Some of the services also occur in group settings.

There are multiple ways in which clients can access the services offered by Stardom. Stardom does home visits, online platform interventions, and telephone therapy, and persons can visit the offices. Referrals are also made through business entities, support groups, and schools in case someone needs the service. Licensed or qualified therapists and counselors are engaged as permission from the state is needed to serve minors and rules of the state are to be met. Apart from certification, the team of Stardom must have highly positive attitudes, know how to deal with at-risk individuals, and have a high persona of affirming others.

**Mission, Vision, Values, and Culture.** Stardom's mission is to ensure that families and individuals receive the best mental wellness assistance for the restorative purposes of their mental and emotional needs. Compassion and positive responses are mandatory as part of the staff terms of reference for working at Stardom. Stardom leadership believes in always having a validator method of service and continuous results of progress and growth. The ultimate goal for Stardom is mental restoration and peace.

The culture of the company revolves around continuous development, being a trainable individual and one that can be depended upon. The culture became more intense during the COVID-19 pandemic, when everyone from various locations was on their own and was expected to deliver the same quotas of their terms of reference. Table 2 gives a concise view of the mission, vision, values, and culture of the company.

**Table 2**

*Mission, Vision, Values, and Culture Paraphrased*

Mission	Vision	Values	Culture
To empower individuals to have the best quality of life mentally and emotionally	Assisting people to lead meaningful lives and to make valuable contributions to society	Building families, loyalty, integrity, confidentiality	The company's culture revolves around three pillars of leadership, which are development, trainability, and dependability.

**Workforce Profile.** Stardom is comprised of 40 staff with an executive director, three vice presidents, and other supporting staff members working at seven geographical locations. After the COVID-19 pandemic, though Stardom remained in the seven locations, the company continued to operate in a virtual capacity with visits to schools and homes where necessary or upon request. The staffing categories in Table 3 depict the hierarchal formation of the workforce.

**Table 3***Stardom Staffing Categories*

Position	Number
CEO/owner	1
Vice presidents	3
Counselors/therapists, support officers, administrative, ancillary	36
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>

**Assets.** Stardom operates from seven geographical locations in the Midwestern parts of the United States. The assets owned by Stardom include play therapy equipment for children and specialized counseling furniture. Other organizational assets include information technology equipment, including hardware and software, human resource software, and payroll system software. Another major asset that means much to the executive leader is the David Allen natural planning system model for planning of both physical and virtual project tasks.

**Regulatory Requirements.** Stardom was registered as a limited liability company (LLC). To ensure compliance with federal regulations, Stardom is audited annually through an independent auditor. All staff members are audited for counseling and therapy licensure, and a Chapter 24 licensure board is consulted on all audit transactions. The company adheres to all applicable labor laws to promote federal



compliance. The institution also has a board of directors providing guidance and support, but the final decisions are made by the chief executive officer.

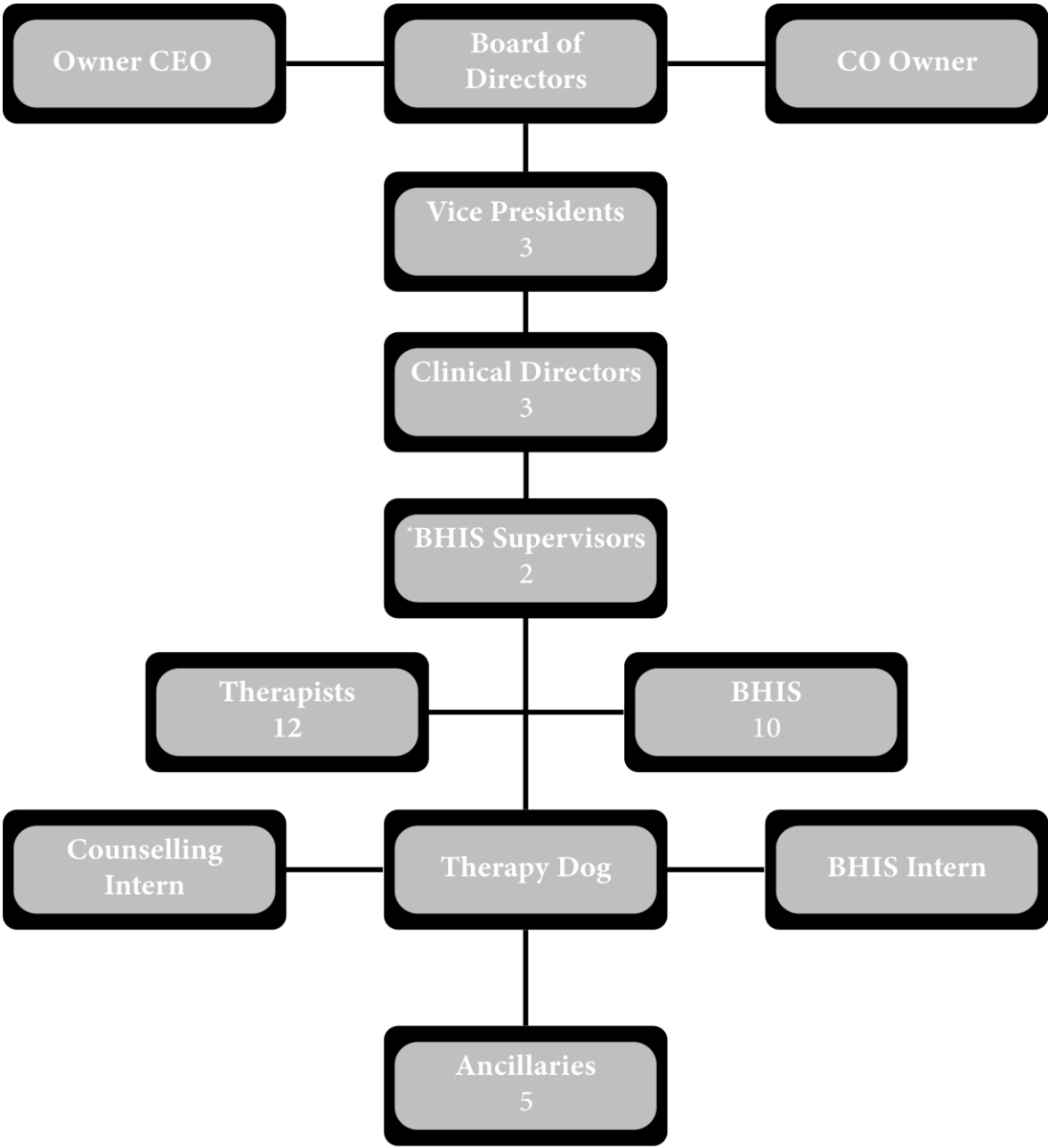
### ***Organizational Relationships***

**Organizational Structure.** Stardom is a for-profit organization with limited liability. Stardom operates with a certificate of organization inclusive of four articles of association filed and signed in 2014. According to Stardom's articles of association, the members of the board of directors' function as advisors who share experiences, as they must have family who are associated with mental health. There is legal liability insurance to cover the board and stakeholders. The board members do not make decisions, which are left to the owner and co-owner. Though there are 12 members on the board, a quorum for board meetings, which occur every quarter, consists of four people. Two of the four persons for the quorum must be the attorney on the board and one of the three vice presidents. Board members are audited quarterly as they go by a code of ethics for confidentiality. Stardom utilizes Chapter 24 licensure for mental health standards recommended by the governor of the state.

Stardom consists of 40 staff strong with senior leadership of two co-owners, one being the chief executive officer. The senior team is inclusive of three vice presidents and three clinical directors. The other staff consists of behavioral health intervention specialists, mental health therapists, therapists, a therapy dog, a counseling intern, and a therapy intern. An organizational chart will give a more visual and clearer description of the staff complement (Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Stardom Organizational Chart*



\*BHIS-Behavioral Health  
Intervention Specialist  
Therapist-Mental Health

Stardom has three segments of mental health and wellness areas, which are counseling, therapy, behavioral health intervention, and play therapy. Each segment is represented by senior staff who are vice presidents. Though the company deals with family mental health, it has an extensive arm that deals with children's mental health and child play therapy. The therapy dog assists children and adults in reaching emotional rehabilitation. At Stardom, there are also very creative physical activities that are used to develop healthy lifestyles in dealing with emotions like anger, patience, and stress.

**Customers and Stakeholders.** The primary customers whom Stardom renders services to include families, couples, singles, and children. The services to adults are not limited age wise, but there are some restrictions on the ages of children. The children for Stardom services are ages 4–18. There are consultations to specifically meet the needs of each customer. There are some customers whose needs include autism support and trauma support; others are related to stress, dealing with anger management, or grief. Whatever the mental health need is, a behavioral health intervention specialist, mental health therapist, or a counselor will work with the customer and their special needs.

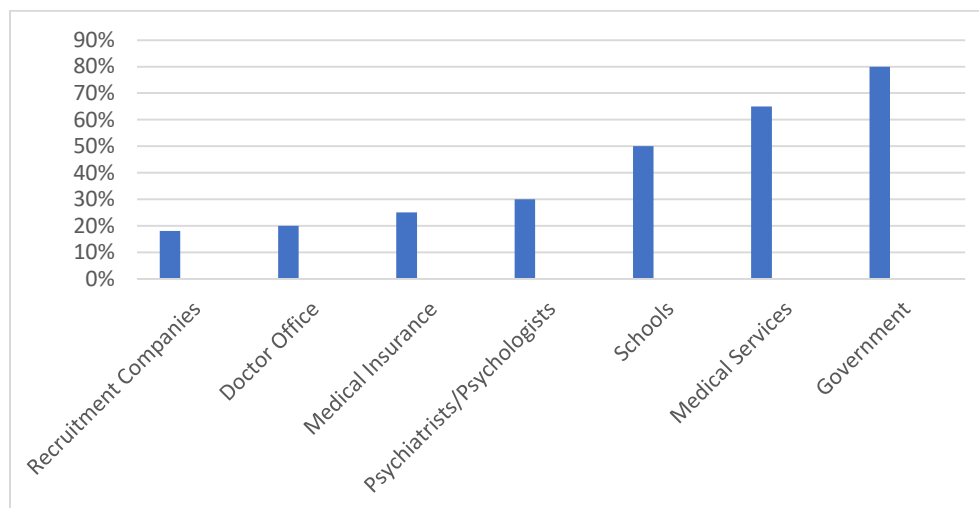
The stakeholders connected to Stardom include the state leader, employees, board of directors, external customers, parents, attorney, clientele, and school personnel. The stakeholders add value by making suggestions in suggestion boxes at all locations and making contributions during meetings and board sessions. Included in the company strategy is the board makeup of people who have a family member who has mental health needs. The addition adds value to board discussions and decisions. Other stakeholders bring expertise to the table that supports the services of Stardom.

**Suppliers, Partners, and Collaborators.** Relationships with suppliers, partners, and collaborators mean everything to Stardom. The suppliers, especially of the therapy toys and paraphernalia, are very valuable as they assist with the rehabilitation of Stardom's clientele. Without those tools for therapy sessions, Stardom would not be able to deliver some services. The technology and software suppliers are another set of valuable suppliers to contribute to the performance of employees. Table 4 displays some of the expertise that enhances Stardom's innovative and competitive nature.

Partnerships and collaborators have high quality expectations and are inclusive of recruitment companies, doctor office referrals, other medical referral services, school referrals, government referrals, psychiatrists and psychologists, and medical insurance companies like Blue Cross Blue Shield and Medicare. Different types of relationships exist between and from partners and collaborators. Figure 3 exhibits the different relationships that enhance the services Stardom provides.

**Table 4***Stardom's Expertise and Locations*

Areas of expertise	Expert titles	Qualifications	Locations
Autism	Licensed therapist	Master's/PhD	Locations 1-7
Depression/confusing thoughts/emotional confusion	Therapist counselors BHIS (TCB)	Bachelor's/Master's/PhD	Locations 1-7
Being bullied	TCB	Bachelor's/Master's/PhD	Locations 1-7
Anxiety-stress	TCB	Bachelor's/Master's/PhD	Locations 1-7
Anger management	TCB	Bachelor's/Master's/PhD	Locations 1-7
Play therapy	Behavioral health intervention specialist (BHIS)	Bachelor's/Master's/PhD	Locations 1-6
Therapy dog	Therapy dog	Certificate	Location 2
Polarization	TCB	Bachelor's/Master's/PhD	Locations 1-7
Parenting	TCB	Bachelor's/Master's/PhD	Locations 1-7
Seasonal affective disorder	TCB	Bachelor's/Master's/PhD	Locations 1-7
PTSD children	TCB	Bachelor's/Master's/PhD	Locations 1-7
Boundaries	TCB	Bachelor's/Master's/PhD	Locations 1-7
Death/Grieving	TCB	Bachelor's/Master's/PhD	Locations 1-7
Trauma-informed yoga	TCB	Bachelor's/Master's/PhD	Locations 1-7
Trauma resilience	TCB	Bachelor's/Master's/PhD	Locations 1-7
Forgiveness	TCB	Bachelor's/Master's/PhD	Locations 1-7
Art of mental health	TCB	Bachelor's/Master's/PhD	Locations 1-7
Documenting therapy	TCB	Bachelor's/Master's/PhD	Locations 1-7
Complicated grief (COVID-19)/return to real-life situations	TCB	Bachelor's/Master's/PhD	Locations 1-7
Sleep apnea	TCB	Bachelor's/Master's/PhD	Locations 1-7
New family	TCB	Bachelor's/Master's/PhD	Locations 1-7
Abuse	TCB	Bachelor's/Master's/PhD	Locations 1-7
Relationship challenges	TCB	Bachelor's/Master's/PhD	Locations 1-7

**Figure 3***Stardom Relationships***Organizational Situation**

The organizational situation began with the general business problem addressed by this study, which was the need for seamless transition of new successors of the business. The study was to explore strategies leaders of a small business use to develop and implement succession plans. Stardom leadership needed to ensure business continuity by ensuring knowledge transfer through strategies made to gain successful succession. Stardom's competitive advantage is the highly skilled, trained, self-motivated, and qualified staff that work at the establishment. Highly self-motivated leaders and staff create an environment not easy to emulate (Cortes & Herrmann, 2020). The environment stimulates innovation and thinking outside of the box enhancing the company quality and brand.

Stardom has a passion for changing people's lives, especially families. The institution delivers many behavioral and mental health counseling and therapy sessions.

The sessions are very creative, especially the child play therapy sessions and the therapy dog services. Because the services are people centered, the specialists, counselors, and therapists bring the services to their clients when needed as the aim is to build, strengthen, heal, and find solutions for its' clients. The services stimulate wellness and quality of life. Each client receives personalized care and has an elaborate action plan. Stardom collaborates with parents, teachers, doctors, care providers, and many other service providers to provide the most transformative mental health care for all people who need the services.

### ***Competitive Environment***

**Competitive Position.** Stardom has three pillars of strength employees must live by which are: continuous development, being trainable, and dependable. The company has a niche of referrals from the state where Stardom resides, hospitals, doctor's offices, schools, and other private institutions. Though there are other institutions that carry mental wellness services, none in the state has the broad scale of services that come under the three umbrellas, behavioral health, counseling, and therapy. All six locations in different towns have all the services provided, as well as the virtual aspect seen as location seven, and home visits. Stardom prides itself on being a cut above the rest as the company's reputation for high quality treatment precedes it. The internal expertise includes specialists with specific specializations in mental health and behavioral disorders. The external partnerships comprise part of the board for advisory purposes.

Stardom is a for profit organization recognized by the state and many of the clientele that patronize the company have Medicaid, Blue Cross Blue Shield and other

insurances that guarantee payments. Figure 4 depicts the robust payment system Stardom has exhibited as a guarantor form to ensure payments are received. The form is inclusive of alternative payment options to guarantee both parties' benefit. As a for profit limited liability company, Stardom's financial status must be protected and not exposed for public scrutiny and to ensure trade secrets are kept for competitive advantage.

