CONCEPTUALIZING LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

CAPSTONE INTEGRATED WHITE PAPER

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Executive Summary

Founded in 1997, the nationally recognized nonprofit Bottom Line supports undergraduate degree attainment and career development of low-income, minoritized, and first-generation college students. Since its inception, Bottom Line has expanded to five regional offices that assist nearly 7,000 students a year. Bottom Line-Boston (BL-B) is one of five regional offices. Bottom Line surveys its employees' job satisfaction every six months. In the survey, some Boston-based program advisors communicated a lack of leadership support. The BL-B executive director believes the leadership team is supportive. This capstone aims to understand the misalignment between support practices and perception. The following questions guided our inquiry:

- What practices and interactions with leaders contribute to and diminish program advisors' sense of support?

- What practices and interactions do leaders perform with the intention of supporting program advisors?

- How are leaders' and program advisors' understanding and experiences of what contributes to a sense of support aligned or misaligned?

To inform this project, we studied social support, organizational development, employee engagement, relationship theories, and transformational leadership. The literature describes strategies for employee support that drive performance, satisfaction, and retention. After reviewing the literature, we narrow our focus to organizational support theory (influencing employee commitment and satisfaction) and transformational leadership support theory.

We designed a qualitative case study in which we collected and analyzed primary and

secondary data. This data included interviews, organizational documents, secondary surveys, observational field notes, and analytic memos. The varied data created an in-depth picture of support vis-à-vis BL-B leadership and program advisors.

We analyzed the collected data thematically, triangulating the organization's and leaders' intended support practices versus the employees' perceptions of support. We learned that BL-B has an array of leadership-supportive practices and interactions. The Boston leadership excels at supportive methods that build trust, maintain open communication, and offer supervisory support. Leaders also attempt individualized consideration, stimulation, and motivation; however, transformational leadership support is intended but inconsistent. Furthermore, there are missed opportunities for transparency, mentoring, and empowerment.

The following recommendations are made to address misaligned support expectations between BL-B leaders and program advisors, as well as to minimize barriers to support:

- BL-B leaders should participate in leadership development training focusing on transformational leadership practices.

- BL-B leaders should incorporate decision-making discussions into staff meetings twice per month.

- Mid-level leaders should collaborate to identify cross-functional, innovative, stretch assignments for program advisors.

- BL-B leaders and program advisors should work 1:1 to revamp individual professional development conversations.

- BL-B leadership should continue to provide social support to program advisors by showing genuine concern for their well-being. This should include becoming well-

versed in Bottom Line employee wellness and other benefits so that they can promote
their use.

- Boston senior leadership should work with human resources to host quarterly
  meetings in which a national office leadership member meets with the regional
  leadership team to review the strategic plan and gather actionable feedback.

Table of Contents

Organizational Review

Organization Context

Founded in 1997, the nationally recognized nonprofit Bottom Line supports undergraduate degree attainment and career development of low-income, minority, and first-generation college students. Since its inception, Bottom Line has expanded to five regional offices that assist more than 7,000 students a year. BL-B is one of five regional offices. Under the leadership of an executive director, the BL-B's thirty-six-person staff helps high school and college students from under-resourced communities of color and historically marginalized communities apply for college, earn an undergraduate degree, and develop a career plan.

The nonprofit organization offers clients one-on-one support through three programs: the Access program aids clients with college admissions, and the Success and Blueprint programs guide success and college completion. According to BottomLine.org, the organization "partners with degree-aspiring students of color from under-resourced communities to get into and through college and successfully launch a career" ("What we do: Bottom Line," 2016). The organization develops strong connections with students, provides individual support, and guides students' persistence to earn a college degree" ("What we do: Bottom Line," 2016). Bottom Line's program advisors are the primary providers of these connections, support, and guidance. As such, the success of the programs is contingent on their performance.

Problem of Practice

BL-B has an employee satisfaction problem that the regional executive director hopes to address before negatively affecting the organization's performance. Given the organization's

lofty mission— "We expect our students to earn a bachelor's degree, accumulate no more than

$31,000 in debt, and be employed or continuing their education six months after graduation"

("About Us: Goals for Our Students," 2016)—collaboration and support are critical. The Bottom

Line national office annually assesses employee satisfaction via an electronic survey. Since the

COVID-19 pandemic, some program advisors at BL-B have indicated, via this survey, that they

do not feel supported by their leadership. This leadership support score continues to drop while

BL-B's overall organizational satisfaction scores remain consistently high. BL-B leadership is

unsure why some Boston program advisors feel unsupported and are, therefore, unaware of how

to make them feel supported.

Figure 1 The organizational hierarchy of Bottom Line's regional office
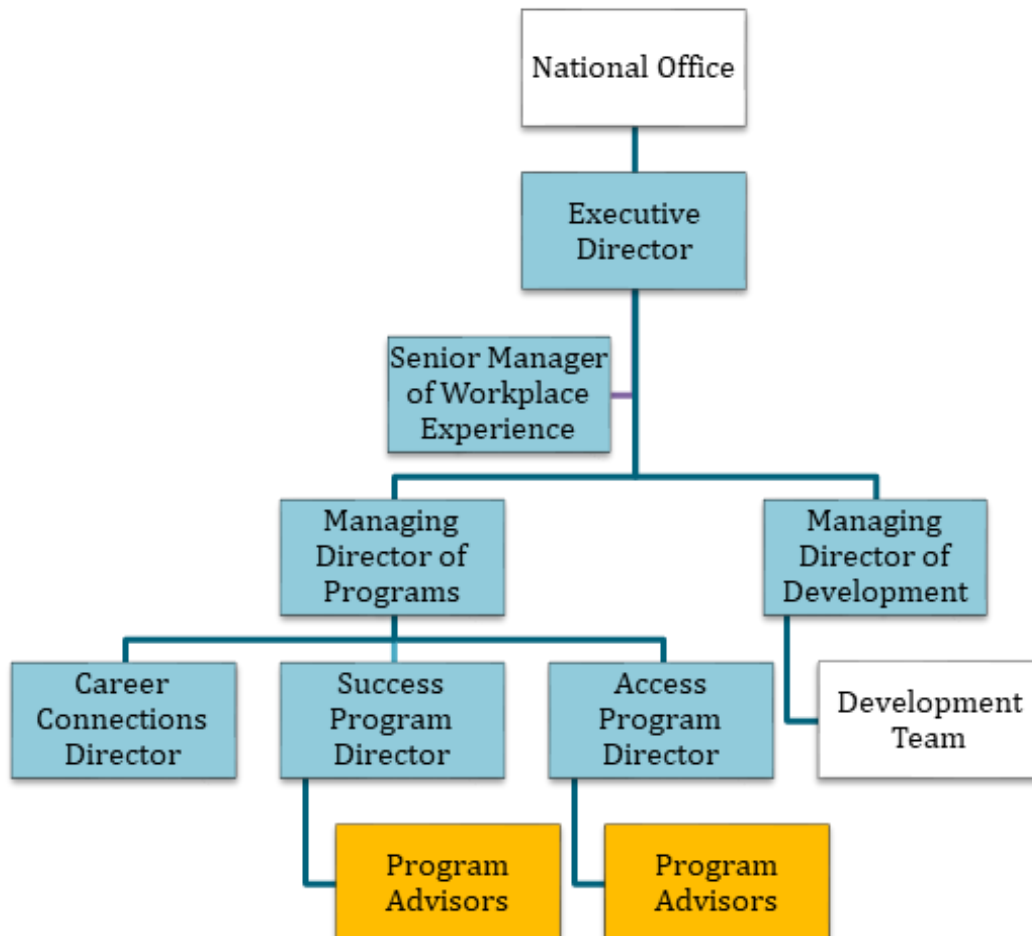
BL-B surveys employees every six months to assess employee satisfaction and the

organizational climate. In the last year, the surveyed BL-B program advisors communicated

insufficient leadership support, which increased between one survey and the next. According to

the Senior Leadership Team Staff Survey (March 2023), its data revealed that six percent of

program advisors felt unsupported by Boston's regional executive leadership team. While this

may not appear to be a significant issue, the BL-B executive director believes the percentage is

more significant than it appears. The executive director cited rumors, employee comments, and

turnover as her source of concern. The Boston program advisors are responsible for client

engagement (Executive director, personal communication, June 28, 2023).

The staff survey also showed an eleven percent drop in overall satisfaction with the

organization. Within Bottom Line's National Staff Survey, Boston program advisors

communicated feelings of unclear purpose, overwork, poor interpersonal communication, and no

path for the future (Bottom Line, 2023). The executive director reported being confounded by

the program advisors' feelings of being unsupported by regional executive leadership. She and

other leaders hold weekly meetings and regularly invite feedback via satisfaction and pulse

surveys. The executive director stated she filled regional leadership roles multiple times in the

last five years. While the reasons for leadership turnover are unclear, the employee surveys

indicating decreased satisfaction and low feelings of executive support may be related (Executive

director, personal communication, June 2, 2023).

 Ensuring a supportive work environment for BL-B employees is not only a moral

imperative but also a practical imperative. BL-B is a nonprofit located in a competitive labor

market. "Among metros over 1 million, Boston registers the highest rate of locally focused

nonprofits, followed by San Francisco and Washington, D.C." (Maciag, 2019, para. 2). The

nature of nonprofit work for human service organizations tends to be emotionally taxing as the

well-being of others is their product (Reinhardt & Enke, 2020). The National Council for

Nonprofits issued reports in 2021 and 2023, citing a "troubling" high number of nationwide

vacancies in nonprofit organizations. In surveys conducted by the National Council for

Nonprofits (2023), "Three out of four respondents report job vacancies (74.6% in 2023, 76% in

2021). By comparison, only a third (33.0%) of private businesses had job vacancies at any time

between August 2021 and September 2022" (p. 3). More than half of nonprofits (51.7%)

reported they have more vacancies now compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic" (p. ii).

Emotionally taxing work, competition for resources, and a national shortage of nonprofit workers

mean BL-B has increased pressure to retain, develop, and engage its employees. Organizational

and supervisory support plays a significant role in employee engagement, retention, and

performance (Anderson, n.d.; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Maertz et al., 2007; Prentice et al., 2022).

Attuning to its employees' need to feel supported is imperative for BL-B.

      Recognizing that employees feel a lack of support from their senior leaders may lead to

turnover, disengagement, and lower performance, the regional executive director created an

employee satisfaction group and hired a senior manager of Workplace Experience. In addition,

the executive director suspected a disconnect between BL-B's leadership demonstrations of

support for their employees and the employees' feeling supported. Thus, the executive director

agreed to this improvement project. This capstone aims to understand this disconnect and

subsequently recommend action that will align BL-B's leadership practices with its program and

advisors' expectations of support.

Project Questions and Review of Literature

The following questions guided our study:

- PQ 1: What practices and interactions with leaders contribute to and diminish program advisors' sense of support?
- PQ 2: What practices and interactions do leaders perform with the intention of supporting program advisors?
- PQ 3: How are leaders' and program advisors' understanding and experiences of what contributes to a sense of support aligned or misaligned?

To understand BL-B's executive leadership's concerns about leadership support, we turned to relevant literature and research to clarify our tacit understanding of the problem and guide this research plan and subsequent recommendations. For this, we explored several areas of research related to support. We focused our search on work done in the organizational development, psychology, and sociology disciplines. Our search terms included "leadership strategies," "organizational support," and "relationship theory." We searched Google Scholar and Vanderbilt University's Jean and Alexander Heard Library research databases. Because workplace climate is a salient topic, we also searched Google. Doing so allowed us to learn what professional organizations were doing regarding workplace support. These searches yielded the results outlined in the following synthesis. The literature most relevant to the area of inquiry included organizational support, social support, supervisory support, human resources development, leadership theories, relationship theories, and workplace engagement.

Social Support

In his book *Work Stress and Social Support*, social psychologist James S. House (1981) identifies four forms of social support: emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, and appraisal support. Emotional support is characterized by demonstrations of caring, concern, and empathy. Instrumental support is characterized by tangible and in-kind actions. Informational support is characterized by giving guidance and direction or ideas on handling problems. Finally, appraisal support is the act of affirming and giving feedback that leads to self-reflection (House, 1981).

In their paradigm of social support, Cullen (1994) identifies the major dimensions of social support. Cullen argues that when synthesizing the literature, social support could be broken into three distinct dimensions: the perception of support v. the delivery of support, instrumental support, and expressive support, and the different levels of support.

Cullen adds a fourth category: social support is delivered informally or formally. Building on previous theory, Cullen states that it is important to recognize that the objective delivery of support and perceived support are often different and dependent upon how support is interpreted in each context. The dimensions of instrumental and expressive support are akin to House's (1981) instrumental and appraisal forms of support. Cullen argues that instrumental support uses the relationship to reach a goal. Expressive support is both a means and an end. He argues that social support occurs at a micro-level and a macro-level. An example of micro-level support is any support occurring between two individuals. Social support occurring between communities and organizations of which an individual is a part is an example of macro-level support. The last dimension of Cullen's paradigm is that social support occurs formally and

informally: "Informal social support would occur through social relationships with others who lack any official status relative to the individual. Formal social support might be provided by schools, governmental assistance programs..." (1994, p. 531).

Shumaker & Brownell (1984) offer a model of support "that involves an exchange between at least two persons, and which is perceived by at least one of the participants to be intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient" (p. 13). They contend that the outcome of support may be "positive, negative, or neutral" (p. 13). This model underscores the importance of support as an exchange and the critical need to recognize the role perception plays in understanding the effects of support. They argue that viewing social support as an exchange process assumes that there are two perspectives, which may differ (p. 17).

Shumaker & Browell encourage those of us who are attempting to understand the perception of support concept to recognize characteristics of supportive workplace exchanges. The perception of an exchange is different from the effects of the exchange. In other words, an exchange can be a positive experience, but the positive exchange might not achieve positive effects. Furthermore, supportive exchanges occur within ongoing relationships; thus, the perception of supportive exchanges may change over time. The participants do not often consciously evaluate supportive exchanges. Support is typically evaluated when there is a notable event: an apparent absence of support or an atypically positive exchange. Many underlying social support themes are foundational to support concepts in the workplace.

Organizational Support

Organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) espouses that people will trade

their time and effort based on their analysis of how much their organization values their

contributions and genuinely cares about their well-being. This perceived organizational support

is more positively related to retention and job satisfaction than pay and benefits. Eisenberger et

al. (1986) propose that employees form global beliefs about the organization's commitment to

them. They assess this commitment by how well the organization earnestly rewards and cares for

its employees. A critical component of perceived organizational support is that the motivation

behind providing employee support must be altruistic. Organizational support theory postulates

that employees feel more supported when they believe the rewards and recognition received

from the organization are given without external pressure, such as those required by law, a union,

or public perception. When an organization engages in supportive behaviors, it should do so

because it is the right thing to do and because it genuinely cares about the well-being of its

employees. Engaging in supportive behaviors because a union or the law requires it or simply

because it is a best practice will be viewed by employees with skepticism and will not lead to

their feeling supported. Eisenberger et al. (1986) developed the Survey of Perceived

Organizational Support which details the hallmarks of perceived organizational support.

Rhoades & Eisenberger (2002) identify antecedents of perceived organizational support

including fairness, human resource practices and work conditions, and leadership. Fairness is

defined through the lens of procedural justice (Moorman, Blakely, & Niehoff, 1998). How

decisions about resource distribution are made is a critical factor of procedural justice. Another

important element of procedural justice is transparency and consistency in decision-making.

Eisenberger et al. (2020) explain that human resources practices and work conditions leading to

perceived organizational support include generous benefits, employee-centered policies,

employee-centered worksites, and professional development opportunities. Eisenberger et al.

(1986) propose that employees only feel supported when they believe the support is altruistic.

The leadership antecedent of perceived organizational support is mediated by the tenet that

employees personify their organization, attributing "human-like" characteristics to the company

(Kurtessis et al., 2017). Doing so encourages an interpersonal-type relationship between the

Figure 2 Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (Eisenberger et al., 1986, p. 502)

1.* The organization values my contribution to its well-being.
2.* If the organization could hire someone to replace me at a lower salary it would do so. (R)
3.* The organization fails to appreciate any extra effort from me. (R)
4.* The organization strongly considers my goals and values.
5. The organization would understand a long absence due to my illness.
6.* The organization would ignore any complaint from me. (R)
7.* The organization disregards my best interests when it makes decisions that affect me. (R)
8.* Help is available from the organization when I have a problem.
9.* The organization really cares about my well-being.
10. The organization is willing to extend itself in order to help me perform my job to the best of my ability.
11. The organization would fail to understand my absence due to a personal problem. (R)
12. If the organization found a more efficient way to get my job done they would replace me. (R)
13. The organization would forgive an honest mistake on my part.
14. It would take only a small decrease in my performance for the organization to want to replace me. (R)
15. The organization feels there is little to be gained by employing me for the rest of my career. (R)
16. The organization provides me little opportunity to move up the ranks. (R)
17.* Even if I did the best job possible, the organization would fail to notice. (R)
18. The organization would grant a reasonable request for a change in my working conditions.
19. If I were laid off, the organization would prefer to hire someone new rather than take me back. (R)
20.* The organization is willing to help me when I need a special favor.
21.* The organization cares about my general satisfaction at work.
22.* If given the opportunity, the organization would take advantage of me. (R)
23.* The organization shows very little concern for me. (R)
24. If I decided to quit, the organization would try to persuade me to stay.
25.* The organization cares about my opinions.
26. The organization feels that hiring me was a definite mistake. (R)
27.* The organization takes pride in my accomplishments at work.
28. The organization cares more about making a profit than about me. (R)
29. The organization would understand if I were unable to finish a task on time.
30. If the organization earned a greater profit, it would consider increasing my salary.
31. The organization feels that anyone could perform my job as well as I do. (R)
32. The organization is unconcerned about paying me what I deserve. (R)
33. The organization wishes to give me the best possible job for which I am qualified.
34. If my job were eliminated, the organization would prefer to lay me off rather than transfer me to a new job. (R)
35.* The organization tries to make my job as interesting as possible.
36. My supervisors are proud that I am a part of this organization.

employee and the organization. This is important to recognize, as anyone acting as an agent in

the organization is perceived as doing so according to the organization's values and at the

organization's behest. Exploring the role that agents of organizations play in perceived

organizational support, researchers found that supportive supervisory behaviors, which include

ongoing communication, concern for well-being, empowerment, and inclusion in decision-

making fostered feelings of perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al.1986; Kurtessis

et al., 2017; Maertz et al., 2007).

