Developing Leadership Capacity at The Bridge Youth & Family Services

by

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COMMITTEE APPROVAL

The members of Jamie McGregor's Thesis Committee certify that they have read the thesis titled *Developing Leadership Capacity at The Bridge Youth & Family Services* and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirements for the Degree of MASTER OF ARTS IN LEADERSHIP.

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Abstract

This human-centred design approach to insider action research examined how The Bridge Youth & Family Services could develop and implement a performance appraisal (PA) system that enhances leadership development for its current leadership team. The study was approved by the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Board. My research engaged directors, managers, and frontline employees across the organization using peer-to-peer interviews and rapid prototyping to understand perceptions about performance appraisals. Participants worked collaboratively to design a new PA tool. I conducted a thematic analysis on the data collected, and the findings demonstrated thematic similarities and differences between the director, manager, and frontline groups. Similarities included the concepts of timing, a safe place for feedback, and the need for personalization. Differences noted included the rating system and a focus on serving participants well. Using the emergent themes, I created a proposed PA system for managers that will help enhance leadership capabilities.

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Chapter One: Focus and Framing

Meaningful feedback delivered in an environment of psychological safety can be key in developing individuals within an organization, and by extension positively developing the organization itself. Given the importance of feedback, I proposed a collaborative process to redesign the performance appraisal (PA) system within my organization, The Bridge Youth & Family Services (The Bridge), to focus on leadership development. I am one of eight senior managers within The Bridge. I first became interested in redesigning the PA system for managers when I became a manager 3 years ago and my staff was invited to conduct a PA process on me that, from my perspective, did not benefit me, the staff offering the evaluation, nor the organization in general. In particular, there was nothing in the current appraisal system to address the specific performance of leaders within the organization. The focus of this study was the development of a PA system that assesses those who are currently in leadership roles.

The Bridge has grown rapidly over the last 6 years, tripling in both government contract revenue and full-time employees. This growth in size and complexity has also increased the number of people in leadership positions, leaving a gap in the system and providing opportunities for leadership development through PAs. The official job performance and evaluation process was outdated, meaningless, and disliked by the vast majority of managers and staff alike. My project focused on developing a PA process for the leadership team that was meaningful, practical, and most importantly recognized and developed leadership capacity. This was important to The Bridge as it will replace a process that was perfunctory, with one that clearly articulates and evaluates the attributes of strong leadership. The process was transparent and collaborative, allowing employees in leadership positions to understand and develop in areas that will support them in their leadership roles.

Inquiry Question and Subquestions

I conducted this research to explore the following question: How can The Bridge develop and implement a performance appraisal system that enhances leadership development for its current leadership team? I also examined five subquestions:

1. What are the characteristics of successful performance appraisal systems?
2. How are people in leadership roles within The Bridge currently evaluated?
3. How have people in leadership roles previously experienced performance appraisals that benefitted them?
4. What would a performance appraisal system that enhances leadership development look like to all stakeholder groups within The Bridge?
5. What does The Bridge need to do to develop and implement a renewed performance appraisal system that develops leadership amongst the current leadership group?

Significance of the Inquiry

The current PA process for members of the leadership team involved appraisal of the senior managers by the directors yearly, and each senior manager was appraised by their direct report staff every 2 years. The PA process did not provide an opportunity for meaningful feedback for development from the directors or frontline staff. Engaging in a collaborative redesign of the PA process for the leadership team could lead to increased personal investment of both frontline staff and managers, hopefully encouraging more engagement in the process as a whole. As The Bridge has grown extensively in the last 6 years, new positions of leadership have become available. The senior leadership is heterogeneous in the number of years within the organization, and number of years of management experience. Additionally, a significant portion of the current leadership team is within 2 to 4 years of retirement, which will leave significant gaps in leadership.

A rapid expansion of The Bridge's funding, number of full-time employees and operating capacity created a change in the leadership structure from flat to hierarchical. The necessary structural reorganization has resulted in the creation of three new director positions that oversee all the program managers in each distinct arm of service: Recovery and Addiction, Family Services, and Finance. The new directors have created a leadership development group that selected six people from across The Bridge to engage in a yearlong process to develop leadership capabilities, demonstrating that The Bridge recognizes the need for leadership development.

The Bridge was beginning to orient itself toward formal leadership development and succession planning. This was uncharted territory for the organization. A new PA process for leadership would fit well into the new orientation, with positive impact at all organizational levels. The directors will have clear and meaningful domains to assess that are related to the leadership capacity of the senior managers. Frontline staff will have a clear understanding of their expectations of their leaders, as well as greater insight into what qualities of leadership they will need to develop if they are thinking of pursuing a leadership role. The managers will gain increased awareness into their own capacity as leaders, as well as prepare them for the structural changes to performance assessment in the near future. This type of positive feedback loop is what Stroh (2015) referred to as reinforcing feedback, in that developing an orientation towards leadership within the PA process will increase leadership capacity across many domains.

The first key stakeholder group comprised the frontline employees, who will be using the PA process to assess the performance of their managers to identify areas of strength as well as areas where they would benefit from development. The second key stakeholder group was the managers who will be the recipients of the PA process from both frontline employees and directors. The third stakeholder group was the directors, who will be using the PA process in much the same way as the frontline employees in order to help develop the senior managers. Having a tool that is collaboratively designed and highly engaging will support managers in experiencing the process as one of value, and not simply a yearly requirement to complete. Additionally, it will allow managers to identify key people within their teams that might benefit from support to develop their leadership capacities as part of an overall succession plan.

There are two factors that make this work urgent. Firstly, as previously noted, many of the senior leadership team are within 2 to 4 years of retirement, which will leave key positions of leadership vacant. A new PA process that is oriented toward identifying and supporting leadership development will help in succession planning for these roles. Secondly, The Bridge has set a "bias towards growth" (C. Thompson, personal communication, March 4, 2019)[1] as one of its key strategic objectives over the next 5 years. Given the recent expansion, it is likely that in the near future new programs will be created and current programs will be expanded, requiring an influx of talented leaders to take on challenging new roles. Collaboratively designing a new PA process for senior managers will help individuals in the organization to understand the key leadership capacities that are sought after and encourage them to develop strength in those areas if they wish to be a future leader. This will help The Bridge meet the growing demand for leadership talent.

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[1] All personal communications in this report are used with permission.

Organization Context and Systems Analysis

The Bridge is the largest provider of community-based substance use services in the entire Interior Health Region. The recent change in provincial governments and the current opioid crisis have led to more robust funding opportunities for the organization. The combination of increased funding and the current organization status make it very likely that The Bridge will meet its annual operating goals and fulfill the expectation with regards to a bias toward growth.

The Bridge is a medium-sized non-profit organization with 120 full-time employees who deliver a wide variety of healthcare and social services in the Okanagan Valley. In Kelowna The Bridge owns three properties and leases one office space that houses mostly administration and support services. To the south, The Bridge leases two properties in Penticton and two properties in the South Okanagan.

The Bridge offers a full spectrum of addictions and recovery services, including adult withdrawal management, youth withdrawal management, facility-based treatment, supported recovery housing, and outreach overdose prevention services. The alternate wing of service provided by The Bridge is family and youth services, which includes foster parent support, youth outreach, family counselling, and youth transition programs. The Bridge offers parent education and play programs up and down the valley in spaces provided to us by other non-profits. Finally, the Bridge has one national program that is focused on healthy eating for children and provides training and resources for facilitators across the country.

The Bridge operates under a governance model that utilizes a board of volunteer directors, which sets policy directions and is responsible for hiring and firing the executive director (ED). The ED is responsible for overall operational decision making, and has a Director of Family Services, Director of Recovery and Addictions and a Director of Finance reporting to her directly. Each of the three directors oversee the senior managers in their respective portfolio. Directors and senior managers are given broad discretionary decision-making authority within their programmatic areas, in so much as they adhere to the terms of the contracts held with funders.

The annual operating budget of the organization is $7.5 million" (C. Thompson, personal communication, March 4, 2019) with the majority of funding coming from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children and Family Development. A nominal amount of money comes in from other government agencies and private donations.

My project aligned with two of The Bridges core values and one of its main strategic goals. Firstly, the value of "acknowledgment of our people" (C. Thompson, personal communication, March 4, 2019), which "recognizes employees as the most important resource the organization has, and supports the need to provide adequate training, support and reward" (C. Thompson, personal communication, March 4, 2019). A collaboratively redesigned PA process could facilitate better training opportunities and increase self-efficacy amongst staff.

The second core value with which my project aligned was leadership, as The Bridge believes they "have a responsibility to provide leadership in advancing conversations and progressive social policy change on behalf of those we support and the broader community in which we offer our service" (C. Thompson, personal communication, March 4, 2019). The ED has identified "cultivating leadership, inspiring development and creating future leaders" (C. Thompson, personal communication, March 4, 2019) as a key component of the annual operating plan. This strategic direction aligned well with my research topic and could be used as a possible tool to meet the goal outlined.

Finally, the strategic goal with which my research aligned was a “bias towards growth,” which was outlined in the annual operating plan (C. Thompson, personal communication, March 4, 2019). This is another area of strong alignment with my project. As The Bridge grows in size, the need for a consistent, meaningful PA process will become greater in order to effectively grow and develop staff.

The boundary of the system I was studying was the organization as a whole, as I was interested in the capacity for a cross section of frontline staff and the leadership team to collaboratively design a new leadership PA process. The above describes the current environment that made my project well timed and well positioned to both fulfill the stated needs of the organization and support the organization in sustainably growing into the future. The outcomes of this research will help The Bridge engage in a PA process that is meaningful to both managers and staff and increase orientation toward leadership organization wide.

Overview of Thesis

The following chapter outlines the current understanding of the uses and misuses of PA systems across a variety of contexts based on the current academic literature. Following the literature review, I discuss my methodology, which includes my general approach to research, my specific data collection and analysis methods, who participated in the studies, and the specific way in which it was carried out. Following a complete description of the study conduct findings and conclusions are discussed, and finally inquiry implications are articulated. As most research is based in the context of a larger body of academic knowledge, I will first explore the current state and debates around the understanding and utility of PA systems.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

I explored two broad topics in my literature review in order to support my research. Firstly, I examined the literature on PA in general. Secondly, I investigated employee engagement in general, and specifically how PA could be used to support engagement amongst employees. Under the umbrella of PA in general I sought first to understand the efficacy of PA and the fundamentals principles involved in conducting them. This topic provided me insight into the systematic and individual components affecting the efficacy of PA. I then looked at how to effectively develop structures and approaches within a PA so I could evaluate the final product designed through this process. Finally, I explored any special considerations in designing a PA process for a non-profit environment so that I could understand the current PA landscape in my industry. I also examined the concept of employee engagement in general and explored how collaborative design and PA can support the development of employee engagement within organizations. This area of research supported my understanding of the potential of utilizing a PA system to improve engagement for the employees of The Bridge.

Efficacy of Performance Appraisals

PAs have been in practice since the early 20th century and are widely used because organizations “believe that it increases productivity and profitability” (Law, 2007, p. 18). While there is some evidence to support that claim, Kluger and DeNisi (1996) conducted a meta-analysis of feedback interventions, which can be seen as an analog for PA, and found data that refuted the efficacy of performance interventions were often underreported or ignored in the literature. Kluger and DeNisi found 38% of interventions actually had a negative impact on performance. Law (2007) argued PAs were a relic from a different era and have failed to account for the shift in employee orientation from external control psychology, in which cues for understanding and reward are taken from outside an individual, usually from someone above them on a hierarchy to internal control psychology, in which building relationships and two-way communication are valued. Some of this critique will be examined when I discuss employee engagement later in the chapter. PAs can cause strife and dissatisfaction amongst employees and fail to account for systemic issues within an organization that can impact overall performance (Law, 2007).

VandeWalle and Cummings (1997) asserted that performance goal orientation (PGO) and learning goal orientation (LGO) may be innate traits that impact the capacity of individuals to be motivated or improve performance based on a PA. Individuals who demonstrated LGO asserted new skills could be acquired through hard work and that failure was an avenue to development (VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997). Individuals who demonstrated PGO believed skills were innate and wanted to demonstrate and validate their personal competency, making them likely to avoid situations in which they did not excel (VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997). Given that PAs are designed to provide feedback for development in all areas, it was likely that people with PGO would not respond well to any PA, and may experience demotivation and poorer performance as a result of the process.

