

Narnian Clinical Counseling: Observations, Analysis and Recommendations

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*To Him who first blessed,
 who gives freely,
To the Master,
 the Joy
 the Hope
To the Manager of Managers
 Consultant of Consultants
 Owner of Owners
Belong all glory,
 honor and praise,
 in business as in all life.*

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis sums up six months of consulting for Aravis Montagne and her sister Louisette Pevensie (names obscured to protect identity). Ms. Montagne owns a counseling center in downtown Chicago called Narnian Clinical Counseling and was happy to receive free consultations in exchange for office and email access. The thesis is arranged by business segments, with each chapter devoted to a single segment. Each chapter stands alone as a summary of my observations, analysis, and recommendations to Ms. Montagne and Ms. Pevensie on the chapter's business segment.

Chapter 2 describes Narnian's origin and history, lists its vision and mission statements, defines core values, and reviews customer demographics, corporate structure, and financial growth.

Chapter 3 begins the profitability segment. The chapter itemizes both advantages and disadvantages to profitability, lists Narnian's profitability strategies, and explores the barriers to innovation in the field of mental health counseling.

Chapter 4 begins the product and service segment. The chapter reviews two services offered by Narnian: individual therapy sessions and an online therapy blog. It explores the therapy service in-depth, then considers how the blog service conflicts with the therapy service.

Chapter 5 begins the customer segment. The chapter considers Narnian's target customer, then reviews the comprehensive demographic it serves. It itemizes customer benefits and hindrances and explores their validity and impact.

Chapter 6 begins the operations segment. The chapter explores the primary business operations: client intake, session management, and client payment. It also reviews how the use of cloud software adds efficiency to Narnian's operation.

Chapter 7 begins the accounting segment. The chapter introduces the benefits gained by hiring an accountant and further benefits Ms. Pevensie could experience. It highlights the time spent closing outstanding debts and considers how a part-time employee might be a better option to manage the work. It also reviews Ms. Pevensie's

decision to supply paychecks every week instead of bi-weekly.

Chapter 8 begins the legal segment. The chapter targets Narnian's client data security posture and how a client data breach could sink the company. It exposes a scam that targeted one of the therapists and the potential for malicious attacks to harm the business. It also reviews the building's physical security.

Chapter 9 begins the employee segment. The chapter explores how Ms. Montagne designs Narnian's culture to encourage collaboration and guard therapists from isolation. It also reviews Narnian's performance evaluation metrics.

Chapter 10 begins the corporate communication segment. The chapter divides corporate communication into external communication via the Narnian website and social media, and internal communication via monthly staff meetings. It investigates the success of the therapist's biographical videos posted on the website and the frequency of blog posts. It also evaluates the effect staff meetings have on unity.

Chapter 11 begins the leadership segment. The chapter compares leadership at Narnian to another business organization and explores how the counseling domain approaches leadership development in unique ways. It also considers how Ms. Montagne's vision and example contribute to her therapist's leadership.

Chapter 12 begins the culture segment. The chapter analyzes how Narnian's culture influences hiring practices and how the way Narnian views itself may filter out quality therapist candidates. It also recognizes tremendous growth in Narnian's cultural diversity over the final three months.

Chapter 13 begins the moral and ethical segment. The chapter reviews the body of ethics that guides licensed therapists in the United States and considers how Ms. Montagne holds her therapists accountable for ethical decision-making. It also explores the tension between secular and Christian ethics and two perspectives among Narnian therapists about client diagnosis.

Chapter 14 begins the social impact segment. The chapter exposes the social nature of Narnian's therapy service and explores how Ms. Montagne might pool individual social efforts more significant effect in the community.

Chapter 15 begins the environmental segment. The chapter journeys through Narnian's minimalist office and notes Ms. Montagne's decisions to cut waste.

Chapter 16 begins the spiritual openness segment. The chapter reviews Narnian's presentation as a faith-based organization and how that differentiates it from other counseling centers. It also explores how the homogenous faith background of Narnian's staff does not reflect its welcome towards clients from all faith backgrounds.

Chapter 17 closes with my reflection on the consulting and thesis experience.

Chapter 2

Company Overview

2.1 Company History

Narnian was birthed in Ms. Montagne’s mind while she worked at a private counseling center. She incorporated Narnian as an S corporation in November 2016. Between November 2016 and April 2017, Ms. Montagne brainstormed her business and designed her website. She took out a business loan and sublet space in a high-traffic area on the “Miracle Mile,” 410 S. Michigan Avenue. Her first client at the new office began in April 2017, and Ms. Montagne gained more clients as referrals from the private practice she was still associated with while she launched her new venture.

Another therapist from the earlier private practice joined Ms. Montagne in a part-time capacity through early 2018. Ms. Montagne was still mostly on her own as a therapist; however, since her friend took only two clients at a time. At the beginning of 2018, they both faced a tipping point; stay at the private practice or launch fully into the new Narnian venture. Ms. Montagne recommitted herself to Narnian; her friend returned to private practice.

When the lease on the Michigan sublet ended, Ms. Montagne searched for weeks without success for another location on Michigan Avenue. When her search expanded, she found a leased office space in the Monadnock building, which is just south and west of Michigan Avenue, closer to the many towers that make up the Chicago Loop. The other places Ms. Montagne approached on Michigan Avenue were wary of accepting a startup because of the risk of delayed payment.

