

Program Evaluation Project

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While working as a licensed professional counselor, the director of the agency approached me, asking for my help in creating a program evaluation. The key issues that the program evaluation would examine are (a) why the agency is only serving a small number of clients of color, and (b) what the agency can do differently to provide services to people of color in the community. If I were truly in this situation, I would argue that, as well as researching these challenges, a small research study geared toward the evaluation of other agency's effectiveness in diverse neighborhoods would be a productive place to start. Our agency could then use that research, compare the foundations of effective and less-effective agencies, and apply it to the foundations of our own agency in order to see where improvements could be made. This would ensure that the current foundation our agency is operating from is equipped to handle more diversity in an ethical manner.

For the sake of the paper, say that research was conducted and the results found that effective clinics in diverse communities had diverse staff, available language services, and frequent multicultural trainings. When compared to these ideal agencies, our agency found that we were lacking in staff diversity and training. Due to the agency struggling to retain staff of color, it was decided that the best option would be to implement a multicultural training program for counselors at the shelter.

I. Introduction

The multicultural training program selected for the evaluation project will take place at the agency for the duration of two years. Counselors at the clinic will be required to attend one-hour trainings provided by the agency twice a month and encouraged to take part in the evaluation process. Although encouraged, participation in the data collection will not be

mandatory to avoid the bias of staff who would not take the time so address the questions seriously.

The second group engaging with this program will be clients of color who come to the clinic. Although all clients are going to be seeing counselors who are receiving the new multicultural training, they will be given the choice to participate in the feedback aspect of the program.

One final arche of this study will look at how diversity numbers at the agency are affected over time with the new implementation of the program.

Purpose

The purpose of this program evaluation is to see how routine multicultural trainings affect counselors, clients, and the amount of diversity at the clinic. The program evaluation is being implemented in order to investigate why there are low numbers of persons of color at the clinic, despite over half of the community being persons of color. Additionally, the program evaluation will address the issue of low retention of diverse staff at the shelter. Completion of the evaluation will give the agency insight into how they can strengthen the foundation of their clinic in order to better serve their staff and community.

Literature

The mission to figure out how the agency can improve in order to create an environment that better serves people of color is important because as counselors part of our duty, as stated in the American Psychological Association (APA) Code of Ethics, is to “honor diversity and embrace a multicultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural contexts” (ACA, 2014). This includes the responsibility to be competent in multicultural settings, and ready to serve those populations seeking help.

Multicultural views can have real consequences in terms of whether people are motivated to seek treatment, how they cope with their symptoms, how supportive their families and communities are, and how well they far in treatment (Gopalkrishnan, 2018). Seeking care can be an extra challenge for certain cultures so it is vital that when individuals in those communities do reach out, they are met with equal opportunity to receive quality care, as therapy has been shown to be a useful tool for managing symptoms and improving quality of life.

It is concerning that statistically white people are more likely to start therapy and stay in therapy for longer durations than people of color.

This issue has been attributed to the quality of the counselor-client relationship, however although past studies have put importance on finding the right counselor-client match, expanding research shows that multicultural trainings are perhaps the more effective solution; concluding that multicultural competence is at the heart of counseling and the core of successful therapeutic outcome (Ertl, et al., 2019).

In contrast to serving the client, multicultural training also serves the counselor. For example, it is important for counselors to have multicultural training on how to navigate microaggressions within the counselor-client relationship- specifically client microaggressions towards counselors.

Microaggressions are particularly common in diverse settings, and it has been shown that counselors of color receive the brunt of microaggressions from clients- often dealing with the offenses in isolation. It can be challenging for counselors to find ways to navigate these microaggressions from clients in a way that respects the code of ethics. Training in microaggressions in counseling is a useful tool to help counselors navigate these situations in a healthy way, which can lead to better quality of life and less burnout. (Branco & Jones, 2021).

The acknowledgment of microaggressions is prevalent in the current situation because counselors working at the agency are working within a diverse community. It is possible that the counselors of color hired at the clinic may not have access to adequate training or support for handling the racism they receive from their clients, resulting in a higher turnover rate.

II. Method

Participants

Both counselors and clients of color will be able to choose if they would like to participate in the process that provides feedback about the evaluation program. That being said, the multicultural training program will affect all staff and clients at the agency. This will potentially cause complications with consent, however because it is an educational program providing information that counsellors are not required to use, it was judged that all clients will be informed of the new training program, but will only be given additional informed consent if they choose to participate in the feedback portion of the evaluation.

Other ethical considerations are making sure that participating clients are still focusing on their own care rather than the impact of the study. Additionally, it will be important to make sure that counselors do not feel burnt out by the ongoing trainings.

A benefit of this study is that the responses from participants will be collected anonymously through a protected online platform resulting in personal feedback that is well protected.