Developing Structures within Performance Appraisals

There is support for the idea that PAs are useful and that “an effective appraisal system is directly related to employee motivation and productivity” (Ahmed, Sultana, Paul, & Azeem, 2013, p. 719). Through their meta-analysis, Kluger and DeNisi (1996) found feedback interventions have an overall moderate positive effect on performance. Even amongst PA advocates there was recognition that there is room for improved efficacy in PA and there are a variety of approaches on how to achieve that goal. Roberts (2003) argued genuine employee participation in creating performance standards, ratings forms, self-appraisals, and ratee participation in the interview alleviated many of the external psychological control factors discussed above, while increasing motivation and capacity for development.

Multisource or 360-degree feedback has been suggested as a way to improve PAs. This method fosters an individual receiving feedback from, subordinates, colleagues, and supervisors to facilitate a more holistic feedback process (Fletcher, 2001). Asmuβ (2008) noted PA interview processes focus primarily on the role of the interviewer, and this causes interviewees to be oriented to criticism as a socially problematic artifact. The author suggested building in opportunity for both supervisor and employee to offer negative feedback to one another as a matter of practice; making them an expected part of the interview form could alleviate some of those concerns (Asmuβ, 2008).Bouskila- Yam and Kluger (2011) found that approaching performance appraisal from a strength based approach that incorporated goal setting was an effective way to increase PA efficacy. While Lawler, Benson and McDermott (2012), noted that collaborative goal setting and a sense of ownership by those participating were key to improving the efficacy of a PA.

Finally, statistically based models that rely on a fuzzy logic approach have been suggested as a way of codifying the PA process. Fuzzy logic takes into account various criteria and provides an easy way to perform the calculation based on organizationally selected rules (Ahmed et al., 2013). This approach would allow for improved consistency and decreased evaluator bias.

Special Considerations for Non-profit Organizations

The area of PAs in non-profits has received meager focus in the research literature, but what literature there is indicated a need for some special considerations when employing PAs in a non-profit context (Seldon & Sowa, 2011). One of the main differences apparent in non-profits that distinguishes them from other environments is their commitment to values, which increases performance and productivity of staff (Cheverton, 2008). Winstanley and Stuart-Smith (1996), questioned the ethical capacity of PAs in general and outlined three key tenets to consider when developing the PA process in a non-profit context: respect for the individual, mutual respect and procedural fairness, and transparency in decision making. These tenets are echoed in much of the research on engagement, which I explore later in the chapter. There is some evidence that when PAs are developed collaboratively within a non-profit they are welcomed as ways to identify goals, set up opportunities for future training, and recognize contributions that individuals made towards the organization (Becker, Antuar, & Everett, 2011). Finally, non-profits often operate with high resource constraints that leave little time to devote to developing a PA process, so any tool developed must provide high utility for low to moderate investment (Selden & Sowa, 2011).

Employee Engagement

Many of the topics I have discussed above, and that have been flagged as important for developing effective PA systems, can be linked to ideas that led to the concept of employee engagement. Employee engagement has been a topic of great interest for organizations, especially over the last two decades, though there has not been the requisite academic rigor in place to define or discuss the concept in meaningful terms (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Employee engagement has fallen into the common vernacular of many human resources managers and leaders of organizations, and it often aligns with the folk theory that employee engagement is a desirable condition of some sort, with organizational purpose and indicated involvement, commitment, focused efforts, and energy of the employees in the organization (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

In an effort to codify the concept of engagement, and provide a theoretical framework that could withstand testing, Macey and Schneider (2008) suggested engagement encompasses three discrete components: state engagement, behavioural engagement, and dispositional engagement, with myriad subcomponents subsumed under each large concept. State engagement broadly refers to psychological ideas such as absorption, attachment, and enthusiasm. Behavioural engagement broadly refers to innovative behaviours, proactivity, and going beyond what is required. Dispositional engagement broadly refers to the natural personality disposition of the employee (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Macey and Schneider (2008) stated these types of state and behaviour engagement can be increased by a variety of organizational and interpersonal constructs, including when managers expectations are clear and fair. Mone, Eisinger, Guggenheim, Price, and Stine (2011), who referenced Macey and Schneider (2008) in their work, also proposed fairness and opportunities for learning and development support development of state and behavioural engagement, and I explore those aspects in the following sections. Nikolova, Schaufeli, and Notelaers (2019) demonstrated that leaders that are perceived as engaged improve the levels engagement for those they are leading

Fairness and Development Opportunities as Related to Engagement

Perception of fairness by employees is a major contributor to engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Maslach and Leiter (2008) did work that supports this hypothesis. Interestingly, Maslach and Leiter viewed engagement in the context of the burnout-engagement continuum: “People’s psychological relationships to their jobs have been conceptualized as a continuum between the negative experience of burn-out and the positive experience of engagement” (p. 498). They offered a definition of engagement that encompasses aspects of state engagement and behavioral engagement “an energetic state of involvement with personally fulfilling activities that enhance one’s sense of professional efficacy” (Maslach & Leiter, 2008, p. 498).

Maslach and Leiter (2008) conducted a study involving 992 employees at a university where they measured six predictors of job burnout and engagement including fairness. In their study, fairness was categorized as the extent to which decisions at work were perceived as being equitable and fair (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). They found fairness to be strongly correlated with engagement and to be the only predictor that showed the ability to move people from a place of near burnout to a place of engagement (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). As my research relied on collaboratively designing PAs in which all parties concerned had the opportunity to shape the process and clearly see the requirement, I suggest that this would improve the perception of fairness when using the PA process and, therefore, have a positive effect on engagement.

Jacob, Bond, Galinsky, and Hill (2008) provided evidence that opportunities for learning and development within an organization can support the development of employee engagement. Jacob et al.’s study examined 3,504 working adults in the United States as part of a survey (i.e., National Study of the Changing Workforce; Society for Human Resource Management, 2016) conducted every 5 years. Job engagement was measured by the singular questions: “I am willing to work harder than I have to, to help my company succeed” (Jacob et al., 2008, p. 150). They found that 80% of respondents who indicated they were provided with significant opportunities for learning felt that they were highly engaged. As outlined above, a good PA system will have goals collaboratively set by all parties involved. As my study examined the potential for a collaborative design process to create a PA system for managers in my organization that would improve leadership capacity, and the knowledge product I created (see

Appendix A) has a space to set learning and development goals, it is reasonable to contend that it could help in encouraging employee engagement.

Collaborative Design for Change and Engagement

My study relied heavily on collaborative design as a mechanism to create a new PA system; I, therefore, explored the literature to determine if collaborative design would be an effective tool to achieve my outcome. Mouchrek (2018) conducted research using design principles engaging college students in the transition to sustainability in universities in Brazil. She argued, “The design process is being applied as a tool to understand reality, formulate problems in new ways and develop solutions that emerge from a collaborative process” (Mouchrek, 2018, p. 91). Mouchrek found engaging in design principles was effective in supporting young people to develop relevant, enduring solutions that were effective in transitioning them into more sustainable ways of thinking and acting.

As my study was conducted in the time of the 2019 coronavirus disease (Covid-19), I was forced to alter my collaborative design process from in-person collaborative design methods to online collaborative design methods. A review of the literature found that Biasutti (2015), demonstrated that having musicians use an entirely online tool to compose music proved effective. The participants in the study did indicate that there were some weaknesses in the online platform such as technical difficulties, some challenges in understanding gestures, and a lack of physical presence. However, overall the participants listed better access to resources in their home, better time management, and being more comfortable in their spaces as positives. They also indicated that they were pleased with their final product. This indicates that collaborative online design is capable of producing useful outputs.

Chapter Summary

PA systems have been in use for a number of decades and are often seen as a way to increase employee productivity and quality of work by the employers who hire them. Certainly, evidence exists that supports the need for some kind of feedback system, but the specific recipe for success remains elusive. My study examined the thoughts and feeling individuals in my organization had toward PA systems in general, and I encouraged them to work collaboratively in designing a new system that would foster leadership capacity amongst managers within the organization. Through my thematic analysis, the themes that emerged were supported by some of the literature that articulated a need for fairness, and transparency, safe feedback, and opportunities for growth and development. A fuller exploration of the thematic process and findings are outlined in the following chapters.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Methodology

As I am a Senior Manager at The Bridge and was, therefore, engaged in insider action research (IAR; Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). This approach recognizes that organizations can be understood by experiencing the process of deliberate change (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). IAR "rejects the assumption that an observer can or should be independent of what is observed" (Fazey et al., 2018, p. 56). This form of action research is conducted when "a member of an organization undertakes an explicit research role in addition to the normal functional role that they hold in the organization" (Coghlan & Holian, 2007, p. 5). This approach made the most sense for my study, as I am firmly embedded within the cultural landscape of my organization and it was necessary for me to adopt an IAR approach to conduct my research in an ethical way. A person engaged in IAR must be cognizant of the multiple roles held simultaneously. Being able to gain perspective, provide adequate feedback, and perhaps provide information that is dissonant with the views held by fellow employees and those senior in the management hierarchy must all be thoughtfully considered and implemented in order to effectively conduct IAR (Coghlan & Holian, 2007).

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) outlined three essential considerations when conducting IAR: preunderstanding, holding dual roles, and organizational politics. Preunderstanding is about capitalizing on the existing understanding of the organization while still maintaining distance that allows for perspective (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Dual roles can lead to role confusion, role conflict, and role overload. Finally, organizational politics can create tension between the future career plans of the researcher and the desire to complete successful, quality work (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Understanding these tensions, it is important that an individual undertaking an IAR study regularly engages in self-reflection and is constantly aware of potential bias. As I am fully embedded within The Bridge, I actively engaged in a reflective process through journaling as well as continuing to engage with my thesis supervisor to ensure my alignment with quality IAR.

Methods

Human-centred design. Human-centred design (HCD) is a practical, repeatable approach that is solutions oriented (IDEO.org, n.d.). The specific design of my HCD approach included peer-to-peer interviews and rapid prototyping, ending with a brief questionnaire. My study brought together members from the frontline, management and director teams into separate groups to answer questions about PA systems and to design unique PA systems that would be ideal to them.

Vechakul, Patel Shrimali, and Sandhu (2015) defined HCD as “an open-ended process that has no predefined outcomes. Embracing ambiguity creates opportunities to explore new direction on the path to innovation” (p. 2556). They used HCD principles to engage 14 professionals from nine organizations in a 12-week process to design an Oakland-based approach to improving the health of babies and toddlers in their area. Through the use of HCD, the project was able to create several high-impact, short- and long-term solutions to improving the health of babies (Vechakul et al., 2015). The authors of the study noted HCD encouraged a strengths-based approach that told a more comprehensive story about the community than demographic data alone (Vechakul et al., 2015). They also noted that the prototyping process allowed individuals to identify and refine promising ideas and allocate resources in the most efficient way (Vechakul et al., 2015).

Kia-Keating, Santacrose, Liu, and Adams (2017) found HCD to share a similar utility when combined with community-based participatory research (CBPR) in understanding and devising solutions to violence-related health disparities among Latino/a youth. The project engaged 173 adults and 21 youth from the community and used HCD principles to create solutions developed at a community level that could be implemented to address the disparity in violence-related health outcomes (Kia-Keating et al., 2017).

The above studies demonstrated that HCD approaches can be used to gather information and develop thematic interpretations in order to devise solutions to problems (IDEO.org, n.d.; Kia-Keating et al., 2017; Vechakul et al., 2015). This indicated that HCD would be effective in bringing together various factions of my work community to design a PA process that could have meaning to all involved. As there is currently a global pandemic, I conducted all data collection through electronic means as a way of guaranteeing social distancing and respecting the health and wellness of those participating in the study. I outlined specifically how technology was used to facilitate my research in the study conduct section.