Figure 3 The perceived supervisor support (PSS)/perceived organizational support (POS) relationship
(Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006, p. 570)
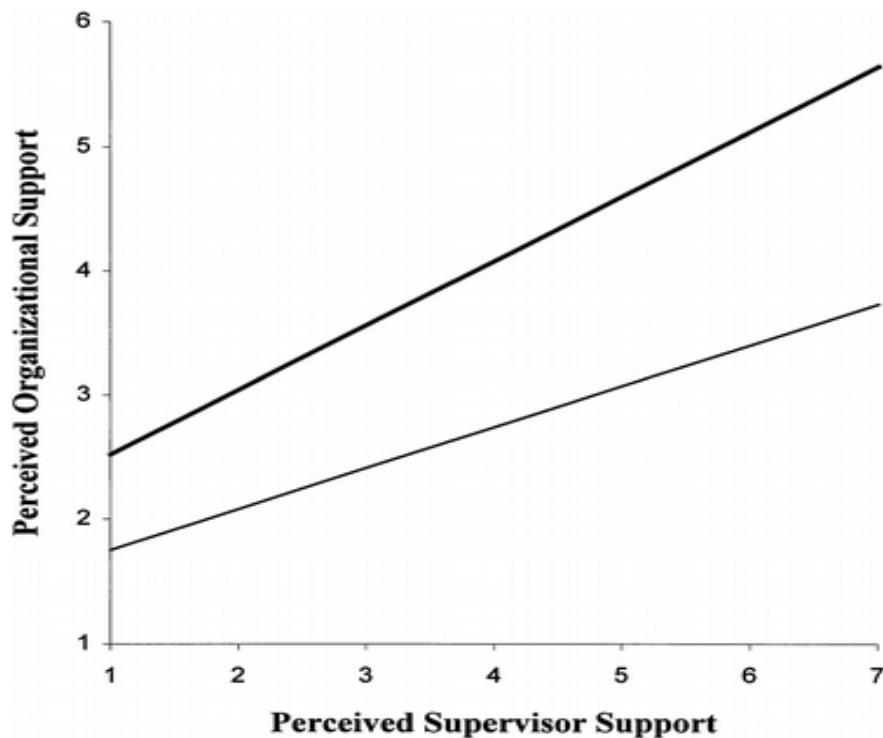
Note. The relationship between perceived supervisor support (PSS) and perceived organizational support (POS) as a function of the supervisor's perceived organizational status (Study 2).) "High status is indicated by the top, the bottom line indicates bold line, and low status. High and low supervisor's perceived organizational statuses are, respectively, 1 *SD* above and 1 SD below the mean."

Perceived supervisory support is the degree to which employees believe their supervisor genuinely values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988). Figure 3 depicts Shanock & Eisenberger's (2006) Study 2 findings. As perceived supervisor support increases, perceived organizational support increases.

Because supervisors represent the organization, employees conflate supervisors' support and organizational support. Eisenberger et al. (2002) demonstrate that perceived supervisory support leads to perceived organizational support. In that same study, researchers link supervisor status in the organization with perceived organizational support. As a result of this link, perceived supervisory support is associated with reduced turnover. This study highlights the significance of supervisory support and the conditions under which it can be most influential. Figure 3 from the study demonstrates the effectiveness of perceived organizational support and the importance of supervisory status. Owing to the relationship between perceived supervisory support and perceived organizational support, it is critical to understand which leadership styles foster a sense of support.

Leadership in Nonprofit Human Service Organizations

Recognizing and understanding the nuances specific to nonprofits helped us to understand the present problem better. The difference between a nonprofit human service organization and a for-profit organization primarily lies in how they measure performance and success: "…[F]or-profit organizations focus on strategies to measure this in financial terms, whereas nonprofits and government agencies produce value that lies in the achievement of social purposes since direct revenue is not usually generated from nonprofit firm activities, a different

type of cultural context arises within these types of organizations" (Thach & Thompson, 2007, p.

356). The nature of the work and the needs of the stakeholders bear an emotional component

that is not often present in a for-profit environment. Unlike typical employees of for-profit

organizations, employees of human service nonprofit organizations are typically motivated by

the desire to enhance the lives of others.

Interestingly, despite the differences in environment, mission, and sometimes, resources,

some research suggests that the competencies needed to lead a nonprofit do not differ from those

of a for-profit (Thach & Thompson, 2007). Figure 4 (Thach & Thompson, 2007) shows a

ranking of leadership competencies based on the type of organization done by a sample of

executive leaders. Although this ranking demonstrates that the value of some leadership

Figure 4 Ranking of 23 leadership competencies/skills by sector. (Thach, & Thompson, 2007)

Competency/skill	All leaders %	For-profit leaders		Public/non-profit leaders	
		%	Rank	%	Rank
Honesty and integrity	84.3	83.6	1	85.2	1
Being collaborative (team player)	66.1	63.3	2	69.4	2
Developing others	58.9	57.8	3	60.2	3
Adaptability	54.2	51.6	5	57.4	4
Self-confidence	53.0	56.3	4	49.1	7
Positive outlook	50.4	47.7	7	53.7	6
Conflict management	47.9	42.2	9	54.6	5
Customer service	47.5	51.6	5	42.6	9
Strategic thinker	45.8	45.3	8	46.3	8
Time management	43.2	48.4	6	37.0	10
Self-knowledge of strengths and weaknesses	42.8	48.4	6	36.1	11
Emotional self-control	36.9	39.1	10	34.3	12
Being inspirational	35.6	29.7	14	42.6	9
Employee performance management	33.1	37.5	11	27.8	14
Initiative and achievement orientation	30.5	31.3	13	29.6	13
Being visionary	29.7	32.0	12	26.9	15
Influence skills	26.7	28.1	16	25.0	16
Stress management	26.3	25.0	18	27.8	14
Empathy to others	24.6	25.8	17	23.1	17
Political and organizational awareness	22.9	18.8	19	27.8	14
Marketing and sales	19.1	28.9	15	7.4	20
Being a change agent	17.4	18.8	19	15.7	18
Accounting and finance	14.0	16.4	20	11.1	19

competencies may not greatly differ between nonprofit and for-profit organizations, there is a

significant value difference in the rankings of "Being inspirational," "Conflict management,"

"Customer service," "Time management," "Self-knowledge of strengths and weaknesses,"

"Political and organizational awareness, and "Marketing and sales." This ranking suggests that

leaders in for-profit and nonprofit organizations see their roles differently.

Although the value of certain leadership competencies may not differ greatly, the

significant discrepancies are "being inspirational" and "conflict management." There is research

that suggests that there are leadership styles that are particularly effective in engaging employees

in nonprofit organizations. Anderson & Sun (2017) conceptualize leadership style as "the

pattern of attitudes that leaders hold and behaviors they exhibit" (p. 76). There is a large body of

literature on various leadership approaches (Dinh et al., 2014). Shared, servant, and

transformational leadership models are among the most widely researched relative to their

efficacy in nonprofit organizations.

During this search, it was difficult to identify a universally agreed-upon definition of

servant leadership. Eva et al. (2019) proposed a conceptualization that appears to include many

of the definitions found in the literature, "Servant leadership is an (1) other-oriented approach to

leadership (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of follower individual needs and

interests, (3) and outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within

the organization and the larger community" (p.114). The focus on the individual needs of the

employees is thought to drive organizational performance. In this model of leadership,

employees whose needs are met by the leader can focus on their work and serve the organization.

Research in this area identifies a strong correlation between servant leaders and employee work

engagement (Aboramadan et al., 2022). For this approach to be successful, the needs of

employees must be understood and aligned with the organization's resources. This may be

difficult in a human service nonprofit with constrained resources and whose stakeholders

sometimes represent vulnerable populations.

Shared leadership, in which managers distribute leadership responsibilities throughout the

team, has become increasingly utilized (Zhu et al., 2018). A more comprehensive definition is

provided by Pearce & Conger (2003): "[A] dynamic, interactive influence process among

individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group

or organizational goals" (p. 1). The hallmarks of shared leadership include decentralized

decision-making, encouragement of all employees to use their talents to improve outcomes, and

a focus on collective input (Routhieaux, 2015). The challenge of using this approach may be that

timely decision-making is not likely. However, because of the highly interdependent nature of

nonprofit human service organizations, we understand why its use is encouraged in the nonprofit

sector (Freund, 2017).

Transformational leadership is characterized by one who inspires action by sharing a

vision with and developing their followers (Bass, 1990; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Avolio et al,

1991). Employees are engaged because they trust and are motivated by the transformational

leader. Studies have demonstrated that this leadership style influences an employee's attachment

and commitment to their organization (Aboramadan & Dahleez, 2020; Peng et al., 2019). Bass

(1990) identifies four characteristics of transformational leaders: charisma, inspiration,

intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Building on this work, Avolio, et al.,

(1991) identify four core components of transformational leadership. They refer to them as the

four I's: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized

consideration. These components represent transformational leaders' behaviors to achieve desired

results (Bass & Riggio, 2006). There are two facets of idealized influence: first is the behavior

the leader engages in, and second, how the followers perceive that behavior. Idealized influence

is marked by the leader acting as a role model, behaving ethically, demonstrating commitment,

and earning respect because of their actions.

As a result of these behaviors, their followers assign leaders high-value characteristics.

Essentially, the follower wants to emulate the leader. Inspirational motivation is a behavior that

leaders engage in that gives meaning to their followers' work: leaders articulate a clear vision

that excites their team and show employees how they are part of the vision. Intellectual

stimulation is the set of behaviors that leaders engage in to encourage their followers' innovation

by creating a safe environment where followers can be creative and can learn. Finally,

individualized consideration is represented by attuning to the individual needs of the followers.

Leaders attune to the individual differences of their respective followers and adjust their

approach to interacting with them so that work is designed and delegated according to the

respective individual's strengths and interests. Individualized consideration requires the leader to

look at the follower as "a whole person and not just an employee" (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 19).

Employing the four "I's" or some combination of the four has been demonstrated to lead to work

engagement, organizational commitment, and, most notably, a sense of support (Aboramadan &

Dahlees, 2020; Peng, et al., 2020; Rafferty & Griffin, 2006).

Figure 5 below compares transformational and transactional leaders (Bass, 1990, p. 21).

Figure 5 Characteristics of Transformational and Transactional Leaders--Exhibit

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER

Charisma: Provides vision and sense of mission, instills pride, gains respect and trust.
Inspiration: Communicates high expectations, uses symbols to focus efforts, expresses important purposes in simple ways.
Intellectual Stimulation: Promotes intelligence, rationality, and careful problem solving.
Individualized Consideration: Gives personal attention, treats each employee individually, coaches, advises.

TRANSACTIONAL LEADER

Contingent Reward: Contracts exchange of rewards for effort, promises rewards for good performance, recognizes accomplishments.
Management by Exception (active): Watches and searches for deviations from rules and standards, takes corrective action.
Management by Exception (passive): Intervenes only if standards are not met.
Laissez-Faire: Abdicates responsibilities, avoids making decisions.

The characteristics in the exhibit highlight why transformational leadership will likely be more effective in a nonprofit human service environment. Transformational behaviors—focusing on the mission and fostering pride in the work being performed—align more with human service work than purely transactional behaviors. Bass (1990) describes transactional behaviors such as management by exception which means leadership "intervenes only if standards are not met" or the employee deviates from rules and standards (p. 23). Transaction-focused leaders are not attuned to the humanity of the employees who are working in organizations whose focus is improving lives. The stakes in these organizations are high. It stands to reason that the employees need to feel cared for and appreciated. Transactional leadership, in which leaders may avoid responsibility and only engage with employees around meeting standards, does not allow for this.

Employee Engagement

We contend that engagement and support are closely connected. Kahn (1990) conceptualized employee engagement as "the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's preferred self in task behaviors that promote connections to work, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional) and active full performances" (p. 70). In their article, "Antecedents, Consequences, and Context of Employee Engagement in Nonprofit Organizations" (2016), Akingbola & van den Berg posit that job and organizational engagement result in three outcomes that nonprofit organizations and their employees highly value: job satisfaction, commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior (p. 65). The antecedents of engagement are closely tied to support. Supportive behaviors are related to how employees feel about themselves, their roles, and the organization.

Although research indicates numerous factors that impact employee engagement, Bakker's "Building Engagement in the Workplace" (2008) insists that most influences fit three broad categories: the employee, the job, and the organization. Bakker et al. (2011) expand upon these categories in "Work Engagement: Further Reflections on the State of Play," where they explain how the employee impacts their engagement with the organization and the work. The employee's unique experiences can cause disengagement. Individual characteristics, values, personality, and motivation can impact the energy someone brings to work. The employee's perception of the position is also subjective: Is the position challenging; is the position limited, or does the employee exercise some autonomy? Plus, what personal resources—mental, physical, etc.—will enable the employee to be fully engaged? Deficits in any of these categories affect workplace engagement and individual perceptions of the workplace (Bakker et al., 2011).

Bakker et al. (2011) go on to explain that the job also influences the employee's engagement. The job, demands, and resources are also everyday influences. The position's physical, psychological, and organizational demands can impact the individual's job perception and performance. Job resources such as organizational support, leadership feedback, and professional development can shift the weight of job demands. The employee's access to job-related resources can increase engagement. When job demands are high, and resources are insufficient, employees disengage. Job resources such as autonomy, feedback, and social support significantly predict work engagement. When employees have access to these resources, they are more likely to feel engaged in their work, and this engagement can spill over to their coworkers. However, social support can manifest as negative emotions and spread among socializing colleagues. Employees frequently experiencing positive emotions are more likely to transfer their engagement to coworkers through emotional contagion.

Finally, Bakker et al. (2011) highlight how the organization's cultivated environment also impacts employee engagement. Culture, leadership, communication, and performance management practices are essential to employee engagement. Employee involvement and participation can waiver due to unsupportive leaders, poor employee interactions, leaders' failure to recognize employees' individual value, and poor working conditions (including inadequate equipment, unsafe working conditions, or excessive workloads).

Jiony et al. (2015) note that organizational culture, social interactions, and workplace relationships impact employee engagement. Positive social connections--support, team cohesion, and supervisor-subordinate relationships—contribute to employee experiences like demands, job resources, negative interactions, toxic behaviors, and other employee perceptions. Conversely,

the organization's diversity and inclusion of individuals' nationalities, cultures, and generational

differences create positive experiences and workplace socialization, which improves

engagement.

Relationship Theories

Unsworth et al. (2018) explain that several workplace relationship theories, including

social exchange theory and leader-member exchange theory, provide the appropriate lenses to

understand leadership support. Kurtessis et al. (2017) argue these relationship theories emphasize

the importance of fairness, reciprocity, and perceived support in shaping employee attitudes,

behaviors, and organizational outcomes.

According to social exchange theory, individuals exchange social resources, such as

support, information, and cooperation (Settoon et al., 1996). The theory suggests that employees

are more likely to provide and seek support when they believe in an equitable exchange of

resources. Employees expect their support will be reciprocated in the future, or they will receive

other benefits in return. This reciprocal exchange of support builds positive relationships and

fosters a supportive work environment. Conversely, when employees believe the support

exchange is imbalanced or inequitable, they feel dissatisfied and reduce their support.

Wayne et al. (2002) explore the fair support exchange between employees and their

supervisors. The research shows that "fair treatment and rewards significantly influence

perceptions of organizational support and leader-member exchange" (p. 590). In turn, balanced

exchanges affect employee support and overall job satisfaction.

Erdogan and Bauer (2010) emphasize the leader-member exchange to enhance employee

support. Leader-member exchange theory focuses on relationships between leaders and their followers. According to this theory, leaders develop individual relationships with each employee. The leader categorizes employees "as 'in-group' or 'out-group' based on mutual trust, respect, and exchange of benefits. In-group members receive more attention, support, and opportunities for growth compared to out-group members" (Graen et al., 1995, p. 220). Positive relationships yield higher job satisfaction, commitment, and performance.