For status enhancement Stardom assists nonprofits and NGOs by sitting on their boards and advising the leadership on innovative health care systems. Though there is not a budget for charitable initiatives, the leader of Stardom contributes through talks and mentoring for children and adults who need mental health guidance and cannot afford the services. These actions serve as corporate social responsibility (CSR) and both internal and external stakeholders enjoy the association of a company who gives back to society. Hossain et al. (2020) explained that loyalty would come easy to companies whose customers are satisfied and one way to capture internal and external customers is to engage in CSR. Doing good deeds for people encourages communities and societies to extend loyalties.



**Figure 4***Guarantor Form*

<b>General Information</b>	If the client has a health insurance policy, it may provide some coverage for mental health treatment. Our billing service will assist you in filing claims. You are responsible for obtaining information about the client's covered benefits. This includes determining if we are in or out of network, copays, patient responsibility, prior authorizations, deductibles, and all other plan details or limits to coverage. You are responsible for notifying us if/when the client's coverage changes. Please direct any inquiries about the client's coverage to their insurance company.
	Guarantor responsibility invoices are mailed to you and are due monthly. You can also pay your balance by using a credit card over the phone or by mailing a check or credit card authorization form to our PO Box. If you refuse to pay your debt, we reserve the right to use an attorney or collection agency to secure payment, as well as to refer you to services with another provider.
	If we are not a participating provider for the client's insurance plan, they will be considered a private pay client. You may request a receipt for your payments, which you can submit to the client's insurance company for reimbursement. Please note that not all insurance companies reimburse for out-of-network providers. If you prefer to use a participating provider, we will refer you to another agency.
	By signing this consent form, you agree that you have disclosed all of the client's insurance coverages and that they do not have Medicare as their primary coverage. By signing this agreement, you agree that if you have not disclosed Medicare as the client's primary insurance coverage and their claims are denied because they have this coverage, you are responsible for payment in full of all services.
	Unless otherwise prohibited by law, in the event that you fail to pay the charges of Stardom, Stardom will pursue legal remedy for the full invoice of charges and you shall be liable for all costs incurred by Heart and Solutions as a result of these collection efforts, including, but not limited to, attorney fees and collection agency costs, whether or not litigation is initiated.

<b>Alternate Funding Sources</b>	Coverage from alternative funding sources such as grants, regional funding, crime victims, wrap-around services, etc. are not considered guaranteed payment and do not negate your financial responsibility.
<b>Additional Professional Fees</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Letter writing/documentation fee to any outside entity on your behalf: \$35.00 per letter</li> <li>▪ Returned Check Fee: \$25.00</li> <li>▪ Appearance in court after being subpoenaed: \$200 per hour.</li> <li>▪ Preparation time for subpoena (including phone calls with attorney): \$200.00 per hour.</li> <li>▪ Travel time to court if subpoenaed: \$200.00 per hour.</li> <li>▪ If the client's case requires their provider's participation, you will be expected to pay for the professional time required even if another party compels your provider to testify. It is important to note that insurance companies will not pay for these kinds of services, and so the responsibility is yours.</li> </ul>
<b>Private Pay</b>	Our Private Pay rates are the same as our insurance rates, however a cash discount is offered for bills paid within 90 days of the invoice. Heart and Solutions cannot offer private pay cash discounted rates to clients who are paying for services due to deductible or patient responsibility from insurance. If payment is not made within 90 days of service, you will be responsible for the full amount, and we reserve the right to end services and refer you to another agency.

**Competitiveness Changes.** To maintain the dominant successful competitive position that Stardom enjoys the company must continue to have a high retention rate of the highly trained staff engaged. The risks of losing staff to other large companies in other states and virtually are very possible. The recruitment process that captures high achievers needs to be continuous and new aspects need to be adopted for the new

generation as generations differ in work ethics. Monterio et al. (2020) stated that different generations like x and y, come with different expectations and work ethic. Puiu et al. (2022) stated that the new generation z though technologically savvy and highly educated have a different type of work ethic that leaders need to prepare for. As changes take place in the organization some of these aspects must be noted to maintain competitive advantage.

Another threat to Stardom is the continued Covid-19 pandemic that encouraged complete virtualization of services, where some clients felt they needed the personal touch and body language was difficult to manage for the therapists and counselors. Although Stardom exhibited great resilience during the covid-19 pandemic, continued shut downs and limited access to customers posed a threat. Stardom has a contingency financial strategy inclusive of at least five years' pay without gaining a profit. This strategy is a robust strategic plan that can sustain the company during emergencies, but through different successors the plan must be maintained.

**Comparative Data.** As a result of Stardom's situation of market dominance, the leadership seldom pays attention to other companies' data. Also, comparative data to the company's limited liability profile is not available for privacy purposes. Stardom utilizes its board for important information as all board members must be well informed and have an association with patients needing mental health care, therefore maintaining loyal affiliations and buy-in. This means vested interest in the company's quality and success. Stardom must not take for granted the competitive advantage it holds as business environments change and new companies emerge, especially in the new virtual business

environment. Tang et al. (2022) stated that the new workforce must be able to work with digitization and the new technologies for survival. For high quality work and a comparative environment Stardom uses updated technologies and only looks to produce internal goals from historical data to measure improvement towards vision and mission mandates. Monthly auditing of staff outputs, assist with accomplishing goals for competitive advantage.

### **Strategic Context**

Stardom's strategic plan contains goals and quotas that are audited for success within a yearly context with goals being met and a 3-month failure ceiling provided. Each month all staff are audited to ensure the 3-month failure ceiling is not overlooked. A new vice president was added to balance the team under the three segment wellness programs. In previous years, the company only had two vice presidents. Keeping track of progress and inventory of 3-month quotas changed format as the company moved to complete virtual sessions during the 2020 and 2021 covid-19 pandemic. Plans and quotas are distributed to all staff and the organization leader has a robust response by three days if the communicated information is not clear or understood. If by day 3 there is no answer it must mean all is well. Some actions are visual and if not taken the leader forwards another email or calls a meeting.

A reactive process is followed to gain insights into what goes wrong, or dissatisfied customers and new procedures are put in place after teams meet about the challenges. In the same vein positive feedback brings innovative novel and creative ideas incorporated into mental health care activities. To avoid the negative results staff are

encouraged to have their own plans that feed into the bigger organizational plan. The actions they document must be in line with their terms of reference or job descriptions. When new ideas for addition to the scope of work are introduced by staff, team meetings are called for quick decisions to be made.

### ***Performance Improvement System***

Audits and a points system for performance management and promotion influence the improvement of staff at Stardom as there is a system in place to move up the ranks. The movement starts from intern to counselor to behavioral specialist to clinician then director and after vice president. Figure 5 presents a visual chart of the incentivized staff complement and the positions. Each set of positions have specific action plans for the audited quotas and implementation of the quotas. For the different positions, the state specifies what the requirements are to move up to the higher stations. The move includes qualifications, experience, and licensure exams. Some positions have more requirements than others, for example, therapy positions must be licensed by the state with a masters' degree and pass an exam in which the employee receives a temporary license for 2 years, then sits another exam, and then the 5 years of experience will make the therapist a supervisor of counselors.

**Figure 5***Organizational Staff Complement*

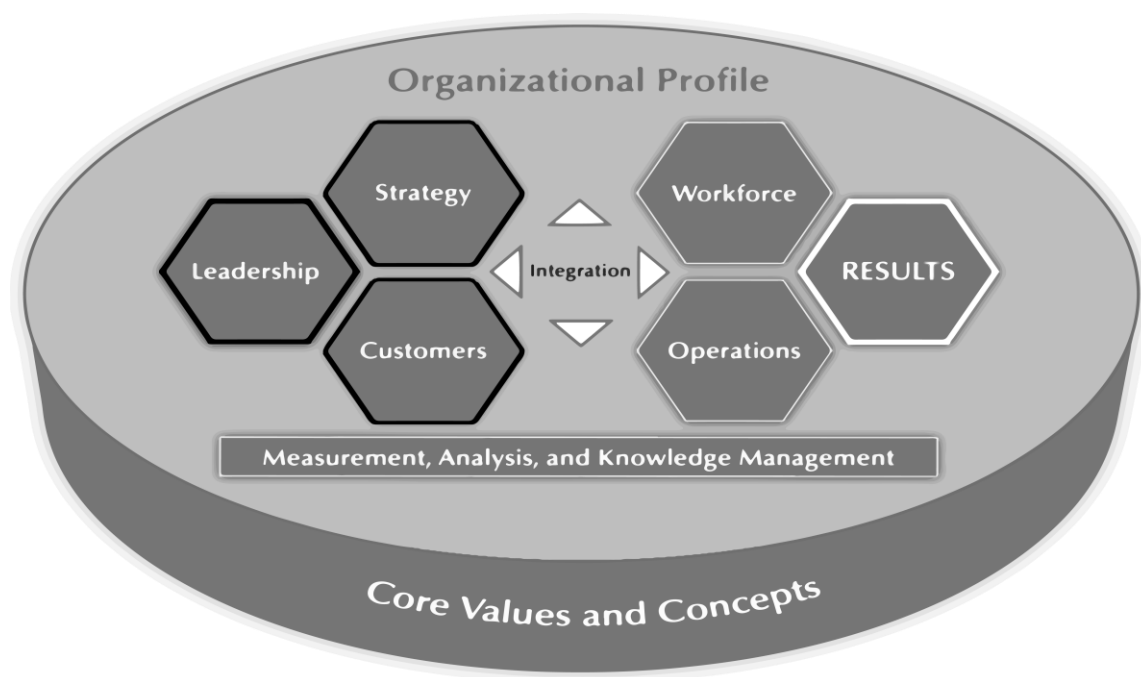
For morale enhancement, feedback is given weekly by supervisors about work and reports through teams that feed into the monthly audits. Sometimes there is administrative stress and to ensure best practices prevail self-motivation procedures are used, for example, quiet yelling by writing what should be screamed out on post its and sticking them up in private spaces. This assists in letting go of the stressors. There are in person retreats every October that took place virtually in 2020 and 2021. The end of the year in December brings team fun retreats that encourage self-assessment talks. Sometimes at retreats, special awards are given to motivate staff. During the month of January, a leadership workshop takes place to motivate and strengthen the leadership skills of staff. For further improvement, whenever new software emerges that can

enhance work performance it is procured. One of the software most enhanced was the electronic HR software to forward important work reminders for better worker performance. The auditing of staff also assists in improving individual roles as well as group improvement to excellence.

### **Leadership Triad: Leadership, Strategy, and Customers**

The leadership triad contains three categories, which are leadership, strategy, and customers. This is the first part of the Baldrige Excellence Framework, and that section explains the key role the leadership team plays in governing the company. The leaders' focus must be on managing and encouraging progress in organizational strategy while delivering value to customers. Senior leaders who are skilled in setting the strategic direction and considering customers' needs and requirements subscribe to performance excellence (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021). The quality of services that customers receive is reliant on the decisions made by the leadership of the company. Knowledge transfer aligns well with leader responsibilities to encourage successor learning and engagement through experience (Milagres & de Araújo Burcharth, 2019). In the leadership triad, I explored Stardom's emphasis on strategic planning to ensure the continuity of quality services for customers. I assessed their perspective on training and development strategy, toward performance excellence for their customers.

For an overview and information about the structure of the Criteria for Performance Excellence, see the diagram on page 1 of the Baldrige Excellence Framework (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6***Baldrige Excellence Framework Structure*

*Note.* From *2021–2022 Baldrige Excellence Framework: Proven Leadership and Management Practices for High Performance*, by Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021, U.S. Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology (<https://www.nist.gov/baldrige/publications/baldrige-excellenceframework>).

In the public domain.

**Leadership**

Stardom’s leaders’ model exemplifies the expectations of their successor teams. They begin with their expectations from recruitment and share their pillars for success and business continuity with all staff. The leaders set the tone, context, and examples of alignment of culture to best practices for employee choices and their decision making in



the organization. Accountability is practiced through quotas and early responsibility for success through goals aligned to standards and company values. Though the highest level of quality services, are expected room to explore innovative ideas for results are encouraged.

### ***Senior Leadership***

Stardom senior leaders consist of a CEO, co-CEO, and vice presidents. These senior leaders along with the board of directors are responsible for driving the organization's mission, vision, and values as well as shaping the culture toward sustainable success. The CEO is the final decision maker, although guided by board suggestions. All senior leaders are responsible for communicating and reinforcing clear guidelines and standards in keeping with the company's values and pillars for excellence. A strategy for continuous improvement is deployed weekly with a check-in audit for quality assurance adopted by all.

**Vision, Mission, Values, and Culture.** Stardom leaders maintain a three-pillar concept that works to strengthen minds as well as the sustainability of the organization. The pillars comprise the ability to be trainable, proven ability to work well and without supervision, and dependability. Stardom's mission is to ensure families and individuals receive the best mental wellness assistance for the restorative purposes of their mental and emotional needs. Stardom links their mission and vision to high achievers to start with recruiting. Stardom's interview for recruitment is robust and consists of three interviews per applicant. Compassion, empathy, and positive responses are mandatory as part of the staff terms of reference for working at Stardom. Stardom believes in always

having a validator method of service and continuous results of progress and growth. The ultimate goal for Stardom is mental restoration and peace. The culture of the company revolves around continuous development, being a trainable individual and one that could be depended upon. The culture became more intense during the COVID -19 pandemic, where everyone from various locations were on their own and were expected to deliver the same quotas of their terms of reference.

Stardom leaders maintain a continuous commitment to ensuring the vision is adhered to by always having department heads shadowed. The strategic plan includes keeping employees knowledgeable so that when others are not available there is still someone to fill in the position so that the families and stakeholders served are not disadvantaged or left without the valued service. The continuous service to clients will keep them loyal and they in turn can convince others to recommend the organization. Stardom also values information from stakeholders and customers to measure satisfaction and success ensuring continual improvement.

Another important feature of Stardom is maintaining a culture that embraces high standards with meeting deadlines and ethical behavior. Stardom works closely with the board of ethics in their state and uses the policies for all partners, stakeholders, and staff. The staff are given responsibilities and are expected to meet all deadlines without strict rules and how and where they go, as long as the quotas and deadlines are met. This builds a level of trust and commitment that is expected from the onset of employment. Much emphasis is placed on ethical behavior and high standards are a part of the policies put in place which is discussed every time there is a meeting.

**Communication.** To maintain a successful business planning process, the engagement of stakeholders, customers, and employees is continuously required. Stardom's terms of reference and performance plans are aligned with the organization's objectives and goals. The alignment of objectives to employee work is checked at weekly check-ins, monthly meetings, quarterly, and annually. The frequent checks are to ensure that high standards and quality are not compromised. In those frequent checks, staff are audited and must meet their quotas and deadlines. When the standards are not met more than twice the employee has to be dismissed, as lives are affected.

To avoid dismissal Stardom leaders, support open communication through calls, emails, and frequent meetings. Return of calls and emails must not exceed 2 days and 1 day especially if the message is urgent. Specifically, to email, if an email stays 3 days and the employee does not respond, that means the employee took action if there is no response the email goes back to the leader to take necessary action. Employees are also encouraged to make great use of bulletins and newsletters to be informed and to inform clients as well. Access to leaders on vacation is made easy for emergencies and ease of responsibilities. The open modes and ease of communication fosters constant information to enable and facilitate the maintaining of objectives aligned to the mission and vision.