Interviews. Peer-to-peer interviews were used at the beginning of the design process, with participants using semistructured interview questions to explore some general concepts related to PA. Vechakul et al. (2015) conducted semistructured interviews to great effect in their HCD-inspired process when attempting to innovate around public health concerns. Employing interview methods at the outset of the process was designed to increase the opportunity for reflection, cementing the importance of the process and the lessons learned. I believe this reflective process helped start the participants thinking about the current system and envisioning the ways in which a new PA system could be designed. As Qu and Dumay (2011) noted, "Interviews provide a useful way for researchers to learn about the world of others, although real understanding may sometimes be elusive" (p. 238).

Prototyping

The purpose of my project was to collaboratively design a new PA system; as such, rapid prototyping was a good fit for my research. Participants were able to carry forward some of their nascent ideas generated in the interview process into the prototyping phase. This process allowed small groups or individuals to begin to design their own versions of a PA process, seek feedback, and redesign in a highly iterative approach (IDEO.org, n.d.). The prototyping allowed for the culmination of the entire process to create something tangible as a solution to the current state.

Kia-Keating et al. (2017) used a form of rapid prototyping when engaging the community to come up with solutions to violence-related health disparities for Latino/a youth. Groups of approximately 15 individuals were led by two facilitators using a storyboard process and semistructured questions to create solution-focused content that was then further developed through an iterative process, culminating in each individual creating their own visual representation of their favoured solution (Kia-Keating et al., 2017).

Methods Flow

Beginning the process with peer-to-peer interviews allowed individuals to start thinking about things as they are and hearing how things could be improved in the future. It offered insight into the participant's initial understanding of the current PA system and how they would like to change it. This primed the participants to enter into the rapid prototyping phase with some ideas on a redesign of a process that would effectively assess leadership. As my methodology was IAR and I was looking to create a change, prototyping leant itself well to the creation of a new PA process for leadership. Ending with a brief questionnaire that supplied insight into the overall process and provided an understanding of the impact on the participants.

Project Participants

Three participant groups worked separately through the entire process. The first group was the leadership team, which was composed of eight managers. There are three distinct arms of service within my organization: Recovery and Addictions, Family Services, as well as Support Services, which fall under the Director of Finance. To conduct my research, I needed a minimum of three managers to participate, and for the research to be considered representative there needed to be a representative from each of the three areas of service listed above. The final manager group consisted of six participants, and there was representation from each of the three required subgroups.

The second group that was engaged was the frontline staff. There are 15 distinct program areas within The Bridge. I sent my request for participation to the entire agency, which includes 120 full-time employees. My desire was to have one person from each program area volunteer to participate in the research. If multiple individuals had volunteered from each program area, the person with the most seniority would have been chosen as they would have the most experience with the current culture and PA process. I needed a minimum of five participants, and needed at least one member from each of the three overarching areas outlined above. I was able to just meet that requirement, as I had five participants in the frontline group representing employees from the three overarching areas of the organization.

The third group engaged was the directors group, which consisted of the Director of Family Services, Director of Recovery and Addiction, the Director of Fund Development, and the Director of Finance. I required at least three of the four of these individuals to participate to obtain a meaningful cross section of the agency. As the Director of Recovery and Addictions was my study partner, he was unable to participate, so I was able to have three of the four directors listed above participate in the study and provide me my sample.

Study Conduct

Recruitment. In order to mitigate what Coghlan and Brannick would call (2014) power-over issues that could be of concern, a third-party facilitator from my Master of Arts in Leadership cohort named Cameron Jarvis recruited the frontline group with help from the administrative team. The administration team emailed all frontline staff with the letter of invitation, study conduct letter, and informed consent letter (see Appendices B through to F). I gave the administration team the required criteria for selection, and they were able to recruit five individuals from the frontline staff who met the desired conditions. Once they had the list of participants, their information was passed along to Cameron Jarvis, and he coordinated the remainder of the process.

As there were no power-over issues in the remaining two groups, I emailed the letter of invitation, study conduct letter, and informed consent letter (see Appendices B through to F) directly to the all eight managers and four directors. Six members of the manager group and three members of the director group agreed to partake in my study.

Peer-to-peer interview. The director, manager, and frontline groups worked separately throughout the entire process to mitigate any power-over issues. At the beginning of the HCD process, the facilitator randomly assigned dyads within each group and they were provided with semistructured interview questions (see Appendix G) to conduct their peer-to-peer interviews via Zoom (Zoom Video Communications, n.d.). They were given 15 minutes to conduct semistructured interviews with their partners. Everyone first joined their group specific (director, manager, frontline) Zoom channel and the facilitator provided them with a time frame and instructions to answer each question as honestly as possible and to save some of the key concepts that arose during the interview process in order to bring them into the prototyping process. The following questions were provided:

1. What in the current performance appraisal system works well for you personally?
2. What would be the ideal future state of a performance appraisal system?
3. What are your personal feelings towards performance appraisals in general?
4. Why do you think The Bridge Youth & Family Services wants to have an effective performance appraisal system?

The facilitator ensured interviews were recorded via the Zoom recording function, transcribed by Rev.com (n.d.) and provided to me for thematic analysis. The facilitator repeated this process for the frontline group, and then an anonymous transcription was provided to me for thematic analysis. I once again repeated this process for the director and manager groups, and then used the transcriptions for thematic analysis.

Rapid Prototyping

The prototyping process occurred in two separate stages for the director, manager, and frontline groups. Stage 1 asked individuals, pairs, or groups of three to design a PA system that they then brought back to their larger groups for feedback and then took away and to undergo an iterative process to incorporate the feedback and design a new system. Stage 2 asked all of the members of each subgroup to bring their various designs together to create a unified PA system from the director, manager, and frontline groups, respectively.

Stage 1: Directors. There were only three participants in the director group, so they worked independently within the same Zoom (Zoom Video Communications, n.d.) channel on their own Google (n.d.) doc to create their prototypes. They were provided the following question, and the question also appeared at the top of their individual Google Doc: What would a performance appraisal system look like for managers that would improve leadership capacity?

The participants of the director group were given 20 minutes to design their own concept of a PA system that would support development of leadership capacity amongst managers at the Bridge. The Zoom (Zoom Video Communications, n.d.) channel was kept open in case any of the participants had any questions or points of clarification that they needed answered. After 20 minutes, each member of the director group was given 10 minutes to share their idea of a new PA system and receive feedback. During their presentations, each manager's Google Doc was shared on screen. I offered the group direction on providing feedback and recorded the feedback on their Google (n.d.) doc so they would have it for their next iteration. They were then given an additional 20 minutes to incorporate the feedback into their next iteration. At the end of Stage 1 they brought their updated version back to the group for feedback using the same process as before. This produced three distinct PA systems that would be incorporated into a final version in Stage 2.

Managers. A total of six managers participated in the manager group. The six managers were divided up into three groups of two. The pairs were randomly assigned breakout rooms, with each manager group working on a separate shared Google (n.d.) doc. The process was similar to that of the manager group, with each dyad being given 20 minutes to collaboratively design a PA system that answered the question: What would a performance appraisal system look like for managers that would improve leadership capacity? After 20 minutes, each dyad brought their design back to the larger groups of six, where they presented and received feedback for 10 minutes. They took the feedback back to their dyads and iterated a PA system and then brought it back for one final round of sharing and feedback. This process resulted in three distinct systems that would be combined in Stage 2.

Frontline groups. A total of five participants took part in the frontline group, and in order to prevent any potential for power-over ethical concerns, I arranged for the group session to be facilitated by an outside third party. In this instance the facilitator split them up into one group of two and one group of three and they engaged in the same process as the manager group, as outlined above.

Stage 2. The second and final stage was conducted in the same way for the director, manager, and frontline groups. In each instance, the individuals or small groups brought their final iterations of their PA system together and collaboratively designed a new system that was representative of the entire group. In the final stage, participants were provided with 30 minutes to design a new system. The final stage produced three distinct PA systems, one from each of the director, manager, and frontline groups, respectively. It was these three final collaborative efforts that I used for my thematic analysis.

At the end of the prototyping process, each participant was asked to complete a questionnaire with the following questions:

1. Does the final group prototyped model represent an improvement over the current process?
2. Do you feel your suggestions and ideas were heard and incorporated into the final model?
3. List three to five themes that came up in the designing of the new performance appraisal system.

These questions were used to discern each participant's impression of the overall experience of partaking in the group-facilitated experience.

My initial idea was to have all three groups: Director, Manager and Frontline, undergo the rapid prototyping process in the same physical space, or the same Zoom channel. In this version of my research the three discrete groups would have brought their final prototypes together and gone through a final prototyping process to create an agreed upon combined prototype. Through the ethical review process it was made clear that using that approach would make it impossible to mitigate the power over issues inherent in bringing individuals from varying hierarchies together in one space. I decided that I would do the final amalgamation of the three distinct prototypes from each group in order to maintain the ethical integrity of the research and provide a singular prototype as my knowledge product to the organization.

Data Analysis

I used the peer-to-peer interview transcripts and the three collaborative rapid prototyping documents for thematic analysis. Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017) suggested thematic analysis exists as a method in its own right and functions as a mechanism for identifying cohesive themes from a large data set and can be seen as a translator between quantitative and qualitative methods and allows for researchers using different methods to communicate. Given that it has the benefit of being flexible and easy to modify and more understandable to the novice researcher, I used the analysis approach outlined in Nowell et al.'s (2017) work. These steps included familiarizing myself with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. As there were no pre-existing theories that I was attempting to understand, I utilized a inductive analysis approach, which is more data driven and produces a more rich description of the data (Nowell et al., 2017).

During the initial step of familiarizing myself with the data seven larger ideas seemed to emerge with some consistency: frequency of appraisal, rating scale, competencies, self-evaluations, feedback, future goals, and being useful. I kept these initial concepts with me as I began to look for specific codes.

I analyzed each transcript independently looking for codes. I employed highlighters, to keep track of my coding, and kept a journal of them as I was going through each transcript. There were six separate transcripts: one from the directors, three from managers, and two from frontline workers. Once I had coded each individual transcript I began the process of theming.

As I reviewed the codes, I looked for the amount of conversation that had occurred within the transcript and how frequently it had occurred. I also began to look for ways in which the individual codes could be combined into larger themes. For example, when I was coding the directors peer-to-peer interview data, I found personalized and expressive, self-evaluation and goal setting, and development to be shared concepts, and these became the theme of self-evaluation/goal setting. Utilizing a similar process I was able to determine between five and six themes for each transcript. Finally, I was able to look at refining and naming themes across the whole data set and found two themes that were generally consistent (timing/frequency and safe place for feedback), and several themes that emerged in the director, manager, and frontline groups individually.

Ethical Considerations

Given that I conducted IAR within my organization, I needed to be especially aware of power-over issues. I gathered information from three separate groups, the managers groups and director group, over which I had no power, and the frontline group, over which I did have both actual and perceived power. To mitigate the power-over concerns in the frontline staff, I utilized the administration services team to send out my invite letters for that group. Additionally, I used Cameron Jarvis as an outside third party to facilitate and organize the data from the frontline group. In the context of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement's* principles (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2018), I engaged in respect for persons by honouring and respecting the autonomy of each individual and providing them with informed ongoing consent (see Appendix E). To address the principle of concern for welfare (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2018), I did not work with any members of a vulnerable group, but as this was occurring within a work environment I took into account their employment. As such, I made efforts to ensure confidentiality of information shared during the group facilitation, and wherever possible participants had the right to request to remove their data from the research (see Appendix E). Finally, to address the principle of justice (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2018), I laid out clear recruitment criteria and invited both leadership and frontline staff to contribute to the research project so that many perspectives could be incorporated into the design of a new PA process.

Inquiry Outputs

There were two major outputs as a result of this research project. Firstly, I produced a thesis for publication, and, secondly, I provided my partner organization with a prototype of a new PA process for their consideration and possible implementation. I worked with my partner to mobilize action during the project implementation by engaging in communication with leaders and frontline staff as to the possible benefits of designing a new PA process and reminded them of the deficits of the current system. I worked in collaboration with my inquiry team in planning a closing event that allowed me to present some of my overall findings as well as demonstrate the potential new PA process and open it up for feedback from the wider organization. There also exists the possibility of attending conferences and presentations as a result of my research methods.