The research we read details the nuanced needs of nonprofit organizations and how support may be actualized in different ways. In addition, it underscores the importance of leadership support and leadership behaviors in gaining the benefits of perceived organizational support. Finally, the literature encourages us to attune to how an organization such as BL-B demonstrates that they care about their employees' well-being, communicates with their employees, and empowers them to ensure that the construct of support is understood and felt by both leaders and employees.

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical constructs most relevant to this inquiry are organizational support and transformational leadership theories. Organizational support theory examines the influence of employees' beliefs about how the organization "values their contributions and cares about their well-being" (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986, p. 501). Relevant themes associated with this theory include the intention behind support, valuing contributions, the important role of agents of the organization, and the belief that valued effort will result in fair and equitable rewards (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Leadership is the primary tool in realizing all

tenets of organizational support.

These pillars of organizational support most closely align with the themes of transformational leadership theory. Transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985) presents an archetype of leadership in which leaders stimulate and inspire followers through modeling and interpersonal behaviors. These practices and interactions include individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, and leader-member relationships.

To answer our project questions, we created this framework in which we leveraged the connections between organizational support and transformational leadership theory. The underlying themes of our framework are inspiration, trust, collaboration, and communication. These theories and related themes informed our study design, findings, and recommendations.

Figure 5 The project's framework divided between organizational support and transformational leadership

Study Design and Methodology

This project aimed to assist BL-B in resolving its problem of practice by discovering and understanding support vis-à-vis its leadership and program advisors. To do so, we designed a qualitative case study in which we conducted a comprehensive review of BL-B's leadership support practices and compared what behaviors are effective and ineffective in contributing to the program advisors' sense of support. The case study approach is often used to answer focused questions, is well-suited for short-term research, and can "be used to inform policies or uncover contributing reasons for cause-and-effect relationships" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 109).

To conduct this case study, we identified appropriate sampling, multiple forms of data with relevant collection methods, and a data coding and analysis process to address the three project questions. We collected primary and secondary data simultaneously over three months. The varied data created an in-depth picture of the organization. Each data tool aimed to answer project questions from different perspectives, drawing information from two key stakeholders: BL-B leadership and program advisors. Peshkin (1993) emphasizes that qualitative methods have the power to capture the complexity and nuance of human experiences, providing rich and meaningful insights that quantitative methods alone cannot achieve.

Timeline

The schedule below (see Table 1) identifies key events, actions, and dates relevant to this research.

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Table 1 Our capstone timeline

DATES	PROJECT ACTIVITIES
11/1-11/30	Requesting and collecting data • Requesting national and regional surveys • Observing the all-staff meeting and the office • Collecting human resource documents • Interviewing Boston leaders
11/15-2/20	Analyzing data
12/1-12/31	Coding data • Combing through surveys and categorizing comments • Searching HR documents for keywords • Organizing comments by group, theme, and function • Scrubbing interview transcripts with Dedoose
1/10, 2/1	Reviewing codebooks and themes
1/1-2/20	Comparing data patterns Interpreting data

Sampling

Given that this study aimed to solve a specific problem in a specific context, we used purposeful sampling to identify who would provide our primary data: "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigators want to discover, understand, and gain insight and, therefore, must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 96). With the belief that all the leaders at BL-B and all the program advisors would provide us with the most substantive data, we selected these groups. During initial meetings with the executive director and in our subsequent scope of work document, we requested the ability to conduct focus groups with the sixteen BL-B program advisors. Initially, the organization agreed to allow the program advisors to participate in focus groups. After further thought, the executive director informed us she did not want to move forward with focus groups. She cited concerns of overwhelming and confusing the advisors with more requests for feedback and third-party

questioning.

Instead of focus groups, the executive director stated that we would be invited to participate in survey debrief meetings with the program advisors. When asked to be scheduled for these meetings, we were told they no longer felt it was a good idea. Given this unexpected shift in our data collection plan, we recognized that findings for project question one would be limited. The ability to speak directly to the program advisors would have allowed us to confirm what we found in the document review and allow us to get a more nuanced understanding of the program advisor's perspectives. We complied with modifications to our methodology since the executive director was our connection to Boston's regional leaders and program advisors. We trusted her assessment that program advisors would feel overwhelmed if external interviewers engaged in another series of questions.

Finally, we requested meetings with anyone considered a leader at BL-B. The senior manager of Workplace Experience emailed Boston leaders about our project and told them to expect a meeting planner. The executive director contacted the five directors and one manager. Each Boston leader, including the executive director, scheduled individual interviews with our interviewer.

Data Collection

Secondary Surveys

Since returning to the office after the COVID-19 pandemic, BL-B surveys its employees every six months. The national biannual surveys question the program advisors' workplace satisfaction with BL-B, its regional leadership, and the advisor position. However, the regional

survey examines specific interactions—such as meetings and mentoring—and BL-B's

implementation of its policies—such as professional development. Since the partner

organization created and distributed the job satisfaction surveys every six months, we neither

recruited nor sampled the participants. To answer PQ2 and PQ3, we needed to collect data that

provided insights directly from the program advisors. We requested that the executive director

share the national employee satisfaction survey data and the regional leadership support survey.

The executive director provided three years of national satisfaction surveys and the inaugural

regional leadership support survey data that all advisors had completed. The national survey was

distributed via email for employees to complete independently, and the regional survey was

distributed during a free lunch that everyone attended. Both surveys had 100% participation.

Although collected by BL-B, the surveys communicate raw data directly from BL-B's program

advisors. It contains not only quantitative breakdowns of the employees' demographics and

Likert scale responses but also qualitative commentary about the leaders' and the advisors'

workplace experiences. The survey data was collected as indicators of perceived support. Boston

leadership support survey's questions identified which categories of support it deems important.

Therefore, themes of support omitted from the survey creation are unimportant or not provided.

The national survey provides a broad view of advisors' satisfaction with only a few open-

and closed-ended questions dedicated to leadership support. Conversely, BL-B's Workplace

Experience Department designed the regional survey, and it mirrors key themes of the project's

conceptual frame--supportive leadership themes in transformational leadership and perceived

organizational support. According to the senior manager of Workplace Experience, the survey

attempts to pinpoint specific issues, weaknesses in organizational and leadership support, and

holes in BL-B's communication strategies. Thus, the regional survey asks dozens of open- and closed-ended questions about multiple areas:

- Which factors of your experience at Bottom Line have contributed to your professional development?

- Please share how Bottom Line could increase its investment in professional development.

- How can the regional leadership team support you in moving toward the next step in your career?

- What does being a satisfied employee at Bottom Line mean?

- Which factors of your experience at Bottom Line have contributed to workplace satisfaction?

- How might you feel most comfortable engaging with members of the regional leadership team?

Document Review

To better understand BL-B's support intentions, we created a list of basic human resources documents—such as employee handbooks and job descriptions (see Appendix C). The document list was divided into four categories that communicate supportive intentions, practices, and interactions. We selected human resources and leadership documents that would communicate leadership support plans. Once the list was created, we emailed the document request to the executive director and the senior manager of Workplace Experience.

BL-B documents and leadership presentations define the office's culture and plans. They typically disseminate procedures, policies, and processes—as well as intended interactions and

practices—to leaders and program advisors. This would include plans to engage and support

program advisors. The collected documents would help us answer project question 2--What

practices and interactions do leaders perform with the intention of supporting program advisors?

Reviewing the documents, we could investigate how leaders intend to support program advisors.

The senior manager of Workplace Experience collected and emailed us two dozen

organizational documents (in PDF format). She also included documents like PowerPoint slide

decks for DEI events, a Deep Dive meeting, and a debrief of the inaugural regional leadership

support survey results. Several documents provided examples of supportive leadership intentions

through diversity and equity events and defined workplace behaviors. We saved the documents

on two password-protected flash drives.

Documents explained the organization's intentions and established employees'

expectations, answering project question 2. They reflected the organization and leadership's

intended support that they internally communicated to the program advisors. Other documents

described the organization and leadership practices and interactions. These documents described

how BL-B and its leaders intended to support their employees. Some documents describe how

employees respond to BL-B and leadership's support and explain employees' expectations and

experiences.

Analytic Memoing

Each researcher maintained a reflective journal (see Appendix J). As Saldana's *The*

Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers (2013) explains, "Analytic memos are somewhat

comparable to researcher journal entries or blogs – a place to 'dump your brain' about the

participants, phenomenon, or process under investigation by thinking and thus writing and thus thinking even more about them: 'Memos are sites of conversation with ourselves about our data'" (Clarke, 2005, p. 202 as cited by Saldana, 2013, p. 44). We documented our biases and assumptions. We wrote about our own perspectives on leadership. We also journaled about our concerns about the process, the unexpected obstacles, and our unfettered reactions to emergent situations.

Writing analytical memos organized our thoughts and findings. It allowed us to clarify and distill uncertain thoughts clearly and concisely. The memos also allowed for better communication of ideas and transparency within the project. We described the reasoning for our conclusions and related decision-making.

Formal Semi-structured Interviews

Interviewing is a data collection technique that helps researchers understand how others are interpreting a specific phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To answer project question 2, What practices and interactions do leaders perform with the intention of supporting program advisors?, we interviewed all seven leaders at BL-B using the formal semi-structured interview format. This format required preparing questions before the interviews while allowing for the possibility of asking additional questions to gain a deeper understanding of answers (Bhattacharya, 2017).

The senior manager of Workplace Experience notified the BL-B leaders of this capstone and that they would receive a meeting planner to interview with us. The senior manager asked that we allow their support staff to schedule the calls. Once we received the meeting planners,

we responded to each planner with a secure Zoom link tied to our account.

We conducted the interviews over two days. One interview was conducted on the first day and the others the following day. All interviews, except for the interview with the executive director, lasted 30 minutes. The executive director interview lasted 42 minutes. We followed a script that ensured we maintained a neutral position and asked everyone the same questions.

At the start of every interview, we introduced ourselves and reiterated the interview's intention, explaining that we would ask a series of open-ended questions. We then asked the interviewee to confirm that we had their permission to record the interview. We explained that we would be the only individuals to have access to the password-protected recordings. Once we received permission, we began to record using the Zoom record function. This function captures audio and video. The Zoom software requires anyone who is logged in to acknowledge that the meeting is being recorded by clicking on a button signifying their understanding. This added another layer of consent. We asked each interviewee to confirm that we had their consent to be recorded. This captured the approval on the recording.

Once we secured approval, we asked each interviewee the same questions, in the same order. Depending on the respective answer, we may have asked for clarification or a follow-up question that allowed for deeper understanding. Using five of Patton's six interview questions—experience and behavior; opinion and value, feeling, knowledge, and background (Patton, 2015, p. 444 as cited by Ravitch & Carl, 2020), we designed our questions to uncover what behaviors leaders at BL-B engaged in with the goal of supporting program advisors. Utilizing different types of questions allowed us to gather different perspectives from the same interviewee. All questions were crafted with support conceptualized through the lenses of transformational

leadership practices and perceived organizational support to gain insight into how employee well-being is prioritized, how inclusion and equity are practiced, and how employees are positioned in the organization's mission and day-to-day operations. Each question drew on either the intended support, the action, or the perceived support.

Once all questions were asked, we invited the interviewees to talk about anything else they wanted to discuss related to leadership support practices at BL-B. We concluded by thanking them for their time and notifying them that they could contact us via email or phone if they had additional thoughts or questions.

All recordings were saved to a password-protected cloud on Zoom. All devices used to access the interviews were also password-protected. Only one researcher had the password for the Zoom account.

Observational Field Notes

Observational field notes provide a firsthand account of the context in which the problem of practice exists. (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). The researcher observes the natural setting of leadership and support in an attempt "to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). Field notes are the appropriate method to document what was observed and of any coinciding ideas. Neuman (2011) identified types of field notes used in qualitative data collection, many of which we used during observations and interviews. Maxwell (2012) argued that "observation can enable you to draw inferences about someone's perspective that you couldn't obtain by relying exclusively on interview data" (p. 94).

We visited the BL-B office hoping that doing so would provide rich information related to leadership support in the setting in which it occurs (see Appendix E and Appendix I). We asked the executive director to identify a date and time to visit the site. We explained the intent of the visit and asked that we be scheduled during which we could observe leader/employee interactions. The senior manager of Workplace Experience informed us that we could visit on the day scheduled for her next "deep dive" meeting. "Deep dives" are all-employee meetings in which a department selects a topic and presents said topic. We opted to accept this invitation as it would be the only opportunity to see everyone on-site simultaneously.

During our visit, we followed the framework of observational field notes suggested by Merriam & Tisdell (2105) which included observing the physical setting, the participants, activities and interactions, and subtle factors. We acted as "observers as participants" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This position allowed us to be visible to the group and engage with the environment while maintaining enough distance to remain objective and observe carefully. The senior manager gave us a tour of the facility during the visit. We attended the "deep dive" meeting, sat in a common space, and quietly observed casual interactions. During the visit, we observed how the workplace was physically laid out. We noted where offices were located, who works in proximity to whom, the aesthetics of the workplace, the artwork throughout the site, and the prominently displayed messages. We observed employees interacting with one another. We attuned to body language and norms that were present. We took photographs of the site, symbols of support, and employee communications. We were careful to observe how our presence might have influenced the context. After the visit, we asked if the executive director and the senior manager could meet for a few minutes. That meeting was recorded. Following the

site visit, we drafted a chronological account of the observation. We might validate theoretical

concepts by observing patterns, relationships, or behaviors if they reflect BL-B's intended

supportive methods. Observing actual behaviors and events can examine whether the other data

aligns with the related concepts. Conversely, the observations may contradict transformational

leadership and perceived organizational support established in the conceptual framework. By

comparing observations to other collected data, we could assess the consistency of BL-B's

intentions versus actual behaviors (see Appendix A).

Data Analysis

We collected most of the data needed to answer our project questions, which included a

large body of documents, an on-site observational visit, and seven 30-minute semi-structured

interviews with leadership. Because of its breadth of data collection, this project's data analysis

included several stages. Each type of collected data required key steps in processing.

Generated Themes

We reviewed the conceptual framework to identify supportive methods within

transformational leadership and perceived organizational support theories. We theorized that

verbal and nonverbal supports would appear within themes, so BL-B leadership practices and

interactions would fall within the defined themes. Based on this research, we identified eight

themes—as shown in Figure 4—of supportive leadership methods and created a theory-specific

codebook (see Appendix F). The themes represented behaviors, interactions, and policies

indicating supportive leadership. They outlined BL-B's methods and activities and that leaders

encourage to support program advisors. The documents outlined BL-B's methods and activities

that support program advisors.

This codebook was applied to the document review, semi-structured interview, and secondary surveys. We analyzed the data separately using appropriate pre-determined deductive thematic coding.

Thematic Analysis

Preparing for thematic analysis allowed us to review multiple qualitative sources and discover broad themes throughout the collected data. It also created a consistent measure of assessment among the diverse information. In "[g]eneral-purpose thematic analysis," Jowsey et al. (2021) explain thematic analysis is a popular method for systematically analyzing qualitative data, such as interview and focus group transcripts. It is one of a cluster of methods that focus on identifying patterns of meaning, or themes, across a data set. Using the theory descriptions, we created a list of keywords for each theme. We coded and analyzed the collected data independently. One researcher coded the interview transcripts and observational field notes while the other researcher coded the surveys and documents. Each researcher coded a sampling of the data to ensure consistent interpretation.

Hybrid Coding. We used hybrid coding. Bihu's *Qualitative Data Analysis* (2023) delineates hybrid coding. He explains, "Deductive and inductive codes are generated for breadth and depth exploration of the research topics, respectively. Deductive coding is based on 'a priori' of codes to which segments of texts and transcripts are assigned. Inductive coding begins with data, making segments and categories, and generating relevant codes" (p. 1).

In addition to identifying keywords related to our conceptual frame, we inductively coded

for words and patterns relevant to leadership support and the concepts. We also coded any

discrepancies or contradictions in the data. Once the coding was complete, areas of convergence,

where the data aligned and supported each other, as well as areas of divergence or inconsistency,

were identified. This synthesis helped to create more comprehensive answers to our research

questions. Proudfoot's (2023) *Inductive/Deductive Hybrid Thematic Analysis in Mixed Methods*

Research explains the value of hybrid coding:

> The approach delineated will therefore be of value to the researchers' intent on exploring
>
> layered and complex problems which might necessitate both a more open and inductive
>
> approach to theme generation and yet at the same time would also benefit from the
>
> theoretical rigor offered by the deductive application of themes derived from an existing
>
> framework (p. 309).

Inter-coding Reliability. Using the same thematic codebook was our first step in inter-

coding reliability. As we reviewed our data, the codebook was revised multiple times. We

included theme keywords and themes that we overlooked, changed keywords that proved

irrelevant, and created collected synonyms to reflect the themes better. O'Connor and Joffe

(2020) argue, "Evaluating the intercoder reliability (ICR) of a coding frame is frequently

recommended as good practice in qualitative analysis" (p. 1). We pinpointed areas of overlap

between the theories and their themes. O'Connor and Joffe (2020) add, "After coding is

completed, depending on the analytic approach used, codes are usually clustered into themes or

narratives that are interpreted according to relevant theory. It is generally accepted that different

analysts, with different theoretical commitments, will organize codes into themes in different

ways (Armstrong et al., 1997, as cited by O'Connor & Joffe, 2020, p. 3).

To increase our coding accuracy, we re-coded our data multiple times. While one researcher focused on coding the documents and surveys, the other researcher coded interview transcripts with Dedoose. One researcher also reviewed the field notes and analytical memos for patterns and themes.