2.2 Vision and Mission

The Narnian vision statement as of August 2019 reads: “to deliver holistically minded and excellent mental health services increasing the health of Chicago through im-

pacting individuals.¹” Similarly, the mission statement is: “To provide mental health services that inspire people to create change and live healthier.”²

Narnian lists its vision statement on its website. The most persuasive statement, however, resides on its hiring page: “Narnian exists to help men and women in Chicago heal and grow through providing exceptional and specialized mental health services.”³

Ms. Montagne is passionate about the health and community of her employees and gifted, young, professional women who live or work in the Chicago Loop. Her vision statement is intentionally vague to acquire more customers.

2.3 Core Values

Narnian expresses its core values (see table 19.1) in the workplace culture Ms. Montagne seeks to create, in the way she hires new staff, and in the way services are rendered. To get a feel for how Narnian thinks about these topics, here are three excerpts from their website.

Narnian advertises their workplace culture:

“Here at Narnian, we seek to create a connected and collaborative environment. Private practice can easily become isolating. We choose to combat this through celebrations, events together, and caring for each other personally. Outside of staff meeting, our therapists enjoy and consult with each other between sessions in our office space in the heart of Chicago. The sense of team drives our culture.”⁴

To Ms. Montagne diversity means:

“Individuals and families need different skills and expertise from clinicians. We strive to provide diverse services to meet a broad array of clinical issues. Outside of theoretical orientation and trained models of therapy, this includes considering skills in language, culture, client’s gender and ethnicity preferences, and any other important factors contributing to the therapeutic relationship. We believe there is strength in diversity! We work to support each other as a team and provide well for our client’s needs through diversity.”

¹Louissette Pevensie. *Christian Counseling at Narnian*. URL: <https://wardrobes.com/christian-counseling/>. (accessed: 16.07.2019).

²Ibid.

³Louissette Pevensie. *Join Our Team! Careers at Narnian*. URL: <https://wardrobe.com/counseling-jobs/>. (accessed: 16.07.2019).

⁴Ibid.

And Excellence in Service means:

“In our line of work, we are hopeful for change and continued growth in the lives of our clients. Because of this, we seek to create a rich environment therapeutically through excellent services! Our own personal and professional growth work is important to this process. A desire to continue growing as a healthcare provider is woven into the fabric of who we are and what we do.”

2.4 Clientele Demographics

One of Narnian’s core values is diversity, and this is reflected more heavily in the clientele than the therapists. Most of Narnian’s therapists are highly educated, Caucasian Christians in their 30’s, female, and have no children.

While the therapists share some demographics, Narnian’s customers also have a distinct demographic. Seven in ten are single women, predominantly Caucasian, with a faith background. Since six in ten customers have Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBS) insurance, many are likely working professional women with higher education. The additional three in ten who pay out-of-pocket are even more likely to be educated professionals since the price-per-visit is over one hundred dollars.

2.5 Corporate Structure

Ms. Montagne is Narnian’s sole owner of and runs the clinical and operational work. Louisette Pevensie, who also happens to be Ms. Montagne’s sister, reports to Ms. Montagne and manages the financial, human resources, client intake, scheduling, blog posting and marketing, oversees a social media intern, and tracks inventory and office supplies. Pam Larkin reports to Ms. Montagne, reviews all therapists’ notes, and shares supervisory responsibilities for junior personnel with Ms. Montagne. Ms. Larkin meets privately with Ms. Montagne once a week for an hour to discuss clinical, ethical, or legal issues with Ms. Montagne.

2.6 Growth

Gross income is \$119,000 YTD (early June), with projected gross near \$250,000. Ms. Montagne’s goal for next year is \$500,000. The cost per session is between \$150 - \$170 depending on whether the therapist is fully licensed, although Narnian adjusts the cost if the client pays out-of-pocket. Narnian seeks to grow primarily by adding new

therapists to service more customers. When the office space supports the maximum number of therapists possible, Ms. Montagne intends to expand to a second location.

Chapter 3

Profitability Strategies

Abstract

Narnian has four key advantages to profitability as a counseling center and two disadvantages. It actively tries to capitalize on these advantages with three profitability strategies, to which I've added three recommendations. Three barriers to innovation serve as opportunities for Narnian to expand its profitability. Finally, Narnian received these recommendations with interest and was inspired to adjust its marketing strategy.

3.1 Introduction

A business may keep its doors open for a time with investment capital or bank loans, but no business can offer sustained service without profitability. For this reason, it is imperative to any startup that it continuously adjusts its business model until it manages to return a profit. Since most startups are not immediately profitable, the startup must keep its expenses low to allow its startup capital to last long enough to find a profitable model.

Narnian has been a profitable business for at least a year. Profitability began early for Narnian because Ms. Montagne was willing to sacrifice to minimize business expenses. She has taken no investment capital and has little debt.

The Narnian business model holds four key profitability advantages over other counseling centers in the area and two disadvantages that Ms. Montagne must mitigate to remain profitable. These advantages are crucial for Narnian to keep its competitive edge.

Ms. Montagne has also chosen three strategies to lower her costs and acquire customers. These are distinct to her business model and have served her well since

she started Narnian.