Contribution and Application

My research project contributed to my organization in a number of ways. It brought a cross-section of frontline employees together in a way that is rarely possible in the organization, fostering improved communication and relationship development. It provided all involved with an opportunity to have their voices heard, and the ability to contribute to developing a process that will have an impact on each individual. Finally, I developed a new PA process that will help improve leadership capacity and awareness of required leadership attributes. In addition, The Bridge could replicate the same collaborative process to redesign the frontline PA process, which would benefit numerous individuals and the organization as a whole. On a larger scale, my research contributed to the capacity of other organizations to engage in a collaborative process to build PA processes that will serve their own unique needs and in doing so improve the performance of their organization. As my research was focused in a non-profit context, it is likely to be of most benefit to non-profit organizations. Helping to increase capacity in these social serving agencies and allowing these organizations to develop and retain the best people for the role will increase their capacity to serve their communities and support some of the most vulnerable people in society.

Chapter Summary

My study employed an HCD approach to collecting a variety of data points from numerous perspectives. The research was designed and conducted in such a way that mitigated power-over issues but still encouraged a collaborative approach to design and future thinking.

The data gathered were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach (Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules, 2017) that yielded numerous findings and conclusions, which are discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter Four: Project Findings and Conclusions

In this chapter, I first discuss the findings from the thematic analysis I conducted. Four overarching themes were noted, I elaborate and explore each theme providing relevant source material from the peer-to-peer interviews and the prototyping process to support the findings. Following the exploration of themes, I articulate four conclusions that I have drawn based on the findings and relate them back to my original research question and sub questions. Finally, I make note of the scope and limitations of my research.

Themes

During the data analysis several themes emerged, two across all participant groups and four specific to one or two participant groups. The themes were as follows:

1. The timing and frequency of performance appraisals for managers needs to be addressed to make it more responsive to change and increase leadership capacity.
2. The PA system needs to create a safe process for feedback to be given and received from subordinates and superiors in order to improve the communication and responsiveness as it relates to leadership of managers in the organization.
3. The rating system needs to reflect clear distinctions between the various levels of performance for managers.
4. Quality care for populations associated with The Bridge's work can be affected by the performance appraisal system for managers.
5. Self-evaluation is important for goal setting.
6. The utility of the performance assessment system needs to be clear to all managers.

The following sections describe each theme in detail. To maintain participant anonymity, coded quotes are used to support each theme. I used the code MG to refer to the six management participants, FL to refer to the five frontline participants, and DG to refer to the three director-level participants.

Theme 1: The timing and frequency of performance appraisals for managers needs to be addressed to make it more responsive to change and increase leadership capacity. Amongst the concepts raised during the peer-to-peer interviews, participants mentioned timing and frequency the most often (FL; MG; DG). Alterations to the frequency of the PA process also appeared in all three of the final prototype documents, indicating that timing and frequency were important areas of change that needed adjustment in the creation of a new PA system.

Many participants appreciated the fact that the current PA process is a scheduled yearly event; participants indicated that it was important to have it scheduled as a way for there to be an annual cue to signal time for reflection (FL; MG; DG). One participant indicated, “So it does cue us annually to take inventory of ourselves or take stock of ourselves, so I like that it exists” (DG). Participants viewed this process in a positive light, noting their appreciation that it exists and is seen as a regular, normal practice (FL; MG; DG).

The vast majority of participants in the study said that they wanted the yearly PA system to be a part of an ongoing process (FL; MG; DG). Many participants indicated that the annual review was not adequate to do any development or improvement (FL; MG; DG). Some participants argued for a more formal and structured way of checking in, with one frontline participant indicating, “I just wish we did more frequent, formalized check-ins than annually. . . . So a monthly supervision is quite useful as far as an ongoing appraisal” (FL). Still others suggested a more informal approach, with one manager stating, “For me I enjoy getting together once a month with my Director of Recovery and Addictions, John, on a regular basis . . . and just sort of go over the whole month and pick it apart” (MG).

Participants viewed more frequent check-ins, formal or informal, as a positive way to get more useful feedback (FL; MG; DG), which is a theme in and of itself that I will examine later in this chapter. With one frontline participant saying,

> Actually, what I would like to happen is if there are things you need to work on, rather than waiting until the whole next year. . . . Two or three months down the line, this is what you were going to work on, how's it going. (FL)

This would seem to support the development of a system that allowed for increased feedback to managers at The Bridge in order to encourage current positive leadership behaviours and readily alter behaviours that are not supporting strong leadership.

There was a small subset of managers who indicated the formal PA happened too often, but they also indicated a need for more frequent informal connections to meet the needs of the organization (MG). One manager said, "So every two years sounds a lot more reasonable to me than every single year. When it comes to managing and leading you have a tendency to give feedback a lot more regularly anyways" (MG). This indicated that although there may be some resistance from managers to undergo a formal process with frequency, there remains a strong desire to have multiple checkpoints in order to assess direction and improve leadership behaviours.

Participants universally noted timing and frequency as issues (FL; MG; DG). Firstly in the positive, that the PA actually exists and that it is scheduled to occur. Primarily, though, it was listed as a negative, that it does not occur often enough, and not in ways that make it meaningful, and useful for altering behaviour or approach. A strong PA system for this organization will need to create a mechanism, either formal or informal, to respond to this clear desire. Developing this mechanism for the PA process for managers will support the development of leadership capacity of the current leaders at The Bridge.

Theme 2: The PA system needs to create a safe process for feedback to be given and received from subordinates and superiors in order to improve the communication and responsiveness as it relates to leadership of managers in the organization. Another prevalent theme amongst all groups was the expressed desire that the PA process be a safe place for feedback. Participants found providing and receiving feedback to be a difficult but necessary part of the PA process and noted it as a key skill necessary for managers to develop if they are to increase their leadership skills (FL; MG; DG). This theme was highly aligned with timing and frequency, as participants viewed it as a process that should be ongoing, not a one-time event. Participants noted several components to this theme, which I discuss below.

It was widely recognized that giving and receiving feedback needed to be normalized and encouraged within the larger culture of The Bridge, and that incorporating it into the PA process for managers could prove useful because they would be able to model the skill for frontline workers. One director remarked,

> I think it has to be a place where we get used to, and comfortable with, and desire to have critical feedback from our colleagues, and our supervisors, and seek that for ourselves. So to increase that aspect of the appraisal performance would be important to me. (DG)

One frontline employee further noted, “I like that fact that if you disagree with part of the evaluation there is an open discussion” (FL). This indicated to me that staff across the organization have a strong desire for the PA process to encourage frank discussion and foster an honest exchange of opinions, which will be a necessary component of developing leadership capacity within the current managers at The Bridge.

Another component that appeared regularly during my thematic analysis was the need for feedback to occur in a 360-degree fashion (i.e., feedback should come from program participants, subordinates, and supervisors). Managers recognized the benefit of feedback from participants accessing their services, with one manager remarking, “Because who I work for ultimately is the participant” (MG). This quote indicated for me that even at the manager level there is still a strong connection to the frontline work and a recognition of the need for feedback from individuals who access services. Still other managers strongly recognized the need for feedback from their subordinates “or my staff, if my staff, I try to have ongoing dialogue with them to get feedback” (MG). Creating a safe process for feedback was important for all participants in this study, and ensuring that feedback came from all the stakeholders was a key part of the theme identified.

Finally, many interviewees identified the benefit of being able to provide anonymous feedback, especially from subordinates upwards (FL; DG). One manager stated, “I have ongoing feedback processes that I try to implement and have them anonymous as well, so if something that’s feeling uncomfortable saying to my face, they can write it down” (MG). One manager even noted that for many there can be a discrepancy between what a staff member will say to a manager in person versus anonymously: “I mean, what a staff will say to you in person, face-to-face, can sometimes be very different than what they say to each other” (MG). This information suggested to me that incorporating a mechanism for anonymous feedback from subordinates will be necessary in developing an effective PA system for managers at The Bridge in order to get a honest picture of their current leadership skill set, leading to effective behaviour changes to increase leadership aptitude.

Theme 3: The rating system needs to reflect clear distinctions between the various levels of performance for managers. There was a great deal of displeasure from both frontline groups about the current rating systems that exist within all of the PA processes at The Bridge. The current system does not provide enough explanation of the scale level, especially when the rating jumped from “Good” to “Excellent.” One frontline person remarked,

> Well, I think one thing I would like to see different about ours is the rating system. Like I have a really hard time judging between good and excellent. Because on a lot of things, I don’t feel like I’m excellent, but I feel like I’m better than good. (FL)

The rating system was a very consistent remark amongst all frontline participants, indicating it would be an area easily fixed when designing a new PA system to use for everyone. It would follow that as engaging frontline staff in the PA process for managers would be desirable, it would also be advantageous to incorporate a rating system that allows them to give more granular information to their managers. This will increase the efficacy of the PA system for managers while also providing them with more specific areas of strength and deficit, leading to improved leadership capacity for the managers.

An alteration in the rating system figured prominently in the final rapid prototype model created by the frontline group in which they proposed a quadrant model that enable managers to plot the ratings onto a graph and have specific quadrants of the graph labelled with relevant categories like: job duties, alignment with values, teamwork and so on. This concept has made it into the final version of the PA system I designed for the Bridge (see Appendix A).

Theme 4: Quality care for populations associated with The Bridge’s work can be affected by the performance appraisal system for managers. This was a very strong theme within the frontline groups; it often surfaced during participants’ conversation while they were answering the question, “Why does The Bridge want to have an effective PA system?” There was some similarity between these responses and those from the manager groups when they were talking about receiving feedback from participants, and in the director group when they talked about aligning with agency values, but it was definitely enhanced and specific when the frontline groups were discussing this concept. As this was such an important concern for the frontline employees, it should be incorporated in the PA system for managers at The Bridge, so that employees can offer perspective on the degree to which a manager is meeting this core value expressed by the frontline staff.

Amongst frontline participants, I noted a pervasive recognition that within the populations the organization works with, there is a high level of vulnerability and that a PA system could be used to support staff in providing good and safe care to those accessing service. One frontline participant noted,

> I just felt because of the populations we’ve worked with, like some, very vulnerable, I guess, in any case, very vulnerable, but it’s important for us to, how does that affect your performance appraisal system so that we can keep tabs on. (FL)

Participants expressed a desire to provide excellent care to those accessing services, noting that the current PA process offers the opportunity to talk about cultural competence (FL). That prompted one individual to articulate a desire for learning and development in that area:

> Some of the questions on the JD PD [Job Description Performance Development] are like providing culturally competent services and that kind of stuff, right? And I know for me, I’ve always put like more trainings in that area, workers, like Indigenous training or like LGBTQ stuff and that kind of thing. (FL)

This indicated to me that incorporating these types of open-ended questions would be of value in the new PA System.

Themes 5: Self-evaluation is important for goal setting. Both the frontline and director groups articulated this theme in a number of ways. Some respondents explicitly stated their affection for self-evaluation (FL; DG), while others articulated positive views about how the current system allows a person to identify goals, state learning objectives, and disagree with ranking from their supervisors (FL; DG). The overall concept of these comments was that it was important for those who were receiving the PA to be able to voice their own opinions on themselves and outline goals that were personally meaningful to them.

One of the directors outlined their utility as a supervision tool when he stated, “So self-appraisal is a really powerful tool. Some people have no awareness or don’t wish to, so that clearly won’t work, but the vast majority of people have pretty good awareness and they understand where their weaknesses are” (DG). This directly makes the point that self-appraisal actually gives a great deal of insight into the level of self-awareness present in the person being assessed. Incorporating this into the PA process for managers will provide the manager an opportunity to articulate goals and learning objectives to both frontline employees and directors. This will foster improved communication and accountability about the areas of leadership the manager will be developing throughout the year.

One of the frontline groups also noted that the self-rating process allowed them to challenge some of their negative beliefs about themselves: “I have a really hard time writing good things about myself” (FL). This participant then went on to positively remark that the comment sections in the current system allows their manager to actually write many good and uplifting things about their performance, which helped them change their perspective.