Stardom also maintains constant communication with external partners, by participating in stakeholder meetings, sitting on some of the boards, and sharing statistics of success. The governor of the state gets statistics and reports from stardom as a key stakeholder to ensure continued partnership and knowledge of successes. Some of the community events are attended by the leaders to ensure knowledge of partnership

agencies. Sharing of information also takes place at the board level, as the board consists of partner agencies involved in auditing, government policies, and therapy ethical standards. The strategic involvement of the different agencies is to foster continuous growth and development of Stardoms services. The feedback and information form part of the harmonization and incorporation of innovative ideas, updated information, and inclusion of policy.

**Mission and Company Performance.** The business plan of Stardom exemplifies and models growth through the comparison of a tree. What goes into the work presented by the employees through the process has to build and nurture all clients. The belief is that the innate ability to cope is through role modeling and practice and what you put in is revealed in the positive or negative results. Though the leaders believe in disciplinary action, they do not go by the customer is always right. An investigation is always done if there are negative complaints about an employee. Stardom values its employees as they view them as their biggest assets for successful business continuity. The company employees are the most important asset, but they are expected to deal with customers with the highest level of care. Each customer needs specified care and consideration must be given accordingly. Special investments are made to ensure the needs are met and advice is taken for the advancement of all. Reports on the way forward for all therapists are expected to include recommendations for the evolving needs of the clients.

**Generating an Environment for Success.** Stardom's Leadership team is dedicated to enabling innovative and creative means for company success. Necessary resources are augmented and upgraded to suit customer needs and expand the employees'

reach to assist the customers. In investing in the correct resources, the leadership assists the employees in achieving the high standards expected that align with the company goals. Quality assurance meetings for improvement are scheduled monthly and where needed weekly. Negotiations are made to schedule workers on holidays which require exchanges and rotation, which is important for staff satisfaction as well as to improve morale.

The therapy employees of Stardom are also involved in exit interviews with clients to mark success and the positive influence toward satisfaction of service rendered. These employees are audited monthly, as well as all levels of staff members. The audits are regarded as positive most of the time as the supervisors are to prepare staff beforehand to ensure positive results. Most of the time when graded, the employee receives an 'A' grade. The 'A' grades lift morale, and the workers tend to strive even more to maintain that grade.

The leadership of Stardom also has relaxation incentives to motivate the staff and foster relationships that encourage equity and diversity in understanding staff differences. Every October, the staff look forward to a retreat at a restaurant or hotel with a theme. A murder mystery or adventure where costumes are included. There were virtual retreats during Covid-19 with funny themes to boost morale. Other workshops, like the leadership workshops, take place in January where icebreakers include solving puzzles. Self-care is encouraged and each staff member must have one self-care goal each week discussed with their supervisor at weekly check-ins. These motivational social events include learning aspects of team building and easing tensions that may build throughout the year.

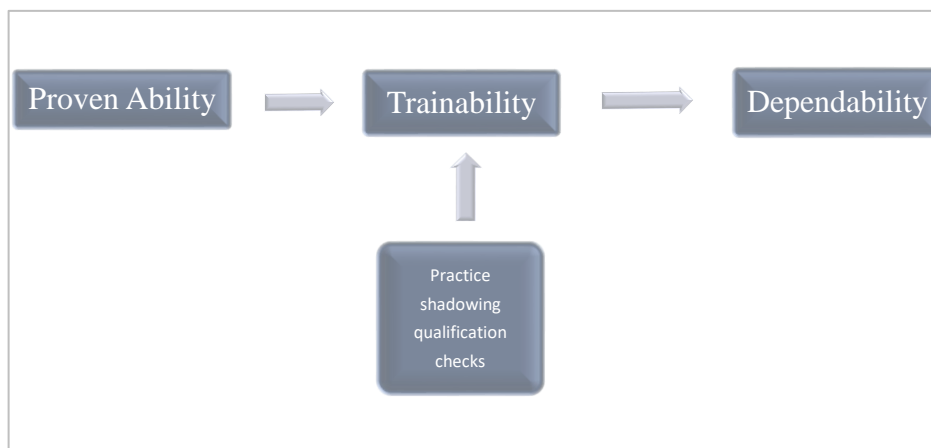
Gifts and raises are also a part of the workshops and motivational events. Though there are great expectations for hard work and high-quality service there is time for fun and training workshops to balance the environment for staff satisfaction.

**Generating Action Focus.** Stardom focuses on achieving objectives, goals, mission, and its vision through a 10-year strategic plan. The 10-year plan is broken down yearly to suit the monthly meetings and terms of reference passed on different levels by the CEO. The strategic plan comprises savings put aside for risk and potential loss; diverse ways of reaching and engaging clients; and robust staffing methods.

The CEO and co-owner allocated hundreds of thousands in funds in a reserve bank for salaries if emergencies like Covid-19, and other losses through risk-taking on new ventures. This action was specific to business continuity measures. The engagement of clients took the form of home visits for people who could not come out and were not inclined to virtual therapy. Virtual therapy was also modified to suit clients who preferred the internet to home visits and in-person office visits. Some clients also preferred video calls and others were satisfied with only audio. Staffing from recruitment begins with ethical testing and three separate interviews per person. The ethical test must be compulsory as therapy requires ethical standards to defuse harm from individuals. Sensitive interviewing requires ethical standards to be adhered to in protection of subjects (Eneman, 2022). Stardom leaders take pride in upholding the highest ethical standards as a wellness organization. To move to higher levels in the hierarchy of staffing there must be qualification checks, shadowing, and practice until the individual is deemed competent and meets the three pillars of proven ability, trainability, and dependability.

**Figure 7**

*Generating Action Through Stardom's Three Pillars for Mobility*



### ***Governance and Societal Responsibilities***

In the following subsections, there is a review of Stardom's governance system, senior leadership and accountability, legal and ethical actions, and societal responsibilities in dealing with senior staff, stakeholders, and the community.

**Organizational Governance System.** Stardom is a limited liability company and therefore affords the owners protection from liabilities and debts. The company is a Chapter 24 agency accredited as a provider of services for people with mental illness and developmental and intellectual disabilities. The organizational governance system comprises a board of directors. The board of directors is a compliance board overseeing regulations, industry standards, internal controls, and guidelines. On that board, the CEO has the last word and makes the final decisions. There are eight members on the board and four comprise a quorum. There are quarterly meetings and two vice presidents from the company must always be present, one of them must have mental health experience. The board is inclusive of an attorney for legal advice, an auditor, and four moms who

have children or relatives as clients of Stardom. A college student and a social coordinator also form part of the board.

Stakeholders on the board are covered by legal liability insurance. There is also owner life insurance that would cover the owners' beneficiary should they pass away. The board members discuss current trends for whatever period they are in and share experiences. Their role is to give suggestions and advice for best practices in relation to mental health and wellness, inclusive of problem solving when difficult situations arise with staff members. Members have a vested interest as they are senior staff or required to have a relative in therapy, therefore they take ethical matters seriously. The board meets quarterly as there are monthly meetings and audits across the organization inclusive of ethical code compliance. Ultimately, the CEO makes all final decisions, especially as it relates to ethical standards and financial accountability.

**Performance Evaluation.** A robust system is used for performance evaluation at Stardom. Performance evaluations of the workforce and the processes undertaken comprise an essential component of Stardom's management structure. A competency-based framework is subscribed to, where supervisors and managers identify staff who match the three pillars of Stardom which are proven ability, trainability, and dependability. These employees are then chosen to shadow other managers and are trained for leadership positions. The evaluations and training are done in all departments and at all levels.

Quotas are to be met for financial gain and company stability as well as high ethical standard codes must not be breached. Reports on billings are discussed at all



levels with supervisors to ensure continuous compliance. Weekly check-ins and monthly audits are aligned to performance and an attorney on a weekly retainer is utilized for situational breaches. Stardom also uses an outsourced HR system to manage situations and consults the state where necessary for more complex ethical breaches.

**Legal and Ethical Compliance.** At Stardom there is zero tolerance for a breach of ethics. Leadership upholds strong legal and ethical standards and receives guidance from a retained attorney. The organization also works with the state to ensure ethical codes for therapy and financial matters are kept within state law. The organization uses a software called Bambee, outsourcing critical HR issues. The software is on auto pilot and allows users to consult for solutions without human emotion and bias. There are also consultations through the state governors' ethical board, to ensure state laws are adhered to. The licensure board is also consulted to keep therapy licenses up to date.

All therapy workers and counselors must have an ethical certificate. This practice began in the year 2020 when a staff member breached a billing ethical code. When that took place Stardom reverted to immediate termination and reported the incident to the state board of ethics. Other staff were aware of the termination and discussed the consequences as major relating to fear of such action and results. Stardom incorporated a policy of ethics exams in which staff must receive 100%. If they did not, they had to repeat until 100% was attained. Learning the information to receive the highest achievement meant an understanding of the law for the leaders. High-quality service standards and ethical excellence are benchmarks for the image of the company. Stardom

has also been associated with boards inclusive of a plan of corporate social responsibility (CSR) which also assists with corporate image.

**Societal Contributions and Community Support.** Stardom understands that being a good citizen means contributing to the community and society and ultimately doing good in the world. Ahmed et al. (2023) stated that doing good in the world builds corporate image and stakeholders including generation Z remain loyal to companies who subscribe to CSR. Stardom's community includes all people in need of mental support. Children are an essential part of the company community as early interventions assist in wellness development. Schools reach out to Stardom for assistance with all illnesses related to mental health including bullying. The CEO and a vice president of Stardom serve on the state public health board and a few boards and contributes input on well-being and mental health. The contribution brought to the meetings include psychosocial best practices for family development, especially children. The CEO also does presentations at schools as a point of societal giving back and support. Webinars and podcasts are also included in forwarding information for public knowledge. The CEO has recognized that more must be done to incorporate CSR into the strategic plan for Stardom.

### **Strategy**

In the following subsections the procedures and implementation for Stardom's business strategy will be described. Stardom's services are of the highest standards and the leaders and employees hold themselves responsible for excellent service to customers and stakeholders. The CEO believes that value for money gives Stardom the edge above

other companies. The leaders developed a comprehensive copious approach inclusive of career mapping aligned to the three pillars Trainable, proven ability, and dependability. The vision of the company is for continuous succession of employees toward upward mobility to take place in all departments not only senior management. The key is to find the right fit for the positions.

### ***Strategy Development***

For natural planning systems, Stardom uses David Allen's model for decision making. Allen (2021) stated that leaders should work toward developing quality workspaces for employees to develop. In developing the strategy leadership took into consideration, employee needs and first check or enquire for interest in upward mobility and learning. The candidates must at least have 4-year degrees and be licensed to be behavioral therapists. Master's degrees for the vice presidents are an asset at Stardom with the head owning a doctoral degree. Stardom promotes from within first and would recruit if there is difficulty finding the right match. Feedback from supervisors is essential to the process as well as survey results from customers. The leaders at Stardom do not believe that the customer is always right so they investigate the surveys to ensure any negative statements are correct in protecting employees.

**Strategic Planning Process.** The strategy planning process began with a long-term plan mapped out by the CEO with input from the leadership team. After the approval by the CEO, the plan was passed on and discussed with the senior leadership team responsible for the yearly plan. The yearly plan comprises training and development, resources for therapy and recruiting of new clients which is linked to

financial gains. Broad goals are broken down to job specific goals transformed into terms of reference for individuals linked to scope of work for departments. As a for profit company, the quota for counseling is important for profitability. Monthly tracking of quotas and customer satisfaction is linked to success. Every January, employee surveys are sent out for feedback. The boxes for the surveys are usually empty, giving the impression that the customers are well taken care of. The monthly audits of employees indicate how well individuals are doing and in turn the company's success. This process initiates comparisons of the quotas and achievements to the plan. A financial auditor forms part of the board of directors for ease of yearly financial audits.

**Innovation and Strategic Considerations.** Strategic planning is a key component of the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program (2021), which explains the internal and external actions to ensure service excellence. Analysis of systems and work environment strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are constantly monitored and adjusted to achieve excellence and competitive advantage. Stardom for many years has achieved an edge in serving a wide range of clients, even children, and couches success as elite status. The repetition of hiring high achievers also contributes to the status as well as the repetition of constant training and knowledge transfer at every level. The CEO refers to this concept as a boring undertaking and believes it to be sustainable, not considering other companies as threats.

Stardom has a unique team that includes behavioral specialists, therapists, counselors, and even a specially trained dog displayed in Figure 2. Other contributions to elite status stem from the specific training of employees as successors in every

department in strategic depth. Strategic depth strengthens a company's staying power, security, and stability (Mason, 2021). In Stardom's case business continuity is explored through staff capabilities to be prepared for other staff suddenly taking extended vacations, leave of absence, illness, or death. Stardom saw opportunity for the training when a key staff member had a terminal illness that was unexpected and had to be replaced. The CEO also realized that death is unpredictable and untimely death needed extensive preparation for succession. Training and shadowing became a part of the strategic plan linked to career mapping with alignment to the three pillars proven ability, trainability, and dependability.

### ***Strategy Implementation***

The next step is that a career path must be identified with a three-pronged approach which is to assist in personal development, growth in the company, and succession for absentia of any form. After the employee for mobility is identified, bi-monthly checks are made to ensure the three pillars are embodied in the individual. If the individual has only one pillar for mobility, they may be reviewed and through further training monitored for improvement or just to understand other positions in the company. The employee is expected to meet agency goals even during training. If during the audits, the individual scores less than 85% 4 times, termination is inevitable. Supervisors are audited for the field of study they qualify for as well as the supervisory role separately. The Career mapping aims for excellence and though there used to be a high turnover rate the most suitable candidates remain at Stardom.

Trainability is essential for the learning opportunity which exempts candidates and adjustments are made for new candidates to go through the process. There is also agility as members moved to online and special home visits when the Covid-19 pandemic caused major shutdowns. Resilience came through as a result of preparation for change. According to the CEO, no one left or was fired as innovative ways for service was applied through technology. The innovation was shown even in group therapy where technological chat rooms were made into breakout rooms and play therapy was switched to online models. The models generated a cost benefit as travel and office use was eliminated. Stardom relies on a cash reserve for emergency funds, cost benefits assist in the growth of that reserve. The reserve is able to provide over 5 years of salaries should there be a lack of profits.

The continuous changes through shadowing and training prepared the employees for change and for the monthly audits which set other staff at ease when they needed time off. Having staff members understand other roles lessened the stress of having to work on vacation or having excess stress worrying when emergencies arise. This practice of knowledge transfer also saves the organization from expensive substitutes, new hires, and department or company closures. When candidates exemplify the three pillars that Stardom values, monthly audits are passed with ease, and continuous improvement is achieved through the shadowing, training, and development regime. Where there is excellence, customers are expected to receive a high standard of service. Action plans from career mapping when diligently followed and inclusive of the three pillars create a path of upward mobility for employees. Other paths may bring extended months of

training and development or termination. Employees not successful because of a lack of pillars or most of the pillars, ethical dilemmas, and failure to pass at the percentage rate required more than three times are terminated. Figure 8 presents a visual aid of the action plan paths.

**Figure 8**

*Action Plan Paths*



**Customers**

Stardom is a for profit organization that provides mental wellness services such as behavioral health intervention services, telehealth, therapy services, and counseling services to families and people in general. The company identifies customers as people who need mental-related services that change mental disturbances and disorders. There are also support services both in person and through podcasts. The nurturing and critical care of Stardom keeps the customers returning and proposing other clients for care. The in-state service is for anyone but has a special segment needing special attention from the ages of 4 to 19. Because of the special segment schools reach out to the agency for assistance. Doctor offices also refer clients to Stardom's program. County referrals are also in order as the company is an S-corp regulated by the state. Some families start in

one service and have referrals to others or there is overlap. To understand customer needs and expectations of clients Stardom uses surveys for feedback, information from local authorities, education institutions, social media, and podcast responses. Other critical information about the customers is gathered through referral forms, Spanish referral forms, medical records request form, satisfaction survey, grievances, suggestions, and compliments found on the internet.

