

THE 20-YEAR START-UP

*Using Capacity Building to Address
Systemic Underperformance in a
Nonprofit Job Club*

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Capstone Proposal
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Binta Brown

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Executive Summary

Founded in 2001 as a result of the dot-com bubble burst and post 9/11, Launch Pad Job Club (LPJC) is a federally recognized 501(c) nonprofit organization in Austin, Texas. Its mission is to provide networking, career development, and job-lead sharing that aids job seekers in their pursuit of gainful employment. According to the executive director, the organization is commonly referred to as the "20-year start-up" among relevant community leaders in the private and nonprofit sectors. In other words, although the organization has been in operation for two decades, it persistently underperforms, exhibiting characteristics akin to that of many nascent or emergent organizations. This capstone project uses LPJC as a case study to address the following problem of practice: how can LPJC effectively build capacities to achieve and sustain improved performance?

Over these last two decades of operation, LPJC has struggled to find its strategic foothold in the nonprofit sector. Limited staff to perform the day-to-day operations, a meager budget and unstable operating space have been persistent challenges for the organization. The rising pressures for performance improvement for nonprofits come from numerous sources, including its donors, governmental funders, business sponsors, its internal clients and beneficiaries, and the general public (Eisinger, 2002; Hoefler, 2000; Wing, 2004). Further, this pressure is compounded by the call for nonprofits to be more business-like (Poole, Davis, Risan & Nelson, 2001).

To understand the phenomenon of organizational underperformance in nonprofits and how to develop strategies for improvement, we created a conceptual framework by synthesizing context-design theory (Wang, 2010), capacity building domains (2004, McKinsey & Company (2001) and capacity building engagement (Light & Hubbard 2004). Context-design theory notes two factors that influence an organization's performance. The first, contextual or the external environment, includes socioeconomic conditions. The second factor, internal design, is

concerned with the production process, organizational structure, managerial roles, and strategies within the organization. While Wang (2010) points us to specific contributors to the underperformance of an organization, McKinsey & Company's (2001) capacity building offers a helpful framework for thinking about the important organizational domains of performance. Light and Hubbard (2004) present a strategy for engaging in capacity building activities to produce stronger and sustainable organizations.

To this end, this project emphasizes the importance of integrating a systems approach to capacity building that examines each element of McKinsey & Company's (2001) framework individually and in relation to others within the organization's context (Light 2004). Concomitantly, the scope and design of the selected capacity building effort should be guided by Light & Hubbard's (2004) theoretical framework for capacity building engagement.

The following research questions guided this investigation and informed recommendations for sustaining improved performance at LPJC:

- 1) What are the underlying factors contributing to LPJC's persistent underperformance in securing adequate and diverse funding, achieving adequate staffing for its administrative operations, and securing a stable location to house its operations?
- 2) How can LPJC's organizational structure be strengthened such that it builds capacity resulting in improved performance?

To investigate these questions, we utilized a sequential mixed-methods approach. We distributed a survey to 5,951 people across three LPJC stakeholder groups: former and current board members, volunteers, and clients. For richer insight into LPJC's operations and culture, we followed up with semi-structured qualitative interviews with the board. With these efforts, we gained the unique perspectives of stakeholders regarding the organization's overall performance.

The findings may assist LPJC and other nonprofits with implementing and executing strategies for building and achieving improved and sustainable performance.

Our project's findings suggest a number of factors connected across three major areas: leadership, operations structure, and board governance. Board members consistently reported disengagement, mis- and micromanagement, a lack of accountability, and uncoordinated group dynamics. Interviewees repeatedly expressed an interest in strengthening the sustainability of the organization. Many respondents recognized that though LPJC's mission is moderately achieved via programming, the organization operating in a perpetual survival mode, i.e., like a "20-year start-up," is unsustainable.

We offer four recommendations for LPJC based on the findings from this investigation. Our suggestions focus on capacity building activities that are within reasonable control of the organization. In using the framework of capacity building (McKinsey & Company) and engagement (Light & Hubbard), we highlight the importance of defining performance in terms of the organization's historical context. First, LPJC would benefit from integrating iterative assessments to monitor organizational efficiencies and determine effective interventions for clear outcomes and reporting. Second, the organization should design governance that supports transparent designation of responsibilities and accountability for leadership and board tasks. Third, LPJC should create an immediate succession plan to set a proactive strategy for addressing inevitable separations among organizational leadership, board members, and volunteers. And, finally, LPJC should engage with a consultant who can co-create a strategic roadmap and step-by-step actionable and measurable execution plan that is aligned with its mission.

Introduction

Launch Pad Job Club (LPJC) is the oldest of three job clubs in Central Texas. A federally recognized 501(c) nonprofit organization, it, by design, utilizes the collective power of its members and community to help job seekers secure gainful employment. Job clubs are formal or informal networking groups of job seekers interested in employment topics, often held in local settings. LPJC offers weekly meetings, networking, and resource and job-lead sharing. An essential programming component is the array of guest speakers sharing best practices related to a host of career-related topics. Job searching, resume writing, interviewing, making successful career pivots, and harnessing the power of LinkedIn and other social media platforms are a few topic examples. Since its inception, the organization has served over 18,000 members from various career tracks and educational backgrounds. The majority of its members identify as mid-to-late-career professionals who have experienced some form of unemployment.

The National Council of Nonprofits (2020) defines capacity building as “whatever is needed to bring a nonprofit to the next level of operational, programmatic, financial, or organizational maturity, so it may more effectively and efficiently advance its mission into the future.” To continue to drive its mission forward, LPJC must view capacity building as a continuous improvement endeavor woven into their real-time practices and long-term strategy. Continuous improvement in the context of capacity building involves, in part, leaders identifying and developing specific competencies needed to advance their organizational performance. The notion of capacity building can be elusive and often goes unnoticed; however, it is considered the driving engine that allows nonprofits to thrive (National Council of Nonprofits, 2020). Specific to LPJC, capacity building is an effort to strengthen its organizational infrastructure, management and governance and leadership and board capabilities.

There has been an influx of nonprofit organizations in Austin, TX. According to a 2019 report from Mission Capital, there were more than 6,000 nonprofits in this metro area, all vying for resources from the same funding pool. The confluence of increased demand for services, decreased resources, the economic recession, and government and donor funding cuts amid a health pandemic have created a tremendous strain on many nonprofits in the area. A 2020 survey reported that 54 percent of nonprofits indicated that they would not operate at full capacity beyond six months without additional funding (Mission Capital). Simultaneously, there has been a reported 49 percent increase in the demand for nonprofits' services. Because of the many ways in which these external conditions affect how organizations function, it is imperative that LPJC consider them when recalibrating its operational management, board governance, and leadership.

Initial informational interviews with LPJC's board members suggested that the organization tends to focus narrowly on program expansion, without equal consideration of the associated rising operations costs, increased competition for funding sources, or emerging sector trends. The general consensus in our initial conversations with those in the organization was that such a narrow focus among the leadership has affected performance. Wang (2004) defines underperformance broadly as “any performance not up to expectation. It is any performance deemed to have room for improvement. It can be a trend of performance deterioration over time, a large undesirable performance variation such as that away from plus or minus three standard deviations, or a performance inferior to established performance standards.” In LPJC, organizational dysfunction, understaffing, financial vulnerability, and operations location impermanence were the inevitable results as suggested by board responses.

Effective approaches to address such organizational underperformance commonly involve a systematic attention to detail and the implementation of a strategic framework of

policies and values, including individual program evaluation, self-assessment systems, or a capacity building approach (Cairns, Harrison, Hutchinson & Tricker, 2005; Rojas, 2000).

Achieving sustainable improvement, however, involves blending the right combination of strategies, given the operating landscape. Misidentifying an organization's capacities may "not lead to lasting organizational improvement," it can, in fact, "cause organizations harm" (Blumenthal, 2001). Organizations have unique missions, communities, and services that demand capacity building specific approaches for effective and sustainable improvement.

We hope that this capstone project will help LPJC establish a robust and flexible capacity building strategy to weather the constant and unpredictable change that is now the norm across many industries. Additionally, by engaging in continuous improvement practices, LPJC will strengthen its overall health and profile in the nonprofit and private sectors.

Organizational Context

As the longest-running job club in Central Texas, LPJC is dedicated to providing first-class career education, support, and coaching to professionals experiencing unemployment. The organization was formed in 2001 as an offshoot of a Texas Workforce Commission-sponsored project to attract white-collar workers to the local career centers to take advantage of the services offered. However, when Dell Technologies laid off hundreds of employees that year due to the dot-com bubble burst, LPJC was instrumental in providing job search assistance and support for those displaced at a critical time in the economy. Further, the far-reaching effects of 9/11 exacerbated the economy's fragility, raising the unemployment rate, which triggered a spike in demand for LPJC services. Today, this organization continues to be a valuable resource for those experiencing unemployment.

In 2005, LPJC officially received its 501(c) status as a nonprofit organization. Since its inception, LPJC has hosted weekly Friday meetings that offer support, education, and networking opportunities for its members. The organization has become the largest networking and support group for job seekers in Central Texas, serving over 18,000 and counting. Due to the job market's cyclical nature, there is an inverse relationship between the club's membership and the economy. In other words, as the economy improves, its numbers decline as more people secure employment.

The organization's member demographic is the result of its founding coinciding with the massive layoff at Dell Technologies in Austin. LPJC is open to all professionals across various industries; however, it is viewed as the job club for largely White middle-career professionals in the information technology industry. While useful for professionals at any stage of their careers, early programming was especially attuned to helping middle-career private-sector professionals

adapt to the evolving employer landscape and successfully pivot to wide ranging jobs. It consists of the following:

- 1st Friday - LinkedIn & Jobscan: Your Very Best Job Search Tools
- 2nd Friday - Resume Tweaking
- 3rd Friday - How to Ace Your Interview! (Nuts and bolts review of what to expect from today's interviewers)
- 4th Friday - Mock Interviewing (Sitting in the "hot seat" for a mock panel interview)
- 5th Friday - How to Fill Out the State Application

LPJC adopted a blended business model approach, combining two job club models.

Following the Enhanced Job Club model, it places individuals in jobs in line with their careers of interest. This model's theory suggests that such placements result in greater job retention and advancement. Concomitantly, using the Traditional Job Club model, LPJC focuses on speed rather than fit, placing individuals quickly, in any type of job. Azurdia et al. (2008) assert that employment, secured via either model, provides workforce training that may lead to better job opportunities.

As a heavily volunteer-driven organization, LPJC relies on Indeed, which matches up to \$5,000 of the organization's donations during Amplify Austin, a major annual fundraising event. LPJC has primarily survived by the founder's financial investments and small donations from individual donors, except for a one-time, in-kind donation from a former client of \$5,000. All of LPJC's funding is allocated toward fulfilling its mission and objectives. The organization receives a generous, ongoing in-kind contribution from Indeed in the form of three to four of their employees providing weekly professional career coaching to its clients.

LPJC has traditionally focused its efforts on programming at the expense of developing a sound operating infrastructure. This overly narrow focus has resulted in its inability to respond efficiently to its challenges. McKinsey & Company (2001) postulated that this sort of prolonged inattention to capacity building is endemic to the nonprofit sector, constituting a limitation to the organization's long-term health and sustainability.

The capstone project's stakeholders include board members, volunteers, the executive director (formerly the operations manager), prospective donors and sponsors, Goodwill (LPJC's temporary operating location), and its current and prospective clients. This project aims to inform nonprofits on how to identify and engage in specific capacity building activities that promote improved performance. Assessing and understanding LPJC's existing capacity building is critical to its ability to adapt to emerging trends in the labor market and the nonprofit sector. Implementing the context-specific capacity building activities will improve leadership, board governance, and operations management to help LPJC effectively advance its mission.

Area of Inquiry

The problem of practice for LPJC is its persistent underperformance in a number of areas important for the long-term sustainability of a non-profit including adequate and diverse funding, staffing for administrative operations, and stability of location for its operations. An initial interview with the founder and executive director indicated that LPJC has long struggled with these matters. These prevailing challenges have often been met with an inequitable distribution of tasks among the board and the executive director along with limited accountability for fulfilling duties and project completion. The findings from our larger investigation corroborated those initial reports about instability across the areas noted above.