Overall, the need for self-assessment component seemed strong, as it allows those being assessed to clearly articulate their own performance and provides agency in encouraging the employee to set and define their own goals for what success looks like, while being able to compare that concept to what their supervisor believes to be the ideal outcome.

Theme 6: The utility of the performance assessment system needs to be clear to all managers. The need for the PA system to be seen as useful was shared across the director and manager groups, but did not appear at all in the frontline group. It is interesting to me that the people who are more likely to be giving the PA process were more concerned with it being perceived as useful (MG; DG), but those who are only on the receiving end of the PA process did not share the concern (FL). In the director group, I had initially separated the coding into two separate entities, "seen as useful" and "action oriented," but upon further consideration, they both fit into the theme of "seen as useful" because the directors spoke to the concept of the PA system not being just a form to be filled out due to obligations.

There was a lot of conversation in both director and manager groups about the current PA system being perceived as just a rubber stamp, and that perception was seen as demotivating when it came time to conduct the PA. One manager articulated the hope that "it would be so useful and relevant within the organization that no rational person wouldn't want to use the system" (MG). This resonated with me, and it was also prevalent among many of the conversations at the director and manager levels.

Utility was also expressed in terms of it being a collaborative approach, with one of the managers stating, "I think it's good if they're collaborative. I think it's good if they're relevant, and meaningful, and useful. I think that's often where they're not, they're about things that are in people's job descriptions that they're not really maybe seeing as important to their day-to-day work" (MG). The need for the PA to be seen as useful was important to these groups, as they indicated it would encourage people to engage more meaningfully in the process, and would therefore lead to better outcomes.

The six themes discussed above present the needs and ideas of a cross section of the organization and how it can be related back to the development of a PA process for managers in The Bridge that supports developing leadership capacity. Although each theme does not specifically speak to a PA process for managers, there is information that can be gleaned to infer the needs of The Bridge as a whole. From the themes explored above I have come to four distinct conclusions that answer my research question, which I discuss in the following section.

Conclusions

My study conclusions are informed by the findings that emerged from my thematic analysis of the peer-to-peer interviews and the rapid prototyping data. Although my research focused on developing a PA process for managers in a leadership role, I gathered data from representatives across the agency hierarchy in order to better inform the process and increase engagement. My conclusions are well supported by the literature review conducted in Chapter 2, and I have brought in further relevant literature as needed to bolster my conclusions and thoroughly answer my research questions.

My primary research question was as follows: How can The Bridge develop and implement a performance appraisal system that enhances leadership development for its current leadership team? I also explored five sub-questions:

1. What are the characteristics of successful performance appraisal systems?
2. How are people in leadership roles within The Bridge currently evaluated?

3. How have people in leadership roles previously experienced performance appraisals that benefitted them?
4. What would a performance appraisal system that enhances leadership development look like to all stakeholder groups within The Bridge?
5. What does The Bridge need to do to develop and implement a renewed performance appraisal system that develops leadership amongst the current leadership group?

From the themes or findings that emerged from my analysis, I developed four conclusions:

1. It is clear from the findings that a PA process for leadership is just that, a process; it needs to take place over time so that there are opportunities for corrections along the way if necessary.
2. The findings suggest that leaders need to know what is expected of them ahead of time so they can modulate their behaviours and actions in order to meet the expectations of the organization and those they are leading.
3. Multisource feedback frameworks such as the 360 model suggest the need to acquire feedback from several different sources to accurately reflect the leader's performance; engaging in self-evaluation as well as with subordinates, peers, supervisors, and those who access service offers a more complete data set with which leaders can make decisions.
4. Given that performance is diverse even within a set of expectations, the way in which performance is measured needs to reflect a number of options that allows for individuals to indicate their level of success in a more granular way.

Conclusion 1: It is clear from the findings that a PA process for leadership is just that, a process; it needs to take place over time so that there are opportunities for corrections along the way if necessary. A variety of respondents noted that The Bridge's current system of having an annual feedback process that is not referred to subsequently throughout the year was not seen as valuable (FL; MG; DG). Many in leadership roles made the point that they seek feedback and opinions from subordinates and superiors on a much more frequent basis than yearly, and that the more frequent engagement was beneficial, allowing them to respond to dynamic and changing situations (MG; DG).

A relational approach was preferred by most in the study (FL; MG; DG); as such, creating a process that will allow for more frequent check-ins would foster the development of familiarity between those being assessed and those doing the assessing. One manager remarked, "Maybe the system, we're both thinking of this as a one once a year sort of performance appraisal, but maybe an effective performance appraisal system would be these ongoing monthly meetings with our manager or director." It is clear from the findings that the managers supported the idea of a process that was organic and encouraged a number of opportunities for them to receive feedback throughout a year. Support for this process was also echoed by the frontline group and director group, with participants heavily supporting the need for a PA process to be ongoing and iterative if it is going to develop the leadership capacity of the managers at The Bridge.

The leaders at The Bridge are performing complex tasks, often balancing many diverse needs and diametrically opposed objectives, navigating the litany of regulatory bodies, contract obligations, new legislations, limited funding and employee well-being are just a small fraction of the required work load of those who a leaders at the management level. The literature suggested that organizations should be careful and thoughtful in providing regular feedback to those conducting complex work (DeNisi & Kluger, 2000). This supports my conclusion that the PA process should provide the opportunity for multiple formal or informal feedback sessions in order to better support and develop leadership capacity for managers at The Bridge.

Further support for this conclusion is found in Law (2007), who suggested that modern employees were moving from external control psychology, in which cues for success are provided by someone else, to an internal control psychology that values relationship and two-way communication. My findings have indicated to me that in order to successfully introduce a process for increasing leadership capacity of managers at The Bridge, creating a PA process that occurs over multiple touch points will be essential to a successful implementation.

Conclusion 2: The findings suggest that leaders need to know what is expected of them ahead of time so they can modulate their behaviours and actions in order to meet the expectations of the organization and those they are leading. The findings indicated that in order for a PA process for managers to be successful, there should be few to no surprises. One manager indicated, “There has to be clarity in advance about what the expectations are, because if you’re being evaluated against expectations, you have to have known what those were to be able to reasonably meet them.” For some in leadership roles, this was about having a clearly articulated set of competencies around leadership specifically, but also domain-specific competencies (DG). For leaders within the organization there are specific competencies such as strategic thinking, funder relationships, crisis management, and coaching capacity that could be part of performance assessment. For example under the competency of coaching capacity, a requirement could explore the following questions: Are you meeting with you employees to debrief critical incidents? Are you adapting your coaching to your employees preferred style of learning? Do your employees come to you with self-development goals? Developing these clear competencies ahead of time so that managers are able to work specifically toward agency goals will provide a more clear understanding of what is expected of leaders and will increase the perception of fairness of the process.

There is a benefit to collaboratively creating those competencies in order to increase motivation and capacity for development (Roberts, 2003). Furthermore, collaboratively developing the competencies and providing them to managers ahead of time will likely increase staff members' perceptions of fairness of the process, which is integral for increased employee (in this case leadership) engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Leaders who are more engaged will be likely to perform at a higher level of competence, and will hopefully increase their level of leadership skill. Clearly outlined competencies, which are delivered well ahead of time so that the manager has an acute understanding of the metrics for success, will increase engagement via perception of fairness, which will in turn lead to developing a successful PA process that will encourage the development of leadership capacity for managers at The Bridge.

Conclusion 3: Multisource feedback frameworks such as the 360 model suggest the needs to acquire feedback from several different sources to accurately reflect the leader's performance; engaging in self-evaluation as well as with subordinates, peers, supervisors, and those who access service offers a more complete data set with which leaders can make decisions. The findings indicated there needed to be a multisource feedback model such as the 360 model (Fletcher, 2001) in order to get a comprehensive assessment of performance for leaders at the manager level. A 360-degree feedback model requires a number of sources from which to gain feedback about a leader's performance, engaging in self-evaluation as well as with subordinates, peers, supervisors, and those who access service gives a more complete data set with which leaders can make decisions. Multisource feedback is not a new idea, and there is evidence that 360-degree feedback supports individuals receiving more holistic feedback (Fletcher, 2001). The findings from this study support a strong desire from most participants to garner feedback from a variety of sources (FL; MG; DG), and this was especially strongly indicated in the findings that involved the manager group.

Managers in The Bridge straddle the world of the frontline workers and the senior leadership team. Frontline workers are concerned with their own well-being as well as the well-being of those accessing services, while members of the senior leadership team are concerned with meeting funders needs and assessing organizational risk. This study sought to gain input from all three groups (frontline workers, managers, and directors) in order to inform a redesign of a PA system. Given their unique role, managers at The Bridge would likely benefit from undergoing some kind of multisource feedback PA process. One manager, when speaking about acquiring anonymous feedback from their subordinates, indicated,

> I'm always curious to see what their feedback is. And for me, there's also this idea of, there's perception and then there's reality. So to me, an appraisal that's anonymous helps with what reality is versus just my perception of things.

Managers expressed an equal desire to garner feedback and assessment from those individuals accessing their services:

> Because who I work for ultimately is the participant it's not for the director of or the. . . . Yes, it is for the bridge because that's where I work, but who I actually work for? Like you said, it is the participants. (MG)

DeNisi and Kluger (2000) provided suggestions for increasing the effectiveness of the 360-degree process. They suggested that the 360-degree process should be used only for development, not for decision making, and applied only when it can be done on a regular basis (DeNisi & Kruger, 2000). This aligns well with my previous conclusion that there needs to be a mechanism for frequent checkpoints built into an effective PA system for leaders at The Bridge.

Overall, given the complexity of the work undertaken by leaders at The Bridge, employing a system that seeks to gain feedback from a disparate and relevant segment of those being served and supported by the leadership team would increase success and leadership development.

Conclusion 4: Given that performance is diverse even within a set of expectations, the way in which performance is measured needs to reflect a number of options that allows for individuals to indicate their level of success in a more granular way. Participants expressed dissatisfaction with the current rating system, as interviewees noted an insufficient number of options for rating the proficiency or skill (FL). The findings indicated that people using the assessment scale could not accurately rate themselves with the choices available and that caused them to question the usefulness of the overall process (FL).

Additionally, this theme arose in the comments around leaders needing the opportunity to goal set, and then importantly have follow-up meetings in which the progress on their goals was measured in some way and feedback could be provided for correction if needed. This concept was exemplified by one manager, who said, "I like it when they have a component that's about, 'What was your sort of chosen growth or learning direction, and what have you done about that? How have you progressed?'" (MG). This type of goal setting along with a robust ranking system will support the development of leadership capacity for the managers at The Bridge.

Jacob et al. (2008) demonstrated learning and development opportunities increase engagement for employees (in this case leaders), and a rating system speaks to the need for fairness and transparency articulated by Maslach and Leiter (2008). Creating a rating system that allows for granular assessment will support the PA process as being seen as fair and as useful, which will positively impact the leadership development for managers at The Bridge.

A PA approach is indeed a process, one that provides managers with their competencies and expected behaviours ahead of time, engages a wide array of stakeholder feedback, and has a rating system to capture granular information is the answer to my research question. Incorporating all of these concepts into a PA process for the managers at The Bridge would increase leadership capacity for managers. Although this research indicates a plausible direction in which to move, there are several limitations that need to be explored, and I will do so in the next section.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of my study was to examine how a collaborative design process could be used to create a PA system that could potentially increase the leadership capacity of the current group of managers at The Bridge. The study looked at the process of design, and perspectives on what individuals in the organization thought were needed for a useful PA system. Although a PA system was created out of the information gathered, managers have yet to test the system to see if it did in fact increase leadership capacity, as that would require another tier of investigation. My study did not focus on redesigning the PA process for every individual in the organization; rather, it focused specifically on those currently in a manager role.

Given only 14 participants took part in my study, the findings and conclusions may not be representative of the organization as a whole. However, a high percentage of managers and directors did participate in the inquiry process. The Director of Recovery and Addictions was not able to take part as he was my study partner, so there may have been some insight lost in that specific domain of the organization. If a similar process were to be used for a redesign of the PA system for the entire organization, more recruitment from frontline employees and engagement of the entire directors group should be sought.