Business profitability is dependent on the identification and maintenance of a profitable business model, but no business lasts in the fast-moving American marketplace without innovation. Narnian resides in a subset of the medical domain, which has numerous barriers to innovation that Narnian must overcome.

In the following sections, we'll explore Narnian's profitability advantages and disadvantages, analyze Ms. Montagne's strategies, review the innovation landscape, and listen to Ms. Montagne's feedback to my recommendations.

3.2 Profitability Advantages

The first profitability advantage is inherent to Ms. Montagne's business model. A counseling center offers an easily scalable business model in the early months of a startup because employee growth is predictable. Ms. Montagne pays her employees only for billable client hours, which guarantees that all her employee's labor directly contributes to Narnian's profitability. Whether the therapist has just begun and only sees three clients per week or the therapist has a full 25 client workload, Narnian receives a profit percentage. Ms. Montagne mitigates employee costs further by offering minimal employee health benefits, which allows more of the per-employee profit to offset fixed costs such as office rent. This employee flexibility lent Ms. Montagne an early advantage towards profitability, as the high-profit margin per employee allowed her to cover her fixed costs with a minimum number of employee hours.

The second profitability advantage is insurance. Clients who possess the appropriate health insurance may have a sizeable amount of their up-front cost covered by their insurance provider, which lowers their perceived costs. Many who would not pursue counseling due to the cost approach Narnian when they realize their insurance provider covers therapy sessions.

The third profitability advantage is the office location. The primary customer persona, the young working professional, frequents the office space in the adjacent blocks around Narnian's office. While counseling services located in suburban areas compete for limited evening time from exhausted professionals returning from their downtown jobs, the same people work within walking distance of Narnian. A downtown-based company can open time slots that fit the client's lunch breaks or the times before and after work transit.

The fourth profitability advantage is the low cost of advertising. Seventy-five percent of first-time clients find Narnian through Internet sites that cost the company little for their participation, such as psychologytoday.com and Facebook. An Internet presence is vital for the company's growth as physical advertising in the downtown area is expensive. Even the cost of a building plaque exceeds the company's startup

budget.

3.3 Profitability Disadvantages

Narnian has many startup advantages but must mitigate several disadvantages to remain profitable.

The first profitability disadvantage is the inflexible prices insurance providers are willing to pay per client. Insurance agencies dictate what a session costs and, because the low client cost offered through insurance is a crucial advantage of most counseling services, Narnian has minimal leverage to make adjustments. There may be other ways to tweak Narnian, but price adjustments is not a likely route.

The second profitability disadvantage is the limited choice in insurance options Narnian offers its clients. Narnian has access to a fraction of the therapy market, though a large fraction, by requiring clients without Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBS) to pay out-of-pocket.

As Narnian grows, one way it might widen its clientele is to panel with additional insurance providers. A considerable percentage of customers who pay out-of-pocket use other insurance providers than BCBS.

3.3.1 Analysis

Ms. Montagne has positioned her counseling center in a high-traffic location, with a lean startup mentality and a focus on her customer demographics. Her prior experience as a staff therapist has prepared her for many counseling best practices, and she is well prepared to remain profitable. She is also taking steps to minimize her disadvantages.

To mitigate the risk of insufficient payment from insurance providers, Narnian has limited its accepted insurance provider to BCBS. BCBS has the highest per-client rate of any insurance provider in Illinois and requires the least amount of administrative paperwork, which makes them a lucrative first option for a startup counseling center.

A single insurance provider does limit Narnian's clientele, and Ms. Montagne is aware that paneling with additional providers might expand her business. The effort to panel with other providers is substantial, and Ms. Montagne may remain content with BCBS for years to come. While there is some risk in binding her business options to a single source of income, she's chosen the most common insurance provider for downtown professionals.

3.4 Profitability Strategies

The outgrowth of Narnian's advantages and disadvantages is a strategy for maintaining profitability through client retention, fixed staff cost, and a diverse therapist selection.

Many of Narnian's clients see the same therapist for six months or more, which allows Narnian to project their profits for most of the year. At the same time, Narnian continues to open therapist slots to acquire an overabundance of client hours to offset the inevitable cancellations. Ms. Montagne's intent with adding hours is primarily to grow the business, but this approach also represents an essential strategy for the maintenance of her business. In addition to adding therapist hours with her existing therapist staff, Ms. Montagne also continues to hire therapists to fill unused office hours for maximum profitability.

Startups often place business profitability above employee benefits, at least until there is evidence of sustainability, and Narnian has taken the same road. Therapist costs are a simple equation, and without any promise of a raise or promotion, there's no reason to expect employee costs to climb faster than inflation over the next two years. The highest employee cost has been regular employee turnover, but no evidence suggests that turnover is a response to the wages or benefits.

Ms. Montagne also pursues profitability through diverse individual therapist experience. Ms. Montagne encourages individual therapists to branch into therapy practices that interest them on the premise that a diverse practice opens new counseling offerings Narnian doesn't yet provide. Ms. Montagne's primary strategy is to capture a larger share of the existing market with the same individual therapist model by diversifying her therapist's skills and backgrounds. For example, it is common for a potential customer to contact Ms. Pevensie for an intake meeting and request a specific counselor that the customer discovered on Narnian's website.