While completing this capstone project, a global health pandemic resulted in widespread disruptions in businesses, including nonprofits. Faced with rounds of redundancies, social distancing and lockdowns, and tighter funding avenues, LPJC had to pivot to online operations quickly to match the changing environment, all while attempting to meet the exponentially increased need for its services. Simultaneously, it experienced some board member turnover, further limiting its administrative and operational capacity.

Significance of Problem of Practice

Nonprofits are under growing pressure to demonstrate their social impact because funders, citizens, nonprofit clients, and taxpayers expect increased accountability and transparency regarding how nonprofits govern their fundraising, expenditure and program outcomes (Brest & Harvey, 2008; Ebrahim & Weisband, 2007; Gibelman & Gelman, 2008; Monitor Institute, 2009). With the emergent professionalization of the sector, credentialed experts such as auditors and evaluators have become the norm in administrative functions to assess nonprofits' social impact vis-a-vis pressing societal issues (Hwang & Powell, 2009).

The job search can be long, frustrating and isolating, and LPJC supports its members by providing knowledge, insights, and coaching through this process. This support is particularly helpful for older and underrepresented job-seekers, who often face hiring discrimination, can leverage the organization's resources to help circumvent these barriers. Further, LPJC closes the network gap among professionals by expanding their circle of influence to enhance their employment opportunities. With increased outside attention paid to nonprofits' operations, LPJC will inevitably face demands to communicate its performance outcomes to stakeholders who aim to be more strategic about their philanthropy. We attest that LPJC will need to invest in capacity building activities that maximize its performance, thereby bolstering its strategic position and reputation in the market.

To help address the organization's lagging performance, LPJC's founder deliberately recruited diverse board members. The assumption was inadvertent value would bring a broader range of information, knowledge, perspectives, and connections to the organization's leadership. However, board member responses suggest that communication issues, stifled ideas, and stagnant decision-making stultify the board's efforts. The appointment of diverse board members constitutes an initial step toward improving board governance; however, diverse policies and practices must likewise be in place to allow its board to have a positive impact (Buse et al., 2016). For example, despite board consensus that the organization's financial health is the driving force behind its ability to fulfill its mission, the founder's discomfort with soliciting money from internal and external benefactors has consistently resulted in the tabling of proposals to explore and pilot new funding avenues. This is to say, more generally, that while fresh ideas have been broached in discussions concerning improving LPJC's performance, the organization's leadership structure often impedes the implementation of those ideas.

The causes of underperformance for a nonprofit can be numerous, including but not limited to managerial roles, administrative or organizational structure, and the socioeconomic, political, and legal environment (Lynn, Heinrich & Hill, 2004a). Our findings captured board perceptions categorizing LPJC's underperformance in three broad areas: leadership, board governance, and operations management. Critiques of the leadership were especially salient in these findings, particularly how the founder's tactical focus on member services (programming) outstrips her attention to and appetite for long-term strategic planning, the latter of which would ultimately steer the board and organization toward sustainability. As it stands, the organization continues to operate, albeit while exhibiting characteristics of a fledgling company.

The focus of our capstone project may be useful to nonprofits across various sectors. Ensuring a social impact remains integral to the missions of many nonprofits despite the several changes within and external to this sector. How can nonprofits identify and utilize tailored capacity building activities to improve performance? A thorough understanding of how to define underperformance and its context-specific causes will enable nonprofits, like LPJC, to customize a multifaceted and flexible approach to enhancing organizational performance.

Literature Review

We conducted a structured literature review of academic and “gray” literature to provide an overview of how capacity building relates to organizational performance in non-profit organizations. The review aimed to identify prior work relevant to our research question and stated problem. We conducted targeted searches initially using Google Scholar. We used a snowball searching method that included investigation of relevant articles that cited several foundational pieces.

Organizational Performance

Wang (2010) asserts that organizational performance is an organization's actions, products, results, impacts, or achievements. To identify challenges and construct realistic decisions that support the alignment of leadership, board governance, and operation structure, the root causes of underperformance must first be uncovered. The organization's efforts to engage in capacity-building efforts are a roadmap to increase performance and effectiveness. Particularly relevant for understanding a nonprofit is a board's activities and their impact on its functioning.

According to Boyne (2003), resource availability is a crucial factor in influencing organizational performance. Other factors affecting performance are the degree of clarity with which organizational goals are defined and the level of effort with which employees work toward achieving them. Clear goals help organizations assemble and concentrate resources to achieve performance (Chun & Rainey, 2005). Kim (2004) posits that employees perceived organizational performance is positively associated with their job satisfaction, public service motivation, effective communication to organizations, and organizational citizenship behaviors. Organizational performance can be affected by their decision-making structure, too.

Board Governance

Jaskyte (2012) presents an integrative model for an organization's board and the executive leader to engage in innovative thinking to strengthen the governance process and lead the organization on a successful path. Innovative thinking, also referred to as organizational innovation, is the development and implementation of business practices that set the tone for the board and leadership's expectations to charter realistic and innovative goals in a cohesive manner. Employing organizational innovation, nonprofits can propel the board to explicitly delegate tasks accordingly based on each board member's skill set and leverage the talent of all stakeholders.

In a later study, Jaskyte (2018) postulates that having board members from different industries, i.e., diverse boards, seemed to harm innovation in an organization. The author argues that as this aspect of diversity increased, innovation decreased. One possible reason for this inverse relationship is that a high degree of diversity inhibits positive group dynamics and communication, which fractures organizational cohesion. Larger boards present similar challenges, including poor group dynamics, namely coordination and communication problems and difficulty establishing interpersonal relationships among board members (Alexander et al., 2001). Provan (1980) suggests, however, that larger boards generate a greater pool of allies and expand the organization's visibility in the local community. Also, larger boards tend to possess more knowledge, skills, and abilities, along with a variety of perspectives on organizational issues. Beyond board cohesion, Leroux and Langer (2016) found a disconnect between the nonprofit board's idealized vision and their actual activities or functions, due in part to the various governance models that ascribe different levels of importance to the board's roles as well as to those of the executive. On one hand, the board is detached from the agency's work and is therefore unable to understand and execute the activities in running a nonprofit (Harris, 1989).

Conversely, overzealous board members can create board interference and, at worse, effect the resignation of board members. The authors draw from Miller-Millesen's (2003) theory-based typology of board behaviors to identify organizational and environmental factors that influence board behavior. Their summation of the results indicates six explanations for this difference, including the percentage of government funding, sex of the founder, organizational age, number of full-time employees, organizational effectiveness, and association membership. These factors play a critical role in the governance and the quality and strength of the executive-board relationship.

Board diversity, Boesso et al. (2017) found, helped strategic planning efforts rather than hindering them, as Jaskyte (2018) found to be the case. The crucial distinction is that Boessos et al. (2017) focus on strategy development, whereas Jaskyte (2018) focuses on innovation. What this distinction suggests is that while diversity may inhibit a board's adoption of cutting-edge ideas or even intra-board cohesion, having diverse voices on a governing board may lend itself more to the adoption of consensus, though not necessarily innovative, strategic plans. Though not particularly rosy findings for diverse boards, they do help explain some organizations apparent reluctance to adopt innovative fundraising and operational strategies. Promising, however, is nonprofits potential for partnering with community stakeholders in a more substantial way, as the research suggests that diverse board members, whose networks span a variety of sectors, makes doing so more likely (Boessos et al., 2017; Leroux and Langer, 2016). As Boyne (2003) suggests, however, it is important that such community partnerships advance a well-defined goal, and that, as Wang (2010) contends, any actions taken toward this goal produce the desired impact on the organization, itself.

While, granted, the term “start-up” connotes a sort of operational agility and goal-related flexibility, Bielefeld’s (1994) study found that these types of nonprofit impermanence patterns are indicative of younger, smaller nonprofits that more often fail to survive. Nonprofits who succumbed to failed operations tended to employ a retrenchment strategy—e.g., saving money through activities such as increasing the lean administrative staff’s workload and relying heavily on volunteers (Bielefeld, 1994). The compounding effect of relying on short-term funding strategies and staff-related retrenchment is the creation of deficiencies that hinder organizations’ ability to take the strategic approach necessary to secure critical resources that advance goal achievement. Ironically, in other words, the very strategic ideation and implementation that a narrow focus on client service implicitly or explicitly seeks to avoid only forestalls later opportunities to engage in the very same strategic thinking.

Nonprofit Sustainable Strategies

While Leroux and Langer (2016) studied the causes of board behaviors, Boessos et al. (2017) examined their effects, investigating board governances’ role in driving grant-giving foundations’ strategies to support charitable and philanthropic activities. The findings help demonstrate the relationships between the choice of philanthropic strategy and board capital (diversity and networks), board activities (board processes, internal board committees, and board effectiveness), and CEO leadership. Boessos et al. (2017) found that 1) highly active boards increase the interactions among foundations, local experts, and community stakeholders; 2) good governance and board diversity, together, are more effective in facilitating the transition toward devising and implementing more effective strategies. These findings suggest that board and good governance processes are strong when there is an active, positive engagement towards an evolved strategic approach and a strong rapport between the board and the CEO leadership.

Ihm and Shumate's (2019) study likewise delves into the roles of board members' social and human capital on nonprofit collaboration with other nonprofits, businesses, and government agencies. Each relationship has unique objectives, leading to different decision-making processes and determining a board's roles in collaboration. The authors' findings revealed that board social capital, but not board human capital, is positively related to the presence and number of within-sector (partner with other nonprofits) and cross-sector (mixed organizations) nonprofit collaboration. Additional results found that board members displaying inter-organizational collaboration with other entities had strong social networks that essentially enhanced administrative innovation, financial success, and organizational performance and survival (Chait et al., 2011; Fu & Shumate, 2017). Lastly, the board members' strong networks enabled nonprofits to find appropriate partners, enhance organizational legitimacy, and initiate relationships with their partners (Austin, 2000; Guo & Acar, 2005; Rondinelli & London, 2003).

Capacity Building Initiatives and Implications

Ebrahim (2003) examines the positive and negative implications of capacity building efforts that an organization engages in to generate practices toward building effectiveness. The author asserts that while an organization engages in capacity building there could be negative implications that arise. Such implications can result in participating in capacity efforts that do not align with the organization's needs which may impede performance improvement. By targeting specific capacities for performance, organizations can attract potential donors and further its sustainability. To determine key capacity building efforts, the definition of capacity building, according to Ebrahim (2003), has to be understood. Furthermore, the author posits nonprofit capacity building frameworks such as that of McKinsey & Company and Urban Institute can be useful imperative technical tools for organizational development. Moreover, both frameworks

can aid in diagnosing issues and design recommendations critical to building internal organizational commitment to change and improving performance.

The article identifies three key lessons for an organization to identify its needs and apply the necessary capacity-building approaches. The first lesson is having the organization align its vision and strategy with staff and systems skills and support needed for enhancing its programs. Second, effective capacity building “is rarely confined to addressing only one of the elements in isolation,” and nonprofits “must also examine, analyze, and address ramifications that making changes will have on the other elements” (McKinsey & Company, 2001, p. 69). Third, organizations must understand capacity building is a long-term process that requires patience (Ebrabim, 2003). Nonprofits utilization of these lessons can further its capacity building efforts to address areas where they are excelling and where immediate and concrete action can be taken more practically and iteratively.

Rather than nonprofits examining capacity-building practices in a short-sighted manner, it should adopt and maintain an adaptive mindset. This mindset will enable an organization to “shift towards a planning style that is incremental and experimental, and in which the [organization] will be responsible for defining the development problem and its possible solutions” (Ebrabim, 2003, p. 15). Organizations commitment to adaptability and patience are key factors to ensure continual learning and development of capacities needed for long term success.

Capacity Building Engagement Model

Light and Hubbard (2004) provides a model for thinking about how to approach capacity building in which they refer to as capacity building engagement. The authors define engagement as “a specific capacity building effort within a single organization.” They noted four universal

elements that determine the scope and design of any activity that shape the success of a project including desired outcome, change strategy, champions to guide effort and resources needed for the process. The relationship among these elements is described as dynamic, and interrelated rather than sequential.

One way to understand different desired outcomes is by looking at the degree of complexity involved in achieving them. For example, the need for a succession plan for an organization brings forth additional considerations beyond selecting a leader. It involves outlining a specific vetting and grooming criteria to transition a new leader. Therefore, Light & Hubbard (2004) quotes Blumental that “most capacity building approaches are characterized by either a focused, problem-centered approach or a broader commitment to work on a range of organizational issues” (p .29). The approach that is asserted can aid to an organization to focus on particular areas for better streamlining complex steps during the capacity building activity.