The original design of the study called for an in-person data collection approach. As this research was conducted during a global pandemic, I had to alter the research design to ensure all methods utilized a completely digital format. This may have impacted the information I was able to gather, as some people are not comfortable using digital communication tools. Furthermore, the regular in-person prototyping process lends itself to various types of expression, such as drawing, images, or even three-dimensional models. This may have been lacking in the virtual methods. If I were to undertake this process again in the future, I would prefer to collect my data using in-person methods.

Summary

My thematic analysis collated opinions and perspectives from a wide array of individuals at my organization about PA in general, what their historical experience with them had been, how they were conducted at The Bridge, and what was a desired future state. That information provided me with inkling of how a PA process could be designed specifically for managers who would increase leadership capacity, and I explored those in depth through my conclusions. Finally, it was important to note this was only the beginning of the process, and that although I had made progress in creating a PA system for managers to increase leadership capacity, there was a limited data set. Further testing and development are needed to test the efficacy of the new tool, which I discussed in the "Scope and Limitations" section of this chapter. The subsequent chapter presents the study recommendations, organizational implications, as well as implications for future research.

Chapter Five: Inquiry Implications

The following chapter moves my study from theory and analysis to application and practice, taking my findings and conclusions and distilling them into tangible next steps for the organization. A list of recommendations in order of importance to my research partner and senior leadership team are presented, followed by a discussion about the implications to The Bridge as an organization. After the implications are explored, possibilities for future inquiry are examined, and the chapter finishes with a brief thesis summary. For clarity, and continuity my main research questions and sub-questions are presented below.

How can The Bridge develop and implement a performance appraisal system that enhances leadership development for its current leadership team?

1. What are the characteristics of successful performance appraisal systems?
2. How are people in leadership roles within The Bridge currently evaluated?
3. How have people in leadership roles previously experienced performance appraisals that benefitted them?
4. What would a performance appraisal system that enhances leadership development look like to all stakeholder groups within The Bridge?
5. What does The Bridge need to do to develop and implement a renewed performance appraisal system that develops leadership amongst the current leadership group?

Recommendations

The thematic analysis identified a number of important findings that I have taken to suggest a number of recommendations that will support The Bridge in developing a PA process to encourage the development of leadership capacity for the managers in the organization. Seven recommendations are listed below in order of importance, and this section will elaborate on each specific recommendation.

1. Encourage managers to learn about the competencies upon which they will be assessed as soon as they are on-boarded to their position.
2. Provide a mechanism within the PA for managers that facilitates frequent feedback throughout the year.
3. Ensure the manager being assessed is provided with the PA document ahead of time so that they can complete a self-assessment as part of the formal PA conversation with their director.
4. Include space under each scored area of assessment for the manager and director to add comments.
5. Place greater emphasis on learning and development goals both during the PA conversation and on the PA document.
6. Consider moving to a 360-degree feedback model for managers.
7. Change the current rating scale of the PA.

Recommendation 1: Encourage managers to learn about the competencies upon which they will be assessed as soon as they are on-boarded to their position. In the prototype I designed based on the findings of my study there are three areas of competencies, administrative, leadership, and domain specific. Providing the areas of assessment when the manager is brought into their role will increase the level of transparency and give the manager a clear idea of what they need to focus on in order to meet the expectations of the director and organization at large. This recommendation aligns with research conducted by Macey and Schneider (2008) and Maslach and Leiter (2008) that demonstrated perception of fairness was a key indicator of employee engagement. Being assessed on competencies that a manager was unaware of until the moment of assessment would rightfully be seen as unfair, providing the competencies ahead of time will mitigate this situation. This simple fix could lead to improved employee engagement and foster an environment more supportive of developing leadership capacity among managers at The Bridge.

Recommendation 2: Provide a mechanism within the PA for managers that facilitates frequent feedback throughout the year. My findings consistently demonstrated that the PA process felt perfunctory when it only occurred once a year and was never referenced again throughout the entire following year. In the prototype PA document I created, there is a space near the end to set up follow-up dates throughout the year to revisit the PA document, with prompts to set those dates in the Microsoft Outlook calendar. This could be provided as an option, and subsequent meeting times could be decided upon in a collaborative fashion between the manager receiving the PA and the director administering the PA.

This collaborative approach resonates with the concept of internal control psychology articulated by Law (2007). The author argued that traditional PA processes fail to account for the movement of modern employees toward internal control psychology, which places emphasis on relationship and collaborative two-way communication (Law, 2007). Designing the PA document in a way that allows for further communication at mutually agreed upon times in the future could strengthen the relationship between those being assessed and those doing the assessing, thereby improving the overall collaborative feel of the process, which would lead to improved leadership capacity for managers.

Recommendation 3: Ensure the manager being assessed is provided with the PA document ahead of time so that they can complete a self-assessment as part of the formal

PA conversation with their director. Giving the PA document to the manager before the formal PA conversation will allow them to reflect on their current status, thoughtfully consider future goals, and be prepared for the possible questions or comments they will receive from the director. This will allow the manager to feel agency throughout the process and to create active points of communication in order to discuss discrepancies between their self-rating and the ratings of their director. This form of self-assessment will be of benefit to both manager and director. The manager will be prompted to engage in self-reflection and be afforded the opportunity to clearly articulate their own perceptions of their strengths and areas of needed development. Conversely, the directors administering the PA to the managers will be able to gain insight into the potential level of self-awareness experienced by the managers, which could also lead to meaningful conversations on areas of discrepancy.

Roberts (2003) argued that genuine employee engagement and use of self-appraisals improved the efficacy of PA systems and increased motivation and developmental capacity, which would support this recommendation's ability to increase leadership capacity amongst managers at The Bridge. Having managers engage in self-assessment is also in line with the concept of respect for the individual, which was outlined by Winstanley and Stuart-Smith (1996) as being one of the three key tenets to consider when developing PA in a non-profit context. Providing managers a mechanism to rank themselves also supports a sense of fairness of the process, which is highly related to employee engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Increased engagement, could lead to increased capacity for managers to develop their leadership at The Bridge.

Recommendation 4: Include space under each scored area of assessment for the manager and director to add comments. There was a high degree of support in my findings that people sought the ability to provide context, expand on ideas, and make comments. Many actually found the narrative comments under the rating to be far more useful as a tool for development and growth. Opportunities for individuals to provide context and comment outside of a simple ranking system could foster improved collaboration and two-way communication, which Law (2007) noted as important.

Moving away from a simple numerical rating system toward a narrative-driven process could also lead to more opportunities to discuss learning and growth, which Jacob et al. (2008) noted as being of high importance to employee engagement. Creating a narrative space for comments may allow the PA document to evolve through use. Consistent areas of dissonance between the numerical ranking and narrative comments between directors, managers, and frontline staff could be an indication that the competency is poorly worded or poorly understood. If the point of a newly designed PA process is to be responsive and improve leadership capacity of managers at The Bridge, then a space for directors, managers, and frontline staff to provide comments under each specific assessment question will be necessary.

Recommendation 5: Place greater emphasis on learning and development goals both during the PA conversation and on the PA document. In the current PA system there exists a small amount of space to outline some learning and development goals. This was a very popular feature of the current system, and it should be more robustly developed in the new system for managers at The Bridge. The prototype I designed includes a large space outlining personal, educational, and professional areas of development, with prompts to set timelines and outline resources needed. In their research, Jacob et al. (2008) made a strong case that learning opportunities were a key driver in employees being highly engaged in their work.

Macey and Schneider (2008) argued that improving employee engagement has shown numerous positive outcomes for organizations and emphasizing education and development within the PA document and process could increase the capacity and willingness for managers to develop leadership capabilities at The Bridge. Designing a system in which learning and development goals make up a large part of the PA system could encourage the process to be viewed more favourably, and seen as forward looking by both directors and managers. Encouraging both parties involved to outline areas for development and growth would also increase the collaborative nature of the process, likely leading to better outcomes (Law, 2007).

Recommendation 6: Consider moving to a 360-degree feedback model for managers. The current system is designed so that the directors conduct a PA with managers annually, and subordinates are involved in that process every other year. My findings indicate that there would be value in involving more stakeholders on a regular basis. Fletcher (2001) argued that a multisource feedback PA process improved the overall efficacy of the undertaking and provided the person receiving the assessment with a more holistic picture of their role within an organization. This could include involving other managers, those who access service, and funders that the managers interact with. Utilizing a 360-degree feedback model also aligns well with the three key aspects of effective PA process for non-profits—respect for the individual, mutual respect, and procedural fairness and transparency in decision making—as it provides the greatest amount of opportunity to receive varying perspectives in an authentic and transparent way (Winstanley & Stuart-Smith, 1996; Fletcher, 2001).

It may not be necessary to involve every stakeholder every year, and there may be ways to develop a system that would increase collaboration by allowing the director and manager to develop the list of stakeholders involved in the process each year. This would involve more work and planning to ascertain who should be involved and why, but there should be efforts made to incorporate a wide array of perspectives in a way that will support the managers to develop their leadership capacity across multiple domains.

Recommendation 7: Change the current rating scale of the PA. It was clear from my findings that the current rating scale does not provide enough granularity for people to be able to accurately represent their opinions. The current scale for the PA system provided only four options, ascending from “good” to “excellent” with no option in between. This arose as a source of consternation for several inquiry participants. In the prototype, I suggest a 7-point Likert scale in which 1 requires dramatic improvement and 7 indicates complete mastery of the skill or desired outcome. This scale, or one like it, will allow those using the PA process to offer more nuanced assessments of the manager. Additionally, using a Likert scale allows a visual representation to be created, which might work well to support learners of different modalities. The adoption of this specific scale is not necessary, but employing one that has the capacity for people to express their personal ranking will be important in developing a PA process that managers can employ to gain useful and accurate information in order to increase their leadership capacity.

The recommendations outlined above are presented in the order agreed upon by my organizational partner, John Yarshenko, who is the Director of Recovery and Addictions for the Bridge, as well as the ED Celine Thompson. The recommendations appear in order of importance based on the discussion between the three of us. Acting on these recommendations will take a concerted organizational effort and will have myriad implications for the organization as a whole, which I discuss in detail in the following section.

Organizational Implications

I brought the findings to John Yarschenko and Celine Thompson, the Director of Recovery and Addictions and the ED, respectively, during an hour-long meeting. I explained my theming process and how I arrived at my finding and conclusions for my research project. Based on my findings and conclusions, I presented my seven recommendations for the organization as well as a rough draft of the new PA process that was an amalgam of the information I gained from the peer-to-peer interviews and three final prototype models created by the director group, manager group, and frontline group. The draft PA document was accepted with only minor formatting changes. The discussion resulted in the seven recommendations outlined in the Recommendations section of this chapter, ranked in order of priority. Given the nature of the current pandemic, it will be difficult to hold a large group meeting in person to present my findings; therefore, I will present my findings via Zoom (Zoom Video Communications, n.d.) to the leadership at their meeting in March and to the entire organization at the Brown Bag Zoom meeting in April.

In order for this change process to be effective it will require the buy-in from directors, managers, and frontline staff. The recommendations outline a process that is more collaborative and seeks input from a diverse group of stakeholders. The frontline staff will have to adjust to a new PA system for their managers and agree to give honest accurate feedback, perhaps on a more regular basis. The managers and directors will need to work in concert to decide who needs to be drawn into the PA process for the manager. On a more administrative note, the PA process form will require formatting to meet The Bridge specifications and portions of the personnel policy manual will have to be updated in order to reflect the new process for managers.

In order to implement these recommendations, the PA document will need to be formatted for the Bridge, and the domain-specific competencies will need to be ascertained from the directors of Recovery and Addictions, Family Services and Support services. In order to align with the recommendations, the competencies will have to be given directly to the managers in preparation for undergoing the PA process in the following year. When managers receive the competencies, it will essentially be the beginning of the new process, as there will likely be a discussion between the director and the manager exploring the new approach and what the competencies mean on a practical level. I recommend that the directors and managers meet each quarter to discuss the new competencies in order to maintain focus on the new approach. Additionally, the personnel manual will need to be revised to reflect our new policy for the PA process for managers.