3.4.1 Analysis

The six-month average duration of a client's therapy sessions gives Narnian stability in the projection of future revenue, but it is still not immune to unexpected cancellations. Ms. Montagne is wisely seeking to expand her business from \$250,000 to \$500,000 yearly revenue by opening as many client hours as her therapists can handle and hiring additional therapists to cover times her current staff doesn't offer today. If Ms. Montagne retains her therapists, she can hit and exceed her goal.

Ms. Montagne's decision to keep employee benefits low has a limited time before it becomes a liability. Although no evidence suggests that therapists left because of minimal benefits, therapists aren't staying because of the benefits package either. Narnian attracts therapists early in their career whose passion for the work exceeds their need for health benefits. Seasoned therapists may not be willing to sacrifice

benefits to work for Narnian. Early-in-career therapists are also the least likely to remain at Narnian once they've obtained the second tier of their counseling license. It may be that an increase in employee benefits may reduce therapist overturn.

The response to Narnian's varied therapist options indicates Ms. Montagne's strategy may have uncovered a pivotal opportunity to capture more work with a wide range of therapist personalities and skills. However, there is insufficient evidence to suggest that customers select their counselor by professional merit rather than their feeling about the therapist's online presence. The client's selection of individual therapists could be evidence of client caprice rather than a genuine need for diverse therapeutic options. It would be a deceptive practice, but Ms. Montagne might produce the same effect by merely placing nice-looking faces of therapists who don't exist on her website to attract more customers, then redirect new customers to her actual staff.

3.4.2 Recommendations

There are three new approaches Ms. Montagne could take to develop profitability in addition to her existing strategies.

- Invite therapists to pool their resources into a brand-new offering. A group therapy session may be a worthwhile attempt, or a short one-time course for those with a specific addiction, or experimentation with online therapy. By engaging her employees, many of whom have fewer than five years of experience, Ms. Montagne could generate more potentially profitable offerings than what she could invent on her own. Then Ms. Montagne can validate whether clients are looking for therapy options or visually pleasing therapists.
- Graduate the cost of individual counseling sessions to reflect the variable value of different times of the day. Although professional women are prevalent in the heart of downtown Chicago, daytime hours are still more difficult to fill than evening hours. Customers who take advantage of their therapist's evening hours would likely pay a higher premium for those slots. Those who needed to cut costs may convert to daytime hours.
- Offer variations on existing therapist visits. All therapists offer hour-long slots; however, a half-hour slot in the middle of the day may attract customers. Alternatively, new customers may prefer a concentration of sessions, perhaps two hours, to launch their counseling experience and gain a substantial benefit from their therapist right away.

3.5 Innovation Barriers

The counseling domain, like other areas of the medical field, is slow to innovate. Three reasons exist for this: the regulatory atmosphere, the reticence of customers to try new therapeutic methods, and the nature of insurance.

The regulatory atmosphere restrains variations on existing counseling center ideas and threatens to shut down innovation if it does not conform to the existing structures. Outside regulations restrain Ms. Montagne's search for profitable opportunities.

Customers themselves are reticent to try new therapeutic methods because of the uncertain nature of the new therapy's effect on their well-being. The American culture is replete with examples of individuals drawn away and abused by charismatic people with "new" ideas. Because of the ephemeral nature of mental health, innovation is even less welcome than a new surgical method, which, while risk may be involved, has clear repercussions. The surgeon may cause damage to remove the tumor entirely, but in mental health, the ideas of healing and damage are less understood.

While the visible customer of Narnian is a therapy client, the insurance provider holds a significant role. One might call them the primary customer since 70% of Narnian's income comes from Blue Cross Blue Shield payments. Insurance bases its business model on controlled risk, which is directly opposed to the uncertain and experimental. While a well-researched case study may sway a forward-thinking insurance provider, a small startup may find it impossible to fund new concepts or perform research to validate them.

3.5.1 Analysis

Narnian may maintain a profitable business for years through slow replication, but business innovation often has exponential effects on profitability. The innovation atmosphere, while it might be daunting, actually represents a critical opportunity for Ms. Montagne because few of her direct competitors are likely to innovate.

To launch innovative tests, Ms. Montagne needs to create conditions that aren't affected by these three barriers. First, she must locate places where regulation is minimal or absent. Second, she needs to find early adopters, especially those willing to pay out-of-pocket because third, she must circumvent insurance providers, at least for a time.

3.6 Feedback

The recommendation to adjust the value of different hours in the day intrigued Ms. Montagne. She had this model in her head, that evening hours are most valuable,

but had not considered charging different amounts by the hour.

The recommendation to adjust the length of therapist visits was a good option, but only possible with out-of-pocket clients. Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBS), and probably most other insurance providers, sets a minimum of 45 minutes per session and a maximum of 1 hour. BCBS usually denies claims that exceed an hour. BCBS also allows for only one visit per day, so a client cannot have multiple hours submitted in separate claims on the same day. Ms. Montagne stated that when she was in private practice, they only accepted cash because it gave them greater freedom of time and approach and that many counseling centers operate this way. Ms. Montagne decided to get paneled with BCBS because she believed that it would offer a more stable income for her employees.

A significant component of Ms. Montagne's growth model is to obtain more office space, so ideas to maximize the space she has would be appreciated.