Though strategic planning is a blueprint for determining the direction of an organization, a measurable aim or action plan is often negated. To thwart efforts of designing a misaligned plan, stakeholders together should be diligently proactive and cohesive in progressing forward. Thus, Light and Hubbard asserts (2004) “having a strategic plan in place is useless if it does not lead to more organizational buy-in and better decision making” (p.50). Furthermore, strategic models should reflect the rapidly changing environment and allow for planning in real time on par with the flux of external factors.

Conceptual Framework

One definition of capacity building often cited in nonprofit literature is “a set of attributes that help or enable the organization to fulfill its mission” (Eisinger, 2002, p. 115). Capacity building is the engine that drives the organization towards achieving its mission through a series of activities and strategies and generally involves a change process. The activities that entail capacity building will vary depending on the organization’s context, challenges, and stakeholders (Wing, 2004). In other words, there is no one size fits all process that defines capacity building. Moreover, the dimensions of capacity building do not exist in isolation but are interdependent.

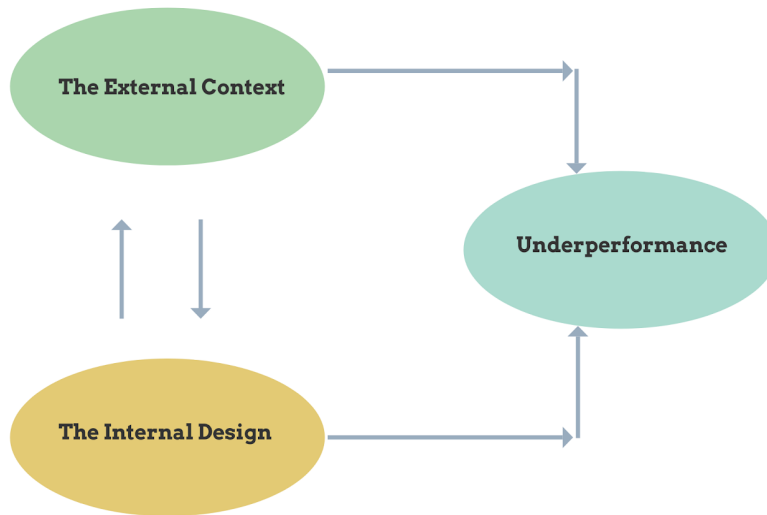
A variety of frameworks are available for nonprofit capacity building. However, no conclusive empirical evidence of what works and why it works to achieve high-performing nonprofits exists (Light, 2004; McKinsey & Company, 2001). Due to this gap between evaluative research and capacity building practices, we have taken a blended approach to guide and inform our research and recommendations for LPJC. We examined nonprofit and for-profit capacity building frameworks such as DeVita (2001) and Millar and Doherty (2016) and relevant theories for understanding underperformance and performance relationships, including production process theory and balanced scorecard theory.

We borrowed from two theoretical frameworks that helped to clarify the problem and purpose of our investigation: context-design theory (Wang, 2010) and capacity building (McKinsey & Company, 2001). Because organizations and their environment are far from static, we argue for a multifaceted approach to conceptualizing underperformance and capacity building towards performance improvement. Because LPJC’s needs are context-specific, we blended two frameworks to design a model to conceptualize the relationship between underperformance and organizational capacity.

Figure 1

Context-Design Theory

Note. Diagram depicts the process of contextual factors within an organization's structure.



Reprinted from Wang, X. (2009). *Performance Analysis for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*. United States: Jones & Bartlett Learning.

The context-design theory (Wang, 2010), the first of these frameworks, depicted in Figure 1, examines contextual factors and an organization's internal design, which both influence underperformance. The contextual factors reflect the economic, legal and political context in which the organization operates. In contrast, the internal design factors point to its production process, organizational structure, managerial roles, and strategies (Wang, 2010). Context-design theory allows for a more holistic and reflective view of underperformance because it focuses on internal and external factors rather than seeing organizations as operating in a vacuum. For this study, however, given LPJC's unique structure and operations, we decided to focus on its

internal factors of underperformance, not without recognizing the important role the external environment plays in underperformance.

Whereas Wang's (2010) context-design theory allows us to identify the causes of underperformance, McKinsey & Company, (2001) allows us to identify the specific domains that harbor underperformance and hinder capacity building potential. Further, this framework centers on continuous improvement strategies that support the entire organizational infrastructure in designing a way forward to build greater capacity. To this end, we draw on McKinsey to conceptualize a systems-oriented lens to capacity building, examining each organizational element individually and in relation to the others within the organization's context (Light, 2004; McKinsey & Company, 2001).

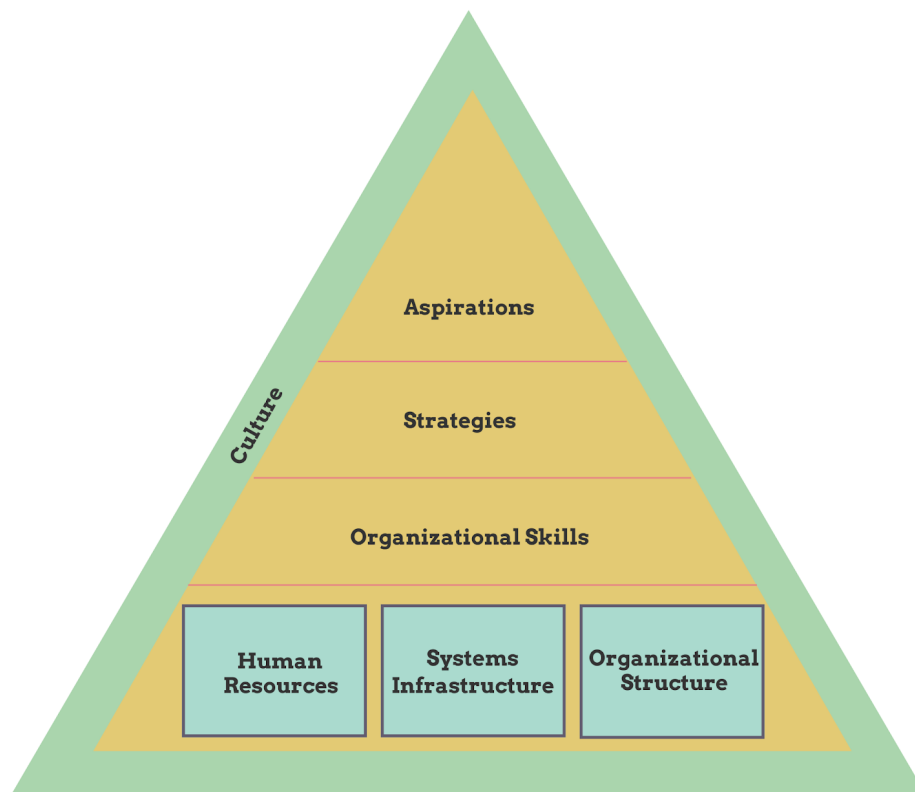
Depicted in Figure 2 are the seven McKinsey & Company's (2001) domains that showcase the connective tissue that binds the organization and forms its culture. These domains include shared values and practices, behavioral norms, and the organization's orientation towards performance. There is an interdependent relationship among domains because work in one area will inevitably have implications for other areas. Even so, we have opted to focus our findings on the four of these seven areas in which LPJC's underperformance is most salient: Aspirations, Strategy, Human Resources, and Organizational Structure. Outlined below is McKinsey & Company's (2001) framework:

1. **Aspirations:** An organization's mission, vision, and overarching goals collectively articulate its common sense of purpose and direction.
2. **Strategy:** The coherent set of actions and programs aimed at fulfilling the organization's overarching goals.
3. **Organizational Skills:** The sum of the organization's capabilities, including such things (among others) as performance measurement, planning, resource management, and external relationship building.
4. **Human Resources:** The collective capabilities, experiences, potential, and commitment of the organization's board, management team, staff, and volunteers.

5. **Systems and Infrastructure:** The organization’s planning, decision making, knowledge management, and administrative systems, as well as the physical and technological assets that support the organization.
6. **Organizational Structure:** The combination of governance, organizational design, inter-functional coordination, and individual job descriptions that shape the organization’s legal and management structure.
7. **Culture:** the connective tissue that binds together the organization, including shared values and practices, behavioral norms and the organization’s orientation towards performance.

Figure 2

McKinsey & Company Capacity Building



Note. The figure showcases the seven dimensions of McKinsey & Company’s capacity building framework. Reprinted from McKinsey & Company, *Effective Capacity Building in Nonprofit Organizations*, Venture Philanthropy Partners (2001).

Our underlying assumption is that using this sort of precise, blended model can generate performance improvement as LPJC recognizes the relationships between various elements that contribute to capacity. Beyond producing mere finger-pointing or generalizations about LPJC’s

underperformance indicators, this model helps us render a honed-in sense of where and how the proverbial ball has been dropped with respect to the organization's performance as a means of informing future corrective actions.

Research Questions

To better understand performance improvement in LPJC, we first broadly define what constitutes improved performance for this nonprofit. According to Richard et al. (2009), organizational performance is the actual results measured against its intended goals and objectives. Hubbard (2009) calls for further consideration of a broader definition that “recognizes and addresses sustainability of work processes and outcomes.” For LPJC, we define improved performance as its ability to adequately staff day-to-day operations, secure a permanent location, consistently and reliably diversify its funding, and identify appropriate activities to engage in to strengthen its long-term sustainability position.

We examine performance improvement through the capacity building lens. This project involves the synthesis of context-design, capacity building engagement and McKinsey & Company’s (2001) Capacity Building framework outlined above. Our research questions are:

1. What are the underlying factors contributing to LPJC’s persistent underperformance in securing adequate and diverse funding, achieving adequate staffing for administrative operations, and securing a stable location to house its operations?
2. How can LPJC’s organizational structure be strengthened such that it builds capacity resulting in improved performance?

Our first question utilizes context-design theory, which underpins the organization’s contextual and internal design to identify plausible reasons for underperformance. It helps diagnose organizational deficiencies that require attention. The second question sought to identify the critical attributes of organizational capacity that bear on mission fulfillment and sustainable performance. We researched the relationships between capacity building and organizational

performance in both non- and for- profit sectors. McKinsey & Company's (2001) seven- dimension framework asserts that capacity building, when targeted and executed well, translates directly into performance improvements on the individual and organization level. Light and Hubbard’s capacity building engagement model complements McKinsey’s by offering four universal and accessible components that help shape the success of LPJC capacity building activities. Table 1 below organized the two research questions to the conceptual framework and the data collection method.

Table 1
Research Questions with Conceptual Framework and Data Collection Method

| Research Questions | Conceptual Framework | Data Collection Method |
|---|--|--|
| What are the underlying factors contributing to LPJC’s persistent underperformance in securing adequate and diverse funding, achieving adequate staffing for administrative operations, and securing a stable location to house its operations? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Context-design theory ● McKinsey & Company Capacity Building | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Informational Meeting (Founder & executive director) ● Quantitative Surveys ● Qualitative Interviews |
| How can LPJC’s organizational structure be strengthened such that it builds capacity resulting in improved performance? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● McKinsey & Company Capacity Building ● Capacity Building Engagement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Quantitative Surveys ● Qualitative Interviews |

Project Design

Our research questions aim to determine the causes of LPJC's persistent underperformance and ascertain the best-suited interventions for the organization. We explored both research questions via the sequential mixed-method study design using data from our initial informational interview with the founder and executive director, surveys, followed by a semi-structured interview. We utilized the epidemiological approach of grounded theory to guide our research. Our methodological framework is guided by the constructivist grounded theory (GT). As explained by social researcher Charmaz (2008), the theory is an emergent method that is inductive, indeterminate, and open-ended and begins with the empirical world and builds an inductive understanding of it as events unfold and knowledge accrues. The constructivist grounded theory is designed to explore social processes with limited existing theories and understand through an inductive approach a phenomenon gathered from interviews, surveys, and observations.