This change will require buy-in from all levels of the organization, but especially from the managers and directors. As I mentioned earlier, the new process will likely be more time consuming and already busy individuals will have to set aside time to dedicate to a new process. It may also be jarring for some managers to see a set of competencies that they are expected to work toward, as that represents a significant shift from the current PA system, which relies more on a job description and duties list. Directors will have to take care to outline the meaning of the competencies and be available for the managers as questions or concerns arise. Managers will need to articulate their anxieties and challenges in a timely manner and work to maintain their current workload through the change.

The benefit of this change occurring for the managers only at this time is that it is a relatively small pilot program, affecting only eight managers and three directors. In that sense, there is less opportunity for large swaths of the organization to be upended by the introduction of a new PA Process for managers. However there will likely still be friction, and implementing the new system will require the following supports. Firstly, clear policy and process must be created that is accessible by both the managers and directors. This policy should include timelines, key benchmarks, and a solid rationale for the change. Secondly, managers and directors will require an information session at which the new PA document and process are explained and they can ask questions and express concerns. Thirdly, the new PA process is meant to be adaptive and individualized, so clear and consistent messaging that everyone may experience the process in a different manner will be key. Finally, during the pilot phase, there will be two separate PA processes going on in the organization, a new one for managers, and the existing one for everyone else. This will cause some administrative obstacles for those in support services who are responsible for human resources. Again, clear, consistent, and frequent communications about what is required will be key in order to ensure this initiative is an organizational success.

The essence of my data collection and research design was deeply collaborative, engaging each level of the organization with members from each of the main departments within The Bridge. It called on participants to share and understand their own experiences of the Bridge PA system, PA systems in general, and how they related to the organization as a whole. Although the output for this research was specifically oriented toward improving leadership capacity among managers in the organization, the process occurred across the agency and represented many voices. From the perspective of Torbert and Taylor's (2008) third-person research concept, my study elicited personal, relational, and organization experiences that signalled a greater need for frequent connection, the ability to grow and develop, and a desire to seek a variety of perspectives. All of those aspects have been included in the redesign of the PA document and process. The findings were directly influenced by the participation of individuals within the organization, with the desire to foster leadership capacity development within the current manager, which will be of benefit to everyone. This will encourage people to readily partake, in the new process and provide energy to sustain the transformation.

My thesis demonstrated that HCD can be used simultaneously as an efficient data collection method and design tool to create a new knowledge product. It elicited responses that bolster the growing body of evidence that collaboration, fairness, and relationship are key in developing a PA process that is seen as a valuable tool, leading to desired outcomes for the organizations that are using them. My thesis also provides information in a non-profit specific context, of which there is minimal currently in existence.

My partner and organization have been supportive of the entire process and were keen to hear my recommendations. They are willing to work with me and the larger leadership team to implement and trial all of the recommendations beginning with my presentation to the leadership team in March. After that, we will work collaboratively to have the first test of the PA process completed by March of 2022. I will remain active in supporting the development and implementation of this project, acting as a coach for both managers and directors as they move from theory to implementation, and I will be available to make alterations as practice demands. My study yielded interesting results and employed an atypical method for data collection. The inquiry results could have meaningful implications for future study, which I discuss in the following section.

Implications for Future Study

My study employed a highly collaborative and iterative HCD approach as a way to understand the current PA system and create a new and better one. The design of my study demonstrated that it was possible to work across hierarchical levels within an organization while respecting power-over dynamics and gaining perspectives from across the organization that formed a potential prototype for a PA system that would meet the functional needs of The Bridge and had the potential to increase leadership capacity amongst managers. The obvious future research that would complement my study is examining the efficacy of the newly designed PA system within The Bridge to see if the collaborative design process created a tool with high efficacy.

It would also be interesting to examine the efficacy of using the same HCD process to redesign the PA systems for everyone within the organization and to explore if increased involvement in the process of creating a PA correlated with increased satisfaction of undergoing the PA. As my project was focused in the non-profit sphere, a place where collaboration and social cohesion are valued, experimenting with the same process across alternate domains such as the tech industry, finance, or engineering could be an interesting study to undertake. Regardless of the occupational domain, examining the capacity of groups to codesign ground-up solutions to their unique problems and then testing those designs for outcome efficacy could be a fascinating area of future research and development.

My study suggests that it is possible to bring people together from across varying departments and hierarchies to collaboratively share experience and design a product that impacts everyone in the organization. A PA system could be viewed as a trivial and bureaucratic tool, needed to simply fulfill a human resources policy, but shifting the perspective toward a PA system being a useful tool for change and development can have a large impact on the organization. Creating a PA system that actively encourages the development of leadership capacity amongst the managers at The Bridge means that the frontline staff will receive better support, guidance, and development themselves. This in turn could lead to the frontline staff providing better care and support to the people who access service. Given that many who access service at The Bridge are highly vulnerable and disenfranchised, providing them with improved care and support would increase their well-being, not just for those at the margins of society but for society as whole.

The Bridge is not a singular entity within the community, they share ideas, staff, projects, and funding with a number of other non-profit social serving entities within the city, region, province, and country. If the PA system designed does in fact increase leadership capacity and improve outcomes along the spectrum, it would be easy for The Bridge to share the process used to arrive at the outcome with all of those partners. This would create the potential to have highly skilled leaders who are well supported and well developed in community-serving organizations across the country. Imagine a world in which the people serving the most vulnerable and marginalized members of society are being led with compassion, confidence, competence, and grace, sure in the knowledge that their leaders are there to help them help others.

Thesis Summary

My study examined how The Bridge could create a PA system that would increase leadership capacity for the people currently in management roles. I conducted this research in a non-profit organization containing approximately 120 full-time employees, offering a wide array of mental health, addictions, and family support programs to the most vulnerable members in the community. The current PA system was recognized as ineffective and disliked by most, especially at the leadership team, so it was a prime opportunity for organizational change.

In order to conduct the study, I engaged in an HCD approach that involved peer-to-peer interviews and an iterative rapid prototyping process. I examined three groups separately: five frontline employees, six managers, and three directors, each moving through the same HCD process. The process yielded recorded transcripts from the peer-to-peer conversations and three distinct prototype models, one from each group. I analyzed both the transcripts and prototypes, using a thematic analysis process, which allowed me to create one amalgamated PA prototype model while also informing my findings and conclusions.

There were a number of findings from the study, one of which indicated a strong desire for the PA process to be more of a continual ongoing experience that allowed for more frequent check-ins and assessment of benchmarks. Additionally, there was a need for the PA process to be a safe place for feedback and be collaborative in nature. Finally, participants expressed a strong desire for the PA process to focus on learning and development. These findings led me to my draft recommendations, which I brought to my research partner and ED, which yielded the list of recommendations presented in the Recommendations section of this chapter in order of importance to the organization. The recommendations focus on making the PA process and document more suited to frequent checking in, utilizing competencies, learning and development aspirations, and making it more user friendly.

My organization is keen to action all of the recommendations going forward, and I will have two opportunities to share my findings with the organization through Zoom (Zoom Video Communications, n.d.) in the near future. The organization will undergo a change process, with support from me as well as the senior leadership team to implement the competencies and PA process for the first time in March of 2022. Further study will be needed to determine if the collaboratively designed process is effective in improving leadership capacity in managers at The Bridge, but that is an area of study for the future.

Engaging in this collaborative process with such a wide array of perspectives has given me renewed respect and admiration for all those who work at The Bridge Youth and Family

Services. This project has the potential to improve the quality of leadership, improve the quality of service, and improve the quality of the entire community.

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Appendix A: Associated Knowledge Product

Performance Appraisal System

Director to Manager

Director:

Manager:

Evaluation or Self Evaluation: Please Circle One

General Administrative

Competency | Rating (1=Dramatic Improvement Needed, 7= Complete Mastery)

Completes paperwork accurately and on time	**1—2—3—4—5—6—7**
Comments:	
Promptly responds to communication from director	**1—2—3—4—5—6—7**
Comments:	
Promptly responds to external contractors	**1—2—3—4—5—6—7**
Comments:	
Completes assigned tasks within deadline	**1—2—3—4—5—6—7**
Comments:	
Responds to crisis effectively	**1—2—3—4—5—6—7**
Comments:	
Meets requirement of regulators (ALR, CCL)	**1—2—3—4—5—6—7**
Comments:	

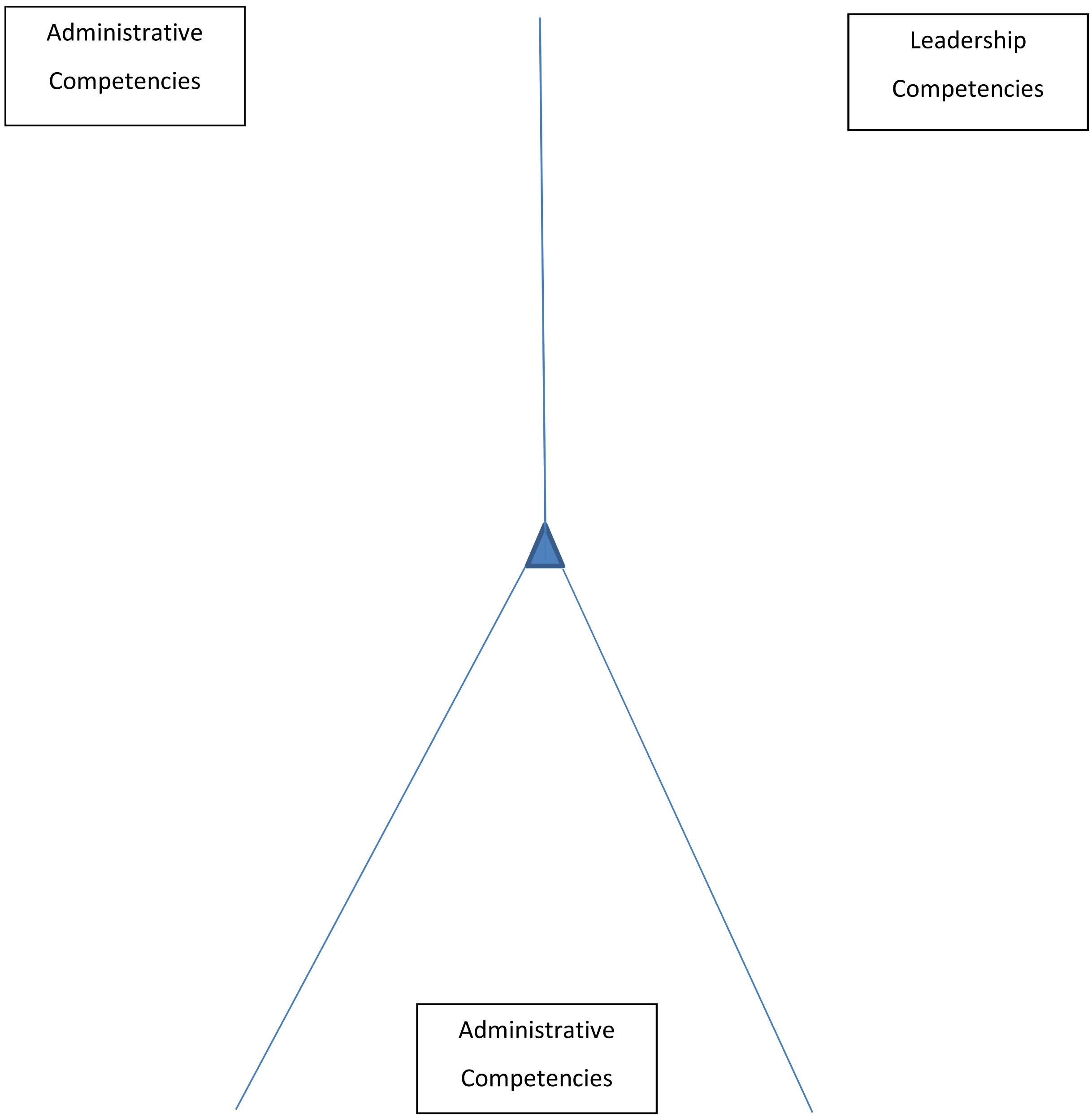
Leadership capacity

Competency	Rating (1=Dramatic Improvement Needed, 7= Complete Mastery)
Is a positive role model	**1—2—3—4—5—6—7**
Comments:	
Builds and supports team	**1—2—3—4—5—6—7**
Comments:	
Takes actions and implements decisions aligned with evidence and agency values	**1—2—3—4—5—6—7**
Comments:	
Builds partnerships to mobilize knowledge and navigate systems	**1—2—3—4—5—6—7**
Comments:	
Oriented to future and supports innovation and change	**1—2—3—4—5—6—7**
Comments:	

Domain Specific: Recovery and Addictions

Competency	Rating (1=Dramatic Improvement Needed, 7= Complete Mastery)
Remains up to date on best practice for addictions	**1—2—3—4—5—6—7**
Comments:	
Participates effectively in on call rotation	**1—2—3—4—5—6—7**
Comments:	
(to be filled in by Director of Recovery and Addictions)	**1—2—3—4—5—6—7**
Comments:	
(to be filled in by Director of Recovery and Addictions)	**1—2—3—4—5—6—7**
Comments:	

Chart your responses with Zero being at the center and 7 being at the farthest point away from the center



Use this following section to outline your future development goals. Goals can be professional, educational, personal, spiritual etc.