Secondary Surveys Analysis. The executive director shared a PDF of the national survey raw data, including the statistical results and line graphics for each Likert question response. The Likert questions were followed with open-ended questions for which each comment was listed anonymously.

We read all the questions, but only four Likert questions were relevant. The questions used keywords connected to the selected codes:

- Support in "Question 6-I feel supported by my Leadership Team" (p. 1).

- Support in "Q1.c- I feel supported by my Leadership Team (Regional Director or ELT National)" (p. 3).

- Feedback in "Q1.g- My manager regularly [i.e., about once a week] seeks feedback from me" (p. 4).

- Feedback in "Q1.h- I regularly [i.e., about once a week] receive feedback regarding my performance (technical or behavioral)" (p. 4).

"Staff satisfaction with support from National Teams," despite its "support" key word, was disregarded because the language referred to national leadership rather than regional leadership (p. 9). We noted the responses for these questions, highlighted keywords for the related open-ended questions, and identified relevant codes.

Questions 5a-11a referenced support and interactions, which are also keywords identified

for additional analysis; however, these questions referred to departmental support rather than

leadership support. We still read and highlighted keywords in all comments to questions 5c-11c

("What would improve your level of satisfaction in the future?").

The regional survey data was shared on an Excel spreadsheet that broke down each

question on a spreadsheet. This survey focused on leadership support at the Boston office, so, all

questions were relevant. We read each open-ended question's responses and indicated identified

keywords and related codes. We indicated keywords in red if the comment was negative.

Table 2 Themes based on our conceptual framework

Transformational Leadership themes	Organizational Support themes
- Idealized Influence - Intellectual Influence - Inspirational Motivation - Individualized Consideration	- Empowerment - Supervisory Support - Mentoring - Trust

We reviewed the keywords and codes for inconsistencies. We noticed some keywords

represented more than one code. During a second review of the responses, we filtered out

manager responses and labeled each comment with keywords and codes. Then, we color-coded

the responses: red for negative, blue for positive, green for advice, and black for irrelevant.

Finally, we labeled managers and advisors, dividing them into positive and negative quotes.

Document Review Analysis. For the document review, we created a table listing all the

human resources documents the executive director emailed. The table included columns

identifying the themes, key information, and theories addressed. We searched the document for

keywords and synonyms. We identified and read policies that included the keywords. We

categorized policies and procedures based on the eight specified codes. The policies and

procedures identified as leadership support are labeled as supportive as defined by organizational

support theory or transformational leadership support theory. We then created a list of supportive

practices and interactions that fit the thematic codes versus those that did not appear in the

documents.

We compared the list of supportive themes in documents to those in the surveys to find

patterns among the codebook themes that emerged across documents, surveys, observations, and

interviews. As a result, we developed a hybrid coding plan of analysis.

We identified keywords and synonyms within the survey comments and labeled the

responses by theme. Next, we compared the highlighted themes and pinpointed leadership

supports that were present or absent according to program advisor experiences. We searched the

documents for keywords and common support activities during the document review. Then, we

indicated the most common themes according to the keywords for each document.

Observational Field Notes. Field notes were reviewed before analyzing the semi-

structured interviews (see Appendix I), reminding us of BL-B contextual nuances. We looked at

photographs and reread the notes to view the responses in relation to the BL-B environment. We

came to understand certain aspects of the workplace culture and interpersonal dynamics. We

identified clear signs of support and anything that may undermine support. In addition, we noted

any behaviors that stood out during the observation. We then compared these signs and

behaviors to our inductive and deductive codes.

Dedoose. Following the secondary data analysis, we analyzed our primary data. We used

Dedoose research software to aid in analyzing the semi-structured interviews. Transcripts and

videos of the interviews were securely uploaded to Dedoose. We then read each Zoom-generated

transcript and edited any erroneously transcribed words. Next, we coded the transcripts using our

deductive codes. We then watched the videos again while reading the transcripts to identify

themes inductively. Once deductive and inductive codes were identified, we used the Dedoose

analysis function to identify the frequency of each code. Upon noticing the low occurrences of

many of the deductive codes, we reevaluated keywords and their relevance to thematic patterns.

We found that some of them could be merged with other codes. We also found that some of the

deductive codes were unlikely to be present based on the interview questions asked. Once codes

were merged or removed, we analyzed the deductive and inductive codes respectively.

Triangulation

Triangulation is essential for this research project since it includes multiple forms of data.

Employee satisfaction, supportive leadership, perceptions of supportive leadership, and their

impact are complex, subjective areas of study that can vary in behavior and interpretation. One

form of data would not accurately convey BL-B's organizational and leadership support.

However, triangulation—gathering and interpreting diverse data—helps to confirm research

findings. Bans-Akutey and Tiimub (2021) explain, "[A] researcher makes use of a variety of

sources or procedures in a study, the deficiencies in one method are reduced by the strengths in

the other method" (p. 3). Each data collection method develops a more in-depth view of BL-B

supports and its interpretation. Moreover, in "Triangulation in research…[t]he use of methodical

triangulation helps the researcher to minimize or offset the effects of weaknesses of the use of

one research method with the strengths of other methods" (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021, p. 2).

It offers clarity in qualitative research. Plus, Bans-Akutey & Tiimub write that triangulation "provides more insights that help the researcher to better explain a phenomenon" (p. 3).

To triangulate our analysis, we reviewed the data separately. Then, we compared our interpretations. We documented our biases, questions, and perspectives. With this, we reviewed and revised the thematic codebook before analyzing the data again.

Findings

Thematic analysis of collected data revealed the presence of supportive practices and interactions at BL-B. Our document review and semi-structured interviews with leaders identified intended supportive actions and practices. The site fieldnotes, semi-structured interviews, and the data collected from national job satisfaction and regional leader support surveys led us to a better understanding of where leadership intentions and program advisor perceptions are aligned and misaligned. In addition, the data identified potential barriers to alignment between these two groups.

What practices and interactions with leaders contribute to and diminish program advisors' sense of support?

Responding to this question, we reviewed the collected data for leaders' actions and interactions. The review was extensive and provided insights that came directly from program advisors. Still, the survey evidence from the program advisors is problematic as the organization collected this secondary data. The organization cultivated the questions and required full participation from the advisors. Because of this, the information gathered was limited based on

the organization's concerns and the advisors' comfort level when responding honestly about the organization. Our findings would likely be stronger if we could proceed with our original data collection plan involving focus groups with program advisors.

Finding #1: Leadership openness to communication, accessibility, and social support contribute to program advisors' sense of support.

In the secondary survey data, program advisors said leadership practices and interactions that contribute to their sense of support comprise access to leadership outside formalized meetings via good interdepartmental communication and public recognition of performance at meetings. Boston leaders try to be approachable and available to any program advisors' questions and concerns.

Specifically, while most program advisors express that support is derived from BL-B leadership behaviors characterized as approachable, responsive, and communicative, some program advisors find that cross-departmental interactions with leaders could be improved to enhance support. Eleven of the sixteen program advisors shared positive comments about leadership communication in general:

- "I believe I am comfortable in asking questions if they come up to the managers from other teams." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "The other managers are very welcoming and inclusive in their mannerisms and behavior, and I feel comfortable approaching them." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "I find it easy to communicate with those involved in other departments." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "Everyone is very approachable and open." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "Managers are very responsive to concerns." - BL-B Program Advisor

Program advisors discussed BL-B's leadership support method in national and regional employee surveys. Their comments indicated that leaders are supportive, and program advisors feel supported by leadership.

According to the job satisfaction surveys, BL-B leadership supported advisors with strong communication. The advisors universally stated that communication among the leaders and advisors was comfortable. Reflecting most respondents' thoughts, one advisor commented, "Everyone is very approachable and open" when asked about the managers' approachability (Bottom Line Regional Leadership Support survey responses, 2023). Only one advisor said they were unaware of the open communication policy.

In addition, advisors pointed to a comfortable, welcoming environment: "Love the staff and the culture." BL-B's social support was apparent during regional meetings and events. Leadership creates opportunities—events, open office hours, coffee chats, and interdepartmental interactions—that allow staff to build community with colleagues and leadership. Advisors said, "There's a great balance of social connection with other team members and actual work," and "I think it's a welcoming, friendly, and fun place to work. Most advisors feel connected to the teams during events and meetings, particularly collaborative retreats." According to the regional leadership support survey, the leadership also supported advisors with its public recognition of good performance. The respondents agreed that great performers are recognized and celebrated during each regional meeting.

Finding #2: Leadership diminishes a sense of support when it lacks transparent, consistent

knowledge sharing, particularly regarding pathways for promotion.

According to the regional leadership support survey, program advisors feel unsupported

because leaders are not consistent and transparent in their knowledge sharing. Some advisors

commented that knowledge sharing from leaders and departments to advisors during meetings

has been helpful: "I think the team[']s updates [have] been helpful in helping staffs learning

about what other teams are doing."

However, two program advisors' comments showed basic knowledge sharing was not

consistent:

- "I don't think I've ever had the opportunity to communicate my concerns with

  managers from other departments, and it's never been expressed that that is something

  that is welcomed." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "I wish I knew who all the managers were and the structures of other teams. While I

  am comfortable talking with members from other departments, I am unsure their

  dynamics and how best to work with other teams." - BL-B Program Advisor

These responses suggested that program advisors were uninformed or were not informed

the same way about leadership. The regional leadership support survey asked, "All staff

members have an equal opportunity for promotion regardless of their identities." Three program

advisors disagreed with the statement. Plus, the responses below infer promotion knowledge

sharing is inconsistent and without transparency.

- "I think that while everyone does have an equal opportunity to get promoted, we need to be better at recognizing the inherent privilege some folks come into this role with that give them a leg up." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "I don't think there are enough opportunities for promotions although it's nice to see that there are more roles being created. Also, having been on the hiring side more recently, I wish that there's more that we can do to coach our staff who hold multiple identities." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "More transparency." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "I think having honest discussions about their work will help me figure out if moving up in the Bottom Line organization would be something that I am interested in." - BL-B Program Advisor

Furthermore, many of the surveyed program advisors said they feel that equitable promotion and opportunity should be available but have not seen it happen in their workplace:

- "I think there is not [a] problem getting a promotion based on any identity! I think there might [be] more issues based on experience and seniority. Sometimes, caseloads make it more difficult to get a promotion because there are elements outside of your control." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "While I think identity does not play into promotion, I do think the current metrics for considering someone for promotion could be better. Aside from data goals, there should be other measures of demonstrating one's competency. Depending on an advisor's caseload and target schools, they may inherently be at a disadvantage, as some students at some schools are frankly more engaged than others." - BL-B

Program Advisor

- "I haven't yet experienced or seen anything that would illustrate the equal opportunity for promotion, so I would say I'm not sure." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "The current senior success advisors (and beyond) all share the same racial and gender identities. There are other advisors who have been with Bottom Line for much longer, others who are graduates of the program, who don't feel the same opportunities in promotion. Similarly to how we acknowledge how our identities affect our students' access to degree attainment, the same exists within the structure of our company. Perhaps one advisor isn't consistently meeting their goals because their racial, economic, gender, etc. identities present obstacles to meeting goals quantitatively. Or, because of their identities, they feel the need to enroll in graduate school in order to have the same level of economic mobility as a white, middle-class person would with just a Bachelor's degree, therefore, they are stretched for time balancing work and school. There seems to be no qualitative assessment when it comes to promotions, it is purely quantitative." - BL-B Program Advisor

Once again, transparency about topics of interest to program advisors were absent. Program advisors were unclear about promoted personnel and criteria. This reflected poor knowledge sharing. It also indicated the promotion process lacked transparency.

What practices and interactions do leaders perform with the intention of supporting program advisors?

Finding #3: Bottom Line national leadership describes its supportive practices in its human resources policies and procedures.

We delved into organization documents and interviewed BL-B leaders to understand which leadership practices are done to support program advisors. Bottom Line-National describes its supportive practices in its human resources policies and procedures. The employee handbook described proper and improper interactions between employees and leaders. The outlined behavioral policies were meant to develop respect and trust among employees. The organizational documents describe how leaders intend to show appreciation and acceptance for employees' diversity and culture. The leaders also have clearly delineated plans for feedback, opportunities for self-improvement, and mission-driven activity. These well-defined supportive intentions were in the human resources and leader documents.

According to the organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) employees develop perceived organizational support in response to socio-emotional needs and the organization's willingness to reward the increased efforts made on its behalf. Therefore, an organization that plans for its employees' needs would benefit. Bottom Line seemed to implement this theory based on its human resource documents. Bottom Line's documents conveyed an understanding of and plan to implement organizational support practices and interactions—building trust, empowerment, supervisory support, and mentoring—aligned with employee needs shown in Figure 7.

Bottom Line also provided a "Stance on Microaggressions" and "Safety Planning and Emergency Policies." The microaggressions document guides employees through understanding and reporting subtle discriminatory actions beyond commonly recognized harassment. The policy defined three types of microaggressions:

- "Micro-assault: blatant verbal, non-verbal, or environmental attacks intended to convey discriminatory and biased sentiments.

- Micro-insult: unintentional behaviors or verbal comments that convey rudeness or insensitivity.

- Micro-invalidation: verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or dismiss the psychological thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of the target group (unintentional)" (p. 1).

The microaggressions document also reviewed steps for the employee's discriminatory behavior, reporting steps, and individual corrective action plans for aggressors:

- "Completing the Support an Inclusive Culture self-paced DE&I training again, and/or other trainings in the GoFar Hub.

- Engaging in further self-reflection through DE&I professional development opportunities including seminars, books on anti-racist behavior, existing training materials, etc.

- Including your action plan for addressing microaggression (p. 2).

Bottom Line's "Stance on Microaggressions" created understanding about unacceptable behaviors at its offices, but it also offered understanding that people may not know what the

behavior is. So, it defined discriminatory behavior and recommended steps to correct the

behavior to support a respectful, emotionally safe environment.

Furthermore, Bottom Line distributed a "Safety Planning and Emergency Policies" that

provided employees with guidance on our policies and procedures in case of any safety issue or

emergency that affects anyone in the Bottom Line community and/or impacts our business

operations at Bottom Line. This information is meant to provide guidance when none else is

available and does not supersede any local/state/federal policies in place. If authorities are

handling the situation/providing directives, Bottom Line staff should defer to the guidance of

those proper authorities (p. 1).

The documents considered situational dangers and the organization's strategy to protect

employees from those dangers. Such documents are intended to support program advisors by

building trust in the organization and its physical and psychological security. Bottom Line's

documents also indicated a plan for mentoring.

Documents such as "Performance Management," "Feedback Processes," "Performance Review & Step back Instructions," and "Competency Model" described methods by which Bottom Line leaders generate respect and growth. The "Performance Management" document, for example, indicates leaders and advisors should meet quarterly for mentoring in the form of feedback: "Schedule these conversations (45 minutes+) in place of your weekly check-in 3 times throughout the year, and according to the deadline below" (p. 1). The document also establishes the minimum intellectual stimulation through collaboration and individualized consideration: "Employee and Manager should agree beforehand which goals and which competencies to evaluate and discuss each quarter. Use this guide to frame your bi-directional conversation" (p. 1). Bottom Line's "Competency Model," in accordance with idealized influence, models expected behaviors for every level of employee.

Figure 6Hierarchy of needs in the workplace (Work-Life Balance LLC., 2018)
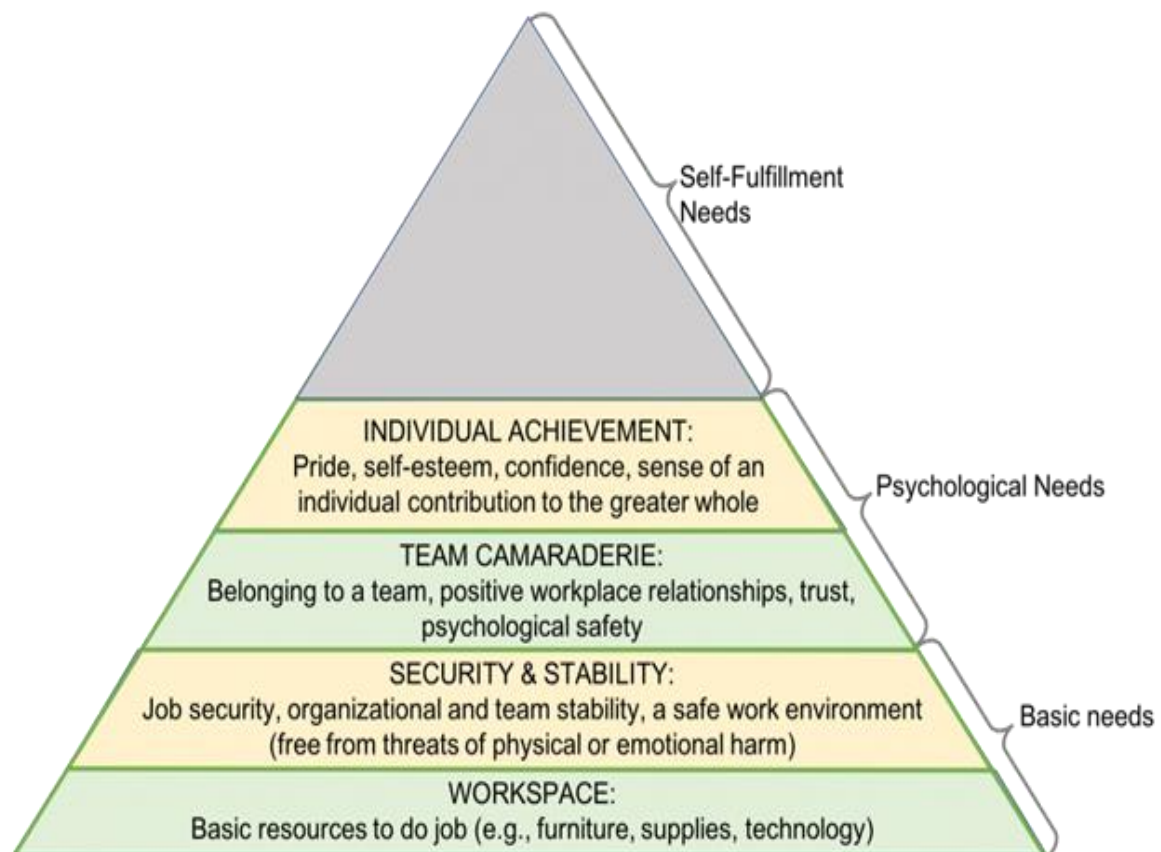
The expectations within the documents defined leadership/organizational support competencies that its advisors should achieve. This intention established specific performance standards, potentially creating a vision and goals. The documents also communicated strategies for improvement when those competencies were not met.