Quantitative Data Collection

Our methodological approach involved an in-depth analysis of survey results on LPJC's leadership, members, staff, and volunteers' experiences and perspectives. We determined that engaging in a holistic approach would help us correlate LPJC's underperforming to unfulfilled capacity-building efforts. Moreover, the methodology allows us to theorize themes relevant to capacity building within the nonprofit sector, gathered from our analysis of our subjects' interactions.

We administered four surveys to each of the following stakeholders: the founder, former and current board members, volunteers, and clients. The survey questions were adapted from *Blue Avocado* (Masaoka, Jan., 2011), a magazine for the Nonprofit Insurance Alliance. We used the survey to garner stakeholders' perceptions of the organization's performance. Each survey

was formatted to a Likert scale. The ratings were outlined as 1-poor; 2-needs improvement; 3-satisfactory; 4-very good; 5-outstanding. The surveys were administered via RedCap, an application for building and managing surveys and databases. The mixed-method approach enabled us to focus on board governance during the early, middle, and current stages of LPJC. The reported board experiences allowed us to theorize reasons for LPJC's wavering operational structure, which impedes the improvement of their organizational effectiveness.

Qualitative Data Collection

We followed up with interviews with past and current board members, including the executive director, to expand upon and validate the survey's emerging findings and clarify any areas of dispute or conflict. The interview questions were intentionally open-ended to better access respondents' true feelings on issues. The purpose of the interviews was to ascertain a history of underperformance, evidence for causes of underperformance, and board perceptions for mitigating these issues. Furthermore, we wanted to expand upon and validate the literature review's emerging findings and clarify any contradicting messaging. Moreover, the qualitative interview responses informed our recommendations based on academic and gray literature on improving organizational performance.

We utilized an interview guide to frame our conversations with the board. This guide was designed to help us cover the necessary topics while allowing for flexibility and consistency with all the participants. The interview questions focused on two main inquiry lines: reasons for the organization's underperformance and recommended capacity building efforts. (See Appendix A for Interview Script)

The restrictions brought on by COVID-19, we conducted our interviews online using Zoom, a video-conferencing application. The interviews' protocol involved first, obtaining an

Excel spreadsheet from LPJC's founder consisting of former and current board members' contact information, respective board roles and notes outlining other specifics. Examples of other specifics included reasons for board members' departures and those who continue to serve beyond their 3-year term. Next, we wrote an email script outlining our study's purpose and the importance of garnering the board's perception of LPJC's performance during their tenure. We then scheduled Zoom interviews with individuals who responded to our request to participate. All Zoom interviews were automatically recorded and uploaded to a cloud server. For interview transcriptions, we utilized REV, a speech-to-text service. These transcriptions were used to analyze, code, and conclude our findings.

Due to the relatively small number of qualitative interviews, we utilized Excel and Word to categorize our findings, making them readily analyzable. Categories/coding were directly aligned with the interview questions. Results were compared across former and past board members, allowing us to identify common and overlapping themes. There were no areas of divergence among respondents. We encountered a low sample size for past board members and volunteers due to a low response rate.

Selection of Participants

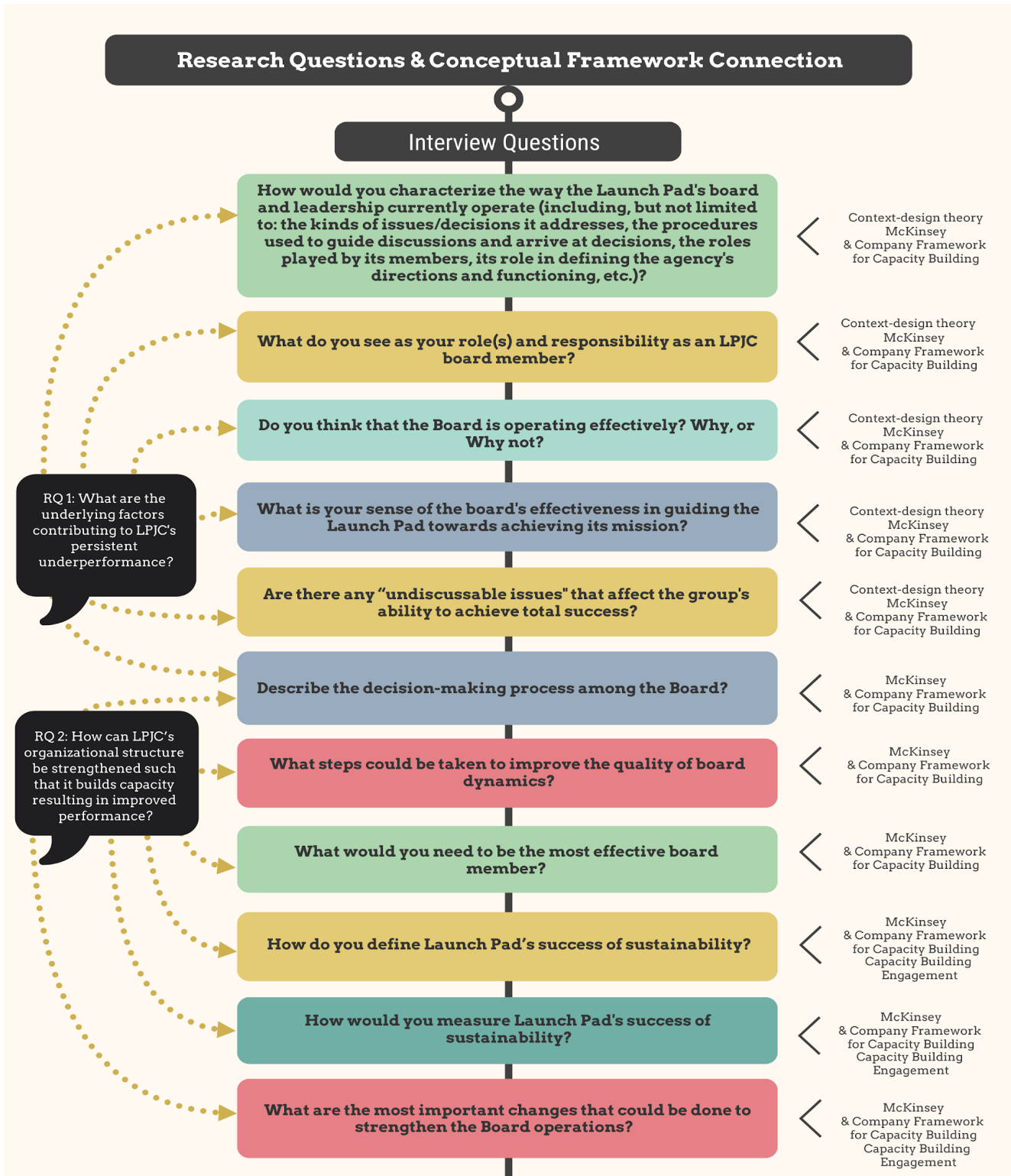
Purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling strategy, was utilized to recruit participants. Purposive sampling allows us to focus on key characteristics of the population we are researching to best answer our questions. The characteristics of the participants correspond with their roles within LPJC. With the executive director's assistance, our solicitation notice for participants was disseminated via LPJC's weekly email blast and newsletter. Our request for participants outlined the purpose of the study and included the survey link. To better understand their experiences and perceptions, we requested 30-minute interviews with each board member.

All former and current board members who agreed to participate were selected.

Participants were sent a Google interview sign-up sheet with instructions to choose a time that best suited their availability. We maintained participants' confidentiality by replacing their names and identifying details with pseudonyms in the transcripts and analysis. As the researchers, we were the only ones with access to the recordings, transcripts, and documents. At the beginning of the interview, we were explicit with participants that their identities and interview recordings would remain off the record. We also informed them that we would delete all recordings upon project completion.

The survey and interview questions drew from academic and practitioner literature reviews and our conceptual framework: context-design theory and McKinsey & Company (2001) capacity building. Our framework's concepts guided our design for the interview questions unique to LPJC's leadership, board governance, and operation structure. Figure 3 below illustrates the alignment among the research questions, interview questions, and the conceptual framework.

Figure 3
Research Questions, Interview Questions & Conceptual Framework Connection



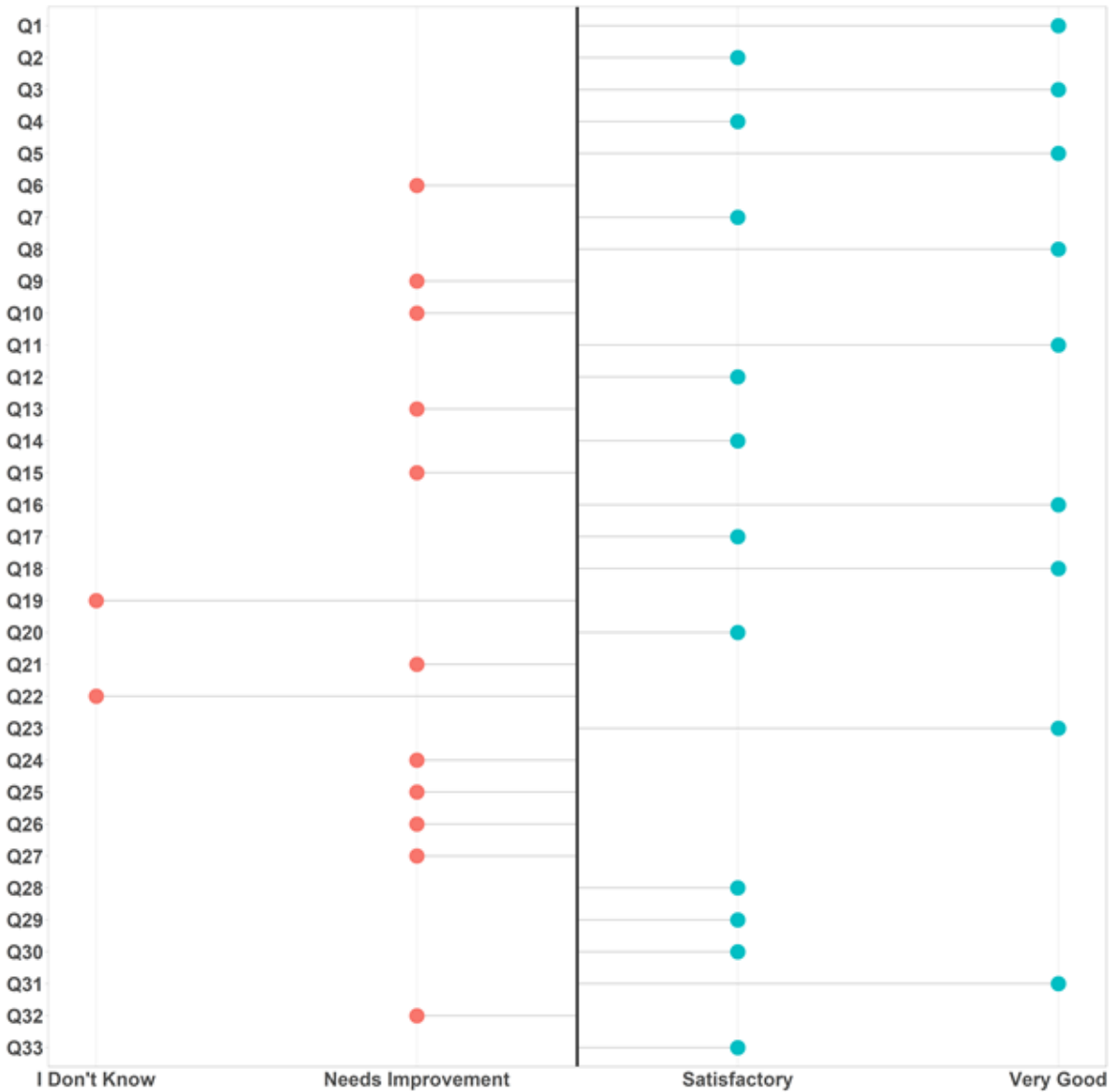
Quantitative Analysis

As the first step in understanding LPJC's root causes for underperforming, we distributed a survey to the stakeholders via email and LPJC's newsletter announcements. The survey questions were adapted from *Blue Avocado*. The format of our survey connected to our research questions and conceptual framework synthesis. The survey's initial intent was to provide insight into the areas in which LPJC performed well and those in which it underperformed. Rooted in the McKinsey & Company's (2001) capacity building dimensions, and context-design theory, the survey sought to comprehend how these concepts impacted LPJC's organizational performance.