An exciting twist to the conversation was that profitability increased when BCBS paneled Narnian, and when Narnian began to publish that they were Christian faith-based. Pressing into these distinguishing features may open new profitability strategies. Also, Ms. Montagne was considering publishing on their website that alternative hours were possible for people who pay out-of-pocket, as she does sometimes offer alternative times. Not long before my interview, a therapist offered a three-hour session to an out-of-pocket client.

Chapter 4

Product and Service Strategies

Abstract

Narnian offers two services: individual therapy sessions and an online therapy blog. The therapy service lacks a central therapy approach, which results in two detractors and two benefits. The blog service conflicts with the therapy service in two ways and may need adjustment. Ms. Montagne has considered selecting a single therapy approach but prefers the benefits of a diverse offering at this time.

4.1 Introduction

Every business seeks to offer a product or service that customers find valuable. When the service is valuable enough to pay more than it costs to offer the service and there are enough customers, a business has discovered a valuable service.

Narnian's primary service is mental health counseling delivered through individual hour-long sessions spaced one to two weeks apart. There are enough customers to fund a staff of ten employees and afford a prime location in the Chicago Loop.

The content of a therapy session is entirely dependent upon the therapist's experience and decision. For example, Sally's customer may receive Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) because that is Sally's therapeutic preference, while John's customer may receive psychoanalytic therapy. The predominant approach is CBT, however, as all therapists have received some training in this approach.

Narnian also supplies a secondary service as a producer of a therapy blog, but this has no direct profitability. However, the blog does attract more customers to its primary service.

In the following sections, we'll explore Narnian's therapy service and the detractors and benefits of allowing therapists to choose any therapeutic approach. Then we'll review the blog service and how it interacts with the therapy service. Finally, we'll hear from Ms. Montagne about my recommendations.

4.2 Therapy Service

The therapy service is supplied primarily by therapists with fewer than five year's experience and supervised by Ms. Montagne and one other senior therapist. The therapist defines the service on a per-client basis. Ms. Montagne improves service quality in two ways: growing professional acumen and direct supervision.

The number one factor that Ms. Montagne presses into to improve the value of her therapist's service is a growing professional acumen. Ms. Montagne believes that the repetition of client interactions solidifies what her employees have learned in higher education and give them direction in their career development. The expectation that a broad range of therapy services attracts a larger pool of customers drives Narnian to encourage and recommend new practices over depth in a single therapy offering.

Ms. Montagne's most senior therapist serves a dual role as a therapist and supervisor. Several of her therapists are seeking the second level of their license, which gives them the ability to bill insurance providers directly but requires weekly supervision to meet the license requirements. The senior therapist shares a portion of the one-on-one supervision requirements and is responsible for the review of all therapist notes before submission to the insurance providers. The first avenue allows the supervisor to offer direct coaching with therapists and is the most effective form of service improvement currently available. The note review has had little impact on the value of services rendered to clients or insurance providers and is primarily litigation protection rather than a learning opportunity.

4.2.1 Analysis

While there have been immediate benefits to Narnian's dispersed approach to therapist practice, two detractors make alternatives worth exploring: the inability to measure service performance and the dilution of service messaging.

First, the lack of a central therapist approach makes it difficult for Narnian to invest in or measure service performance. Client retention has been the primary measurement of service excellence, but there is little insight into the actual practice of individual therapists or directed efforts to increase retention. Counseling centers that select a primary therapy model have an advantage over Narnian in that more precise measurements of individual ability can be measured between therapists and service improvement opportunities can be focused on the needs of that therapy practice.

For example, were Narnian to narrow its offering to only Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), this framework would highlight the skills necessary to excel. CBT focuses on reaction to stimuli and feedback on a client's weekly attempts to use CBT practices taught by the therapist. Tools such as a survey could measure the effect of each week on the client's experience to stimuli and offer concrete examples shared by all therapists for mutual learning. Conversations between a senior therapist and their junior report would be more directed because of the emphasis on results, where the existing structure at Narnian can hinder a supervisor's coaching. A supervisor who doesn't know a therapy method can't coach a student in that method.

Second, the lack of a central therapist approach dilutes the messaging about the services offered at Narnian. The website or direct referrals must be deliberately vague because the potential span of therapeutic methods is expansive. Competitors have the advantage of a clear message about what they're capable of offering and the additional benefit of perceived expertise because of their focus. One reason Ms. Montagne keeps Narnian's messaging vague is to avoid the use of unhelpful domain nomenclature. Still, she could reword a single method with common phrases more effectively than general therapeutic methods.

Although these two detractors argue for an alternate approach, the outcome should not lose the following two existing benefits.

First, therapists at Narnian have greater freedom of choice in their therapeutic service on a per-client basis. One reason for the plethora of therapeutic approaches is the complexity of individual experience and needs. For therapists to serve their clients most effectively, they may be required to mix principles and techniques across other therapeutic approaches. By avoiding the selection of a central therapeutic approach, individual therapists can flex with their client's needs and requests.

For example, one therapist I interviewed explained that her client had been reading about a progressive therapy approach that the client thought might help. The client asked the therapist if she would practice this therapy with the client, to which the therapist agreed. Had the Narnian policy restricted its therapists to a narrowly defined list of therapeutic approaches, this therapist would have been unable to accommodate this client and would likely have lost them. Instead, the therapist studied the therapeutic approach and applied it to a positive effect.