The intended internal and external professional development fund policy supported advisors through stimulation, motivation, and growth. According to the policy, Bottom Line will invest in an employee's increasing professional development: <1 (first year on staff) $250, 1<2 (second year on staff) $500, 2<3 (third year on staff) $750, and 3+ (fourth year and more) $1,000. The document also listed various methods of development that BL will support use of professional development funds for the following:

- dues and subscriptions

- membership fees in professional groups

- preparatory exam classes

- certifications (including exam fees) and continuing education expenses

- professional meetings

- conferences

- seminars

- online courses and workshops

- relevant instructional/professional development materials (e.g. books)

- accredited and relevant college courses (including tuition fees, course materials, etc.) if the education is related to your work at Bottom Line (p. 1-2).

In addition, Bottom Line advisors can use the funds for wellness. The "Professional

Development Fund Policy" explains, "The wellness program is meant to provide employees with reimbursement for the types of activities that support their well-being, growth, mental and physical health, and ease within a professional setting" (p. 2). The program covers:

- "Physical health activities not covered by insurance (acupuncture, massage, etc.)

- Mental health activities (counseling not covered by insurance, meditation classes or apps., etc.)

- Food/non-alcoholic beverage during work hours (staff using the funds for this purpose are encouraged to combine expenses, e.g., buy a prepaid coffee" (p. 2).

Through this policy, Bottom Line supports advisors' mental growth and physical well-being, which are correlated to psychological needs and individual achievement. Wang (2022) explains:

"Eisenberger et al. developed the concept of perceived organizational support to assess employees' perception of the organization's commitment to them. Perceived organizational support is based on favorable treatment from the organization, such as adequate job training, attractive work conditions, and health care benefits. With elevated levels of perceived organizational support, employees believe that the organization cares about them and values their contributions; if firms could build a reciprocal relationship with employees, this scenario tends to promote their creative behavior and performance at work" (p. 407).

Bottom Line outlined leave that reflects individualized consideration. Policies such as the victim and bereavement leave communicated respect for individual situations, which is typical of transformational leadership support.

- **4-3. Victim Leave**

Bottom Line will not discharge or in any manner discriminate or retaliate against an

employee who is the victim of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking or kidnapping

or who has a family member who is a victim. Eligible employees may take up to 15 days

of unpaid leave.

- **4-5. Bereavement Leave**

Bottom Line provides bereavement leave to support employees who have experienced a

meaningful loss. Full-time and part-time employees who lose a close relative will be

allowed paid time off of up to three (3) days to assist in attending to obligations and

commitments. For this policy's purposes, a close relative includes a spouse,

domestic/civil union partner, child, parent, sibling, or any other relation required by

applicable law.

- **4-9. Other Disability Leaves**

In addition to the leaves described above, employees may take a temporary disability

leave of absence if necessary to reasonably accommodate a workplace injury or a

disability within the meaning of federal and/or state law.

The duration of a leave under this section shall be consistent with applicable law, but in

no event shall the leave (Bottom Line, 2023, p. 27-28).

Plus, Bottom Line showed respect for individual values by defining policies for

individual practices such as voting and military service.

- **4-6. Voting Leave**

In the event employees do not have sufficient time outside of working hours to vote in a statewide election, the employee may take off enough working time to vote. Such time will be paid. This time should be taken at the beginning or end of the regular work schedule and should not exceed two (2) hours. Where possible, supervisors should be notified at least two (2) days prior to the voting day.

- **4-8. Military Leave**

Bottom Line is committed to protecting the job rights of employees in the uniformed services. Bottom Line grants military duty leave in accordance with the requirements of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 ("USERRA") and any applicable state and local laws. USERRA prohibits discrimination against employees and provides reemployment protection and other benefits for veterans and employees who perform military service. Bottom Line prohibits retaliation against any employee who requests a leave of absence under this policy. Employees should ask management for further information about eligibility for Military Leave (Bottom Line, 2023, p. 27-28).

Finding #4: BL-B leaders indicate they use inclusion, social support, and being visible and accessible as their primary modes of supporting program advisors. In addition, leaders discussed engaging in professional development conversations with program advisors as a mechanism of support.

The following are specific practices and interactions that BL-B leaders perform with the intention of supporting program advisors: ensuring that everyone's perspective is considered

when making regional-level decisions, reflecting on potential bias in hiring, targeted

development interventions for minoritized employees, aiding program advisors in the

completion of their work, approving a paid time off request, providing opportunities for program

advisors to pitch ideas, allowing program advisors to work a hybrid schedule, and ensuring that

leaders are in the office when the program advisors are in the office. Also, BL-B leaders remain

mindful of their positionality and attempt to minimize the hierarchy by being visible, relatable,

and conversational.

Examples of Inclusive Practices

When discussing ways to ensure an equitable and inclusive environment, one BL-B

leader talked about the reflection and subsequent action she engaged in when recognizing that

program advisors of color were not being promoted:

> "So, when we're talking about what does the makeup of our team look like? Right? So,
>
> our senior leaders, our regional leadership team… If you look at us. We hold a variety of
>
> identities, right? But we're vast majority, were we're women of color. But then, when you
>
> look at the rest of our staff like, what's the makeup of our advising staff? Our advising
>
> staff isn't reflective of our regional leadership team, right? And so what is the breakdown,
>
> and how inclusive are we being in our hiring practices, in our promotion practices in our
>
> career development practices? Right? So these are all questions that we're currently really
>
> trying to dig into and understand. You know, what are the personal biases that we hold
>
> right when we're going through the current going through the interview process or
>
> promotional processes? And if we're noticing patterns in terms of who's getting
>
> promoted." - BL-B Leader

This same leader discussed approaching minoritized employees about professional development. In one case, they encouraged an employee to apply for an open position.

Another example of inclusive practices is ensuring that employees are comfortable being themselves and sharing their identities by way of using pronouns, being mindful of inclusive language, encouraging employees to celebrate their different identities, and being culturally competent:

> " We begin meetings by letting people know our pronouns with no expectation of anybody else doing the same. If you're comfortable, and you wanna share you're you're free to share. But if not, you don't have to. We started to really be mindful of like creating cultural competence and exposure of different cultural celebrations for folks on staff of different identities and beliefs." -BL-B Leader

Another leader recounted how they encouraged and provided a safe space for their team to think about bias in a writing exercise:

> "…[W]e're gonna look at these specific like traits or characteristics of white supremacy. especially those that are typically related to nonprofit work, things like urgency or binary thinking or quantity over quality, things that like tend to infiltrate nonprofit philosophy. And we're gonna review it for those specific things, write comments on the side, think about like additional language that you could use instead… It's not like nobody's saying like, Oh, shame on you so and so, for, like you wrote this content that is biased in this way like it just is the way."-BL-B Leader

When considering a role change, a program advisor who wanted to consult their family was supported by a BL-B leader:

"…[S]o, I talked with them. They were like, well, I wanna go talk to my family, I said, go

talk to your family. If talking to your family means, you have additional questions. Come,

talk to me…sort of really leaning into that cultural competence of like the family unit is

also very important to them." -BL-B Leader

Examples of Social Support

BL-B leaders outlined how they attend to the needs of program advisors by centering

their humanity, offering aid, and encouraging a work-life balance.

When talking about support, one leader explained the importance of recognizing the

emotional nature of the program advisor's work:

"We make a real effort at identifying the needs of our staff and being realistic about the

kind of work that they do and that it's work that can lead to burnout can lead to an emotional

and physical weight that they need to carry, and so, we do our best to one name that and

then to acknowledge that and provide flexibility that can relieve some of that when

necessary. So, an example of that is the way in which we've continued to honor a real

hybrid sort of schedule." -BL-B Leader

When one of their employees needed to take a leave of absence, one leader described

how they ensured that the employee did not worry about taking the time off:

"And so, there's been instances where we've had over the last year, or where we've had

staff members who've had to take a family medical leave right? And so[,] I don't want

you to have to think about work. We'll take care of it. And even if things might be a little

bit chaotic on our end, right? It's not the employee's responsibility to have to think about

that really allowing them the ability to disconnect and walk away when they need it, and

then also making sure that we're creating systems, for when they come back right? So in

instances where I've had folks who have to step away, I'm like, Okay, …we're gonna

create a leave plan right? And then part of that leave plan. I want you to think about how

this person's going to experience returning to the org," -BL-B Leader

One leader ensures their respective team members feel supported in taking time off:

"I approve every single PTO, every single sick request, every time that they're like I need

to go and get away. I tell them we're not surgeons. We don't do rocket science here.

Nothing is burning, nothing's on fire." -BL-B Leader

BL-B Leaders talk about alleviating their program advisors' work stress by taking on the work:

- "And so, when we have conversations and I hear about what are the gaps, I'm instantly

   the one who's like, oh, what can I take off your plate? What can I do?" -BL-B Leader

- "You're feeling stressed because you have a ton of student meetings. Okay? Which

   meetings can I just take? And can you go and do the other things that are really

   important to you?" -BL-B Leader

Accessibility

Leaders at BL-B seemed to see their accessibility to employees as one of their primary

ways of showing support:

- "So, because we're a hybrid organization, it means that our ability to connect with, for

   me to connect with people other than my team. I have to be very mindful of creating

   those touch points and moments. It also means that when I'm trying to connect to

   create connections with other teams, I also need to be mindful of trying to meet them

   where they're at. Right? So, for specifically our access team, you know, they're in the

office Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, So, that means intentionally creating

time to be there on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays to make sure that there's

overlap right. But they're not only getting access to their direct Pd, but also to me,

humanizes me a little bit, right?" -BL-B Leader

- "I've tried to create a culture where they, if they're in the office, I'm there right? I

  want them to have direct access to me and the ability to like, ask questions, the ability

  for me to ask about how they're doing." -BL-B Leader

- "I think for me I always try to be regardless of how busy I am,I try to be in spaces

  where community comes together. And so, I tried to like be in our kitchen area or

  stop and say "hi" to people or chat. And so, I try to even though I might have a day

  where it's back-to-back. If I have a moment, I try to be in spaces around individuals

  so that they see and try to ask how they are." -BL-B Leader

- "I have tried to create a culture where I create a lot of focus groups, or I'm pulling in

  at managers and senior advisors." -BL-B Leader

- "I don't believe in the hierarchy. I don't believe in authority. I don't do that. I don't

  subscribe to the girl boss energy. I don't do that, and so I don't expect them to manage

  me." -BL-B Leader

- "We've really been focused on a balance of meeting with regional leadership. On a

  more frequent basis. In a lower-stakes situation. So that when you are not when

  you're interacting with regional leadership in a situation that might be higher stakes or

  feel higher stakes to you, it's not the only time that you're interacting with them." -

  BL-B Leader

Professional Development Conversations

BL-B leaders discussed how they use one-to-one and development conversations to support their employees:

- "I asked that, I said, 'You know, put those thoughts to paper. What does the job description look like, you know?' And with the help of their manager, they formulated what that was, and then they sent it up to the leadership team." -BL-B Leader

Figure 8 Frequency of support practices mentioned in leaders' interviews
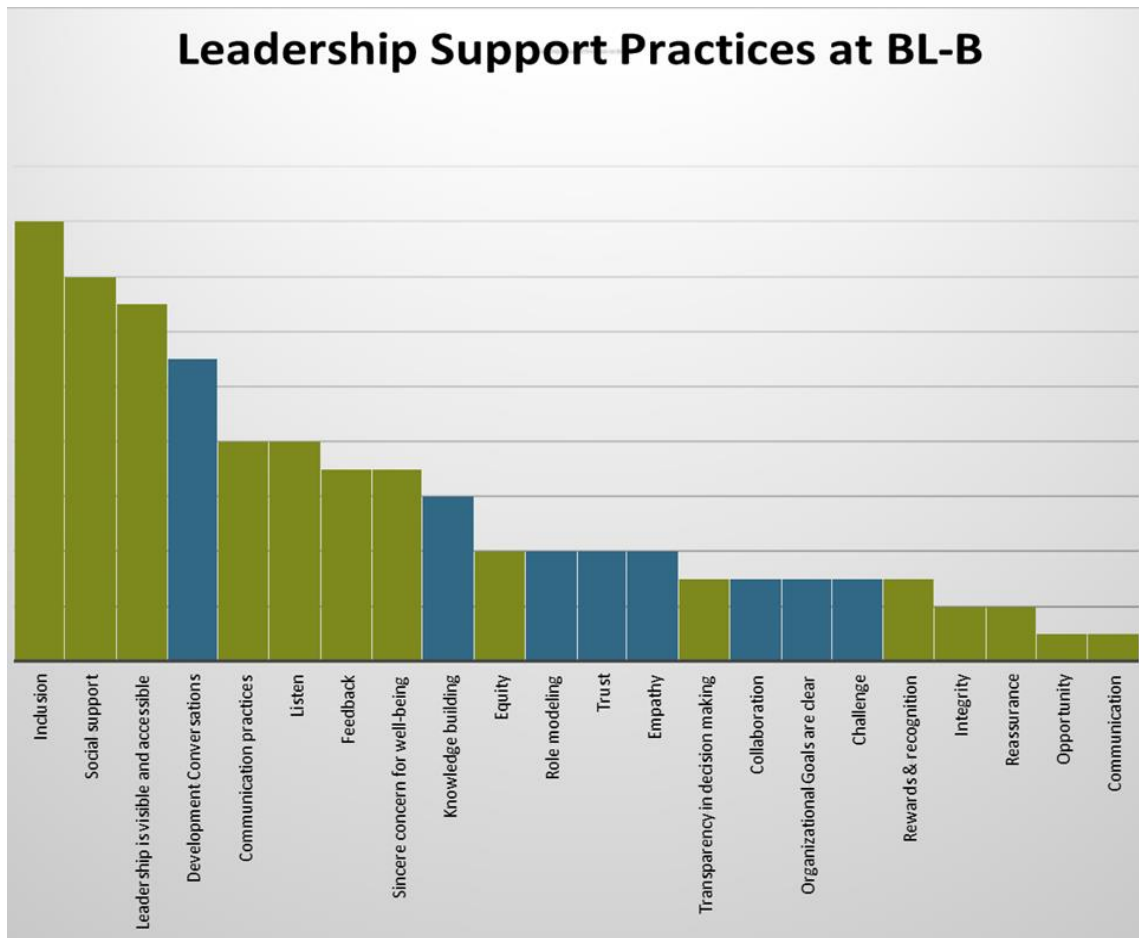
Note. Green refers to organizational support practices mentioned during leaders' interviews, and blue refers to transformational leadership practiced mentioned during the leader interviews. The Dedoose graphic shows the frequency leaders referred to specific support behaviors. The taller bars indicate the support was mentioned more frequently than the shorter bars.

- "If we had 3 applicants, we had to say no to 2 of them. What were the grow[th]s that we really saw, right? We would like them to work on over the next 6 months, 8 months a year, get them to a place where they would be then ready to take on that role or a role like it. Right?" -BL-B Leader

In our review of the interview data, we found there were a few contradictory statements from leaders. For example, while one leader stated that she believed leader/program advisor interactions were "scarce at best," most of the leaders reported multiple touchpoints. Another contradiction amongst the leadership data was the belief that program advisors understood how to grow their careers in the organization. Some leaders reported that pathways to career development were unclear to program advisors, while others reported the opposite. The varying perceptions of BL-B leaders represent areas for future investigation as BL-B leaders continue to seek to promote a sense of support amongst program advisors.

How are leaders' and program advisors' understanding and experiences of what contributes to a sense of support aligned or misaligned?

Finding #5: BL-B's leadership intention of providing support through accessibility and social support aligns with program advisors' sense of support.