### ***Customer Expectations***

Customer needs change especially through crises, Stardom ensures that they read the grievance, suggestions, and compliment documents. Referral forms are used to find out the expectations of clients with specific information about their needs and preferences. Processes and adjustments to the processes and services are guided by the expectations of clients. Payment plan expectations are taken into consideration as well and a guarantor form showcased in Figure 4, is ready for clients to understand and meet expectations while guarding against misunderstandings on payment responsibilities.

**Customer Listening.** Listening to the customer is critical for the Stardom team as listening keeps their services updated and assists in keeping customers satisfied. Because the company serves a wide range of clients the diverse needs of people must be considered. Changes that affect the clients' attendance is also taken into consideration for example, throughout the years of 2020 and 2022, Stardom became an online service provider when shutdowns became compulsory. Some clients at times also needed home visits and Stardom complied.



Stardom understands that listening and acting in accordance is an essential part of the fulfillment of the mission and vision of the company. Eliminating stigmas of mental health and ensuring clients are enabled to live meaningful lives, contributing to society. Preparation for diversity when listening to a wide range of customers is of paramount importance. The Innovative ways in which Stardom responded to the needs of the clients made the company unique. Special services like the dog therapy, special building blocks, Spanish services, and play therapy. Assessment of client feedback for innovative action takes place at monthly meetings and more urgent changes take place at weekly check-ins or a call or email to a supervisor or the CEO.

In listening to the clients, the surveys must incorporate questions to suit and assess all the support the clients receive and be detailed for excellent service. The support services are inclusive but not limited to the art of healing; coping with anxiety; spreading kindness; embracing artistic creativity as an aid for mental health; finding pride in the art of cooking; supporting adolescents on social media; disordered eating; play therapy; coping with ambiguous grief; happy holidays; trauma and co-regulation; social media advocates for mental health; small wins celebration; learning autism; why goals; anxiety in children; post-traumatic stress disorder in children; life's meaning; certified dog therapy; anger; therapist connections; boundaries; improving parent child relationships; seasonal affective disorder; summer mental health bucket list; children and covid grieving; trauma informed yoga; trauma and resilience; forgiveness truths; and lives of passed loved ones.



businesses needing support services in the mental wellness services offered. The Governor of the state is included, as the state refers clients to Stardom and commissions progress meetings for updates and analysis of opportunities for improvement and success. The services that are analyzed are inclusive but not limited to therapy services, behavioral health intervention services, telehealth, and counseling.

### ***Customer Engagement***

Beyond just business Stardom engages customers by adding value to the sessions they attend. There are internal and external customers, and both are to be treated fairly and with respect. The internal customers are given assistance to grow through training and development toward upward mobility and succession and to be informed generally about the company and its services. External customers grow through the customers themselves as they express to others their progress. Referrals are also made from schools, businesses, and government services. The therapists and counselors also bring in people who are interested in their services. The treatment is special, and most times customers are allowed to set their own goals and be actively involved in their personal care. Therapists are to be consistent with their interventions to encourage the return to sessions. Customers have choices to participate or communicate in person or online.

**Customer Satisfaction.** Feedback from customers is sought in many ways. A box at physical centers, weekly check-ins, monthly audits, and a survey form is given to customers. The form given to the customers asks about how they feel, safety issues, respect, likelihood to return, progress, and goals. The form is presented in Figure 10 with

a Likert arrangement to gain knowledge of the sentiments felt to glean opportunities for improvement.

**Figure 10**

*Stardom Client Satisfaction Survey*

### Stardom Client Satisfaction Survey

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Please let us know the office and provider who serve you.

**I feel safe in session \***

1  
Strongly Disagree

2

3

4

5  
Strongly Agree

**I feel heard and understood by my provider \***

1  
Strongly Disagree

2

3

4

5  
Strongly Agree

**I feel respected by my provider \***

1  
Strongly Disagree

2

3

4

5  
Strongly Agree

**I look forward to sessions with my provider \***

1  
Strongly Disagree

2

3

4

5  
Strongly Agree

**I feel that I am making progress towards my goals \***

1  
Strongly Disagree

2

3

4

5  
Strongly Agree

Is there anything else you would like us to know? Keep in mind, sharing specific details may result in this survey no longer being anonymous.

If you would like a member of leadership or administration to follow up with you, please leave your contact information below.

Another critical way Stardom acquires knowledge about customer satisfaction is through decreased deviant or negative behaviors. In the segment pertaining to children, parents many times want to quantify change in behavior and look forward to 30% or sometimes 100% behavioral change. Leaders of Stardom believe their system to be efficient and second to none as many of their clients have remained with the company for more than 5 years.

### **Results Triad: Workforce, Operations, and Results**

The focus of the results triad is on the organization's workforce, operational processes, and results. There are essential practices that a company must employ for continuity as it grows and develops with long-term and short-term challenges that consistently arise (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021). The program emphasizes the pivotal need for leaders to develop an engaged workforce with efficient systems, processes, and performance results that are aligned to the company mission and vision (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021). For visual overview and information about the structure of the Criteria for Performance Excellence Overview, see Figure 11.

Figure 11

*Criteria for Performance Excellence Overview*

*Note.* From *2021–2022 Baldrige Excellence Framework: Proven Leadership and Management Practices for High Performance*, by Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021, U.S. Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology (<https://www.nist.gov/baldrige/publications/baldrige-excellenceframework>). In the public domain.

I chronicled and assessed Stardom’s results triad processes as it related to the approach, growth, learning, and integration as stated in the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program to determine Stardom’s relevance of their performance and strategies toward business continuity. Efficient companies utilize an integrated approach to align strategic and operational goals to their needs (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021). For context, knowledge transfer succession plan achievement ensures a need for levels of knowledge sharing coupled with the needed resources. Knowledge sharing is

needed for strategic company growth and business continuity (Ncoyini & Cilliers, 2020). Organizations with dynamically evolving resources must constantly modify toward purpose and their processes, to have quality continuous results, and competitive advantage. Miethlich and Oldenburg (2019) emphasized that long-term management of human capital resources related to intelligence, culture, diversity, and workforce experience, contributes to the value of the company towards competitive advantage. In the following text, description, and analysis will be explored on workforce-focused processes, key operational processes, and the performance results that derive from these processes.

### **Workforce**

Stardom is a small company consisting of 40 permanent staff including a canine therapist, behavioral therapy intern, and a counseling intern. There are full-time behavioral and counseling therapists and ancillary staff as well. These individuals, including the CEO and co-owner take care of the day-to-day direct needs of the clients. Other functions like legal and HR functions are outsourced through a weekly retainer for legal matters and software for HR functions. The CEO of Stardom believes that the human resources of a company are the lifeblood of the company. Without the quality and valued staff, the company standards and policies would not be outstanding. People are responsible for maintaining high standards and assisting in an organization's competitive edge (Collins, 2020). The CEO establishes the policies and procedures disseminating the information to the compliance board and dedicated team. The procedures are

implemented in alignment with the mission and vision and with terms and scope of work enabling valued and quality-assured systems in the workforce.

Stardom has not made a concerted effort on diversity and inclusion but does not tolerate discrimination of any kind. The goal is to have people from all walks of life to be a part of the company and to access the services. The workforce is set up for high achievers and the leadership makes no excuses for the high standards expected. The state has the final say about qualification requirements for positions. A bachelor's degree in human services and a license. The license is temporary for 2 years. For supervisory positions, the staff must have a master's degree, license, and 3 years of experience. Then there must be 5 years of training before the official supervision of other counselors. For special areas of therapy like play therapy for children, there must be 2 extra years of supervision and 7 years of experience. Exit interviews of clients help for workforce improvement and quality improvement meetings are key drivers of Stardom's workforce.

### ***Workforce Environment***

The high standards that Stardom expects by hiring achievers assist with maintaining company ideals. The leaders set example by achieving high grades and exceptional quotas. The staff are not pressured to be specific in the way they get the job done so that they can be innovative and creative with their work. Each department follows the procedures given which are aligned to procedures set by the leaders and to strategic goals. The following subsections describe critical attributes of the company's workforce environment from recruitment onwards.



**Workforce Capability and Capacity.** Stardom recruits qualified high achievers to deliver high quality services. The applications are carefully chosen and shortlisted according to the departmental needs. Each applicant undergoes three stringent interviews to ensure the right knowledge, skills, attitudes, abilities, and competencies correspond to company standards. Capability must be suited to the specific therapy the candidate is being interviewed for. Understanding the therapies and counseling practical and tacit components are key to acceptance into Stardom. For understanding of Stardom's environment and standards Interns are preferred to begin the journey of succession into the company. Two interns are brought in: one for counseling and the other for the behavioral therapy department. There is training and shadowing for staff who exemplify the three pillars of the company which are proven ability, trainability, and dependability. Each level from interns to supervisors and vice presidents has shadowing and training for upward mobility. Career mapping is a part of the upward succession when staff's capabilities match the three pillars of Stardom.

**Recruitment, Hire, Onboard.** Stardom begins recruitment from within the company. Personalities are assessed and check-ins include self-care goals of the candidate. The check-ins are weekly with supervisors to identify whether they are dependable, trainable, and have proven ability. An ethics test must be taken because of the nature of the positions. This was added to the recruitment process after an unethical dilemma with a staff including a client which was false billing. The therapist was reported to the ethics board of licensure and Medicaid for violating ethical codes. The information was publicized to send a message to all staff. The potential candidate must

take an ethical test until 100% is gained so that a great understanding of ethical expectations is clear.

When internal candidates do not meet the criteria for a position Stardom leaders recruit externally. Preferably recommendations from the board or reputable staff prevent costly advertising and lessen the risk of unethical people. Most times recommendations work better as people do not want to let down their proposers. Other recruits are found through advertising and the leaders prepare the terms of reference for the scope and expectations. The recruitment policies depending on the level of the position start with a bachelor's degree for counseling and supervisory positions must have a master's degree. HR is outsourced; therefore, the CEO and senior managers assist with interviewing. Three interviews on general company situations and soft skills questions are asked in the first interview. The second interview includes therapy and counseling questions which include practical decisions. The third interview includes ethical testing and further questions on the three pillars Stardom leaders expect. The successful candidate gets a Job description that includes company services, chain of hierarchy and reporting, scope of work, key tasks, and general and specific responsibilities of the duties.

**Workforce Change and Diversity.** At Stardom change is met with resilience. The workforce experienced changes a few times with one of the times being through the sudden illness of a valued staff member and had to bounce back and get a replacement. Lessons were learned to have succession planning with successors readily trained to take the mantle. The leaders were able to move forward by sharing the workload though it was not easy. The CEO learned about strategic depth and how it builds on a secure base of

training to have succession and deal with loss whether short-term or long term. Stardom did not strategically set out to incorporate diversity, but core values surround equality and equity.

**Workforce Benefits and Policies.** The staff at Stardom enjoy freedom from being micro-managed. Leaders at Stardom expect a 40-hour week, but it can be done however employees see fit as long as quotas are met, and responsibilities are accomplished. This benefit allows employees to grow and be innovative and creative. It also allows for emergencies and staff can work flexibly from home or other locations. Challenges at work can affect workers' emotional and physical well-being (Kronenwett & Rigotti, 2022). Stardom leaders assist with staff insurance and workers and their families receive free and discounted therapy. The upward mobility plan is a great benefit to employees. There are also bonuses for the therapist when they work 90-hour weeks and surpass their quotas. Another great incentive is that vice presidents are aware of a succession plan to own the company in 10 years.

Stardom's main policies surround ethical behavior. Professional conduct is always expected and a culture and climate of respect for others. Confidentiality and protecting clients and their rights are at the forefront of Stardom's policies. According to Summerville et al. (2024), programs that encourage and stimulate mental, physical, and social well-being must be inclusive of diversity to encourage ease in the workplace as well as for customers. Though Stardom leaders do not go out of their way to mention diversity, the staff compliment is diverse starting with the CEO. When staff have overall wellness, they tend to contribute better towards work and make better decisions. Some

social contributions for Stardom's employees include monthly lunch outings and Christmas parties, with themed retreats in January. The most important benefit and policy that the company subscribes to is the chapter 24 code of conduct accreditation for people with mental illness and disabilities. This code protects both staff and clients alike.

**Workforce Health, Security and Accessibility.** Work environments must be extensive in practices that promote health, accessibility, and security for employee safety. Stardom maintains a culture of training and cross-training to ensure learning throughout the organization. Learning is inclusive of therapy content as well as health, safety, security threats, and accessibility. At Stardom priority is given to the health and safety of workers including the compliance board. Stardom subscribes to and continuously review safety policies. One policy that is inclusive of training and supervisory instruction is the Health and Safety model adopted globally (Chen et al., 2020). The Department of Labor in the United States is one of the countries which has special monitoring of employers' compliance and safeguards' employee's right to work in a secure, safe, and healthy environment (Chen et al., 2020). Stardom also plans to extend the workplace by maximizing accessibility in eliminating barriers that prevent people with disabilities from working to their potential or accessing services.

### ***Workforce Engagement***

**Drivers of Engagement.** The leaders of Stardom maintain an engaging work environment that encourages high quality, innovative, and committed employees. The committed workers accomplish results reflective and aligned to the mission, vision, and values of the company (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021). The CEO of

the organization developed a plan of succession to have the vice presidents as successors in 10 years and prepared a plan of readiness for the succession. The strategic plan is inclusive of consultancy, training and development, and space to grow. A consultancy was established to attain opportunities for improvement through a Walden University DBA student. Training and development through online learning and leadership is continuous as a culture of positive decision-making is inculcated within the organization. Achievement of sustainable goals aligned with company vision is also instilled through training and practice to strengthen employee leadership skills. The leadership of Stardom often exits the organization to encourage space for growth and healthy decision-making in their absence. The longer the vacation without work and worry the more growth is realized for a successful succession plan.

**Organizational Culture.** The leadership at Stardom works hard to create a culture of ownership and loyalty. The role of leadership is to foster an atmosphere that assists all staff in understanding their role in the present and future success of the company. The engagement and consistent shadowing, training, and development embody succession strategies and striving for excellence. All levels are given the opportunity to grow and be responsible for their successes, which mirrors the success of the organization. Workers are encouraged to bring up any grievances at weekly check-ins and monthly meetings to mitigate against threats or any conflict that may affect the image of the company. The meetings are part of a strategy to listen to and resolve the concerns of staff for efficient and effective business continuity. Meetings are also a means of setting goals, directing, and redirecting for thorough analysis and decision making for

future successes. There is individual grading that excites and motivates the staff to work within an excellent framework. The workers are also taught and expected to improve when constructive criticism is given and must understand it enhances their work and by extension the company's worth.

**Performance Management and Development.** Performance management and development that includes a strategy and policies to enhance the results, promote excellence in a company's niche. The monitoring and evaluation systems both Individual and at the organizational level must match job descriptions and align with the mission and vision of the company. Stardom aligns work to upward mobility and going beyond duty brings rewards in the form of bonuses. Performance management and development of the workforce is executed through a framework that is extended to individuals as well as teams. Individual training is comprehensive, covering a wide range of areas for succession. Ethical training, regulatory compliance, therapy and counseling techniques, behavioral techniques, and soft skills for professional enhancement. The organization leaders encourage systematic surveys for feedback to measure impact against the desired and planned outcomes.

Career development is consistently discussed, as Stardom understands the necessity for all departments to maintain knowledgeable successors. All supervisors and managers work with subordinates to assist them in understanding their role at Stardom and for their overall growth. There is always measurement of the staff competencies using key performance indicators (KPIs) against strategic objectives essential for the effectiveness and success of the business.