CEO (Founder) Survey

The CEO survey was adopted from *Blue Avocado NonProfit: A Magazine of American Nonprofits*. Connected to RQ1, this survey aimed to garner the founder's overall impressions of the organization's performance and identify strengths and opportunities for improvement. The founder's overall perception of her leadership borders between Needs Improvement and Satisfactory. The Needs Improvement responses are closely aligned with the overall board assessment findings, overlapping in the categories of leadership, operations structure, and board governance. Furthermore, these findings suggest a need to incorporate leadership development for the organization's growth and continuity. Figure 4 below displays the founder's survey results. Upon reviewing the responses, we realized a comparison between the board and founder would provide richer data. Consequently, we invited the founder to complete the board survey.

Figure 4: Scores of CEO self-assessment survey



Board Member Survey

We adapted the Board Self-Assessment from BoardSource. The initial board member survey was emailed to a total of 52 members, former and current. This survey garnered 17 responses, of which 10 were present board members, 4 former, and 3 who did not disclose their status. The 32.693% (n=17) response rate was the final sample size after sending three emails, an initial, and two follow-ups. The introductory email and board survey can be found in Appendix

B and C, respectively. The survey consisted of 38-questions and was sectioned into the following categories: Overall Organizational Performance; Community Leadership; Administration and Human Resources; Financial Sustainability; Mission Impact; Board of Directors; Any additional comments.

A comparison between the founder's and board's perceptions around fulfillment of responsibilities and performance was necessary to illuminate the capacity building activities and working relationship between the board and top management that need attention (see Appendix D). The results indicated that the founder thought the organization "Needs Improvement" in Q1, Q4, Q6, Q9, Q23, Q27, and Q28. For the same questions, members gave a "Satisfactory" rating (mean score greater than 3.0). For Q17 and Q21, the founder gave a response higher on the Likert scale than the mean of members' scores.

Volunteer Survey

The number of volunteers' responses was extremely low despite four attempts to solicit participation through emails, newsletters, and a posting on LPJC's website. We were unable to send personalized emails due to a lack of reliable contact database for volunteers, past and present. The volunteer survey findings would have given us more informed perspectives based on their experiences in this specific role to analyze operations management. The 12-question survey was sent twice through the organization's email and newsletter blasts to increase our response rate. An exact number of recipients is unknown; however, we received a total of 8 respondents. The operational areas in which they serve include registration/sign-in, audio/visual, and hospitality. Given the minimal sample size, there was insufficient data for meaningful statistical analysis. (see Appendix E)

Client Survey

Adopted from BoardSource, this survey, like the others, was distributed via LPJC's newsletter and email blasts. The survey consisted of nine questions with an area to provide additional comments. This client assessment aimed to collect different perceptions and opinions regarding their experiences. This survey garnered 41 responses out of 5951 clients on the organization's mailing list. Though the sample size was insufficient to provide substantial data to answer our research questions, we took a closer examination at responses for question six, "What improvements can be made to enhance your experiences at LPJC?" The responses revealed similar issues related to themes unearthed during the board interviews including leadership's maintaining the status quo and the organization's inability to pivot amid emerging job market and nonprofit sector trends. (See Appendix F)

Qualitative Interview Transcript and Thematic Analysis

The initial step in analysis involved searching for potential themes related to underperformance from two sources: an initial informational interview with the founder and executive director and LPJC's documentation. The informational meeting helped us to get a broader understanding of the organization's life, operational structure, and leadership. Further, documentation review of LPJC's board meeting notes and retreat minutes were included at the beginning of the coding process. We viewed the data through the lens of LPJC's internal design. From this first pass, three recurring coding themes emerged: governance, operational structure, and leadership. Data analysis involved reading interview transcripts and our general notes from our initial step, which led us to a refocused coding phase.

On a second pass at the data that included board member interviews, we categorized the responses using our three themes derived from our conceptual frameworks. Under those themes, we crafted sub-themes during our last pass of the coding as we continued collecting interview

data and analyzing transcripts. For example, these sub-themes drew from repeated phrases and keywords from respondents that were related to one of the three overall themes.

As we analyzed the interview data, we also attended to participants’ roles within the organization. For example, a respondent served as secretary; thus, their responses were analyzed to search for organizational challenges and communication issues. Since the secretary is tasked to dictate notes for each meeting, information regarding tabled discussions and/or decision stalemates would be evident. Our analysis format was extended to each participant’s interview in the sense that we reviewed each transcript coding for the sub-themes identified above. Below, Table 2: *Interview Transcript Thematic Analysis* illustrates the categorical codes used throughout our analysis that aligned interview findings with our themes.

Table 2
Interview Transcript Thematic Analysis

| Main Themes | Sub-themes | Direct Quotes |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Leadership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Disorganization ● Directionless ● Incompetent leadership ● Lack of shared vision | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Tables many items and proceeds without board input.” ● “Meeting unorganized; unclear of what we were trying to accomplish.” ● “Actually thought about quitting the board until the leader started putting us in teams and giving us roles.” |
| Operation Structure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of procedures ● Practices do not abide by bylaws | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “We do need to continue to focus on better organization, better direction on the things we want to work on.” ● “We can not stay on the agenda, we go down a rabbit hole a lot.” ● “Good intentions, lots of good ideas but no plan to follow through, to execute” ● “Operations still feel like a start-up.” |
| Board Governance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Leveraging talent/intelligent ● Directionless | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Chaotic decision making; no true sense of leadership or direction; no rules governing operation.” |

USING CAPACITY BUILDING TO ADDRESS
SYSTEMIC UNDERPERFORMANCE

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● No clear roles or responsibilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● “I think they wanted new ideas and fresh outlooks but it’s hard to accept new things from people who have been doing things for so long. Conflict between old members and newcomers.”● “We need to form a vision and strategy for fundraising, for long-term growth, to address the Central Texas job seekers need.”● “There is a need to apply skills to address whatever might come up from different people.” |
|--|--|--|

Limitations

We were hoping to hear from more former board members; however, due to LJPC's spotty record keeping, the contact list provided was truncated and incomplete with unreliable contact and LPJC service details. As a result, our outreach and sampled size were impacted. The interviews with board members corroborated our perception of encounters with the organization's data collection. They revealed a lack of a robust record-keeping system. Insights from former board members might have provided complete historical data to review and analyze LPJC's growth and progression over the past 20 years.

Another oversight was not soliciting external stakeholders' perspectives, for example, donors, guest speakers, business partners such as Indeed and other job clubs. This inadvertence provided only a partial look at the problem of practice. Hearing from these stakeholders could have provided signals about the organization's reputation, limited funding sources, and impermanence of location. The high number of nonrespondents for the member survey and the lack of diversity among stakeholder perceptions may have significantly influenced the sample and the findings' generalization.

As previously mentioned, the global health pandemic introduced a host of restrictions that impacted our study in several ways. We pivoted from face-to-face interviews and meeting observations to an exclusively online platform. The survey response rates may have been negatively affected as participants were coping with a super disruptor and constantly shifting priorities. Moreover, the amount of stress from the onset of COVID-19 may have exacerbated the degree of bias in responses as well as our sample size.

Findings

We identified four findings below that are connected to our three major themes: leadership, operation structure, and board governance. Findings 1, 2, and 3 address the first research question: What are the underlying factors contributing to LPJC's persistent underperformance in securing adequate and diverse funding, achieving adequate staffing for its administrative operations, and ensuring a stable location to house its operations? Finding 4 targets research question 2: How can LPJC's organizational structure be strengthened such that it builds capacity resulting in improved performance?

Finding 1: Board members reported a lack of vision and strategic planning

The first interview question posed to board members was, "*How would you characterize the way that Launch Pad's board and leadership currently operate?*" An overwhelming 90% of respondents reported that the board lacks focus. In interviews, board members explained that without clearly stated common purpose and goals, the board is left befuddled about the priorities. Many said that discussions around essential agenda items frequently get tabled, stalling decision-making in critical areas. Despite having bylaws, one board member stated, "I've got to tell you, I'm not really sure how it happens because we really just kind of follow what the founder wants to do." Another described the board operations and leadership as "loosey-goosey." Without a coherent strategy to fulfill LPJC's goals, the board meetings have "run amok," as one board member put it. "The same members dominate the discussion while others say very little. And, while great ideas are generated, however, few displays very little tolerance for innovation or different points of view for achieving specific goals," was a third sentiment of LPJC's leadership.

Carman and Nesbit (2012) postulate that nonprofits decline because of a lack of leadership capacity building, increased competition from other organizations, and inability to expand. Given the obscurity around the organization's mission and vision, the board members lack direction and confidence in their ability to push the organization forward. Statements from board members alluded to disengagement. One board member reported, "the meetings are unorganized, and we are unclear of what we are trying to accomplish." Another member declared that, "we cannot stay on the agenda, we go down a rabbit hole a lot." Disengagement can be caused by a lack of agency and impactful action, inadequate framing of core issues, and unclear vision and strategy to advance the organization.

Finding 2: The founder/CEO lacks business acumen and has little experience in capacity building in nonprofits

To better understand ways to improve organizational performance, the qualitative survey asked board members to share their ideas for strengthening LPJC's performance. Board members suggest that the founder/CEO has not offered particular business acumen nor embrace "adaptable management style to keep up with changing internal and external environments." Further, the founder/CEO is not knowledgeable in capacity building activities that would enhance the performance of the organization. In general, the board indicated the need for more experienced leadership "who can convey the organization's larger mission and steer the board, staff, volunteers in a direction to demonstrate measurable outcomes" particularly given the current economic and social challenges that continue to plague nonprofit sectors. According to a former board member, "LPJC is synonymous with the founder, and her legacy is revered among many in the Central Texas community." Although the founder's reputation is a great asset to LPJC, board members suggest that the very nature of who she is potentially hinders the board from

providing open and honest communication about the need for new leadership with innovative ideas and a healthy degree of risk to advance the organization to the next level.

To sum up this point of view, a member reported, “There is obviously the element of founder’s syndrome. She [founder] has blind spots and has lost sight of what’s best for the organization. Healthy turnover is necessary for key roles.” A second board member reinforced the notion of fresh perspectives by stating, “The founder does not have the right mindset to pivot to the new paradigm in the nonprofit realm.” Consistent sentiments from respondents suggest a need to recruit board members with business acumen and experience in capacity building in nonprofits to complement the founder’s skillset.

Further, 13 out of 15 board members (85%) from the interviews acknowledged that if the founder transitioned from her role, the next leader should encompass expertise in nonprofit management and business acumen to produce results that have a more significant mission impact, are more financially sound, and lead to greater stability. Numerous responses echoed the need for succession planning. Moreover, members expressed concern for the institutional knowledge residing solely with the founder. In the event of her unexpected departure, the organization would be left vulnerable.

These are challenges familiar to many nonprofits, which commonly fail to allocate the time to develop leadership or lack the dedicated resources to evaluate development, leadership practices, and pipeline (Hannum et al., 2011). For example, a 2011 national study of executive director leadership reported that only 17% of organizations had a written succession plan. Nonprofit board members and leadership’s failure to invest time in training and developing new leaders will lead to a possible disruption in the continuity of the organization’s leadership trajectory (Cornelius et al., 2011).

Even if members with greater business acumen and expertise in capacity building were to be added to LPJC's board, there would remain a need to deepen the management relationship between the founder and board for the newly acquired business know-how to be effectively applied operationally. Insofar as leadership is "not a set of responsibilities held by any one party but rather as a set of actions that emerges from multiple actors,"(Bernstein, 2016; Stone & Ostrower, 2007, p. 430) joint efforts between LPJC's founder and board are needed to move the organization forward by all. The shared responsibility to engage in tasks collectively would mitigate struggles among the board, executive director, and leadership. One respondent stated, "They (founder and executive director) are not effectively using the strength of each board member and not holding them accountable. Furthermore, it does not matter how many great ideas the board has if leadership lacks the skills to harness these ideas into real outcomes."

Finding 3: Board reports flawed procedures of governance create inefficiencies in board operations

93% of survey respondents attributed the lack of clarity for their roles and responsibilities to poor accountability, no true sense of leadership and chaotic decision making. When asked, "Can you describe the decision making process of the board?" one board member expressed, "There is none. We use the rules of order and that's about it. Decisions are made by one person saying what we're going to do, and everybody else does it."