Goal:
Timeline for goal:
Benchmarks:
What is your first step? :
What do you need from The Bridge to help you ?:
How will you know you have succeeded in this development goal?:

It is important that we keep this conversation going? Do you want to revisit this document throughout the year?

Yes No

If the answer is yes, how often should we review this document?

Every ______________________________ Months?

Take the time now and schedule some time throughout the year in your Outlook calendar. Write the dates below once you have them in our calendar.

1) ________________
2) ________________
3) ________________
4) ________________
5) ________________
6) ________________

Use this space to indicate anywhere of importance, where the Director and Manager have disagreed on a rating of the skill

Director ____ Date___________________

Manager ____ Date ___________________

Appendix B: Letter of Invitation to Frontline Staff

Dear The Bridge Youth and Family Services Employee,

I am contacting you on behalf of Jamie McGregor who is inviting you to be part of a research project that he is conducting. This project is part of the requirement for his Master's Degree in Leadership, at Royal Roads University. This project has been approved by The Bridge Youth and Family Services, and he has been given permission to contact potential participants for this purpose.

The purpose of his research is to explore how The Bridge Youth & Family Services can collaboratively develop a useful, practical to use performance appraisal process that meaningfully assesses and helps develop the leadership team. Your name was chosen as a prospective participant because you are an employee of The Bridge Youth & Family Services.

This phase of his research project will consist of a variety of group facilitated learning experiences conducted through Zoom and Google Docs, and is estimated to last 3 hours**.** The attached document contains further information about the study conduct and will enable you to make a fully informed decision on whether or not you wish to participate. Please review this information before responding.

You are not required to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. I will hold your decision whether or not to participate in confidence and the researcher, Jamie McGregor. will not know who has withdrawn their voluntary participation.

Please feel free to contact the administration team at any time with any question, they will forward your questions on to the research team anonymously for clarification.

If you would like to participate in his research project, please contact:

Name: Administration Services
Email: [email address]
Telephone: [telephone number]

Sincerely,
Administration Services

Appendix C: Letter of Invitation to Managers

Dear The Bridge Youth and Family Services Manager,

I am inviting you to be part of a research project that I am conducting. This project is part of the requirement for my Master's Degree in Leadership, at Royal Roads University. This project has been approved by The Bridge Youth and Family Services, and I have been given permission to contact potential participants for this purpose.

The purpose of my research is to explore how The Bridge Youth & Family Services can collaboratively develop a useful, practical to use performance appraisal process that meaningfully assesses and helps develop the leadership team. Your name was chosen as a prospective participant because you are a manager of The Bridge Youth & Family Services.

This phase of his research project will consist of a variety of group facilitated learning experiences conducted through Zoom and Google Docs, and is estimated to last 3 hours. The attached document contains further information about the study conduct and will enable you to make a fully informed decision on whether or not you wish to participate. Please review this information before responding.

You are not required to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. If you would like to participate in his research project, please contact:

Name: Jamie McGregor
Email: [email address]
Telephone: [telephone number]

Sincerely,
Jamie McGregor

Appendix D: Letter of Invitation to Directors

Dear The Bridge Youth and Family Services Directors,

I am inviting you to be part of a research project that I am conducting. This project is part of the requirement for my Master's Degree in Leadership, at Royal Roads University. This project has been approved by The Bridge Youth and Family Services, and I have been given permission to contact potential participants for this purpose.

The purpose of my research is to explore how The Bridge Youth & Family Services can collaboratively develop a useful, practical to use performance appraisal process that meaningfully assesses and helps develop the leadership team. Your name was chosen as a prospective participant because you are a Director of The Bridge Youth & Family Services.

This phase of his research project will consist of a variety of group facilitated learning experiences conducted through Zoom and Google Docs, and is estimated to last 3 hours. The attached document contains further information about the study conduct and will enable you to make a fully informed decision on whether or not you wish to participate. Please review this information before responding.

You are not required to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. If you would like to participate in his research project, please contact:

Name: Jamie McGregor
Email: [email address]
Telephone: [telephone number]

Sincerely,
Jamie McGregor

Appendix E: Research Information Letter

My name is Jamie McGregor, and this research project is part of the requirement for a Masters of Leadership at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by contacting Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Director, School of Leadership Studies: [email address] or [telephone number].

Purpose of the study and sponsoring organization:

The purpose of my research project is to undertake a process to collaboratively develop a new performance appraisal process that will be used to assess those individuals currently in leadership roles at The Bridge Youth & Family Services.

The research question for this project is: How can The Bridge develop and implement a performance appraisal system that enhances leadership development for its current leadership team

Your participation and how information will be collected:

The research will follow a Human Centered Design (HCD) approach and will be conducted through Zoom and Google Docs over a three hour time period. As part of the HCD approach you will be participating in peer to peer interviews (15 minutes) and Rapid Prototyping (150 minutes).

As we are currently in the midst of a worldwide pandemic, the whole process will be conducted via a mix of Zoom meeting and shared Google Docs.

Peer-Led Interviews (Frontline Group)

- What in the current performance appraisal system of leaders that you use every two years works well for you personally?
- What would be the ideal future state of a performance appraisal system that you would use to assess your manager?
- What are your personal feelings towards performance appraisals in general?
- Why do you think The Bridge Youth & Family Services wants to have an effective performance appraisal system?

Peer-Led Interviews (Managers and Directors)

- What in the current performance appraisal system works well for you personally?
- What would be the ideal future state of a performance appraisal system?
- What are your personal feelings towards performance appraisals in general?
- Why do you think The Bridge Youth & Family Services wants to have an effective performance appraisal system?

Prototyping

- In your groups create an ideal performance appraisal system
- Bring back the prototype to the larger group and receive feedback
- Return to small group and incorporate feedback
- Bring the design back to group for presentation

Benefits and risks to participation:

By participating in the study you will have the opportunity to collaboratively build a performance appraisal system that will be used throughout the organization, and to help encourage the development leadership capacity. It will also give you an opportunity to interact with staff from across the agency, further developing your interconnection to the people you work with and the understanding of our organization.

There will be a cost of time, it will pull you away from your regular daily work, and perhaps cause some distress amongst the participants that would regularly have contact with their service providers during this time. There is a risk that what you say inside of the group facilitated process may not stay within the group, although that will be the intention.

Inquiry team:

John Yarshako Director of Recovery and Addictions Services

Cameron Jarvis, External Researcher

Real or Perceived Conflict of Interest:

Jamie McGregor, the lead researcher in this project recognized that he may have a perceived conflict of interest because of my dual role as Manager of Recovery and Addictions and my role as RRU researcher. This is a voluntary study, and you are free to withdraw yourself at any time. In Recognition of my managerial role, the frontline staff process will be facilitated by an external third party by the name of Cameron Jarvis. He will not share any of the names of the frontline staff who participate.

Confidentiality, security of data, and retention period:

I will work to protect your privacy throughout this study. All information I collect will be maintained in confidence with hard copies (e.g., consent forms) stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Electronic data (such as transcripts or audio files) will be stored on a password protected laptop. If you are participating in the frontline group, your information will be stored by Cameron Jarvis and will be destroyed six months after the completion of the study. Information will be recorded in hand-written format or audio recorded, and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be destroyed at the completion of the study and any information provided by an identifiable individual who has withdrawn from the research will not be retained. As this project is primarily group work, it will not be possible to keep participants anonymous from one another, nor to guarantee that information shared inside the group process will not be shared outside of the group environment. All data collected will not be attached to a single identifiable person. As we are utilizing Zoom recordings and Google documents I cannot guarantee what those organizations will do with any of the recording or Google Docs. The Zoom session may be recorded and the data is stored in the USA. Data stored on servers in the USA may be subject to examination by the US government under the USA Patriot Act.

Sharing results:

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters In Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings with The Bridge Youth and & Family Services, and all members who participated in the group facilitation will receive a copy via e-mail.

Procedure for withdrawing from the study:

You can withdraw yourself at any time from this study by contacting Jamie McGregor at [email address], [telephone number] or talking directly to him in person If you are a member of the frontline group you can email Cameron Jarvis at [email address] to withdraw yourself from the study at any time. Data of the recorded conversations, and information produced by the groups you are in will not be able to be returned due to its anonymous nature.

You are not required to participate in this research project. By signing the in-person consent form you indicate that you have read and understand the information above and give your free and informed consent to participate in this project.

Please keep a copy of this information letter for your records.

Appendix F: Informed Consent Letter

Informed Consent Letter: Building Leadership Capacity within The Bridge Youth and Family Services

By signing this form, you agree that you are over the age of 19 and have read the information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this project and have data you contribute used in the final report and any other knowledge outputs (articles, conference presentations, newsletters, etc.)

- ☐ I consent to the Zoom recording of the peer to peer interview. The Zoom session may be recorded and the data is stored in the USA. Data stored on servers in the USA may be subject to examination by the US government under the USA Patriot Act.
- ☐ I consent to quotations and excerpts expressed by me through the facilitated group work be included in this study, provided that my identity is not disclosed.
- ☐ I consent to the material I have contributed to and/or generated [e.g., flipchart notes, Google Docs or visuals from an arts-based method] through my participation in facilitated group work be used in this study.
- ☐ I commit to respect the confidential nature of the facilitated group work by not sharing identifying information about the other participants.

Returning Information:

It will be impossible to return individual data to people from the prototype process, as it will be combined within group work on shared Google Docs. Transcripts from the peer to peer interviews will be sent to each participant, and they will be given ten days to withdraw from the study. The group interview transcript will be sent to the separate working groups: frontline, manager and director. The frontline group will be able to send any additional context or information to Cameron Jarvis and then the manager and director groups will be able to do the same, sending their information to Jamie McGregor.

Conflict of Interest:

Jamie McGregor, the lead researcher in this project recognized that he may have a perceived conflict of interest because of his dual role as Manager of Recovery and Addictions and his role as RRU researcher. He will not be facilitating the frontline staff sessions and will not know who participates in order to mitigate any conflict of interest. This is a voluntary study, and you are free to withdraw at any time.

Name: (Please Print): ____

Signed: ____

Date: ____

Appendix G: Peer-to-Peer Interview Questions

Questions/Instructions Used in the Group Facilitation

Peer-Led Interviews (Frontline Group)

- What in the current performance appraisal system of leaders that you use every two years works well for you personally?
- What would be the ideal future state of a performance appraisal system that you would use to assess your manager?
- What are your personal feelings towards performance appraisals in general?
- Why do you think The Bridge Youth & Family Services wants to have an effective performance appraisal system?

Peer-Led Interviews (Managers and Directors)

- What in the current performance appraisal system works well for you personally?
- What would be the ideal future state of a performance appraisal system?
- What are your personal feelings towards performance appraisals in general?
- Why do you think The Bridge Youth & Family Services wants to have an effective performance appraisal system?

Prototyping

- In your groups create an ideal performance appraisal system.
- Bring back the prototype to the larger group and receive feedback.
- Return to small group and incorporate feedback.
- Bring the design back to group for presentation.