**Succession Planning.** To avoid business continuity failure organizations must prepare for succession processes through knowledge transfer for generational stability and success. For organizations to remain relevant survival strategies are imperative especially in this competitive business environment that exists globally (Odiachi et al., 2023). It is critical that businesses consider the competitive aspect of business continuity to strategize according to market trends and company changes. Taking for granted the present success of a business is not sufficient as new companies are being built constantly and are always competing for survival. Change is faster than it used to be as technology makes things evolve at unusual speeds. Stardom leaders believe that their company has the edge as they have invested in innovative resources and have a high-quality program. The leaders do not look at other companies as threats and have relaxed as many companies come on the market with a similar niche as theirs and close their doors after a short existence. Though the CEO sees the company as a cut above the rest, there is a strategic succession plan in place. After 10 years, Stardom's CEO and co-owner plan to move on and sell the company to the successors who are now vice presidents. The successors are being trained, developed, and are shadowing the leaders who also allow them space to grow and make company decisions.

**Equity and Inclusion.** Though the leaders of Stardom do not make a deliberate effort to ensure diversity, one of the core values is equity. The leaders believe that every employee must be treated fairly and given a fair chance from recruiting to upward mobility. All that is asked of employees is to maintain high standards for client satisfaction. Every client must be treated fairly and with respect and to ensure that is

accomplished there are surveys and grievance forms designed to capture customer satisfaction. Figure 10 gives an account of the survey questions asked for analysis of customer satisfaction. Equity and inclusion take the form of ensuring nondiscrimination and in therapy and counseling environments gender, race, and demographics are to be a non-issue. Careful consideration must be given to language in these environments to ensure clients feel safe. Summerville et al. (2024) suggested that language can be devastating to individuals in the workforce if not chosen wisely. Stardom takes pride in training workers in soft skills and counseling skills to mitigate against language that suggest discrimination and non-inclusion. The leaders of Stardom have also extended their training offerings to the wider public, inclusive of in-person training and podcasts.

### **Operations**

There are many factors that are critical to the successful delivery of services to valued customers. Continued quality of the operations is essential for strategic longevity of an organization. When organizational leaders manage and implement strategies that are innovative, improve processes, and services, effectiveness and improved operations result as well as customer satisfaction (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021). A framework of Knowledge transfer assists companies with sustainability and business continuity. Odiachi et al. (2023) maintained that strategic choices through succession planning allows organizations to achieve competitive advantage. Stardom has high quality services that are available for individuals of all walks of life. Even a therapy dog is available for their clientele. There are online services, in person in the office, as well as home visits. Surveys are also done frequently to find out what customers need and



brought to weekly and monthly meetings. Leaders continuously upgrade their services according to ideas from the board, staff, and new services through reading and research.

### ***Work Processes***

**Process Design.** Through Stardom's wide range of services, client's needs are met and upgraded according to survey results and research. Support services are not specifically personalized but are developed and delivered based on general preferences and needs. Stardom's CEO believes in therapy environments people must be treated the same for proper tracking of techniques. A master planning model through HR software tested and adopted called Bambee is used to create process. Other approaches inclusive of forms for information and grievances are used by Stardom's team to amass data to inform the decision-making process on process design. Information from stakeholders, families, and service users assist to ensure the services are relevant and satisfying. Though these strategies facilitate growth and competitive edge researching other companies with similar niches are essential. Odiachi et al. (2023) mandated organizations to research the impact of other companies as sustainability is an all-inclusive strategy to sustain present and future competitive advantage. Sometimes new companies emerge and surprise companies who otherwise felt they had nothing to worry about. Coopetition, which means gaining multiple alliances to form an ecosystem which grows into a competition war zone, can cause innovation disruption for organizations (Shang & Chiu, 2023). Shang and Chiu (2023) encouraged leaders to have a plan for unforeseen emergencies. Stardom leaders has a business continuity plan developed in the previous years, in the event of failure to pay workers, natural disasters, death, and other absent worker reasons.

A reserve of funds as a back up to pay over 5 years of salaries, continuous training and development in all departments, guidance on emergency lines, generators, and actions for disasters, and a Will detailing company and finance actions. This plan assists with resilience and agility in protecting the company's future. The CEO is the lead in all activities and actions.

### ***Operational Effectiveness***

One of the measures Stardom leaders put in place is cyber security to reduce the risk of cyber-attacks. This measure is a proactive move for operational effectiveness and prevention from operation interruptions. Stardom leaders also believe in maximizing value and minimizing waste which keeps the company lean. The CEO recognizes that this approach facilitates resilience. The giant emergency fund in reserve is also a means to stay resilient. In 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic no one was laid off as the fund was used to subsidize during shutdowns.

Another plan Stardom has in place is liquidation of assets in case of an emergency. Covid-19 pushed Stardom to move all services online and the offices remain closed. Stardom leaders are also determined to always hire the right professionals to deliver high quality services that are efficient. The compliance board of directors and other partners also inform the leaders of new practices for quality assurance. In all departments, there is shadowing, training and development, and career mapping. Other benefits assist staff in being effective, such as life and health insurance, free counseling, free counseling training, and free attorney assistance. Staff got birthdays off and can work from home 2 to 3 days a week after the physical offices were opened. There are also

book clubs, dinners, and retreats. Stardom is accredited by the chapter 24 administration code and must maintain high standards of service no matter the location. Audit checks are made annually to ensure mental health practices are in accordance with the law in that state. Accreditation can be given for a 2-year or 4-year period and must be renewed for continued service.

### **Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management**

To remain successful in business there is a need for measurement, analysis, and knowledge management. Competition is inevitable and companies must constantly improve what they do as changes take place in the global market. As change takes place, data, institutional knowledge, and information are measured and analyzed to improve and achieve performance excellence that is continuous (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021). The goal in using this framework is to ensure continuous learning and agility (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021). There is constant reassessment and adaptation as processes are managed and audited towards performance excellence. The leaders of Stardom use the results to inform their decision making. Zhang et al. (2020) debated that performance management systems are critical to improve employee performance as they stimulate organizational learning and links tasks to decisions and outcomes.

Stardom leaders used measurements to analyze employee performance to ensure standards were being kept. Han et al. (2021) stated that leaders have used measurements to analyze employee performance and quality of work and encouraged the drive towards excellence. The capacity of a company is within the human resource and leaders can use

the analysis results to maximize competitive advantage. Monthly audits and surveys are used by Stardom to gain data on staff input and information in the process of measurement of performance improvement toward business continuity.

### ***Measurement, Analysis, and Improvement of Organizational Performance***

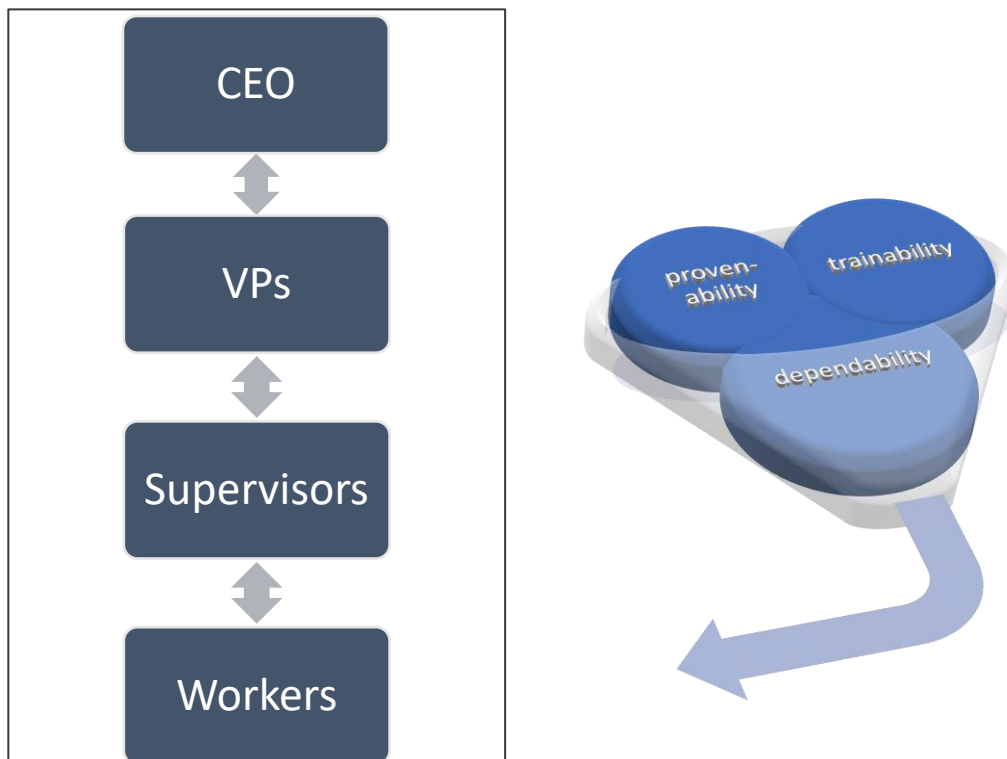
Competition necessitates performance improvement for superior performance. Critical to competitive advantage is the analysis of company data in comparison to other similar companies. Comparative data from the industry creates a knowledge base for companies to benchmark their own performance through consistent analysis of workers outputs (de Waal, 2021). Although Stardom has a unique set of services in the state it resides in, there are over 47 other similar organizations with similar services. Stardom measures company performance by the high standards they hold their staff to and does not worry about other similar organizations.

Stardom is accredited by the state through chapter 24 for mental health. All the therapists who are employed with the company are licensed. Staff who counsel Stardom's clients must have no less than a bachelor's degree. The leaders of Stardom measure and analyze workers against the three pillars of Stardom, proven ability, trainability, and dependability. In audits supervisors assess the workers and the supervisors are also assessed by these standards and report to senior staff. The information in the department is used to begin career mapping for upward mobility. Shadowing of the supervisor is included with training and development for succession planning. After two months progress is checked for upgrading of training or selection. Figure 12 depicts a visual representation of assessment for upward mobility. Continuous learning is at the forefront

of the organization's priorities and pecuniary and other incentives toward upward mobility keeps staff motivated.

**Figure 12**

*Stardom's Assessment and Career Mapping*



***Information and Knowledge Management***

There is a high level of knowledge through qualifications at Stardom. From the CEO, a doctorate had been attained, master's degrees and bachelor's degrees bring knowledge to the company in mental health. Changes in all fields, especially mental health, evolve constantly, and therapists must upgrade and update their knowledge constantly. The CEO of Stardom believes that the organization must always be informed and retrieve quality data. Attending conferences on mental health and subscribing to

bulletins, news articles, and newsletters are part of the leadership routine. If information comes to the forefront and Stardom does not get documentation, then a call to state-heads are made.

Information is passed on in team meetings, weekly and monthly. During the monthly meetings staff are audited to ensure that they are knowledgeable, informed, competent, and to enquire about their possible upward mobility. There is also a response time where the CEO expects answers in 3 days or less and if it does not happen an email will automatically go back to the CEO. If there is a response the email does not go back. Though best practices are always needed for communicating information Stardom's leaders are aware that administrative stress can impede the process, especially when many tasks are being handled at the same time. Special efforts are made to mitigate stress for the workers who are taught to let go of tension stress through writing and expression. The use of knowledge and resources embedded in learning through delegation and sharing assists with sound decision making. Poblano-Ojinaga (2021) acknowledged that new ideas are developed through new concepts and embracing innovation and change. The CEO of Stardom believes that giving workers autonomy in work schedules relaxes their mind to think clearly and ensures efficient and effective dissemination and implementation of information. Futuristic decisions are guided by change when there are issues to be rectified, and by the mission and vision inclusive of succession planning. The positive feedback and results from clients prove the effective use of knowledge management, measurement, analysis, and performance has been the foundation for continuous improvement to reach Stardom's goals and financial stability.

The foundation of the Baldrige systems perspective is Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management. Information in this section is critical to effective management and leadership, and to a fact-based, knowledge-driven, agile system for improving performance and competitiveness. By describing processes for Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management, you support the Leadership Triad and the Results Triad.

### **Collection, Analysis, and Preparation of Results**

#### **Thematic Findings**

The purpose of this single case study was to explore strategies small business leaders use to develop and implement succession plans. The conceptual framework used was knowledge transfer to address the following research question: What strategies do small business leaders use to develop and implement succession plans? The knowledge transfer framework was based on Woodworth and Thorndike (1901), who studied how people learn and the mental processes for training. Stardom was the organization chosen for consultation with two main leaders, a CEO, and a co-owner. Stardom is a mental health multifaceted service institution situated in the Midwestern parts of the United States. Stardom began implementation of a 10-year succession plan to guarantee future business continuity. Through the knowledge transfer theory coupled with the Baldrige Excellence Framework, I collected data in the form of semistructured interviews from two Stardom leaders. I assessed company documents, and available information on Stardom's web page. Using the Baldrige Framework seven category criteria, I interviewed the CEO in depth on the organization's strategy, process, and performance.

There was also in-depth discussion of the interview questions with the CEO and another leader. Interview durations ranged from approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour. To foster an environment of trust I ensured confidentiality and privacy by assigning a pseudo name Stardom to the company and named the participants speaker 1 and 2. The interviews were conducted via telephone and Zoom audio. Data analysis was conducted through Yin's (2018) thematic analysis approach and the results of the data analysis revealed the following themes: (a) employee and leadership audits, (b) career mapping for succession planning, and (c) transferring knowledge through shadowing, training, and strategic depth.

***Thematic Finding 1: Employee and Leadership Audits***

The two leaders interviewed echoed similar sentiments on the themes captured through data collection. The first theme that emerged was employee and leadership audits. The two leaders' focal point centered around finding the right fit for supervisor positions and for employee understanding of the organization. Speaker one stated that every employee and leader should know their role and their link to company goals. The employees and leaders are audited monthly and quarterly for trouble shooting and finding out what they may be struggling with. Speaker two emphasized the necessity of monthly and quarterly audits for employees and leaders to understand their role and other roles in the company and take responsibility for ensuring company goals are met when other staff are not available. Strengthening a company's knowledge base in company culture ensures understanding of roles and responsibilities aligned with goals. Pivec and Potocan (2021)

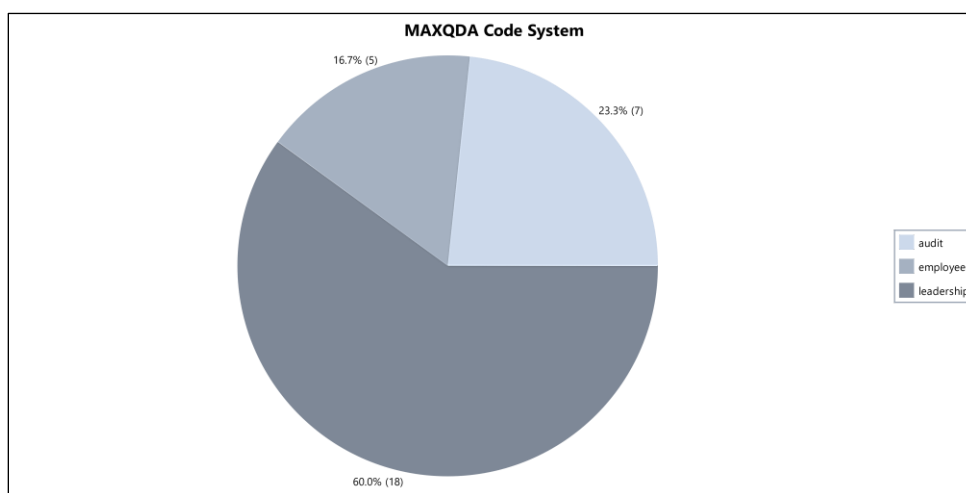


maintained that strength of culture on knowledge transfer improved employee and leader performance.