Data Collection

Data will be collected in the forms of qualitative surveys and quantitative questionnaires. Surveys will ask a set of open-ended questions that will be used to gain context for the reality of the situation. Questionnaires will be used to obtain quantifiable data that can be used to track the

effectiveness of the program. Although questions will address similar topics of discussion, there will be different surveys and questionnaires for counselors versus clients.

Over the duration of the program, counsellors will take a total of three surveys: one at the beginning, middle, and end of the program. They will also be asked to fill out questionnaires every other month. Clients who choose to provide feedback on the program will receive two surveys, one on intake and one at discharge or the two-year mark (whichever comes first). Participating clients will also be asked to fill out questionnaires every-other month.

The surveys and questionnaires will be taken with tablets at the clinic. This will (a) ensure that the participant is the one filling out the survey (b) allow the participant to select their desired language (c) Keep the results within an online survey system protected by the agency's privacy regulations where the responses will be pooled. None of the data collected will ask for participant names. If a participant has a disability that prevents them from filling out information on the tablet, they can choose to have a staff member at the office or caregiver help them out.

Finally, data from the agency will be trended over the two years and compared with the retention of clients and staff of color at the agency, as well as overall clients of color at the agency, to see if or how diversity at the clinic correlates with the effects of the multicultural training program over time.

Ideally, qualified individuals outside of the agency would assess the collected data to prevent bias, and speculation of who reported what responses in the data. If that was not possible, qualified individuals working internally on the program evaluation (including myself) could view the data collected and investigate the effects of the study. If the study is assessed internally, it will have the benefit of more background knowledge with the risk of increased bias of reviewers.

Data Analysis

For analyzing the surveys, thematic methods will be used to determine trending issues and benefits of the program. This will be beneficial because the surveys will include qualitative responses from participants in order to add context and perspective outside of the questionnaires.

For the analysis of the questionnaires descriptive statistics will be used to analyze the effectiveness of defined variables in the program. For example, counselors' level of comfort working with clients of color in relation to trainings attended. We could also apply these descriptive statistics to different formats such as the Mann-Kendall test to see how those variables trended over time.

Program evaluators could also use ANOVA testing to see if there was a correlation between variables of the program and overall agency trends. For example, comparing the overall satisfaction of clients of color, with the number of clients of color at the shelter.

III. Results/Findings

Audience

Once the results of the study were obtained, they would be broken down into a digestible format and shared with the agency director, and then with staff. It is possible the data collected would also be shared with other agency boards.

The results of the program would be shared during an agency meeting, where staff would receive a nice lunch for participating in the program (ideally something nicer if funds are not limited). The findings will include the overall effectiveness of the training program. They will also include findings from more complex variables such as counselor-client relationship, perceived quality of care by clients over time, staff turnover versus increased training, etc.

At this point in time, it is important to make sure that the staff feels valued even if the results had negative reflections. For example, if the results show that the counselors had negative feelings toward the program, it is important that they feel validated for giving an honest response. It is also important that the *why* of the program is reinforced so that despite the outcomes, the agency understands that the program was a productive step in the direction of understanding the way multiculturalism interacts in their field.

Out of concern for confidentiality, at this stage the results should reflect a pooled overview and not specific individual responses. Although the surveys and questionnaires were anonymous, it is important to prevent individuals from speculating specifics of given responses.

IV. Implications

Say that the results of the program found that frequent multicultural trainings resulted in an increase of diversity at the shelter among staff and clients and also showed an overall increase in counselor competence and comfort working with clients of color. This could be cause to implement permanent trainings on multicultural issues and techniques at the agency.

Since the agency achieved its goal of obtaining a higher number of diversity in staff and clients at the shelter, it was more effective in serving the diverse community. The program gave the agency a better understanding of how to operate, resulting in an ethical foundation to move forward with. Using this base, future program evaluations will be able to ethically conduct more targeted program evaluations in the community.

V. Closing Thoughts

The program evaluation I selected for the agency was intentionally set up to focus on supporting and retaining clients and staff, rather than doing outreach in the community. The purpose of this was to make sure that the clinic had a good ethical and supportive base to operate

from before actively drawing in more of the community. Pushing for clients and staff of diversity in an agency that is not ready for it could potentially cause harm to those individuals.

A limitation of this study was that it looked at a large number of variables in relation to the multicultural training program and trends at the shelter. Due to the high variability in factors, it is possible that results of this evaluation may not be reflective of the reality of the situation.

A mixed-methods approach was used in the analysis of this program to help bridge gaps between the quantitative data collected from the questionnaires and the perceived realities of counselors and clients. In the future, the agency could benefit from evaluations that narrow down the independent variables in order to gain a more precise understanding of how certain factors interact.

References

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