BL-B's documents summarize socially supportive practices and interactions. For example, Bottom Line's Competency Model defines social competencies such as relationships and communication and lists expected behaviors by position level and competency. For relationships and communication, Bottom Line expects the following:

Manager

- Is aware of one's own actions and behaviors and how they may be perceived by

  others

- Demonstrates and displays understanding of emotional intelligence

- Is approachable and welcoming

- Is committed to staff and student relationships

- Promotes a supportive environment built on confidence, respect, and trust

Director

- Treats all staff and students with respect regardless of their level, personality,

  culture, or background

- Demonstrates humility

- Is not afraid to be vulnerable in order to build impactful relationships

- Develops and maintains strong relationships with external partners and

  stakeholders

- Fosters an environment where direct and indirect reports are able to voice their

  concerns or ideas without fear of criticism, ridicule, or retaliation

Executive

- Displays a high degree of emotional intelligence

- Seeks opportunities to build collaborative relationships with external partners

- Actively seeks feedback from others

Communication

- Communicates in a motivating and compelling way

- Identifies and shares relevant information with key stakeholders

- Positively influences the thinking and actions of others

- Uses effective facilitation strategies to encourage participation from all

Director

- Communicates and writes persuasively in order to manage expectations, performance and behavior of team

- Adapts communication style and content to meet needs of internal and external stakeholders

- Communicates with staff, students, funders, and other stakeholders with confidence, openness, and appropriate transparency

- Skillfully probes and asks questions that help others reflect

- Recognizes and resolves controversy/conflict before it creates an adverse effect on the team

Executive

- Models effective communication and positive attitudes even in challenging situations

- Uses fact, reason, and persuasion to create alignment with the vision and strategic priorities

- Breaks down barriers to effective communication within and outside the organization

- Creates and sustains a culture in which feedback is valued, sought out from a full range of stakeholders, broadly discussed, and acted upon

- Establishes communication systems that engage key stakeholders, and utilizes a variety of channels (p. 1-2).

In the regional leadership support survey, program advisors commented positively about these social practices and interactions:

- "In the last six months especially, I have seen how all departments have been so willing to support one another and collaborate with each other. I can tell how each department contributes to each other's work and each piece is integral to the Success of our region." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "I appreciate the efforts Bottom Line makes to provide cross-departmental information and collaboration." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "… provides the space and support to help me feel comfortable with this." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "I feel a strong connection to the success team but CCT and development have also served my students in significant ways, they are very approachable and have plentiful insight to offer regarding our networks." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "In my role, I'm constantly trying to think of ways the work I do can support ALL of our teams/students. I also meet regularly with individual Success advisors to discuss their students across the region and ways I/alumni/CCT can support them." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "Staff transitions resulted in additional/new responsibilities for me, and the support I've gotten from other staff at Bottom Line, both inside my team and outside, has allowed me to develop new skills." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "I think it's a welcoming, friendly, and fun place to work. Most people care deeply about the students/work we do, and are very committed and focused on the work they're doing. There's a great balance of social connection with other team members and actual work." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "Being able to engage with and create program[m]ing with other teams has contributed most to my professional development." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "Conversations about future goals, asking for feedback and ideas around larger strategy for Bottom Line (when appropriate but for example, budget planning) rolling out new projects and strategies in a clear, thoughtful way." - BL-B Program Advisor

Program advisors positively described social support within the regional culture and specific department interactions. As finding #1 stated, program advisors feel supported by the leaders' openness and accessibility.

Finding #6: BL-B's leadership intention of providing support through inclusivity practices and professional development conversations is sometimes experienced by program advisors as lacking substance and purpose.

While leadership reported using inclusive practices such as inviting feedback from program advisors and having professional development conversations as demonstrations of support, program advisors reported that these demonstrations were sometimes one-sided or superfluous. When answering the question "How can RLT support you in moving toward the next step in your career," program advisors gave the following responses:

- "Sharing more PD opportunities, sharing resources about larger MA education-related

issues and having discussions about them." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "Offering skip-level meetings that are more of a conversation instead of the manager/directors [m]ainly being the one asking questions." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "I think having honest discussions about their work will help me figure out if moving up in the Bottom Line organization would be something I am interested in." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "I'm not sure what my next professional steps are, but I would appreciate if RLT continued to provide advisors the opportunity to take on small leadership roles." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "Maybe provide opportunities to shadow some other roles or attend meetings to gain insight into other departments in the organization (regional or national!)" - BL-B Program Advisor

- "Take into account qualitative measures when it comes to promotions, find and register people for specific professional development opportunities so people can go as a team, start a book club that allows us to read material about the challenges our students are facing in the world of higher education." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "They can support by offering professional development opportunities in the office." - BL-B Program Advisor

Although the leaders recognize that there is limited opportunity for the program advisors to be promoted, they believe they provide growth opportunities by having development conversations.

The program advisors reported the opposite experiences among the same supportive

practices and interactions.

Finding #7: While leaders primarily use meeting time for recognition and information sharing, program advisors experience meetings as missed opportunities for dialogic engagement, collaboration, and knowledge building.

Leadership viewed all-staff meetings as social support because they give individual recognition to top performers and have opportunities to interact with employees. Leaders responded positively when the regional survey asked what is most helpful about current all-staff meetings.

- "I think they are short and sweet but keep us up-to-date on what each team is working on. I like the celebratory style of them as well." - BL-B Leader
- "Love the quick updates on projects and knowing what's going on across the region - maybe a follow up post in the general channel with To-Dos (like this survey link, etc.) afterwards." - BL-B Leader
- "It [is] helpful to hear updates from each team every week to get a better sense of what is going on, especially from the Development perspective since it can otherwise be difficult to know what goes on day to day on the program side. Also love the space for shout outs!" - BL-B Leader
- "I feel the meeting agenda is strong for the amount of time we have together. It is straightforward and everyone knows what to expect. I am glad that we have time for a warmup at the start to connect as a team early in the week and ending with shoutouts always fills my heart with joy! It[']s great to hear about what's going on in other departments as well with weekly win dates!" - BL-B Leader
- "I love that the all-staff [meeting] is a quick way to see each other, share wins and

department updates." - BL-B Leader

- "They allow for everyone to find out what other teams are doing and provides updates on any meetings/events that are coming up." - BL-B Leader

- "I like the team updates and feel that I get to know what's happening and get a preview of what's to come." - BL-B Leader

- "I have only attended 2 all-staff meetings so far and I have been impressed with both! I love that there is a space for shoutouts and that they are also not too long and get to the point. A great balance!" - BL-B Leader

- "I like that it's a quick opportunity to learn what each department is working on and hearing the individual work that's happening is always heartwarming." - BL-B Leader

All but three leaders who did not respond to the question identified the all-staff meetings as positive recognition and information sharing. The surveyed leaders offered only minor criticisms. For example, "they can sometimes feel a little repetitive," and "only feedback, though I'm not sure how actionable this is, would be to see more staff on camera during this time."

Program advisors' sense of support during meetings misaligns with leadership's public recognition and community-building meetings. When commenting about team meetings, program advisors acknowledged that all-staff meetings recognized employees and followed the recommended organizational leadership support methods. Yet, most advisors said the meetings were missed opportunities. In the BL-B regional survey, program advisors said leadership practices and interactions that contribute to their sense of support are access to leadership outside formalized meetings via good communication, public recognition of performance, and information sharing across departments at meetings. Several survey respondents commented that the meetings wasted their time:

- "It's a nice time to community build, but sometimes the time spent feels a bit superfluous." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "I am not sure that we need All-Staff Meetings every single week - sometimes the time for shoutouts feels a bit drawn out. Maybe this could be switched to an every other week format?" - BL-B Program Advisor

 Meetings do not support them because of the lost time and productivity. Other advisors' comments inferred agenda topics would create more transparency and would better inform the group:

- "I wish more important weekly information and deadlines were talked about during these meetings. I know it's meant to be short but reminders of important events would be great." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "I think having honest discussions about their work will help me figure out if moving up in the Bottom Line organization would be something that I am interested in." - BL-B Program Advisor

These comments contrast with other advisors who said about the staff meetings: "It is helpful to hear from other departments to be up to date on [what's] going on [organization] wide." Another advisor said, "I think the teams updates has been helpful [for] staff[']s learning about what other teams are doing." These polarized responses suggested leadership was unaware of and did not support individualized informational needs. Other advisors mentioned ways the meetings could be more valuable:

- "The Weekly All Staff meetings could have some more interactive components added to them (Whereas right now the only way to contribute to the conversation is to share

out via Teams using your voice or the chat)" - BL-B Program Advisor

- "I wish I knew who all the managers were and the structures of other teams. While I am comfortable talking with members from other departments, I am unsure their dynamics and how best to work with other teams." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "RLT {Regional Leadership Team} could work to be more collaborative with the work that we do in the MA region, opening up leadership in different ways to those who may have the least leadership/ least room to grow in their roles" - BL-B Program Advisor

Furthermore, several program advisors referenced recognition when the regional leadership support survey asked program advisors to "describe an instance when you felt connected to the larger MA region, beyond your direct team" and asked to describe how the all-staff meetings are helpful or need improvement:

- "Recognition night." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "I am not sure that we need all-staff meetings every single week. Sometimes, the time for shoutouts feels a bit drawn out. Maybe this could be switched to an every other week format?" - BL-B Program Advisor

- "I feel like shout-outs and team updates could be done in an email. I sometimes do not see the value of attending these meetings." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "Frankly, the all-staff meetings are so short and frequent that they often feel more like opportunities for shout-outs to staff. It's nice, but I don't think it's a terribly productive half hour." - BL-B Program Advisor

- "Meetings often appear to be dominated by shoutouts, and I would appreciate more substantive information being shared during these sessions." - BL-B Program Advisor

Additional Findings Related to Leadership Support Practices at BL-B

Finding #8: Barriers to BL-B leadership's ability to support program advisors include the national office's control, balancing supportive practices with key performance indicators, and a lack of career paths outside of programming advising for the program advisors.

While our interviews with BL-B leaders were designed to understand the practices and interactions they perform to support program advisors, we inevitably unearthed potential barriers to their ability to do so. Three recurring themes related to potential barriers to support emerged during our analysis of the interviews: the national office's control, balancing supportive practices with key performance indicators, and the need to identify career paths outside of programming advising for the program advisors.

National Office Control. Several of the leaders interviewed talked about decisions made at the national level. Decisions that affect the program staff directly were reported to be somewhat out of their control. Leaders describe the decision-making process:

- "Bottom Line is really invested in ensuring …that we have a one bottom line approach. So, if a lot of those decisions happen centrally, so, on the national level. And yeah, that's the way that I would say…I think sometimes feedback gets bubbled up to the national team." BL-B leader

- "Most decisions that are going to affect programs are made by our national team…" -BL-B leader

- "When there's a decision around the program that needs to be made and we can't kinda

  like do it the way we want to, it's felt a little jarring. But I think that's a stage of our

  evolution as a national program."-BL-B leader

Regional leaders reported tensions and a disconnect with being part of a corporate-type

structure. One leader describes how she perceives the national office role:

"I think the presence of the national team feels very like imaginary, hard to describe…So,

I don't know if it's like a good or bad thing. I mean, I think I've enjoyed not having someone,

you know, constantly overseeing my work. But with both there's [*sic*], I think, challenges

and opportunity with that model of having the people who are implementing like the actual

policy across the organization and like the actual decision makers more present in

regions."-BL-B leader.

Leaders express concerns about their ability to support their employees fully. Regarding

addressing dissatisfaction, one leader stated:

"Where is the dissatisfaction coming from? And can we actually make change regional

based on this dissatisfaction? Or if this is a national problem that is out of our scope of

control. And yes, I will share the feedback in the spaces that I'm in. But recognizing we

have no autonomy really to decide what they act on a national body…So some of that

dissatisfaction falls up the ladder, on the national dissatisfaction of systems of processes,

expectations that we're not able to change regionally, that we have to find a way to make,

do, or to be okay with in the moment."-BL-B leader

When asked how the program advisors perceived how the organization values them, one

leader discussed policy:

"I feel very supported. I feel seen. I feel like I can take my time off. I don't feel like it's ever questioned…where I feel like there's a tension is when we bring in national folks. And they're like 'people really shouldn't be taking time off. Because and that means they can have student meetings, or that means that they can't deliver on something…the advisors are the largest population staff but yet when we make policies we don't think about that experience when we make policies."-BL-B leader

A leader expressed confusion around what they can do to support their employees:

"One tension that I would say that an organization like Bottom Line really feels is being a part of a national organization, and what is within regional leadership discretion versus what is not? I don't have an answer, but it is something that, you know, influences the way we show up and I also think that this region this team really invested in in this version is really invested in how we support our staff."-BL-B leader

Balancing Supportive Practices with Key Performance Indicators. During the interviews, leaders talked about the challenges around being perceived as supportive and meeting the organization's performance goals:

- "...[A]s a leader, there is a balance around advocating for your staff and also advocating for the organization right? I do think a lot of times … leaders lean toward like advocating for their staff, because, you know, we're a nonprofit and everybody works hard and their goals are might be unfair or there are things that they can't, you know, account for so they need a moment where they can get a win."-BL-B leader

- "Yeah, it's really about the staff satisfaction like they (leaders) don't want to disappoint the staff. Have that difficult conversation?"-BL-B Leader

- "And so, I try to listen. Have an empathetic ear. But also, then it's like also providing the truth right and where we are grounding us in like, what is the business model that we're in? And so, while it doesn't feel good, this is why. And so, as a leader, as a person, you can feel this type of way, but as a leader, you have to be sound in the business model. So, when you actually communicate that you're not leading so much in empathy that it seems wavering, you have to deliver it leading with conviction."- BL-B leader

- "And then, to pile on these KPIs that the team is already frustrated with and is thinking are unattainable, yet they can't take care of themselves."-BL-B leader

The need to identify career paths outside of programming advising for the program advisors. The leaders at BL-B all agreed that development conversations with program advisors are occurring. They also agreed that while there is opportunity for growth within the program advisor pathway, it is limited. There seems to be a disconnect about the intention behind development conversations and where they may lead. During our leadership interviews, several interviewees recounted a story about a program advisor who pitched an idea to broaden his role. Some leaders positioned this story as an example of development gone well, others positioned it as development gone wrong. The program advisor in question was not meeting his goals, and the role expansion he pitched was not consistent with the BL mission, according to leaders:

- "We have advisor pathways. For advisors, particularly and so those advisor pathways do lay out very clearly. If someone is looking to grow outside of those advisor pathways? The path is not as clear and so I and I don't think to be honest, that folks know what they need to do always in those situations. And that is something that really, I think depends on the talent and development conversations that each employee is having with their managers."-

BL-B leader

- "If they wanna grow? I think it depends on what pathway they wanna do. If you wanna be a people manager and wanna go down that path, there needs to be the opportunity to even move into that role. And so, someone has to leave for someone to go into that role. If someone wants to be more like project management base, I've seen more of like those roles coming up in the last year that I've been here, and the region advocating for those creation of those roles which I think happen ad hoc."- BL-B leader

- "But it seems much more feasible for someone to move into a project-based role versus a people manager. But I would say, it might be a little hard to acquire the skills to go into one of those roles depending on what job you're doing. If you're an advisor and you're focusing on 60 to 70 students, you don't have extra time to do extra projects to grow those skills. If you're already in a project-based role, you do have the extra time to grow those skills which makes it easier in that person's trajectory to go into one of those roles that comes up."-BL-B leader

- "Once you get to the highest part of the advisor, you have to move somewhere else, and so I think that's what creates the kind of the glass ceiling for them. But I do think there is some small opportunities for them to own different projects and kind of grow." BL-B leader

- "A director would have to leave their role in order for someone to even be thinking about growth opportunities, at least internally. I've always thought about it, like you want someone to be growing, regardless of whether or not they're gonna stay at your organization. Right, because you want them to be director somewhere… So, you know, like, I think as a people manager, you have to be putting those professional development

opportunities in front of people…"-BL-B leader

Figure 9 Most cited barriers to support

Note. Box size reflects how often interviewed leaders mentioned the respective barrier of support. The larger the box, the more frequently the barrier was mentioned.

Recommendations

We designed our recommendations to align support expectations between leaders and advisors, as well as to overcome barriers to supportive practices. We designed them with the understanding that nonprofit human service employees are generally intrinsically motivated. Our recommendations are consistent with organizational support theory and leverage the principles of transformational leadership theory.

Recommendation #1: BL-B leaders should take leadership development training focusing on transformational leadership practices.

Transformational leadership is closely related to perceived organizational support (Kurtessis et al, 2017). Because nonprofit human service employees tend to be intrinsically motivated (Park & Wood, 2012), it is important to recognize their roles in the overall mission

and attune them to their individual needs. Transformational leadership practices in nonprofit

environments have resulted in favorable firm performance, employee inclusion, commitment,

and trust (Brimhall, 2019; Garman et al., 2003; Geer et al., 2008; Yasir et al., 2016).

Transformational leadership is characterized by one who inspires action by sharing a vision with

and developing her/his/their followers (Bass, 1990; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Avolio et al., 1991).

The principles of this model overlap with the principles of organizational support, particularly

recognizing and rewarding employees according to their respective values, the importance of

building trust, and the significance of the leader to the employee's sense of support.

　　　　As BL-B leadership looks for ways to grow opportunities for program advisors across the

organization, they should ensure a consistent leadership experience. All leaders participating in

the same training and employing the same leadership model will build a foundation of supportive

methods and create consistency.