Audits are important to expose strengths and weaknesses of employees and leaders. Speaker, one expressed the need for staff to state their goal expectations so that their goals match company goals especially the three pillars proven ability, trainability, and dependability. Speaker two expressed that expectations must be met during audits and employees and leaders should reveal needs for training. Sometimes through audit checks, expectations and needs are revealed. In the research interviews audit, employee, and leadership were mentioned several times forming relevant themes. Figure 13 depicts frequency of employee and leader audit themes, through the MAXQDA coding.

**Figure 13**

*Audit, Employee, and Leadership Regularity*



Stardom leaders believe that finding the right leadership involves auditing employees to find the right fit. The company leaders ensure frequent auditing of the work ethic, attitudes, and learning abilities of employees and leaders in all departments for

upward mobility and substitution of work for sustainability. Odiachi et al. (2023) echoes the first thematic finding and stated that finding the right leader among employees is critical and must be done through stringent measures that weigh company survival. Stardom audits for best fits for upward mobility take place weekly, monthly, and quarterly to ensure important gaps and opportunities are not overlooked.

Thematic finding 1, also aligns with the conceptual framework for this study. Knowledge transfer is imperative in finding the right employee and leader passing on knowledge ensuring the employee is the right fit for available positions or potential positions in the event of absenteeism. Woodworth and Thorndike (1901) began the journey of mindset for learning and finding people who could process and implement consistently. Stardom constantly seeks high level workers that are stimulated and meet their company's three pillar criteria, which is proven ability, trainability, and dependability.

### ***Thematic Finding 2: Career Mapping for Succession Planning***

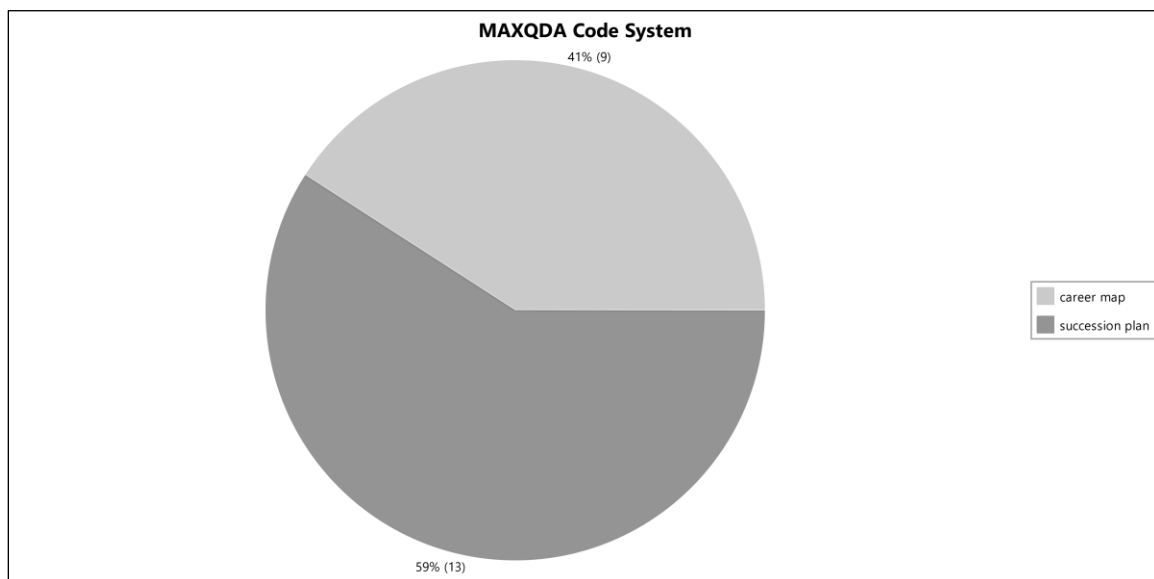
It is critical that companies use career mapping for clear understanding of careers for employees, upward mobility, and succession planning. For employees career mapping must be a journey in the knowledge of learning and development for what their interest or progress in the business world. Mapping assists with understanding where you are and what you want to accomplish. For upward mobility, the understanding of the path is essential and the requirements of the job or market. Mapping careers for succession planning depends on the company sustainability strategic plan and goals. Stardom's career mapping is significantly tied to departmental needs and leadership in case of

vacation, illness, death, or any absenteeism of an employee. The leaders insist that business continuity is critical, and any absence can interrupt the flow of work. Halsne (2019) recognized the necessity of company need to recognize development of selected people to replace critical positions when individuals have left. Career mapping must be continuous as change in people circumstances are unpredictable. Odiachi et al. (2023) stated that the business environment has made survival strategies imperative for company planning to have relevance, succession management, and sustainability. To ensure these contents of the created plan are implemented career mapping is essential to match the right positions. Stardom takes the mapping initiative seriously by continuous mapping both laterally for knowledge and for upward mobility and succession.

Stardom's career mapping begins from identification of staff who exemplify certain characteristic traits even in interviews and match them to the three pillars of their standards. If the individual does not have proven ability, trainability, and dependable traits they are not deemed a successful candidate. The training must be comprehensive for leadership as the right leader is to be chosen to drive organizational goals (Odiachi et al., 2023). When the need arises for upward mobility, staff are chosen through weekly, monthly, and quarterly meetings by supervisors and recommended for shadowing, position training and development, and strategic depth cross training done for absenteeism.

Driving organizational goals must be done efficiently and therefore the transference of knowledge is to be accurate and inclusive of company secrets. Stardom leadership believes that in using shadowing as a technique not only skills and knowledge

is passed on but company secrets of success. The knowledge transfer framework used for this study is relevant and fitting as the transference skills are needed to transfer the right information for success. Conway et al. (2019) studied the unwillingness of some leaders to have succession plans, causing lack of transference of knowledge and skills and destroying opportunities for upward mobility and continuity. Retarding company progress means retarding new policies and growth to meet changes in the fast-paced global environment. The lack of critical traits and processes for knowledge transfer results in poor governance and hinders the environment changes to be made for succession planning (Motoc, 2021). There can be no career path if there are no governance structures for mobility. Shirmohammadi et al. (2021) debated that career development is essential for expansion of horizons and succession planning. Expanding horizons means having agility for competitive advantage and career development includes understanding information being transferred (Henson, 2023). Career development through mapping is a strength Stardom has in developing human resources in preparation for succession planning. Figure 14 portrays the frequency of career mapping and succession planning themes through the MAXQDA coding.

**Figure 14***Career Mapping and Succession Planning Regularity****Thematic Finding 3: Shadowing, Training and Development, and Strategic Depth***

Leaders of organizations have an advantage when there is continuous shadowing, training and development, and strategic depth. Continuous shadowing, and training and development encourages knowledge and learning of new trends in the global business economy. Shirmohammadi et al. (2021) explained that human resource development interventions assist leaders in gaining their desired outcomes toward local, regional, and international business goals. The changes and growth of information in the business world needs educated and experienced workers to keep up with global fast-paced trends. There are many unrepresented new trends as organizations do not emphasize the need for knowledge transfer through learning, both internal and external business acumen in their niche (Shirmohammadi et al., 2021). Stardom leadership realized the need for workers to be educated and trained consistently for high standards and innovation in the working

environment. The education about the company's mission and vision cannot only come from business information and knowledge but from concepts and secrets that give the company a unique image. The know-how and marketing innovation combined with the resources and capabilities foster economic growth (Frias et al., 2023). The know-how represents shadowing and innovation, and capabilities result from training and development. The combination of shadowing and training and development enables knowledge transfer (Letonja et al., 2021).

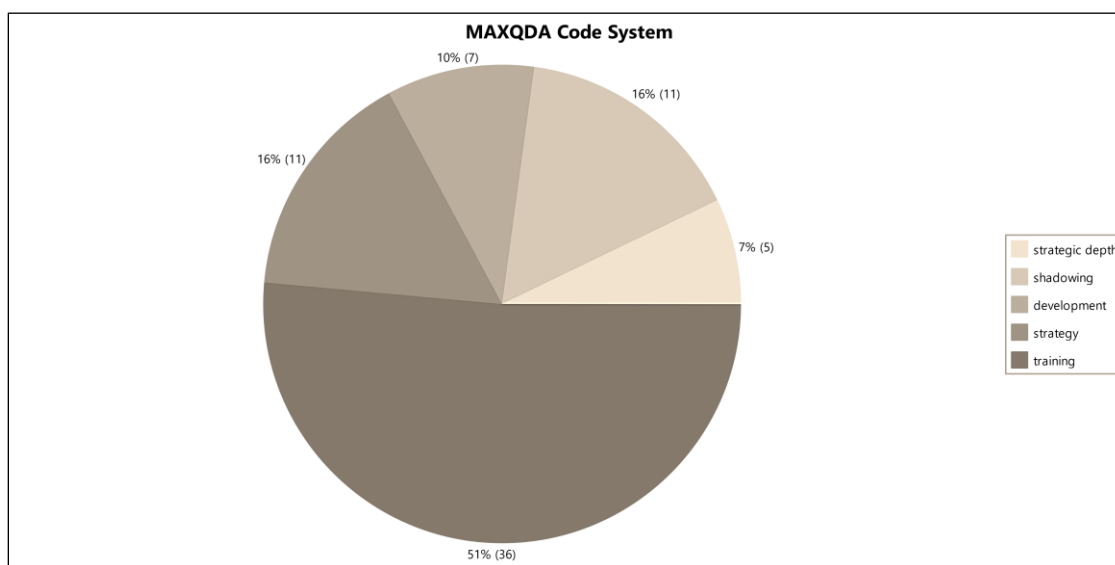
Knowledge transfer is the conceptual framework that grounds this research study. This conceptual framework knowledge transfer for succession planning was based on the foundation set by Woodworth and Thorndike (1901) who dissected the way in which people learn and the psychological processes it entails to be trainable. Stardom leaders recognized the need for trainable individuals to be involved in the company if continuous succession is to be achieved. As a result of this recognition, Stardom ensured that the pillars of the company included proven ability and trainability as pillars for staff to achieve.

The latter part of thematic finding 3 includes strategic depth which the CEO of Stardom introduced to the staff complement. The CEO described strategic depth as cross training for trainable and dependable members of staff who were ready for upward mobility, and long-term adaptability or for knowledge to replace anyone who needed a break, vacation, or had a negative circumstance. Changes in business industries are inevitable and there are strategic dilemmas that need the strategic depth of cross training to maintain their level of competitiveness (Shang & Chiu, 2023). Strategic depth is

preparedness or security that absorbs or mitigates against risks and negative outcomes, reduces vulnerabilities, and aids with riding through a storm (Finkel, 2023). Finkel regarded strategic depth as both defense and offense, where there is protection for the company from losing a critical person and seizing new opportunities. To mitigate against risk and be in a position of offense and defense requires financial reserves. Stardom has financial reserves and has chosen strategic depth to navigate risk as experience taught the CEO that illness, death, and other emergencies can come at any time. Substitute workers who are internal, dependable, and know the culture work best for company resilience. The key words that formed the third theme are found in Figure 15 where MAXQDA coding portrays theme three-phrase frequency and importance, gathered from the interviews.

**Figure 15**

*Shadowing, Training and Development, and Strategic Depth*



## Product and Process Results

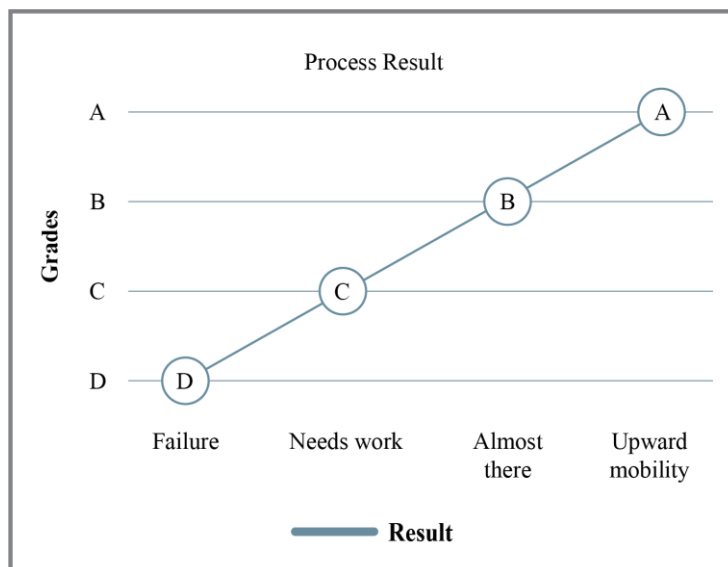
The leadership of Stardom attributes success through the client satisfaction survey and quota of clients per therapist. Mobility of staff and expansion of clientele also augurs well for success as numbers for a for profit organization means added profit. There is also the training and development that is factored into weekly check-ins and monthly meetings. Audits are a part of the meetings and grades are attached to motivate and show progress through process. 'A' grade, show quality of work and proven ability to work and be trained. An 'A' for upward mobility successors means clear understanding of the work that is to be done at a higher level. 'B' means almost there, and 'C' means work to be done. 'D' is considered not ready and if the candidate fails more than twice that could mean termination. The audits are not in the form of an exam, but more competency based, to check for gaps and see whether the candidate knows what to do and is doing it well. There is also strategic depth training that may not necessarily mean upward mobility but preparedness at all levels and departments to know jobs of all levels in case of any absence. A process result cycle and chart are found in Figure 16 and 17.

**Figure 16**

*Process Audit Cycle*





**Figure 17***Process Result Chart***Customer Results**

Most times customers do not fill out the surveys as they see Stardom as satisfactory. Sometimes there are comments, but they are usually positive. The leaders pride themselves in ensuring no discrimination. There are grievance forms for customers as Stardom deals with complaints in a very professional manner. A customer grievance form is displayed in Figure 18.

**Figure 18**

*Grievances Form*

**Stardom**  
Grievances

Client Name

First Name
  
Last Name

Name of person completing this form

First Name
  
Last Name

Email

  
example@example.com

Phone Number

  
(000) 000-0000  
Please enter a valid phone number.

Description of the concern: \*

Requested Resolutions:

\*  I understand that my written concern will be reviewed and investigated internally

I request that my concern be reviewed by the Stardom compliance board at their next quarterly meeting (January, April, July, October)

\*  I understand that all team members and/or contractors such as, but not limited to, board members, who might review this concern have signed confidentiality agreements to keep my personal health information protected

Stardom leaders do not believe the customer is always right and therefore have a system which includes meetings first when complaints by clients are lodged. Stardom would rather lose a client than lose a worker as the workers are deemed high achievers and are classified as rare. Although Stardom leaders put staff first, they are expected to treat customers with utmost care and attention. Stardom clients are to stay in sessions for up to 5 years. Because the services are mainly counseling and therapy there must be consent and clients are free to leave if they want to (see National Commission for the

Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Most clients stay for the course of the therapy, the few that leave usually leave at the beginning of the sessions. Customers are held responsible for the frequency of their sessions. The leaders of Stardom take into consideration those who start and remain, those who miss sessions and those who leave. Stardom leaders understand that they have no control over people's goals and therefore respects customer decisions. Clients set their own goals except when they are minors and parents set the goals. Expectations vary as sometimes parents want to see behavioral change with decreases of 30% and others want 100%. Data is collected on no shows as 24-hour notice should be given. If customers do not show up more than 3 times the file is closed.

That data is evaluated and exit interviews are used to find out reasons for patterns of behaviors. A suggestion form displayed in Figure 19 is used to get suggestions from clients for decision making to comprehend how to provide optimal services to them. The customer is also covered through a confidentiality clause to enable trust. Stardom has a great reputation with customer referrals and organizational referrals, being the largest source for its customer base. Schools are one of the biggest referral groups as many behavioral issues surface there. Some of the issues noticed are related to learning disorders and bullying. The CEO of Stardom stated that the remarkable relationships built through the company results in free public relations for the professional way in which customers are handled.