LPJC's current board structure appears to be a blend between a governing and working group. Such a hybrid may affect adopting good governance policies that lead to role ambiguity and a lack of accountability among the board. LPJC serves a large population of clients and is heavily reliant on the executive director, founder and its handful of volunteers to bear ultimate responsibility for the operational activity. Moreover, programming is dependent on the ebbs and

flows of the labor market and requires competent manpower. The executive director stated, “My concern is if the founder, or any key volunteers, for example our videographer, is rendered incapacitated, things would fall apart. Essentially, we have all our eggs in one basket.”

Consequently, running entirely on a small number of volunteers with an overburdened board is not a reliable or sustainable business model, which inevitably will produce uneven results.

LPJC’s recruitment of board members does not entail a written job description outlining primary duties and responsibilities. The current structure, or more so practice, makes little distinction between the board, founder, and execution director functions.

Beyond confusion about role expectations, some board members complained about a degree of micromanagement by the executive director that contributed to flawed procedures in board operation. For instance, the absence of a traditional fundraising role among members of the board reflects the expectation that they perform many of the duties ordinarily left to the administrative staff. This expectation, in turn, reflects the organization’s failure to fundraise adequately, the money from which could otherwise go toward compensating administrative staff to relieve board members of such duties. The related flawed procedures of governance thereby create a drain on the board’s effectiveness. Moreover, organizational growth has shifted the board roles and responsibilities. A compounding problem is that while the board collectively possesses a range of expertise in various fields, the reported unorganized and uncoordinated discussions and decision making hamper their ability to be effective strategic leaders. For example, one member has considered leaving the board. They reported, “It felt like a ship adrift; it felt like a total waste of time when we met.” Another stated, “there is no structure to decision making, no historical data, no one knows who is monitoring the budget for instance, a lack of clarity on goals and how to get there; there is no clear idea of who is responsible for what and as

a result, projects never get completed.” With that, we deduce that the board exhibits challenges with group decision-making despite having procedures in place. More importantly, the degree to which board members are aware or acknowledge that such dysfunction puts the organization at risk is unclear. Major operational and financial issues that affect the long-term sustainability of LPJC often go unresolved while matters of trivial scope, usually those which have occurred in the past, receive disproportionate attention. A prime example is LPJC’s budget, where the same line items come up for discussions every month. Many interviewees described an inordinate amount of time is spent trying to reconcile the previous month’s financial statement, as reported by many board members.

Given that board members play a vital role in governing nonprofits, particularly due to the presumed relationship between board performance and organizational effectiveness (Herman and Renz, 2000, 2008), the reports of dysfunction in governance at LPJC are alarming. When asked to describe their board role and responsibilities, one respondent stated, “My biggest role is that I question everything that occurs in this club. There is no accountability for project completion; meetings are often derailed by side chatter and strong opposition for most recommended action”. This and similar statements indicated a need for more clearly defined board roles and responsibilities, differentiating them from those of the executive director and volunteers. Such role ambiguity is linked to decreased effort and job performance and lower satisfaction and commitment (Tubre & Collins, 2000). Moreover, role ambiguity can have an inverse relationship among organization programming, volunteer and client involvement, and board and leadership engagement, thus directly impacting the overall organization performance.

Generally, it appears that there is diffuse authority between the board and executive director. A vast gray area exists for their respective roles and the limits of their authority,

resulting in a breakdown of communication and divided decision-making. Our analysis identified a recurring theme of a lack of coordination among the board, founder, and executive director and unclear authority boundaries. Such disconnects lead to “overzealous managerial power at times,” according to a board member that disrupts the balance of collaboration and coordination via overstepping onto each other’s territory.

Finding 4: Absence of consistent assessments and training and development opportunities impedes board operations and dynamics

To learn the board’s viewpoint on improving board operations, and dynamics, these two interview questions were asked, “What are the most important changes that can strengthen the board’s operations?” and “What steps could be taken to improve the quality of board dynamics?” Responses covered a range of intersecting interventions related to robust governance, experienced leadership, and sounder operation structure. Referencing the board’s operations, responses included, “Clear leadership, clear board responsibilities, a clear strategic plan for goal achievement, and room for progressive ideas to root and harvest.” Another comment summed up the sentiments of many respondents stating, “Training and professional development is essential but seemingly absent. We need to establish some outreach pipelines or some ways to get the board engaged, not just with Launch Pad members, but with the general business community.”

Board self-assessments, when done well, allow the board to reflect upon ways for improvement and identify ways to advance the organization’s priorities. BoardEffect contends that boards must engage in yearly self-evaluations to ensure that duties and responsibilities are being met and that relevant processes are established to foster planning and oversight over the organization (Price, 2019). While no explicit mention of the need for ongoing assessments was made, we deduce that self-evaluations would make the case for board improvement by

illuminating many of the findings reported from surveys and interviews to ensure stakeholders are fulfilling their responsibilities and strengthen board governance.

Wing (2004) posits that capacity building that focuses on individual participants' internal learning via extensive information sharing between agencies and industry experts is instrumental in improving operations in the long run. A number of board members reported that training and development had not been prioritized accordingly. One interview respondents' statement reflects this belief:

I think we should all have a lot more training on being a board member and every month we should have a training incorporated in our meetings, whether it be grant writing, whether it be leadership, whether it be innovative ideas, workforce ideas, or innovative strategies during COVID. Something to keep our board members that are not really open-minded to start getting to understand that change is inevitable, and we have to be very, very focused on our yearly goals and change management, something just to keep us engaged as a team.

Recommendations

We borrowed from both practitioner and academic literature and the private and public sectors to identify feasible strategies for LPJC. Because organizations are fluid, we formulated our recommendations through Light and Hubbard's 2004 capacity building engagement model (See Appendix G). Light and Hubbard (2004) proposes four interrelated, nonsequential and readily identifiable components that shape the success of any capacity building efforts in organizations. These include:

1. The desired outcome/goal of the capacity building activity
2. The change strategy selected to fulfill the outcome/goal
3. The champions guiding the effort (internal and external)
4. The time, energy and money invested in the process (resources)

The authors posit that while the desired goal typically determines the change strategy and subsequently identifies who should champion the effort, the capacity building activities largely rely on the organization's resources. Organizational resources, such as time and funding will influence the selected outcome and the champion will likely influence the chosen change strategy. Consequently, how much time and money required for the capacity building activities will also affect the choice of outcome. With that, this model is useful as first steps in identifying various capacity building approaches and ascertaining the exact contributors of success in each.

We acknowledge that external environmental factors, for example, funding trends, likely influence LPJC's ability to participate in capacity building; however, for this study, we focus on appropriately tailored capacity building strategies within the organization's control. Of importance is that while immediate financial sustainability is the primary problem perceived by founder, executive director and board members, an even more substantive and systemic issue is that effective and efficient use of funds is contingent upon clearly defined leadership roles, sound

governance, and a strong board structure. By connecting the findings to the literature, the conceptual framework, and the data collected, the following recommendations were determined:

Recommendation 1: Integrate continual assessments to monitor organizational efficiencies and determine effective interventions for clear outcomes and reporting

In 2019, there were approximately 1.54 million registered nonprofits in the US, amounting to \$3.73 trillion in assets, an increase of 4.5% from 2006 (Urban Institute, 2019). Rapid growth in this sector, accompanied by increased professionalism (Hwang & Powell, 2009), has intensified attention to nonprofits' performance. Despite these growth trends, nonprofits continue to overlook the importance of performance assessments to account for their social impacts in the communities in which they serve (O'Dwyer, 2007). Moreover, when reporting, often information on nonprofits' operating expenses, decision-making process, and outcomes is limited (O'Dwyer, 2007).

Regular assessments of and reports on nonprofit performance provide several practical advantages for nonprofits. Solid arguments for evaluation and reporting include intra-organizational benchmarking, accountability to stakeholders, and demonstration of its utility and value (Jones & Mucha, 2013). For a more rounded perspective of the organization's capacity-building capabilities and overall effectiveness, both internal and external stakeholders should engage in the assessment process. Results from assessments can disclose deviations from desired values, inequities, and operational inefficiencies; improve board satisfaction; and offer opportunities to reduce costs (BoardSource, 2017; Jones & Mucha, 2013). Moreover, these self-assessments keep board policies top of mind, allowing for amendments as they grow out of date, measure their effectiveness, and demonstrate improvement. With the need to attract new donors and obtain grants, LPJC's responsibility, according to stewardship theory, is to have detailed

reports for review and maintain transparency. Over the past decade, for instance, LPJC has applied, unsuccessfully, for nine grants, prospective funding sources for which measurable evidence of the organization's impact is typically a required part of the application. Such evidence would constitute the talking points, moreover, employed in fundraising appeals made to prospective benefactors. In short, without such measurement protocols and assessment-related records in place, LPJC's funding-related woes are bound to continue. In addition, with the increased calls for accountability, LPJC can employ more accurate and consistent data collection and storage to exhibit outcomes, provide insights about performance, inform critical organizational decision-making, and maintain transparency with the community.

While we recommend McKinsey & Company's (2001) framework to establish a baseline for capacity assessment for LPJC, The Council of Nonprofits offers numerous resources to assist LPJC in this endeavor. The assessment process can take various approaches. Prioritization, for example, could be one appropriate method that allows LPJC to focus on specific capacities or capacity deficits for different reasons. Based on our findings, a few examples could include building leadership competencies, growing a robust volunteer program, strengthening board accountability and retention, and diversifying funding sources. A second approach entails using Pareto analysis (80/20) to determine immediate action courses for maximum benefit. Such an analysis illustrates the problems that yield significant improvement.

Given the rapid pace at which environmental conditions are changing, adaptability and rapid prototyping are paramount. Benchmarking offers a third alternative path that enables LPJC to understand its capacities compared with those of other nonprofits with a similar mission, size, and environmental factors. Performance comparison with other organizations can generate strong interests among stakeholders (Wang, 2009). Coupling elements from McKinsey & Company's

capacity building theory and the engagement model, LPJC could develop questions connected to the three broad areas we identified in the findings: leadership, governance, and operation structure. Each element could be assigned a score to generate an assessment of the organization's capacity. These questions would be answered by stakeholders and beneficiaries alike to gather a comprehensive perspective. The overarching questions for the board are, "What did we want to accomplish?" and "How are we achieving it?"

Recommendation 2: Design governance procedures that support transparent designation of responsibilities

Our research indicated the main areas of governance include board composition, the relationship between board and management, the board's functions and responsibilities, the board's effectiveness, and the link with organizational effectiveness. The current structure of LPJC's board and leadership is a blend between what Carver (2007) might call a "working board" and "governance board," though LPJC does not explicitly recognize this situation. Carver defines a working board as a governing board with little or no staff, a dual-function of strategic and operational. According to Boardable (2020), nonprofit board governance is the combination of systems, guidelines, and processes used to make decisions, hold decision makers accountable, and take action. The purpose of governance is to ensure that an organization achieves what it should achieve while avoiding those behaviors and situations that should be avoided.

Having neither a purely working nor governing board, LPJC should adopt a mixed model that incorporates both governance and working characteristics. One way to establish this model is by assigning certain board members to working committees and a chair or defacto operating manager. The committee would assume responsibility for managing specific operational leadership functions. Simultaneously, the entire board would prioritize its strategic endeavors. In

an increasingly competitive market, good governance's failure may negatively impact an organization's funding and tarnish its reputation (Eaton & Akers, 2007).

A critical component of governance is board composition. Given the decision making power of boards and its influence on performance, LPJC should proactively identify its desired board composition to enhance recruitment strategies and outcomes. According to BoardSource (2017), a good starting point is creating a board matrix, or an inventory of perspectives, skill sets, leadership qualities, and experience that are needed based on anticipated goals, skill and network gaps in the current board composition. Such a matrix will serve as LPJC's guiding light as talent moves in and out of the organization to ensure a balanced board.