Second, Narnian requires little overhead to achieve its current approach. While Ms. Montagne and her supervisor do evaluate quality service and opportunities to coach, they don't presently have a shared plan for service improvement at the individual therapist level. Ms. Montagne does have a broad grasp of therapeutic approaches, but even to apply performance standards in a single therapeutic approach would add a significant amount of additional work to define, share, and enforce.

4.2.2 Recommendations

The broad service offering dilutes the message and service improvement, and these detractors may outweigh the benefits. Therefore I recommend the following two adjustments.

- Select a single therapeutic approach to prioritize. The majority of therapists at Narnian are already proficient in CBT, which makes it my first candidate. Because of the prevalence of CBT in the counseling community, however, this selection does not differentiate Narnian from other counseling centers, so it's a trade-off. Ms. Montagne's long-term desire to bring health to young, professional women may not fit with CBT's immediate but shallow healing. Perhaps a pairing of CBT with a similar approach could improve the effect without diluting the message and limiting performance gains?
- Incentivize growth in core therapeutic approaches. Narnian is already willing to assist therapists with training opportunities that they'd like to pursue. Still, Narnian can encourage an emphasis by sharing training opportunities that strengthen the core approaches and setting how they'll assist instead of leaving it to closed-door negotiations.

4.3 Blog Service

Narnian's primary service is individual counseling, but it pours a remarkable amount of time and effort into a vibrant Internet presence.

Every therapist supports the Narnian blog. Full-time therapists are required to write one blog a week and part-time one every other week. Each blog is independently reviewed for quality, assigned an image from a paid image service, and queued up for publication to the website. No therapist gets paid for time spent researching or writing blog posts. In the last two years, Narnian published over 200 blog posts to its website.

New therapists are eager to contribute to the blog, but after a few months, even a seasoned therapist runs out of blog ideas. To maintain the pace, therapists share a list of blog ideas and read new material they can draw upon for their next blog.

All blog posts are reviewed by an intern or by Ms. Pevensie before publication. Ms. Pevensie adds posts that have passed her review to a queue and later publishes them on a set schedule. She follows the publication of each blog post with notifications on popular social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

As the blog has matured, more structure around the blog topics has developed. The blog content now matches holidays and other meaningful events around its pub-

lication. If Christmas is a month away, Ms. Pevensie posts at least one blog about a topic that applies to the Christmas season.

4.3.1 Analysis

The blog service fits uneasily into the Narnian business model. It undeniably sets their business apart from others on the Internet as one of the most prolific publicists, yet the service value is difficult to assess. Ms. Montagne agrees that in-person therapy far exceeds the value of reading a blog on the Internet, yet she asks every one of her therapists to invest multiple hours a week to this secondary service. Two issues arise from the imbalance caused by this dual-service approach.

First, the weekly blog writing pulls therapists from their primary service. Therapists serve in hour-long therapy sessions, but quality care demands that therapists prepare for the session and develop a therapy plan for each client. Each therapist is also required to chart notes and log payment information the same day they see a client. Hours spent on quality blog writing competes with hours spent preparing for clients.

Second, because blogs are unpaid work, they add tension to the employer/employee relationship. Most new therapists are happy to have a place to contribute. Still, the question of pay inevitably surfaces as therapists realize that they are adding value to Narnian without reimbursement. Narnian depends on the selfless nature of its therapists to generate quality, free blog content.

4.3.2 Recommendations

Narnian stands out from other Chicago-based counseling services on the Internet because of its Internet presence. However, the apparent tension between the two services and the way it adds stress to the employer's relationship with its employees begs for modification. Therefore, I recommend two changes to the existing practice.

- Offer payment per blog hour spent. It may be more practical to pay per blog, but higher blog quality comes from the time invested, not blogs completed.
- Reduce blog frequency. Fewer blog posts that better apply to clients would be superior to the current rapid frequency if drawing clients is the blog's purpose.

4.4 Feedback

The recommendation to specialize Narnian's services intrigued Ms. Montagne, and she knows of at least two other counseling centers who do this. There is some tension

between allowing her therapists to pursue what they're most passionate about and between standardizing her practice. Still, she likes the way that diversity is working for them now. For example, she has two therapists who are adding continuing education credits in new fields of therapy and even helps to pay for this education because it gives Narnian more tools to help clients. Ms. Montagne hasn't had a significant issue with diversity isolating her therapists and believes it's because they depend on outside therapists to learn new skills. Ms. Montagne agrees that it's not simple to track therapist effectiveness and growth, but this doesn't seem necessary at her early-stage business.

Chapter 5

Customer Strategies

Abstract

Narnian's target customer is young, professional women with a faith background, but it serves a broad demographic base. Narnian offers six customer benefits and can diminish three hindrances. Five of the benefits relate directly to Narnian's core service.

5.1 Introduction

Every business has customers. Successful businesses know the needs of their customers and how their services meet those needs and can make effective business changes by giving their customers more useful and accessible service. Poorly run businesses misunderstand what their customers want and experience swings in profitability from business changes because they cannot gauge how a change affects customer sentiment.

Counseling services target a vast range of clients — families or individuals, old or young, married, single, and divorced. Many counseling centers do not explicitly target any single customer demographics from a desire to help all who want their services. For the same reason, counseling services with a Christian background rarely advertise that their practice is faith-based.