　　　　Finally, this training will grow the knowledge and skills needed to build trust and

collaboration as well as develop the leaders' ability to balance support with overall performance

(Bass & Bass, 2008).

　　　　If the cost of this training is a barrier, we recommend that the BL-B development team

and the executive director work with their partner sponsors who have internal organizational

development divisions and with partner colleges with leadership programming to receive in-kind

training.

Recommendation #2: Incorporate decision-making discussions into staff meetings twice per month.

Procedural justice is an antecedent of perceived organizational support (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Rhoades & Eisenberger (2002). Employees who believe that decisions are fair and transparent and that they have a voice in those decisions feel supported (Ohana et al., 2013). "Features of procedural justice such as transparency and consistency in decision making, impartiality, and employee input into the decision-making process readily influence procedural fairness judgments and therefore could be used to promote POS" (Eisenberger et al., 2020, p.105). Given that program advisors voiced a desire to have more dialogue in meetings and that leaders voiced concerns about soliciting feedback that may not be actionable, using this time to be clear about the decisions that are made and allowing time for questions will increase transparency, dialogic engagement, and, subsequently, feelings of support and problem-solving. Including decision-making discussions in team meetings models transformational leadership behaviors, thus contributing to the employees' professional development.

Recommendation #3: BL-B leaders and program advisors should work together 1:1 to revamp individual professional development conversations.

This activity operationalizes the "individual consideration" principle of transformational leadership theory. The leader attunes to the individual differences of her/his/their employees and adjusts her/his/their approach accordingly (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Co-creating development conversation ensures that the leader meets the individual needs of the program advisor. This activity empowers program advisors as they influence their own development. Development

opportunities not only empower the employee, but they also lead to a greater sense of support as they are at the discretion of the leader and/or the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1997).

Recommendation #4: BL-B Mid-level leadership should identify cross-functional, innovative, stretch assignments for program advisors. These projects and assignments must serve to meet the mission of Bottom Line.

Providing the opportunity to work on stretch assignments to the program advisors operationalizes the "intellectual stimulation" principle of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Stretch or challenging assignments lead to innovation and engagement (Preenen et al., 2011). According to Prysmakova & Lallatin (2023), providing individual professional growth opportunities leads to perceived organizational support, demonstrating a commitment to the employee on the part of the organization or leader. Much like individual professional development conversations, stretch assignments are discretionary, thus leading to a greater sense of support (Eisenberger et al., 1997). In addition to contributing to support, providing these opportunities to the program advisors will build skills they need to move up or outside the advising pathway. Finally, assignments of this nature will broaden the perspective of the program advisors as they will be exposed to different divisions of BL-B. They would better understand how other divisions contribute to the BL mission.

Recommendation #5: BL-B leadership should continue to provide social support to program advisors by showing genuine concern for the program advisors' well-being. This should include becoming well-versed in Bottom Line employee wellness and other benefits so that leadership can promote their use.

This is another discretionary activity which means it leads to a greater sense of support (Eisenberger et al., 1997). A primary tenet of organizational support is that employees assess organizational support according to their belief that the organization genuinely cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). During our semi-structured interviews, we found BL-B leaders were inconsistent in articulating Bottom Line's wellness benefits. Given the emotionally taxing nature of the program advisors' work, they must maintain overall wellness. Encouraging the use of benefits that support their well-being and giving employees the freedom to use these benefits ensures there are no mixed messages or what's called the "reality-rhetoric gap" (Baluch, 2017).

Recommendation #6: The executive director and senior manager of Workplace Experience should work with human resources to host quarterly meetings in which a national office leadership member meets with the regional leadership team to review the strategic plan and gather actionable feedback.

Researchers found that leaders who feel supported by their organization support their employees. The trickle-down effect of supporting leaders (Masterson, 2001) argues that

organizational practices and treatment are reciprocated from top leadership to frontline employees. In the case of BL-B, the result of the trickle-down effect would be supported program advisors and engaged student clients. Leaders are the key to the trickle-down effect: supported leaders are supportive leaders. BL-B leaders cited feelings of disconnect between themselves and the national office. These meetings would provide a greater sense of connection and provide BL-B leaders with the information they need to support their respective teams best. Their organization will support them, and it will trickle down.

Eisenberger et al. (2002) demonstrated that when employees believe their supervisor is well-regarded by the organization, they have a higher perceived organizational support. When the program advisors observe their leaders being regarded by the national office, they will feel greater support from those leaders.

Discussion and Conclusion

We explored leadership support in a regional office of a national nonprofit organization. We collected and analyzed primary and secondary data, including satisfaction surveys and semi-structured interviews to understand program advisors' and regional leaders' perceptions of support respectively. The interviews, human resource documents, and observation notes identified common intentions to support program advisors.

Overall, we found that the regional leaders' social supportive interactions resulted in program advisors feeling supported. However, attempts to use meetings and various generic communication channels as supportive strategies were neither intellectually stimulating nor received as intended. Program advisors maintain comfortable interactions with various

leaders. The national office provides all BL leaders with prescriptive guidance on supportive leadership action in its human resources documents. The leaders at BL-B adhere to the national office's precise expectations and steps outlined. We found that BL-B leaders may not be receiving adequate support from the national office. Regional leaders discussed feeling disconnected from the national office, a lack of autonomy related to programs and key performance indicators.

Limitations

While we believe in the veracity of our findings, it is important to recognize their limitations should BL-B wish to further this study. First, this project began at a time when BL-B was in flux. The executive director was searching for three new leaders: the Senior Manager of Workplace Experience was not in place, and the employees at BL-B had recently returned to the office on a hybrid schedule following the COVID-19 pandemic. Navigating these changes while only being in the role for less than three years created pressure for the executive director. We do not know if this flux had a significant influence on leadership support.

Second, regional leadership made significant adjustments to our agreed-upon study design and methodology. All program advisors' thoughts about the organization and its operation were filtered through leadership. Regional leaders said program advisors would be exhausted and overwhelmed by conversing about their roles. We wonder if these adjustments reflect the program advisors' limited empowerment and autonomy. If we had the opportunity to gather more primary data, and the opportunity to explore how aforementioned changes may affect leadership support practices, we may have drawn additional findings.

Finally, the inadvertent exclusion of the Equity and Inclusion lens to conduct this study is a limitation. One researcher self-identifies as a Black woman. The other researcher self-identifies as a Black and Indigenous woman. Our point person for this project was the executive director who self-identifies as a Black woman. It is likely that we unintentionally failed to include this lens because for us equity is not a lens that we consciously put on and take off. It is simply the way we see the world. However, without exploring the role equity plays in the theories that we relied upon, in the leaderships' intentions, and in the program advisors' experiences, we missed an opportunity for a more nuanced conceptualization of leadership support at BL-B.

Areas for Further Investigation

Much of the program advisors' dissatisfaction stems from workload and pay—which the regional leaders are not empowered to address because of national leadership policies and procedures. According to years of job satisfaction surveys, program advisors have regularly criticized the low wages and high workload. They have pointed out challenges that limit their completion rates. However, regional leadership has not addressed or resolved the concerns; workload and pay standards are set at the national level, not adjusted at the regional level. Regional leaders have expressed sympathy, yet the concerns remain unaddressed as though regional leadership is not listening.

We did not examine workload and pay data since the study did not focus on the employee satisfaction and its influence on perceptions. Still, this unresolved issue could contribute to the program advisors' feelings regarding leadership support, as workload and pay are on the

workplace hierarchy of needs, and feeling heard and respected is part of organizational support

theory. Although the regional leaders cannot address this issue directly, they could implement

transformational leadership practices to address dissatisfaction. They could engage the program

advisors' intrinsic motivations by using transformational leadership practices that offer program

advisors more empowerment and skill-building outside their roles.

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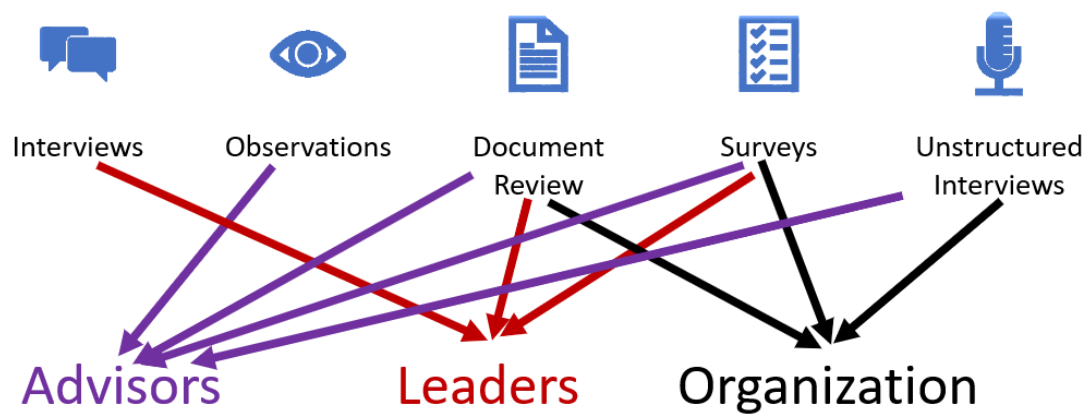
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Appendices: Instruments

Appendix A: Data Collection Chart

This graphic breaks down the project questions and the data that should answer them.

Project Questions	Data source	Data Collection Method(s)	Data Analysis Procedures
What are your project questions?	What data is required to be able to answer this question? Specifically, what data do you need?	How will we get this data? Explicitly clarify whether it needs to be generated or where/how you will gain access to necessary data	How will we turn this data into evidence that answers this project question? Be specific
What practices and interactions with leaders contribute to and diminish program advisors' sense of support?	Human resources documents: exit interviews & pulse satisfaction surveys, employee handbook, benefits descriptions, externally and internally facing messages about employee support Workplace Experience group's planning & work that support advisors Program advisors' experiences and perceptions	• Focus group • Interviews • Document review, (including website, internal calendars, written communications regarding employee support activities/offerings, emails between executive leaders and program advisors, performance review docs) • Observation of/minutes from staff meetings?	Theme analysis identifies the types of support, leadership techniques, and communication purposes.
What practices and interactions do leaders perform with the intention of supporting program advisors?	HR documents: handbooks, benefits, summary plan description (SPD) • Required leadership training assets/activities • Workplace experience planning & observations • Leadership styles and activities descriptions • Information about/from activities/gatherings which are affiliated with demonstrating/offering support to PAs • performance reviews, • 360 feedback, • informal "check-ins," wellness • professional development offerings	• Interviews • Observation • Document review, (including written communications regarding employee support, activities/offerings, performance review docs, work social activities) • Observation/minutes of staff meetings	Theme analysis identifies the types of support, leadership techniques, and communication purposes.
How are leaders' and program advisors' understanding and experiences of what contributes to a sense of support aligned or misaligned?	Comparison and analysis of collected data	• Interviews • Focus groups • Document review	Themed and coded data

Appendix B: Data reflecting stakeholders

Interviews   Observations   Document   Surveys   Unstructured
                            Review   Interviews

Advisors   Leaders   Organization

Appendix C: Document Review Categories

Good afternoon, _____.

Dale and I want to review the organizational documents (listed below). We selected these

documents because they typically communicate support expectations and guidelines among

leadership, advisors, and the organization. The identified documents can create expectations

regarding leadership support at Bottom Line-Boston.

Please contact us with any questions or concerns regarding the list. Also, let us know if any of

these documents cannot be shared.

We appreciate your assistance.

Charmaine Weston

Categories	Documents
Communicating org/lead to employees	• Newsletters • Blog posts • Performance Management Documents
Communicating employees to org/lead	• Exit interviews • Feedback Processes • Job Satisfaction Surveys
Communicating organizational structure/guidelines	• Mission, Vision, and Values Statements • Code of Conduct or Ethics Policy • Employee Handbook • Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Initiatives
Communicating organizational support opportunities/guidelines	• Employee Recognition • Employee Development • Growth Opportunities • Job Description • Rewards Programs • Training and Development Programs • Health and Safety Policies

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Emailed Invitation

BL-B executive director or her designee will set up the interviews between individual

BL-B leaders and Dale Merrill. Following the receipt of the email, Dale will send the following

email to individual leaders:

Dear __(insert leader name)____ :

Thank you for your willingness to participate in our study on leadership support at

Bottom Line-Boston. The purpose of the study is to identify common themes related to how

Program advisors are supported by leadership. As well as how leadership intends to support

employees at Bottom Line. Our interview scheduled for *insert date* will be recorded over

Zoom. This recording will help me take accurate notes and will not be given to anyone else.

Once we are finished with the recording, it will be deleted. I will conduct the interview with you,

and I will review the recording. Upon completion of this study, we will present our findings.

We will not use your name or personal identifiers during the course of this project. In addition to

presenting our findings, a written report will be submitted to Vanderbilt University and Bottom-

Line Boston. While participating in this interview, we ask that you please have your camera on

and be in a place where you are free from distraction. If there is anything about this process that

you would like further clarification on, please don't hesitate to ask.

Thanks again, and we look forward to our meeting.

Respectfully,

Dale Merrill and Charmaine Weston.

Interview Script

Hi, my name is Dale Merrill, and I'll be walking you through the interview today.

Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today.

If it's okay with you, I'd like to ask for your permission to record this interview.

[TURN ON RECORDING]

Just to confirm, our interview will last about thirty minutes. The recording will only be used to help with our notetaking. Your name will not be associated with the recording. Do I have your consent to record today's interview? We are currently exploring BL-B's support of advisors. We want to learn more about organizational and leadership strategies to create a supportive environment. As a leader at Bottom Line, your insights will be instrumental in helping us better understand.

Let's begin with you stating your name, title, and how long you've been at Bottom Line and any other roles you've held at Bottom Line.

Closing

Thanks again for taking the time to meet with me. Do you have any other comments about leadership practices at Bottom Line Boston? Do you have any questions for me?

Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview Question	Conceptual Frame
What practices and interactions with leaders contribute to and diminish program advisors' sense of support?	• How are decisions that affect the programs made? • When you reflect on leader-advisor interactions, what experiences come to mind? • Can you describe a few interactions that you believe developed individualized connections with employees? • If an employee wants to grow at BL-B, what do they need to do?	• Organizational support theory • Transformational leadership theory • Perceived organizational support theory • Organizational support theory/ Transformational leadership theory
What practices and interactions do leaders perform with the intention of supporting program advisors?	• How does BL-B address workplace dissatisfaction? • Provide examples of how BL-B fosters an equitable and inclusive environment. • I'd like you to think back to a time when you sought to support or uplift a member of your program advisor team. What did you do? What did you say?" • How do you ensure that your employees know that you care about their well-being? • *How does BL-B prioritize the needs of employees?* • What resources are available to help employees with health and well-being? How do they know about these resources? • As a leader, is there anything you believe you should be doing but are not? Why?	• Organizational support theory • Organizational support theory • Organizational support theory/Transformational leadership theory • Perceived organizational support theory • Perceived organizational support theory • Perceived organizational support theory • Transformational leadership theory

Appendix E: BL-B Site Visit

BOTTOM LINE-BOSTON SITE VISIT

NOVEMBER 13TH, 2023

Top left: Open office space for career planning team.

Top right: Program advisors' cubicles

Bottom left: Calm corner designated for program advisors who need a quiet space to work.

BOTTOM LINE-BOSTON SITE VISIT

NOVEMBER 13TH, 2023

Top left: Photos and biographic information of employees are prominently displayed. Employees can opt not to have their photos on the wall.

Top right: Once a student submits their college application, they place their name on the pennants where they applied.

Bottom left: When students are accepted into a school, they place their name on the school pennant.

BOTTOM LINE-BOSTON SITE VISIT

NOVEMBER 13TH, 2023

Top left: Conference rooms are named for well-known Boston locations. Employees use QR's to book space. Digital screens display availability.

Top right: Development Office

Bottom left: Main gathering space. Located on the second floor. This is the space where large employee meetings such as the "Deep Dive" take place.

BOTTOM LINE-BOSTON SITE VISIT

NOVEMBER 13ᵀᴴ, 2023

Top left: All restrooms are gender inclusive. This sign includes language articulating BL's position on restroom inclusivity.

Top right: Sign reminding employees that this is a nut -free kitchen.

Bottom left: Designated parking for all BLB employees.