The challenges LPJC faces related to board governance are not unusual for non-profits. Carver (2007) posits that the board job design and process lack attention to the policy aspect of the organization and fail to offer a coherent way of "collecting, deliberating and enunciating those policies" (p.45). Zimmerman and Stevens (2008) argue that unclear roles and responsibilities and a lack of a compelling purpose detract the board from engaging fully. Since no one-size-fits-all board governance model exists, we recommend using Carver's Governance Model (2007) which includes a set of principles to develop a modern view of governance concepts and LPJC's board-management-leadership partnership (see Appendix H). Carver's principle to, for example, "force forward thinking" could shift the focus from day-to-day budgetary and logistical matters into a strategic visioning session of sorts, by which board members establish organizational goals and benchmarks toward the achievement of those goals. Once concrete goals are established, LPJC's board would be in a position to, as Carver suggests, "enable an outcome-driven organizing system," determining the organizational functions and decisions to be employed and made--essentially creating a roadmap to achieving the established

benchmarks. Finally, upon embarking on this roadmap, LPJC’s board could apply Carver’s principle to “separate large issues from small ones” by maximizing the time devoted to making progress toward established goals and prioritizing these matters over resolving small issues that, while perhaps important, should not serve as impediments to the organization’s progress.

In so doing, the expectation that board meetings address both strategy and operations issues would become the norm. More importantly, we recommend differentiating strategic and tactical agenda items and creating a process by which tactical matters are redirected to the executive director. Such an approach will likely entail training and development for the board and leadership facilitated by a third party.

Recommendation 3: Hire a strategic planning professional to cocreate a strategic roadmap & a step-by-step actionable and measurable execution plan (who, what, how, when & why) that is aligned with LPJC’s mission

As succession planning is essential for LPJC’s sustainability, it is equally important to provide professional development for the current founder and executive director. Continuing education is key to discovering new knowledge, which “every nonprofit must possess in order to find the energy to take on some of the most complex problems and issues facing society today” (Third Sector Company, 2021). We recommend that LPJC engage with a consultant to design a work-sharing option that enables the organization to determine the work they have the capacity to complete while the consultant assumes the work that LPJC cannot perform. This partnership could entail an environmental scan to understand the historical context and challenges of the organization, co-facilitate the strategic planning process, and provide the tools in which to engage in the prescribed work.

Closely related to working with a strategic planning professional is for LPJC to participate in blended learning as a pathway to enhance leadership competencies and build confidence. Free to low cost professional development courses exist by way of online platforms such as LinkedIn, BoardSource, Coursera, and university certification programs. The organization may want to consider a possible policy or mandate in which leadership, the executive director, and the founder attend yearly ongoing education training.

Professional development for LPJC leadership could, for example, be integral to their developing the capacity for program evaluation, which would, in turn, enable them to conduct the self-assessments outlined in recommendation one. A training on the topic of “strategic visioning,” as another example, could help the leadership develop the capacity to engage in “force forward thinking,” which was proposed in recommendation two. To accommodate for time and convenience, participation in the training can be done synchronously or asynchronously.

Recommendation 4: Create an immediate succession plan to set a proactive strategy for addressing inevitable separations among organizational leadership, board members, and volunteers

During the qualitative interviews board members expressed a need for an executive succession plan for the organization. Such a plan would create a pipeline to identify, develop and train incoming leadership. Potential candidates could be sourced through various channels, including current and former board members, vendors’ and partners’ employees, board member referrals, retired leaders from other organizations, and recent graduates who are aspiring leaders. According to McKee (2016), a succession plan is necessary to achieve financial sustainability and maintain the organization’s unique culture while enabling mission-driven activities. With

LPJC's current structure, we recommend a joint effort between the founder, executive director, and board to strategically outline, as a top priority, a succession plan for not only the president, but also one for board members, the executive director, and volunteers.

The increasingly complex environment in which nonprofits now operate has amplified the need for strong leadership to execute their strategy successfully. To best navigate LPJC through this complex terrain, we recommend identifying a CEO-designate with a blend of private sector business acumen and traditional nonprofit values and competencies. Such competencies are context-specific, and having a proper understanding of the organizational context in which a leader is operating is central to leadership success (Zigarmi, Lyles, & Fowler, 2005). Bridgespan (2017) presents a three-key category to consider attributes that make a great leader: general competencies, context-specific competencies, and core values and beliefs (see Appendix I). We recommend that the LPJC board consult Bridgespan's three-key category when considering prospective candidates for the future CEO.

Succession planning for positions beyond the CEO role could be assigned to a working subcommittee and would include a plan for departures after three-year board member terms, a plan for emergency departures, a recruitment and outreach strategy with an associated timeline, and the organization's onboarding procedures. The last of these, onboarding, is, based on our findings, vitally important for the short- and long-term health of the organization. Currently, LPJC's onboarding is perfunctory, constituted by a receipt of the organization's bylaws for new board members' perusal. Onboarding has a considerable impact on the success (productivity) of an organization. The onboarding practices for board members provide a critical pathway for an organization's future course toward improved performance. Once again, while there was no explicit mention of onboarding during qualitative interviews, many respondents indicated

confusion regarding their roles and responsibilities during their tenure. Establishing intentional onboarding procedures would help make the organization's implicit expectations explicit for new members.

Finding 2 acknowledged the founder/CEO's relative paucity of business acumen and inexperience with nonprofit capacity building. This finding is perhaps less a reflection of shortcomings on the part of the founder than a recognition of how the norms of the nonprofit sector as they pertain to organizational leadership have evolved since LPJC's founding. Indeed, research question one revealed that most board members relate a lack of business acumen and a lack of expertise in capacity building (i.e., that of the founder) to the current underperformance of the organization. Nevertheless, the founder/CEO remains a key player within the organization given her 20-year tenure with LPJC--a duration of service that makes putting forth a succession plan for the inevitable transition in leadership all the more important. One of the essential duties of the board is to prepare leadership transitions properly. McKee (2016) posits that succession planning is necessary due to the "predicted shortages of experienced nonprofit executives combined with growing numbers, size, and economic and social significance of nonprofit organizations" (p. 587). Most nonprofits are, the author notes, like LPJC, not well equipped for the transition.

The front-end work of succession planning involves aligning the organization's strategic objectives to the desired executive qualifications. As mentioned in the first recommendation, one of LPJC's first steps is to engage in a self-assessment capacity activity to outline a clear mission, vision, and strategic plan. Once the mission is detailed, the board, executive director, and founder can shape the organization's objectives to adequately complement the vision and skills of the current or desired new leadership. While there is a plethora of toolkits to choose from, the

Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City provides detailed and step-by-step succession planning recommendations and forms (See Appendix J). We suggest that LPJC utilize all the forms within the toolkit, but begin with forms “important competencies” and “board member matrix.” The first form explains and outlines capabilities of the desired current or desired new leader. The second resource identifies current and desired characteristics of the board. Succession planning involves more than preparing for new leadership, it involves preparing the board to reevaluate and possibly redesign their current membership mix. Time is of the essence according to the executive director; if the founder is unable to finish out her time, then LPJC could be placed in a complicated transition. Thus, LPJC’s investment in walking through the toolkit will be valuable and a step forward to strengthen the organization’s sustainability.

Conclusion

This capstone project aimed to answer the following problem of practice: how can nonprofits effectively build capacities to achieve and sustain improved performance? Two research questions were asked to understand the contributing factors of underperformance and strategies for achieving performance improvement: (1) What are the underlying factors contributing to LPJC's persistent underperformance in securing adequate and diverse funding, achieving adequate staffing for its administrative operations, and securing a stable location to house its operations? and (2) How can LPJC's organizational structure be strengthened such that it builds capacity resulting in improved performance?

The findings revealed that LPJC's long-standing and overlapping performance issues spawned from deficiencies in three major areas: leadership, board governance, and operation structure. More specifically, the lack of knowledge about and failure to apply key business competencies created a roadblock for enabling and empowering the board as strategic leaders. Furthermore, inefficient processes for making and executing decisions to advance the organization's mission and strategic leadership were reflections of the structure that has proved to be unfavorable for performance improvement.

We hope this study's findings and recommendations will allow LPJC to implement flexible capacity building strategies, thereby improving its performance towards a sustainable future. Due to nonprofits' complexity, there is a confluence of factors that determine the appropriate and successful interventions. LPJC and other nonprofits must recognize the interdependent, context-specific and dynamic relationship among capacity building elements. Coupled with the rising ambiguity and uncertainty in the nonprofit and job market sectors, building capacity successfully is not only an iterative process but a necessary strategy for sustaining improved performance.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Interview Script

Thank you for interviewing with me today. My name is [interviewer's name], and I am conducting research for my doctoral capstone project at Vanderbilt University, Peabody School of Education. The purpose of this project is to build nonprofit capacities to improve organizational performance toward sustainability.

Participation in this interview is entirely voluntary, and your information will be kept confidential. The interview should take 30 to 45 minutes and will be recorded on this platform, Zoom. I will ask you approximately twelve questions about your experiences and perceptions as a [current/former] board member. Again, all your identifying information will be held in confidence and not included in the final capstone project.

Appendix B: Recruitment Language for Qualitative Surveys and Quantitative Interviews

Board Email Attempt 1:

Greetings,

We, Binta Brown and Madia Cooper are students in the doctoral program Leadership and Learning in Organizations at Vanderbilt University. As former and current board members, it is critical to obtain your perspective on LPJC's operations.

This is a two-part process: 1) Board Member survey (15 minutes); 2) Interviews via Zoom (20-30 minutes). We would greatly appreciate your participation to help us understand the issue and the context to enhance LPJC's operations.

Please complete the survey by Friday, August 14, 11:59pm:

Board Member Survey: <https://redcap.vanderbilt.edu/surveys/?s=WCLDPYLMH>

Please sign up for an interview time by Saturday, August 15:

Interview Scheduling Link:

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=OX9aur7js0q0UGf6gPrsrdQPticd6DVInC1MsvgFyPVUQji3UkhST0hLMU04OFkyRERTSkRCQUowUi4u>

Thank you,
Binta Brown and Madia Cooper

Board Email Attempt 2:

Greetings,

We hope that you are doing well amidst these complex times. We are researching Launch Pad Job Club as part of our doctoral degree. Kathy Lansford-Powell listed you as a board member for this organization. We would value your perspective on the operations, board function, and

overall leadership of the club. Would you mind completing a survey and sharing your time to speak with us via Zoom for 30 minutes?

Here are some dates that we could speak:

Sun, Jan 24 @ 2 - 6 pm CST; Mon, Jan 25 @ 6 - 9 pm and Tues, Jan 26 @ 8 am - 12 pm CST.

Should none of these dates/times work, kindly send me a couple of dates/times that are convenient for you?

Survey link: <https://redcap.link/0j5mhdgi>

Best,
Binta Brown & Madia Cooper

Board Email Attempt 3:

Hi, [Board member name],

We hope that you are doing well amidst these complex times. We are researching Launch Pad Job Club as part of my doctoral capstone project at Vanderbilt University. Kathy Lansford-Powell listed you as the [service years/board member title role] for this organization. We would value your perspective on the operations, board function, and overall leadership of the club during your service.

Would you be willing to complete a survey and speak with me via Zoom for 30 minutes. Here are tentative dates: Sun, Jan 24 @ 2 - 6 pm CST; Mon, Jan 25 @ 6 - 9 pm and Tues, Jan 26 @ 8 am - 12 pm CST.

Here is the survey link: <https://redcap.link/p3edau6l>

Should none of these dates/times work, could you kindly send us your availability?

Thank you for considering, [board member name]!

Kind regards,
Binta Brown & Madia Cooper

Volunteer Email (LPJC email): Sent by Executive Director

Former LPJC board member Binta Brown and her education partner Madia Cooper are working on their Ed.D together focusing their work on Launch Pad. (*I know, impressive right?!*) To that end, they are asking the club's volunteers to PLEASE fill out their [survey](#). They say it will take 10 minutes. Personally, unless you are long-winded (*guilty!*), I don't see it taking that much time. The deadline date is from last fall, so please disregard. If you are one of the 2 responders to this same survey, you're off the hook. The rest of ya? Great opportunity to share your thoughts about your roles with the club. Basically, you're free to talk behind Kathy's and my backs. 😊

Thank you for your continued support of the club. Oh, and if I missed anyone (i.e., Val) because I don't have their email addresses, please forward this email on to them (with my apologies).

Hope to see you all again come this summer or by next fall. Even when we do return to Goodwill Career and Technical Academy, we have safety protocols in place to protect the club's greatest assets...you.

Client Email (LPJC newsletter blast via LPJC's website)

Launch Pad Survey

We have partnered with Binta Brown and Madia Cooper, students in the doctoral program Leadership and Learning in Organizations at Vanderbilt University. They are conducting research regarding improving Launch Pad Job Club programs and services.