Narnian has a clearly defined target demographic and actively seeks to remove barriers and add benefits for these customers. Like other counseling centers; however, Narnian keeps its advertisements generic. Unlike other counseling services, Narnian explicitly advertises that their service is faith-based.

In the following sections, we'll consider Narnian's customer demographics, review hindrances these customer experience to seeking out counseling services, and what benefits Narnian offers to attract these customers.

5.2 Customer Demographics

Narnian Clinical Counseling follows the pattern of other counseling services by generalizing their marketing message to attract a wide swath of customers. Any person or family who does not feel “good”, whether that’s because of undue anxiety, relational strife, guilt, shame, confusion, or otherwise, Narnian offers to assist.

Though the marketing material is generalized, Ms. Montagne is intent to target 22-45-year-old working professional women with a faith-based background. The majority are between 25-35 years old, though the full range is 20-55. The gender demographics hold at 75% female and 25% male (see table 19.2).

The customer demographics have a slight trend towards couples and have seen an uptick in male clients and African-American clients. Ms. Montagne attributes these trends to the addition of therapists who share the demographics of their clients and advertise a desire to work with these demographics in their blog writing. For this reason, Ms. Montagne focuses her marketing efforts to expose the therapists she has on staff rather than advertise to a specific demographic and hire employees that meet their needs.

5.2.1 Analysis

Chicago is a remarkably diverse city, and marketing designed to attract a broad audience is more likely to succeed here than elsewhere. However, Narnian does not show up in the top five Google results, at least as of September 2019. A wide net catches more customers in Chicago, but all of the counseling centers listed above Narnian are casting the same net. Narnian may not stand out to potential customers as a superior option, but rather as the available option after the customer has contacted another counseling center and discovered that they didn’t have any openings.

The marketing material may cast a wide net, but Ms. Montagne has a specific customer in mind. She fits the demographic herself and could tailor her website to more closely match the needs of her chosen demographic, but she chooses to remain generic. The need for mental health counseling is so prevalent in Chicago, and the number of potential customers is so high that Ms. Montagne could operate her business for many years without ever becoming more focused on a single customer segment. Still, she may find more significant growth and impact if she were to focus now.

Ms. Montagne’s desire to make a positive impact on this particular customer segment began before the start of her business. It could blind her to opportunity in another customer segment she did not anticipate. She seeks women from other ethnic and socioeconomic segments than her current target but sees family counseling or male counseling as a minor addition rather than a potential business opportunity. As a profitable business, the target demographic is not a pressing concern for the

viability of the company, as it might be for an unprofitable startup. Still, there is a danger that the demographic may gradually shift over time without Ms. Montagne's adjustment to match their needs. If so, Narnian could slowly lose clients or find that it's not gaining clients after those who have been seeing therapists for many months move on.

5.2.2 Recommendations

I think Ms. Montagne and Ms. Pevensie do an excellent job balancing their customer segment to include the demographic target while also being open to the unexpected. Ms. Pevensie keeps an informal record of the customer segments that contact Narnian to schedule appointments and is likely to notice a shift in customer segments long before the shift hurts Narnian. My recommendation is that Ms. Montagne and Ms. Pevensie continue to track demographic information about the customers who seek their current services and consider how they can appeal to segments that hold a growing percentage of the total.

5.3 Customer Hindrances

Counselors agree that, of a majority who experience ills with which counselors might assist, a low percentage ever seek a counselor's service. Three common explanations exist:

1. There's a stigma about visiting a counselor in the American culture. The idea is that if you're seeing a counselor, there must be something terribly wrong with you. That a counselor might help improve one's quality of life or be temporary support through a rocky transition has not been publicly acknowledged. Cultures outside the United States tend to be even more hostile, which means that immigrants are unlikely to seek counseling services.
2. The cost is prohibitive. There is a shortlist of insurance providers who recognize mental health as a valid need, which means many with insurance must pay for counseling out-of-pocket. The insurance providers who do provide mental health counseling may only offer co-payment to their premium plans, which limits the beneficiaries to employed professionals.
3. The profession is unregulated. Many unlicensed people offer services that they claim are equal to a certified professional. The mixed experience people have had from these semi-professional counselors has developed a bad taste for counseling.

5.3.1 Analysis

Narnian skirts these hindrances in their business model.

First, the target client demographic is a young, female professional who lives near downtown Chicago. Much of the stigma attached to counseling is not present among young professionals in Chicago, which makes Narnian well suited to this market.

Second, Narnian is paneled with an insurance provider, BCBS, that offers coverage for mental health needs. The average client pays less than \$30 in copay costs.

Third, Narnian advertises only professionally licensed therapists. The licensing process gives clients a degree of confidence that therapists give quality care.

5.4 Customer Benefits

To help their customers with the problem they experience, namely, that they don't feel good, Narnian offers a collaborative relationship with a mental health expert utilizing best practices in psychotherapy. Ms. Montagne sees several key benefits in this approach:

1. The license of her therapists adds authority and heightened confidence that counseling is beneficial, not harmful. An Narnian customer doesn't need to question whether his therapist knows how to counsel them in their circumstances.
2. The diversity in age, gender, and passion of her therapists allow Narnian to better match potential customers to a therapist who is well-equipped to support them.
3. The faith background of all therapists is a crucial benefit. Faith-based counseling centers in Chicago are sparse, but many customers want their therapist to have a faith background. Even if faith isn't a significant factor in the customer's life or their pain, if it's part of their cultural heritage, they believe it's essential.
4. Narnian's counseling approach focuses on empowering changes rather than fixing problems.
5. Narnian's office is conveniently located, which benefits busy professionals.
6. The weekly blogs are a useful marketing tool and help customers get to know therapists. This knowledge lowers the barrier to entry and benefits clients and non-clients with valuable mental health tips.