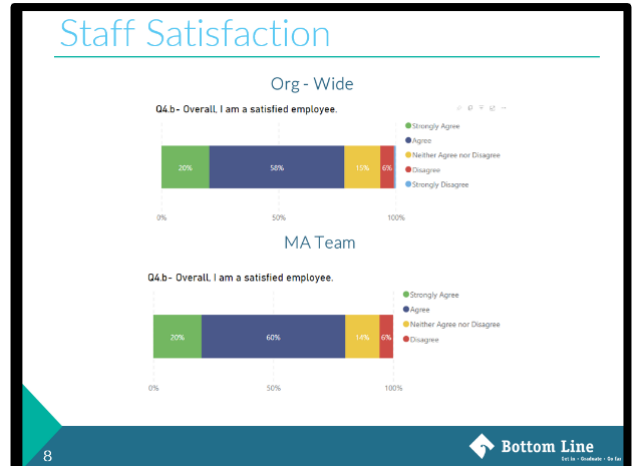## Appendix F: Theory and Thematic Codebook

Initial Thematic Codes

THEORY	CODE	PURPOSE	DESCRIPTION	KEYWORDS
Transfor-mational Leadership	Idealized Influence	Act as role models by adhering to high levels of ethical and moral conduct; provide a sense of vision and mission; build followers' trust and respect	Ability to encourage participation and communication	Role model Ethics Moral conduct Vision Mission Trust Respect Enthusiasm Embody Value
	Intellectual Stimulation	Challenge assumptions, take risks, help followers think outside the box; provide stimulation, creativity, and innovation	Ability to embrace change; adaptability	Explore Learning activity Create Challenge Creativity Knowledge building
	Inspirational Motivation	Creates appealing visions by showing optimism about followers' abilities; creates a sense of purpose and encourages team spirit	Vision of the future Having goals and direction	Goals Vision Collaborate New Change Optimism Inclusion Productivity
	Individualized Consideration	Acknowledges followers' needs, provides support and empathy, and are considerate of individual talents, backgrounds, and situations	Emotional Intelligence Empowering employees	Conversation Mentorship Empathy Purpose Strengthen skills

THEORY	CODE	PURPOSE	DESCRIPTION	KEYWORDS
Organizational Support	Empowerment	Management allows employees to make decisions and take action independently	The organization and leadership create meaning for the employee and the position.	Autonomy Conversation Sharing Motivation Opportunity
	Supervisory Support	Leadership builds one-on-one relationships with employee		Collaboration Communication Listen Feedback Motivate Reassurance Recognition & reward
	Mentoring		The employee is developed into a competent worker with awareness of the position's impact on the bigger picture.	Social support Communication Professional Development Goal setting
	Trust	Leadership builds one-on-one relationships with employees. The employee knows		Fair Equity Inclusion Well-being DEI

Revised Thematic Codebook

Deductive and Inductive Code Book-Final Iteration

Theory	Code	Purpose	Description	Keywords
Transformational Leadership	Idealized Influence	Act as role models by adhering to high levels of ethical and moral conduct; provide a sense of vision and mission; build followers' trust and respect	Followers admire and respect the leader. Followers see their part in the mission.	Role model Trust
	Intellectual Stimulation	Challenge assumptions, help followers think outside the box; provide stimulation, creativity, and innovation	The performance of the firm is enhanced by innovation.	Challenge Knowledge building
	Inspirational Motivation	Creates appealing visions by showing optimism about followers' abilities; creates a sense of purpose and encourages team spirit	A vision of the future clearly communicated goals and direction.	Collaboration Organizational Clear goals
	Individualized Consideration	Acknowledges followers' needs, provides support, and empathy, and is considerate of individual talents, backgrounds, and situations	Emotional Intelligence Empowering employees	Empathy Development Conversations
Organizational Support	Autonomy/ Empowerment	Allows employees to make decisions and take action independently	The organization and leadership create meaning for the employee and the position.	Opportunity
	Supervisory Support	Leadership builds one-on-one relationships with employee	The follower believes the leader genuinely cares about their well-being.	Communication Feedback Listen Reassurance Rewards & recognition Sincere concern for well-being
	HR Practices and Work Conditions	Signals to employees that the organization positively regards them and their contributions	These are practices that are discretionary and are not obligatory	Communication Practices Social support
	Fairness	Leadership builds relationships with employees in which employees believe the leader does what they say they will, and they have the employee's best interest in mind	Practices reflect that the leader is honest, transparent, and has the employees' best interest.	Equity Inclusion Integrity Transparency in decision-making

Appendix G: Survey Questionnaires

Regional Survey Questions

Regional Culture

- Please explain your score re: departmental connections.
- Please explain your score re: sharing with managers+ from another department.
- Please describe an instance when you felt connected to the larger Massachusetts region, beyond your direct team. when you felt connected to the larger Massachusetts region, beyond your direct team.
- Please explain your score re: recommending a role in the Massachusetts region to a friend.

Talent Development

- The Massachusetts region invests in my professional development. Please explain your rating re: equal opportunity for promotions.
- Which factors of your experience at Bottom Line have contributed to your professional development?
- Please share how Bottom Line could increase its investment in professional development.
- How can the regional leadership team support you in moving toward the next step in your career?

Workplace Satisfaction

- Please share one or more sentences about what being a satisfied employee at Bottom Line means to you.
- Which factors of your experience at Bottom Line have contributed to your workplace satisfaction?
- Which factors of your experience at Bottom Line have negatively impacted your workplace satisfaction?

Regional Leadership

- *Please share 1-2 sentences about what support from the regional leadership team means to you.*

Appendix H: Document Review Codebook

Document	Review date	Context	Connections to PQs[1]				Connection to Lit Review	Coding themes
			1	**2**	**3**	**NA**		
Performance Management	11/12/23	Describes evaluation process		x			Identifies leadership/ organizational support intentions	Respect, values, planning, talent development, results, relationship, agility, communication
Performance Review & Stepback Instructions	11/12/23	Scoring instructions for evaluation				x		
Competency Model	11/12/23	Defines evaluation competencies		x			Defines leadership/organizational support competencies that it intends to achieve Communicates employee, manager, director, and executive expectations	Respect, values, planning, talent development, results, relationship, inclusiveness, agility, communication
Professional Development Funds policy	11/12/23			x			Describes organizational support of professional development and physical and emotional well-being	Professional development, Well-being, financial support
Employee Benefits Contract Info	11/13/23	Defines employee benefits			x		Defines employee benefits	
BL Foundation	11/13/23	Vision and values				x	Defines mission, value, and mission	
Juneteenth 2023 Deck	11/13/23	Celebrate DEI					Organizational support includes DEI activities and building awareness of inclusive actions	Modeling inclusive activity, culture building event
BL Stance on Microaggressions	11/13/23	Defines behavior and steps		x			Defines inappropriate workplace behavior and encourages communication and action to correct inappropriate behaviors (microaggressions)	Defines inappropriate workplace behavior and encourages communication

[1] 1: *What practices and interactions with executive leaders at BL-B contribute to program advisors' sense of support?* 2: *What practices and interactions do executive leaders perform with the intention of supporting program advisors?* 3: *How are executive leadership's and program advisors' understanding of what contributes to an advisor's sense of support similar and different?* NA: *Not relevant to research questions.*

Document	Review date	Context	Connections to PQs[2]				Connection to Lit Review	Coding themes
			1	2	3	NA		
Safety Planning and Emergency Policies	11/13/23	Protocols for Student Safety		x				Describes emergencies and instructions for student safety
Bottom Line Most Recent Retention Data	1/6/24	Key ideas from exit interviews			x		Effective leadership support has positive impact on employee work and morale. Communicates the results of leadership support and areas of weakness	Lacking empowerment Motivation Attrition Advancement
Bottom Line Talent Dashboard FY2021	1/6/24	Quantitative results of exit interviews			x		Effective leadership support has a positive impact on employee work and morale. Communicates the results of leadership support and areas of weakness. Quantitative results of attrition and demographics without causes 2020-2021	
Feedback Processes	1/6/24	Outlines communications between employees & managers					Regular communication between employees and managers	Communication
HR Metrics by Team as of 11/8	1/20/24	Summary 2023 attrition interviews				x	Although the data reflects national rather than regional termination, the summary reflects regional survey comments.	Planned departure Limited advancement Work conditions
Competency Model	1/6/24	Outlines expectations for each level		x			Provides examples of practices and interactions	Communication, Relationships
Bottom Line Employee Handbook FY24	1/20/24	Mission, Vision, and Values Statements				x	The handbook shows the employees' rights are protected. Yet, there are no guidelines for transformational	

Date	Item					Description	
						leadership—i.e. motivation, inspiration, advancement, autonomy, etc. Intentions are focused on the client not the employees or organization. Based on the employee handbook, support is a hands-off approach rather than individualized engagement that guides one's progress. The handbook outlines basic needs and support methods. Yet, they fulfill the lower hierarchy of needs.	
1/20/24	Training and Development Programs (also Go Far Hub)		x			Corrective training for DEI and skills rather than advancement	

[2] *1:* What practices and interactions with executive leaders at BL-B contribute to program advisors' sense of support? *2:* What practices and interactions do executive leaders perform with the intention of supporting program advisors? *3:* How are executive leadership's and program advisors' understanding of what contributes to an advisor's sense of support similar and different? *NA:* Not relevant to research questions.

Appendix I: Observational Field Notes for BL-B Site Visit

Dale Merrill-Observer

November 13, 2023

I arrived at 11:55. When I pulled into the parking lot, I immediately noticed that there were several parking spots designated for Bottom Line. I parked my car and entered the building. The Manager of employee engagement is our primary liaison for this project. She gave me instructions to enter the offices. I used the call box in the lobby of the building to call BL-B. Their director of operations answered. It was clear that he knew I was coming as he said my name before I told him who I was. He unlocked the door and gave me instructions on how to get to the BL-B offices. I was immediately struck by how bright and modern the communal office space was. The manager of Workplace Experience greeted me and began to give me a tour. I noticed a group of what I assumed to be employees in the kitchen. They looked over at me repeatedly. It seemed like they didn't know who I was or why I was there.

The Tour

BL-B offices occupy two floors of a small office building. The open floor plan, exposed brick walls, and multiple windows make the physical space bright and energizing.

The main floor is the second floor and is where most of the employees are located. The first floor is where the Career Planning and the Development teams are located.

Prominently displayed and close to the main entrance is their employee wall. The wall has photos of employees that include personal information, like hobbies, and names of pets. It was explained to me that employees may choose not to participate. Also brought to my attention

was the "I submitted" wall and the "What's your next step" wall. The student clients pin a card

to the college pennant representing the school for which they applied. Subsequently, when

students are accepted into a school and they commit to attending, they place their names on the

school pennant. It was a clear source of pride for my tour guide.

Other things of note on the tour:

There is a main kitchen and eating area. In this area, there is a space called the

"Boomerang," which is a large counter shaped like a boomerang. I was told that many chance

encounters happen at the boomerang. It is the spot where all employees like to hang out. There

is a second kitchen on the first floor. Initially this space was for everyone. When leadership

found out that an employee had a dangerous peanut allergy, they deemed it the "nut- free"

kitchen. All of the bathrooms are labeled gender inclusive. There are masks and hand sanitizers

placed throughout the offices with signs that indicate that they are not mandatory. The

conference rooms have digital signs. They are named after well-known Boston locations. The

digital signs display if the room is booked and for how long. The large, open common space in

the center of the main floor has many windows and six square tables in the center of the room, A

large television is mounted on the wall, with a small couch and two chair facing the television.

There are long tables pushed against the wall of one side of the room; on the other side of the

room is the boomerang and kitchen. There are soft chairs with a small table in the back corner of

the room. Leaders have hard-walled offices. Non-leaders in divisions not related to programs

have open-office space. These offices are bright and modern. The program advisors have

cubicles. The space is long and narrow. There is a space in the back of this office designated the

"calm corner." I was told this was a space where program advisors could go if they needed quiet

space.

The "Deep Dive" Meeting

Following the tour, I was invited to an all-employee meeting called the "deep dive." The

meeting was scheduled for 12:30, so I was seated in the program advisor area. Upon entering the

program advisor area, I was introduced to two of the advisors who were present. They met me

with smiles. I was there to observe. Despite wanting to ask them questions, that was not my role,

nor did I have the organization's permission to do so. While waiting, I overheard a phone

conversation one of the advisors had with what I assumed to be a student client. The advisor

expressed concern that the person on the line was missing a meeting. I noted that the advisor's

tone was chastising.

When it was time for the meeting, I was escorted back to the large open space. I was told

I could sit anywhere. Acting as only an observer and not a participant, I sat in the back corner.

This gave me a vantage point from which I could see the entire room.

Employees began to enter the room. Some sat at the tables, others sat in the front of the

room by the big screen. I noticed that the vast majority of the employees were white. The

meeting was started by an employee who was unknown to me. She introduced the topic and

began a presentation that was presented on the large television. The topic was interviewing best

practices. I then learned that the facilitators were from the Career Development team. They

explained that knowing best practices allows the staff to support student clients with interviews. I

watched as the executive director and the manager of experience sat at different tables with

employees. The meeting began at 12:33. I observed the interactions of the employees. I realized

that it was not obvious who were the leaders and who were the followers. Everyone was dressed

casually. No one stood out as being a leader. The executive director and the manager

participated in all the breakout sessions. The people leading the conversation were somewhat

business casual. The presenters were conversational; they held cups and walked around the room

while presenting. I noticed that everyone who had their cell phone with them had it placed face-

down on the table. There were group exercises in which the facilitators asked everyone to move

around the room and talk to different people. Everyone seemed engaged. The first table the

facilitator asked to debrief was the table at which the executive director was sitting. During one

debrief, the manager of Workplace Experience spoke for her group.

　　The meeting ended at 1:30. Following the meeting, everyone dispersed quickly to the

boomerang for a potluck organized by the employees. I walked around and took photos of the

workspace. The manager and the executive director brought me to a conference room so that I

could ask follow-up questions. With their permission, I recorded the meeting. It will be part of

my coding and analysis. I left at 2:40.

Appendix J: Analytic Memoing

Analytical Memo 1-draft

As I reflect on this project from the beginning to where we find ourselves now (which is planning for data collection), I am thinking about the role "support" plays in the workplace in general.

I recognize that having worked in human resources for twenty years, I have biases related to organizational behavior that I will need to be attuned to throughout this project. The prominent and perhaps most undermining bias to data collection is that after twenty years in human resources and organizational development, I've seen it all, meaning, because I've reached a certain level of success in my career and in my education, I have the answers. The fact that I have not explored the role of support is evidence that there are areas of human resources that I have yet to explore. Because human resources has often been framed as a soft discipline and because of my own intellectual insecurity, I've often thought of human resources as being pretty simple and straightforward. As a result, the answers related to human resource problems always seem apparent to me. However, this doctoral program has brought awareness to the erroneousness of that thought pattern. Human behavior is not that simple. It is nuanced, it is specific, and it is co-created.

Honoring this, I have to go into this context (Bottom Line-Boston) realizing that it is an independent and self-contained system that is not like any system in which I've worked before. Therefore, the answers that I think I have or the solutions that I identify may not be relevant.

I have thought about the number of ways in which I have supported my employees and the number of ways in which I have been supported by leaders. When we began planning our data collection, I thought about questions, tools, and observations that would identify the themes and patterns similar to my conceptualization of support. I caught myself doing this despite the literature. All of this being written, as we enter the data collection phase of this project, I am wondering how Bottom Line looks, feels, and acts differently from what I am used to.

Other than support, I have spent a lot of time thinking about transformational leadership. Grounded in theory, I know there are hallmarks of transformational Leadership. But

how might transformational leadership at Bottom Line look a little bit different than what I am used to? I wonder how the experiences of working in a nonprofit situation where the stakes may be higher for leaders as they are trying to enhance the lives of young, underrepresented people, may be different from the experiences of leaders in for-profit organizations.

I am anxious to begin data collection. This project to date has had many starts and stops, most of which can be attributed to goal misalignment. My partner and I want to ensure that the problem we are trying to solve has merit and that providing recommendations to BL-B will support them in meeting their overall mission. Being a BIPOC, first-generation college student from a lower socio-economic background, BL-B's work has personal significance. This desire to help them in a meaningful way has at times led me to want to quickly and without discipline fix problems that may not be problems.

After reflecting and sorting through my biases, I am ready to collect data with a perspective that is not wholly informed by me and my experiences.

Analytic memo 2-Post Semi-structured interviews

After completing interviews with seven leaders at Bottom Line-Boston, I came to an embarrassing insight into my biases and ignorance. I was surprised to learn that the leaders at BL-B are very knowledgeable, self-reflecting, and accomplished. My bias about who I believed to be a typical nonprofit leader became evident to me. My expectation of these leaders was that they would only be socially and emotionally driven. I didn't expect them to be disciplined in their approaches to their work. I expected they would be well-intentioned tacticians. Instead, I found self-reflective, strategic thinkers. It forced me to think about this project more broadly. My initial biases led me to believe that there were likely to be some obvious and quick explanations for the problem of practice.

In addition to the findings above, I realize that thirty minutes was not enough time to probe a little further to gain a deeper understanding of their intentions as leaders. It took time for me to get situated and understand their context. By the time this happened, we were almost finished with the interviews. Our project questions would have been better served if our interview questions were more specific. For example, our question about how Bottom Line

prioritizes their employees' well-being. In retrospect, I would have asked how Bottom Line in **Boston** prioritizes the well-being of **Boston** employees. The initial question led to somewhat generic answers.

Finally, the interviews (except for 1) were done in succession. I had no breaks. I would not schedule this way in future projects. I did not have time to reflect or write notes following each interview. Without these breaks, I missed reflection time which may have led to me improving subsequent interviews.

Analytical Memo 3-Coding and analyzing the interviews

"Analyzing with integrity," were the words from our advisor that haunted me through this process. There were several moments when I found myself attempting to make meaning of things to fit my hypothesis. Having a hypothesis in a qualitative project is problematic as I am supposed to go where the data leads me. Instead, I was leading the data.

In taking a step back, I know I need to abandon some of my predetermined codes, I should likely collapse some of them. I will talk more about this with our advisor.

Some of the things I see in this process that I didn't recognize during or immediately following my interviews, was that many of the leaders seemed to use a lot of jargon in place of substantive answers.

I'm also concerned that some of the recurring themes may not be something that we can assist with improving, one of which is the control the national office has over BL-B.