**Figure 19***Suggestions Form*

## Stardom

Suggestions

**Client Name**

First Name
Last Name

**Name of person completing this form**

First Name
Last Name

**Email**

example@example.com

**Phone Number**

(000) 000-0000

Please enter a valid phone number.

**Description of the suggestion: \***

I request that my suggestion be reviewed by Stardom compliance board at their next quarterly meeting (January, April, July, October)

\*  
 I understand that all team members and/or contractors such as, but not limited to, board members, who might review this suggestion have signed confidentiality agreements to keep my personal health information protected

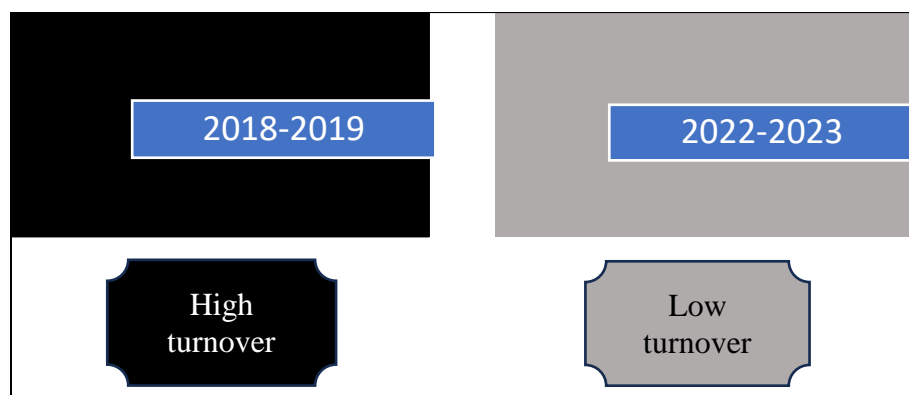
**Workforce Results**

Stardom's workforce climate is results oriented and high standards are expected, that is why the pillars of the company hinges on proven ability, trainability, and dependability. The human resources at Stardom are treated with respect and trust as the leaders are aware that the success of the organization relies on them. An environment of

low stress, expressing ideas, and rest is strengthened and encouraged. The CEO insisted that staff are allowed to make their own hours if they meet their quotas for the week and month. The hours must only consist of 40 hours a month for life balance to be successful, avoid burnout, and produce at a high standard of quality service. The expectations of the leaders regarding quality service seemed to be a concern in the few years before Covid-19 as the staff turnover was higher than after the natural phenomenon. Figure 20 is a visual aid to strengthen the understanding of the changes before the COVID-19 pandemic and after. After the health disaster, that led Stardom to go completely digital, the company leaders decided to continue with a hybrid approach. Ng et al. (2022) made similar reference to digital changes by his statement that, digitization is critical for strategic planning for workforce development. Though Stardom recognizes the importance of digitization, the leader's decision has been to outsource IT assistance. Most of the time IT assistance seemed minimal in recent years as many hours were spent at home.

### Figure 20

*Staff Turnover Before and After COVID-19*



Therapists and counselors are efficient and professional whether they work from home or in the office. The CEO expressed her satisfaction that the staff exceeded expectations most of the time. The only lamentable issue is that the staff does not have a lot of control over what they do because they are state regulated. How they do their work is easier to manage and new forms of engaging clients emerged in 2021- 2023. Home visits and telehealth became more popular whether it was behavioral therapy or counseling. Sometimes therapy may crossover and depending on client needs services may overlap. Figure 21 showcases a clearer understanding of overlapping and crossover services. As the services are critical there must always be a succession of staff for positions in all departments and at all levels. Knowledge transfer has been a constant at Stardom. The CEO recognized the need for consistent knowledge transfer as result of an unexpected tragic event. A key staff member suddenly announced a terminal illness, and it was difficult to find a replacement. Driving with the co-owner on a vacation, the CEO realized that if both were to pass what would be the demise of the company. These incidents triggered innovative thoughts that were then put into a strategic plan for action.

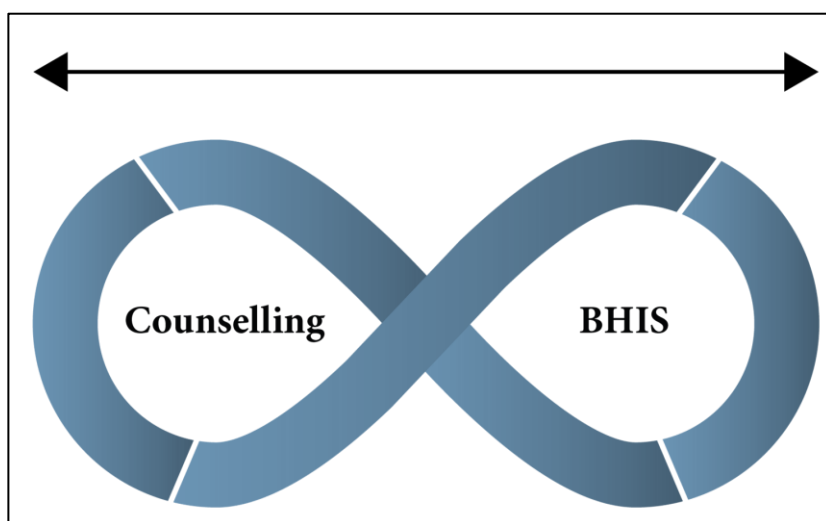
The plan was to have continuous training and development in all departments, laterally and for upward mobility. Further, shadowing was also introduced for learning from experiences on the job which included secrets of company success. Letonja et al. (2021) encouraged strategic plans through knowledge transfer which adds innovative stability to organizations. This practice enables succession through learning and creates a culture of high standards and ease of stress. When emergencies occur, there is always someone knowledgeable for replacement. Business continuity is maintained through

continuous training and development. Increasing employee engagement with company goals promotes the process of knowledge management towards succession planning (Sahibzada et al., 2023). Engaging the workforce with continuous knowledge creation reduces turnover and in turn improves culture, job satisfaction, and productivity.

Other measures incorporated into the policies and procedures of Stardom include qualifications, bonuses for going beyond the call of duty, and outings that include retreats. Qualifications are important at Stardom, if individuals do not have at least a degree they do not get an opportunity for an interview. Workers who are accepted and become a part of the employee community are treated equally to those who have been there. Because the CEO and other leaders recognize the value of human resources, pecuniary incentives for extra work are rewarded. Restaurant outings and retreats are also part of the culture to boost staff morale. There are also privileges granted to staff like in-house attorney privileges, free counseling services, and health insurance.

### **Figure 21**

*Crossover and Overlapping Services*



## **Leadership and Governance Results**

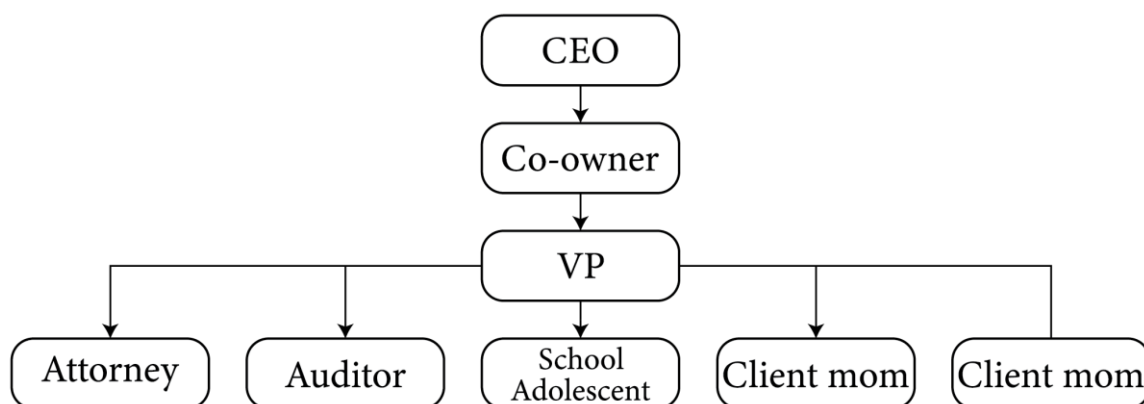
Leadership and governance must exemplify direction, structure, accountability decision making, mitigate conflict, and set the right examples for employees. Stardom leaders believe in leading by example and stimulating a learning environment. The CEO of Stardom, after deciding on having a 10-year strategic plan, began implementing training for upward mobility and continuous learning throughout the organization. Stardom leaders make things easier through a natural planning model to process ideas. The head stated that the David Allen model productivity tool for getting things done, is a great tool for processing ideas and is stress free. The CEO inspires hard work, trust, and loyalty by being kind and always communicating with the staff. That type of leadership is authentic leadership. Nawaz and Tian (2022) mentioned that leaders who encourage innovation and organizational learning boost company success and are labelled as authentic. Although Stardom leaders are authentic, they expect accountability. In 2014 the CEO introduced auditing of workers to ensure understanding of responsibilities and tracking of alignment to mission and vision. The audits were also to ascertain relevant job description factors were kept during career mapping and attitudes aligned with the three pillars of Stardom, proven ability, trainability, and dependability.

The three pillars of Stardom were developed for quality assurance and to drive advancement into new and better roles. Weekly and monthly audits would reveal alignment to the three pillars determining selection for shadowing, training, and Strategic depth workshops. Information or mistakes inform decisions and new programs through audits and meetings. The vice presidents were chosen and upgraded through auditing and



alignment to Stardom's three pillars, they are considered part of the leadership team. The CEO has the final say on all decisions, although great consideration is given to the co-owner, board of directors, and vice presidents. Figure 2 exhibits a visual aid of the organizational structure.

The CEO leads the board of directors as the president and founder of Stardom qualified with a PHD and licensed as a therapist. The board of directors is comprised of eight members and is a compliance board for chapter 24 accreditation of mental wellness and disabilities. The members of the board are there to support and make suggestions and the board does not get audited. The CEO's husband is the chief compliance officer on the board and supervises the administrative person. On the board, there are two moms of clients, an attorney, a school adolescent, an auditor, and an alternating vice president (VP) always. There are quarterly meetings and a quorum of four is sufficient to commence proceedings. If a VP is not present the meeting is postponed. Figure 22 is a visual aid of the board composition. Though Stardom's CEO and co-owner are married the company is not seen as a family business, because the vice presidents are considered the successors of the company. The only child is not considered a successor, but provisions had been made to cushion ill fate or untimely death of her parents.

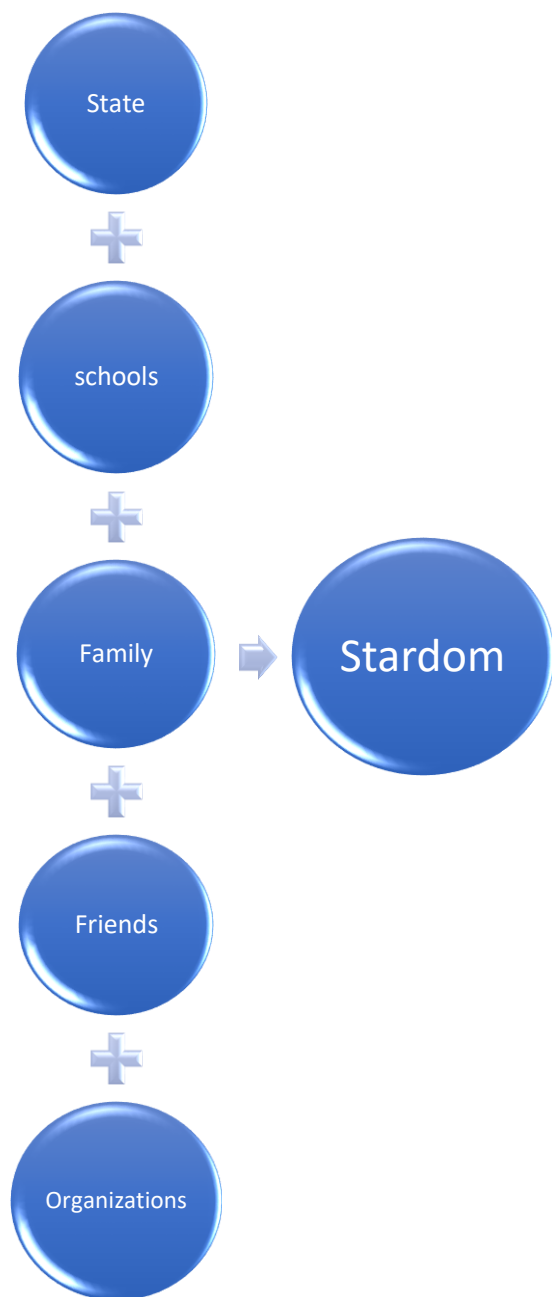
**Figure 22***Board of Directors Composition***Financial and Market Results**

Stardom's financial standing is remarkable, as there is a reserve to pay staff more than 5 years if there is a financial downturn. During Covid-19 Stardom survived without terminating anyone. The company went remotely online from the seven locations and was able to take care of all expenses. During the lockdown there was a higher demand for services. Stardom's niche is counseling and therapy and though there are 47 companies similar surrounding the organization the leaders do not see them as threats or competitors. Financial stability is enjoyed by the company as the state refers clients, schools and other companies do the same, as well as families and friends. Figure 23 gives a clearer picture of the client base of referrals. The main services are as follows: Therapy services, Behavioral health intervention services (BHIS), Telehealth, BHIS & Therapy FAQ, Counselor podcasts, and training for providers. There are also many other support services available portrayed in Figure 9. The CEO of Stardom confidently stated that there have been many new entrants on the market and before a year or 2 they folded. The

leaders believe that they offer a wide range of services that companies cannot compete with. The leaders do not collect comparative data for competitive advantage. According to Odiachi et al. (2023), competition is constant and new incumbents are inevitable and usually do not give notice on market entrance. Companies are to investigate market trends and be ready for new vibrant companies. There are 47 similar companies that may expand and copy Stardom's niche. It would be wise to compare to see which one is closest and may expand for competitive advantage.

**Figure 23**

*Client Base of Referrals*



## **Key Themes**

### ***Process Strengths***

Continuous improvement is achieved through the approach used by leaders. Companies achieve operational excellence through planned processes that are effectively put in place (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021). Organizational context is key to methods used for process success. The process must include teaching, learning, integration, and implementation. The Baldrige Performance Excellence Program (2021) has information that is easy to understand, and the information is inclusive of best practices across departments and segments of work. Teaching means communication, that is clear and passed on from the top down to supervisors and workers. Leaders' transference skills must be effective for clear understanding of processes towards efficient implementation. Learning includes absorbing the information transferred interpreting it the right way and then putting the understanding into practice through processes. As time elapses there must be improvements made through innovation and change either from market trends or expansion and growth.

Stardom aligns all processes to mission, vision, and pillars of the company. Special care is taken to ensure continuously high standards are maintained by listening and acting towards client needs. Instruments for suggestions and complaints are also developed to give a sense of stability and trust to customers. Audits are in place to stimulate learning and growth and other workshops are used to promote ease of processes and workload. Shadowing, training and development, and business continuity are key for upward mobility using career mapping. Higher education is encouraged for self-

motivation and edification. According to the leaders of Stardom people must be trainable to be successful when trained. Knowledge transfer cannot be accessible without ready mindsets. Woodworth and Thorndike (1901) began the knowledge transfer mindset quest to understand the learning and mental processes for training. Stardom understands the need for mental stimulation and the success of the process only through trainable people.

Following industry and state best practices, Stardom leaders believe that the market share belongs to the company. The leaders are confident because they have highly skilled and trained workers, and a long line of support services that many companies, though similar do not serve. Many organizations have tried to compete, but the leaders have constantly seen their failure even before 1 year.