In the process, Brown and Cooper are administering surveys with you, the club's stakeholders. We would greatly appreciate your participation to help us understand the issue and the context to enhance our operations.

Please complete the survey by Friday, August 14, 11:59pm

[Member Survey Link](#)

[Volunteer Survey Link](#)

If you have ever volunteered directly for Launch Pad, Leap to Success, Toastmasters or volunteered for the Employment Expo or for any club-sponsored activity

If you have any questions, please
email BrownCooperCapstone@Vanderbilt.edu

*Thank you for helping Binta and Madia
in their desire to help the club!*

Appendix C: Board Member Survey

Confidential

Page 1

Board Member Survey

Thank you for participating in this research survey. The purpose of this survey is to gather your perceptions about the operations of Launch Pad Job Club. This survey should take 10-15 minutes to complete. Your responses will be anonymous.

* If you have been a board member for multiple years, please focus your responses on your current board service.

Survey deadline: Friday, August 14 11:59pm

If you encounter any issues or have questions, please contact BrownCooperCapstone@Vanderbilt.edu

1) Years of service

.....

Overall Organizational Performance

| | 5. Outstanding | 4. Very Good | 3. Satisfactory | 2. Needs Improvement | 1. I Don't Know |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 2) Demonstrates quality of analysis and judgement related to progress and opportunities, and need for changes. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3) Maintains and utilizes a working knowledge of significant developments and trends in the field. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4) Builds respect and profile for the organization in its various constituencies. Supports the overall field/movement in which the organization works. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5) Establishes ambitious goals for excellence and impact and initiates, maintains, and adapts programs with excellence and impact. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6) Works with the board and management staff to develop strategies for achieving mission goals and financial viability | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7) Appropriately provides both support and leadership to board. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

8) Additional Comments...

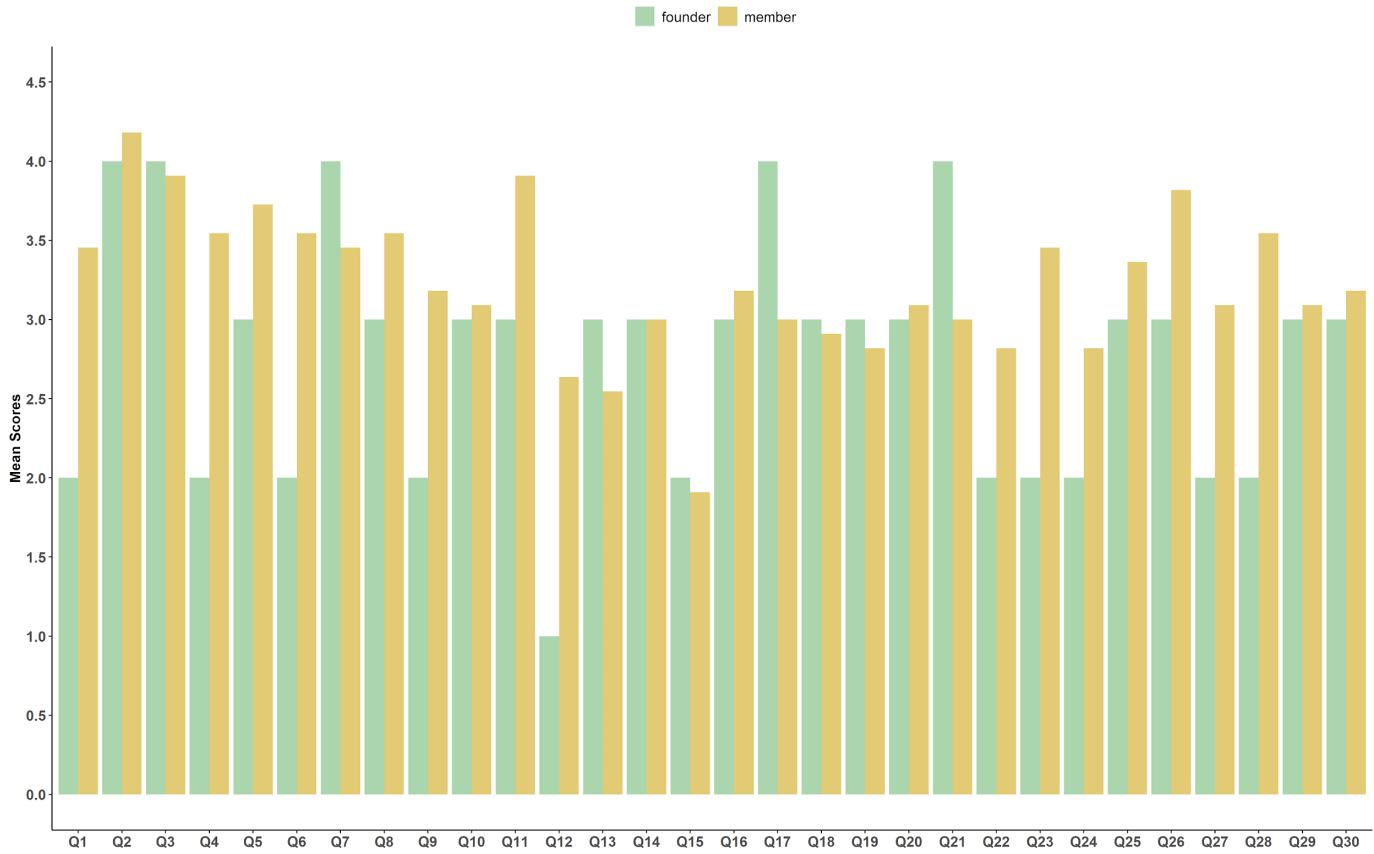
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Appendix D: Comparison of Founder & Board Member Survey Responses (diagram)



Appendix E: Volunteer Survey

Confidential

Page 1

Volunteer Survey

Thank you for participating in this research survey. The purpose of this survey is to gather your perceptions about the operations of Launch Pad Job Club. This survey should only take 10 minutes to complete. Your responses will be anonymous.

Submission Deadline: Friday, August 14

If you encounter any issues or have questions, please contact BrownCooperCapstone@Vanderbilt.edu

- 1) What is/was your specific task(s) as a volunteer?

- 2) What period did you serve as a volunteer? E.g. (months/years)

- 3) Why did you volunteer for Launch Pad? What drew you to the organization?

- 4) How long have you been volunteering for Launch Pad?

- 5) Do you plan to volunteer in the future?

- 6) What about the organization that will lead you to continue to volunteer?

- 7) After spending time with the organization, what are your concluding thoughts?

- 8) If you had to describe the mission of the organization to a friend, who is unfamiliar with the organization, what would you tell them?

- 9) What could the organization do to assist you in succeeding as a volunteer?

- 10) Additional Comments...

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Appendix F: Client Survey

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Page 1

Member Survey

Thank you for participating in this research survey. The purpose of this survey is to gather your perceptions about the operations of Launch Pad Job Club. This survey should only take 10 minutes to complete. Your responses will be anonymous.

Survey Deadline: Friday, August 14 11:59pm

If you encounter any issues or have questions, please contact BrownCooperCapstone@Vanderbilt.edu

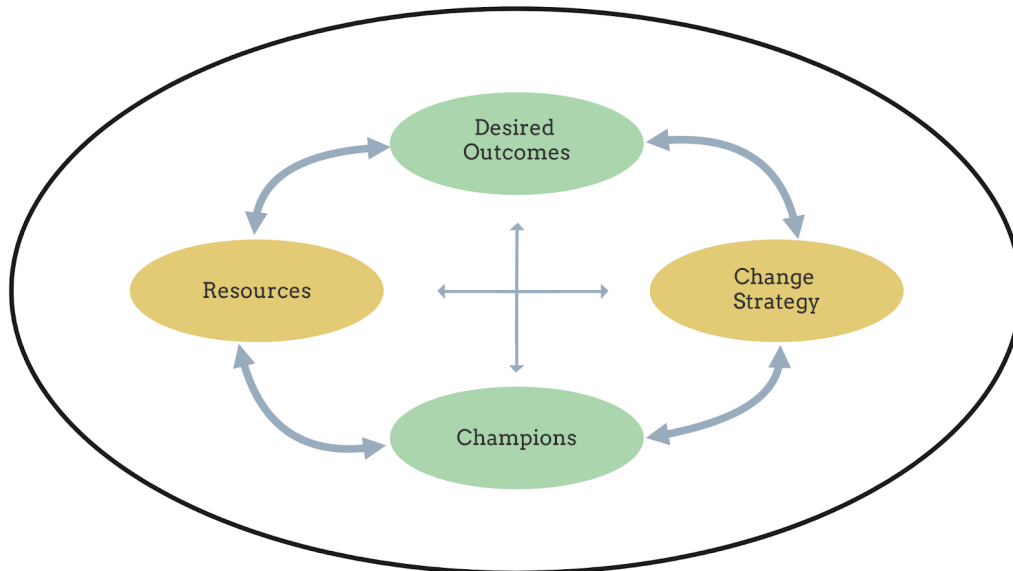
-
- 1) How would you rate your experience as a member at Launch Pad?
5. Outstanding
 4. Very good
 3. Satisfactory
 2. Needs improvement
 1. I don't know
-
- 2) What was your employment status during your time with Launch Pad?
- Unemployed
 Underemployed
 Part-time employed
 Full-time employed
-
- 3) What activities/services did you utilize at Launch Pad?
- General meeting & presentation
 Toastmasters
 LinkedIn & Job Scan
 Resume Tweaks
 How To Ace Your Interviews
 Mock Interviews
-
- 4) What was the most useful activity/service you experienced from Launch Pad?
- General meeting & presentation
 Toastmasters
 LinkedIn & Job Scan
 Resume Tweaks
 How To Ace Your Interviews
 Mock Interviews
 Supportive environment
-
- 5) Were you able to find employment as a result of your involvement with Launch Pad?
- Yes
 No
-
- 6) What improvements can be made to enhanced your experiences at Launch Pad?
- _____
-
- 7) Additional Comments...
- _____

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Appendix G: Light & Hubbard's (2004) Capacity Building Engagement Model



Note. Diagram depicts the relationship between four components of Light and Hubbard's Capacity Building Engagement model.

Appendix H: Carver's Board Governance Model

Carver's principles of policy governance are as follows (Boards That Make A Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit & Public Organizations, 2007):

1. "Cradle" vision. A useful framework for governance.
2. Explicitly address fundamental values.
3. Force an external focus.
4. Enable an outcomes-driven organizing system.
5. Separate large issues from small ones.
6. Force forward thinking.
7. Enable proactivity.
8. Facilitate diversity and unity.
9. Describe relationships to relevant constituencies.
10. Define a common basis for discipline.
11. Delineate the board's role in common topics.
12. Determine what information is needed.
13. Balance overcontrol and undercontrol.
14. Use board time efficiently.
15. Enable simultaneously muscular and sensitivity use of board power.

Appendix I: Critical Attributes of Effective Nonprofit Leaders, Bridgespan (2017)

Critical Attribute of Effective Nonprofit Leaders

1. General Leadership Competencies
Companies largely consistent across fields and roles

| Leading the Organization | Leading Others | Leading Oneself |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strategic thinking• Problem solving• Decision making• Change leadership• Project management• Systems thinking• Business and operations management | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trust and collaboration• Communication and influence• Developing others• Cultural competence• Conflict resolution | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Growth mindset• Self awareness• Motivation• Empathy• Openness to change |

2. Context-specific Competencies
Skill and expertise required to lead within a specific field or role

- **Knowledge and expertise** in the specific field of work
- **Specific skills** required by the context of organization or field
- **Role-specific competencies** for specific function

3. Core Values and Beliefs
Values leaders must endorse and embody to lead authentically and achieve impact

- Fundamental beliefs and values underlying the **organization's theory of change**
- Values and behaviors **consistent with the culture of the organization**

Appendix J: Succession Planning Toolkits

The Kansas Nonprofit Executive Succession-Planning Toolkit:

<https://www.kansascityfed.org/documents/82/nonprofit-resources-NONPROFIT-TOOLKIT.pdf>.

The toolkit includes the following tools:

- Emergency Succession Planning Tools
- Departure-Defined Succession Planning Tool
- Executive Self-Reflection Questions
- Executive Sample Job Description
- Important Competencies
- Board Membership Matrix