### ***Process Opportunities***

Stardom has a design that works, inclusive of main and support services which includes a canine with therapeutic skills. There are also many other support services available. During COVID-19, Stardom added other services to the reservoir of services, like home visits. Another important aspect of counseling was recognized by Stardom which is training trainers to external leaders and companies. The company has a design for improving and reviewing using an auditing and grading system. The system has great opportunity for upward mobility in all departments and if employees meet their quotas and pass the audit assessments at an 'A' level there is career mapping and promotions.

Though there is not a formal succession plan, Stardom leaders have expressed the processes, communicated the information to the successors, and put risk mitigators in place. The leaders have strategic depth in place and have drawn up a will for their child in

case of their untimely demise. Stardom's CEO has a timeline for succession which is 10-years. During that time span the leaders of the company continue auditing and training staff of all departments and all levels in the event someone must leave for emergencies or for relaxation purposes.

### ***Results Strengths***

As a result of the successful training scheme that Stardom has developed internally, other organizations have sought to engage Stardom for similar assistance. A new program emerged out of the training and became an external consultancy. Stardom has a training program that is for external individuals and companies in counseling and therapy techniques.

Other companies solicit assistance from the CEO to be a part of their board of directors' team. The role of the CEO is to guide organizations in how to deal with mental health issues and for training initiatives. These requests have increased the confidence of Stardom leaders and assisted with the relaxed atmosphere as it relates to comparative data seeking.

### ***Results Opportunities***

As a result of Stardom's lofty standards, highly skilled, and qualified employees, there is a chance that other cooperations can try to recruit the staff. There is also the possibility of the staff moving for higher paying jobs. Trust in companies has become a selling point for workers, they profess loyalty for organizations that invest in CSR. May et al. (2021) argued that the new generation expects corporate social responsibilities (CSR) to be high on the agenda for companies. Solovida and Latan (2021) stated that

companies with competitive advantage incorporate people, planet, and profit in their strategic plans. Stardom does some CSR by reporting and volunteering on boards, but more is expected. Other organizations also are in the business of investigating other companies for competitive advantage. These companies assess other companies in similar niches to themselves. They seek out comparative data for their company's advantage. In-house IT personnel for the new technologies and new age digitization can also be added to the company's corporate programs. Embracing these new opportunities and developing a documented strategic plan could sustain business continuity through long term succession.

### **Project Summary**

Succession planning has been underestimated for many years, and organizations have reaped negative repercussions as a result. Gehrke (2019) studied the effects of purposeful succession planning for avoidance of negative consequences in the succession process. Odiachi et al. (2023) stressed the importance of having the right leader with the right information to drive organizational goals continuously. Many companies have waited for someone to leave or die without transferring relevant information that cannot be retrieved and have had to close a department or the whole organization. That result gives rise to the purpose of this qualitative single case study that was to explore strategies small business leaders use to develop and implement succession plans.

I was attached as a research consultant to a Midwestern company in the United States, as the DBA requirement for the Consulting Capstone program at Walden University. I named the company Stardom, a pseudonym for privacy, and to protect the



organization's identity. The research was to find opportunities for improvement (OFI) and recommendations for succession planning. The general business problem was that some small business leaders do not effectively plan to ensure business continuity for succession of knowledge to serve their stakeholders and communities, which can result in the business being closed. The specific business problem was that some small business leaders lack strategies to develop and implement succession plans.

I used the knowledge transfer theory originated through (see Woodworth & Thorndike, 1901), as the conceptual framework to analyze the company systems and succession planning success. Stardom made available two leaders, the CEO, and another leader, to answer the interview questions. For accuracy and strategic data on succession planning. There were in-depth discussions on research opportunities for improvement and decision making towards the future. The research began with the organizational profile analysis in terms of gaps and challenges and included opportunities. After the profile analysis the first part of the Baldrige structure the leadership triad was deeply analyzed for leadership responsibilities and roles in governance and strategic planning. This was an intricate topic as the leaders were responsible for important communication of vision and mission aligned with workers scope of work. The importance of the mission and vision for Stardom family must encourage competitive edge which Stardom believes there should not be concern about.

The workforce results were also analyzed through the measurement and results analysis the shadowing, training and development with the strategic depth put in place by leadership assisted the auditing process for career mapping and upward mobility and

eventually successor readiness. This strategy gives rise to knowledge transfer for succession planning fostering innovative learning strategies and mind stimulation towards productivity. Woodworth and Thorndike (1901) originally projected the thoughts that mind stimulation was the key for learning and developing towards productivity and in turn long term business continuity. Weekly and monthly progress has been a strategic part of the process to ensure continuous high standards of service for continued successful survival.

After careful measurement and results analysis of the two triads of the Baldrige Excellence Framework, revelations of indulgence for more input into competitive comparative data was realized. The need for CSR planning details emerged as a conversation and more open discussion on more sharing of decision making at lower levels. A major area such as digitization was also a topic for discussion on internal IT and HR assistance for software development and advice to contemplate internal inclusion.

The leaders of Stardom work hard at maintaining the career mapping process and assessments. This best practice is continuous in all departments and at all levels. The understanding of all people and working through cultural differences makes the processes of work easier (Summerville et al., 2024). Human resources are a company's main asset therefore the investments and training for succession must be to their advantage for business continuity.

### **Contributions and Recommendations**

This study had revelations that can be useful to all companies that want to continue business transactions in the future. This study has been critical as succession

planning continues to be a challenge for small businesses, because succession of leadership and knowledge transfer in companies has been lacking (see Motoc, 2021). Many times, when leaders leave or any staff who have knowledge other employees lack there is a void and continuity in the department of leadership fails. When key members of an organization especially leaders leave in an untimely manner it retards growth in business continuity, hence the need for strategies. Stardom can utilize learning strategies from this study to further enhance their already thriving performance. The study will assist in proposing new opportunities to add improvement for innovation and seamless business continuity. There are also opportunities to maximize business competitive advantage continuously through CSR inclusion and community involvement.

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies small business leaders use for succession planning and implementation. Though the study was for a single case, many organizations can use the recommendations to mitigate against unexpected loss of key knowledge and information that could stagnate business departments and organizations. Teams working through diverse cultural circumstances and having equal opportunities for upward mobility encourage easier and quicker deliverables (Summerville et al., 2024). Succession planning for business continuity processes could also be made easier and of higher quality when all levels in departments have successors.

Recommendations for Stardom emerged from many dialogues and from the interview questions that were derived from the main interview question. The research question was: What strategies do small business leaders use to develop and implement

succession plans? Stardom had many strategies in place for leaders who left but through tragic circumstances realized that shadowing, and training through all departments and leadership, eases staff emergencies for taking time away from work. There were gaps that were found to increase Stardoms' competitive advantage and expand its business continuity for risks and unforeseen circumstances. Recommendations given were through themes found such as employee and leadership audits. The weekly check-ins and monthly audits assisted with finding weaknesses for change and upgrading staff who had excellent reviews more than twice. Constant upgrading of the organizational chart would make the company relevant and give hope to other staff of mobility in the organization. Apart from the compliance board, a consortium of leaders could assist and be responsible for different departments to ease responsibilities on the few vice presidents and the senior leaders. Bonuses, monthly rewards, and end of year awards could be added incentives. The second theme, career mapping for succession planning gives the individuals career paths to either succeed in the current job or move in a different direction. Policies for risk such as bonding after shadowing and training help to give back to the company and give time for proper replacements.

The third theme, employee and leadership audits brought forth facts of learning needs and talent improvement needs lacking in the company for upgrades and others lacked the knowledge around them. There were also general needs like the lack of a CSR detailed for social give-back, a strategic CSR plan for continuous image and loyalty was not documented (Hossain et al., 2020). CSR has become a necessity as new generations expect to work for jobs that are society and community committed.

### **Application to Professional Practice**

This study brings a new angle to the existing body of knowledge of succession planning through the conceptual framework, knowledge transfer. The Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework (2021) questions extracted information that made new implications for strategic succession planning. The practices of shadowing, training and development, and strategic depth throughout the organization is inevitable to keep the organization learning and moving with the right information to continue success. The application of key professional practices is critical and necessary for professional development and decision making for both employees and leaders.

The inclusive career mapping makes for strong principles and enhancement of personal careers. Upward mobility is inevitable and is a contributor to the overall success and business continuity of the organization. Leadership's audits both internal and external must contribute to problem solving, time management, and ethical adherence. As changes take place globally, especially with technology, companies have no choice but to become digitally competitive to have the efficient quick responses clients need. Satisfied companies invest in digitization and expect organizations to be versed and ready to meet their fast-paced needs (Nichols, 2022). Organizations are to comply with the expectations of global customers that is symbiotic with new technologically enhanced business practices.

One of the crucial things Stardom needs to take into consideration for business practice is the evolving changing needs of customers and not take for granted Stardom's large niche of customers. Customers can move from anywhere knowing they can work

remotely. Disruption and competition evolve very quickly influencing customer decisions on their behaviors and on company loyalty (Rizomyliotis et al., 2021). The rising needs for counseling and new ideas like inclusivity and others for diverse needs can change the needs of customers and in turn their loyalties. Organizations can move very quickly as they study each other's data for sometimes years to make their competitive move.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Social change refers to the causing of people, behaviors, cultures, and infrastructure to become different and more positive. Organizations use social change opportunities to get market share and competitive advantage. People and behaviors can change as people get employment. Cultures could be diverse and change both internal and external expectations and results of a company. These changes can influence training as people learn differently and tests are to be administered in different ways. The transference of teaching methods would have to change. A good example is the new technologies affecting all work environments through artificial intelligence called smart technology (Zhang & He, 2020). Many staff have been intimidated and slow in accepting changes. During COVID-19 just changing from classroom in-person teaching to online platforms had school closures around the globe.

Another important area for company concentration is the environment and community needs. Sometimes just involvement in community needs can bridge the distance gap between community and companies. Organizations do not know where to begin, but advocacy, podcasts, and news items could change the image of a company.

Mainly people want equity and justice, they want fair treatment. Companies are to ensure injustice is not a practice and further discrimination which attracts litigations.

### **Recommendations for Action**

The recommendations for action are opportunities for improvement on the already fascinating organizational processes in place through the Stardom leaders. The findings may be useful to business leaders and consultants. The recommendations are based on assessments, analysis, findings, and conclusions on the data from the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program (2021) and interview questions. New information emerged for competitiveness, CSR, and digitization.

Being competitive on the market means knowing what other companies in your niche are doing and ensuring it is done better. Stardom's leaders believe their diverse niche of mental wellness services are sufficient to relax and not worry about competition. Comparative information on similar agencies and new entrants is essential as this is common business practice to have companies surpass others in the market. In the area where Stardom is situated, there are 47 similar companies, and anyone can emerge with new services and prices to compete with Stardom. Stardom needs to begin comparative investigation on neighboring companies and research for possible entrants as a for profit company. Unities in evolving technological companies and others come together to achieve objectives and goals and compete on the market (Moon & Lee, 2021). Some companies come together sometimes to form allies against single companies for their demise.

CSR is another company attraction for high achievers. Hossain et al. (2020) stressed the importance of company CSR inclusion that enriches organization image and attracts brilliant young workers as well as loyal customers to its' doors. The concern and empathy from agencies resonate trust to both internal and external customers. Digitization has another profound effect on companies. Being current and showing speed through the internet attracts brilliance and educated individuals to organizations. This aspect also assists companies with being relevant enough to stay in business. These aspects escalate company growth. These findings for company growth can also be adapted by other industries where constant training and learning new strategies can keep them sustained for many years. Stardom outsources IT when most of the work has been moved to a digitized scope and network. As constant training is a strength of Stardom, an inside individual should be needed as constant IT upgrading and troubleshooting becomes a necessity for continuity.

Stardom must also have data that sell equality to staff. This would mean eliminating the notion that the customer is not always right. A great suggestion is to claim equality in every aspect so both internal and external customers feel valued and see the company as equitable. New policies for transparency and equity must be adopted to enhance relationships and customer loyalty for succession and business continuity. Industry leaders and consultants will be apprised of this new research through a newsletter, government gazette, conferences and training, the publishing of the capstone, and a new book, to ensure awareness and preparation for relevant information on knowledge and succession planning.



The awareness campaign to industry leaders and consultants on the new research, will be disseminated through the NSDC newsletter which is supplied to both Government agencies and private entities. Another action for disseminating the information would be through the requested reports to the education parliamentary representative, who is the minister for education and vocational training. The government gazette usually seeks new information from government agencies through its new print factory and government public relation officers. The results will also be presented to local community groups, and other stakeholders. Finally, Selma St. Prix, General Manager of the NSDC, will present the results at conferences to government officials, magistrates, and judges from the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) region and international partners.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The study for this research did not include significant financial aspects for business continuity. Researchers should take into consideration an extension for future research on the financial ramifications for succession planning. There is a great need to have an in-depth knowledge of the effects of finances on the continuity of a for-profit business. This study also had only two leaders for interviewing. Two leaders were the minimum to be interviewed at the time of the study. It would have been a more extensive study if there were more leaders to interview for better analysis of the company from the leaders' perspectives. Last of all this study only had the female gender for dialogue and interviews. A male perspective could have brought another type of input for analysis.

## **Reflections**

I was given an opportunity which was rare in two ways. Getting into the consulting capstone and having a chairperson who has been compassionate and gave great feedback to for ensuring success. Walden University's DBA was a challenge and a great learning experience. I worked hard and spent many hours a day and sleepless nights to achieve a 4.0. The biggest challenge was the APA 7, which was very new to me. I was humbled because I prided myself in writing proposals well. This was a different, more meticulous way of communication.

The DBA journey gave me patience and tested my tenacity. I had to learn to be independent in my learning and typing. The great reward was to have a chair and team in the capstone that was very supportive. The positives outweighed the challenges as the learning curve was extremely high. The lessons went from understanding quantitative SSPS to APA tables and figures. The great Tuesday night sessions also taught so many valuable lessons for school and life. Last of all, the Baldrige Excellence Framework brought a new way to look at excellence and has been very effective in capturing all aspects of leadership and work and how to assess in detail to find the gaps for building an excellent organization inside and out. I am very grateful for such an opportunity.

## **Conclusion**

Knowledge transfer in succession planning has been underestimated for a long time. It is the best kept secret in business continuity. Many researchers and authors write about the leaders and CEOs that had poor behaviors and left with knowledge. There was

even the passing down of company information but the comprehensive knowledge to be passed on was not communicated.

Knowledge transfer was not just about passing on family secrets or skills from top managers but about shadowing for secrets, skills, qualifications, new trends, CSR, digitization, and an understanding of the culture and values that make the company successful. Most importantly having ethics, right leadership, human resource skill sets, and ensuring all departments are being trained for any emergency is key. These concepts work for ease of productivity, professional excellence, and strategic business continuity.

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## Appendix: Interview Protocol

<b>Stardom Interview Protocol</b>	
<b>Scheduling – Meeting protocol</b>	<b>Action</b>
Request schedule for the interviews	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Request schedule appointments</li> <li>2. Confirm agreed date and time.</li> <li>3. Call a minute before for timeliness.</li> <li>4. Forward the zoom link to the participant the day before or morning before.</li> </ol>
Original University consent sufficient for client	
Before meeting	Prepare note pad Unofficial greeting
Start meeting	Press record button Official greeting – Thank you for participating
Timeline	30 minutes to 1 hour
Call or internet interruptions	Three tries then continue by email
After meeting	Ask If there is anything else Thank you If there is time left discuss achievements/ Member check
Outline member checking process	State next meeting’s topic if time permits
End Recording – End meeting	State next meeting’s topic if the hour was up or send it in an email