5.4.1 Analysis

A staff of licensed counselors is a requirement for any counseling center. The poor experiences with unlicensed counselors that Ms. Montagne expects many of her customers to have had before Narnian are possible, but it's probably a uniquely Christian issue. Pastors are the most likely culprit for unlicensed mental health service, and Christian faith traditions seem to be the most likely to propagate the expectation that spiritual leaders can help with severe counseling needs.

The diversity at Narnian has grown since August 2019, or it would be a challenge to accept diversity as a critical customer benefit. In September, the majority of therapists were from similar training backgrounds, at similar ages, primarily women, and white except for one. By November, however, it's challenging to identify a majority at all. Diversity has risen to be one of Narnian's most definitive customer benefits.

Customers do appreciate the openly Christian atmosphere at Narnian. There is a small number of Christian counseling centers in Chicago which leaves many needs in this customer segment unmet. A friend whose wife works at a Christian counseling center remarked that it's almost impossible for him to find a Christian counselor that doesn't know his wife well, not because she's widely known, but because the population is small. Customers are looking for this attribute, and Narnian serves them well by explicitly calling out this benefit on its website.

It's unclear whether a customer would agree that a focus on empowering change is a crucial benefit to the service they receive from Narnian. Many customers arrive at the door in some measure of distress and have at least one problem they'd like to see rapid improvement. Narnian may retain customers by enabling change instead of fixing problems. Still, this benefit describes the type of service they employ more than an attribute of the counseling customers seek.

Narnian does have a convenient location for the professional demographic. Situated in the middle of Chicago's downtown business district, it ought to be the most accessible place for a professional to visit. Ms. Pevensie's informal research into the demographics of prospective clients does indicate that a location closer to a densely packed residential area would net Narnian more clients than at present. Narnian's existing clients travel a half hour or more from their homes to their appointments instead of dropping in from their workplaces. Ms. Montagne is actively looking for new locations either directly north or south of the Chicago Loop because both directions are heavily residential.

The blogs Narnian produces are a different service than its core service. Customers may be attracted to the core service, mental health counseling, by reading the blogs, but it's not evident that any customer seeks out Narnian because they want to subscribe to their weekly blog posts. Even if that were true, it would take a considerable change to make blog writing a directly profitable enterprise. The critical customer benefits Narnian offers do not include blog posts unless these posts are used in addition to existing therapy, perhaps as a resource between sessions. The posts are

not being used for this purpose, however, which makes them irrelevant to the core business from a customer benefit perspective.

5.4.2 Recommendations

Ms. Montagne is already searching for a second location, and I recommend she consider a location closer to residential housing because her clients travel more from their homes and than their workplaces.

Although the blog posts do distinguish Narnian from other counseling centers in the Chicago area, it's not an evident customer benefit. Narnian doesn't even include the blog in the list of services it offers. Yet the blog is still considered a benefit. I recommend that every therapist estimates the number of clients who refer to blog posts in therapy. Also, that therapists list blogs they have recommended clients read after a session. If this is a minimal percentage, it's likely not a key customer benefit at all.

5.5 Feedback

Ms. Montagne and Ms. Pevensie were encouraged to continue keeping tabs on the customer demographics who contact Narnian. The locations she's considering for a second location are naturally closer to residential areas.

Chapter 6

Operations Strategies

Abstract

Narnian's primary operations are client intake, session management, and client payment. Ms. Pevensie exclusively manages all operations. She has developed an intake and tracking system for each client that works well for Narnian. Narnian gains operational efficiencies through the use of cloud software.

6.1 Introduction

Operational efficiency impacts every aspect of a business. An inefficient business operation reduces profitability and harms customer experience. Ideal operations change as a business grows because many processes cannot scale.

In its two-year existence, Narnian has operated as an informal partnership between Ms. Montagne and Ms. Pevensie. Ms. Montagne is the sole documented owner and CEO of the company, while Ms. Pevensie's position is an office manager; however, Ms. Montagne makes business decisions jointly.

Ms. Pevensie exclusively manages staff coordination, marketing publication, and customer intake. Her prior experience as a high-end restaurant manager gives her the skill to manage several moving parts across the business, which would typically take several people to manage. Ms. Pevensie's expertise reduces the operational cost of the startup by a significant margin, though it's unlikely to scale. Ms. Montagne hired a marketing intern and gave the intern social media and blog publishing responsibilities to grant Ms. Pevensie more operational freedom.

In the following sections, we'll review the central client intake and payments operational processes and offer a thorough analysis and two recommendations. Then

we'll explore efficiencies and risks in Narnian's use of cloud software.

6.2 Client Intake And Payments

New Narnian clients contact the office via email or phone. Every day, Ms. Pevensie reviews each introduction and records every entry into a Google Sheets spreadsheet. She logs the date, the client's contact info, and any notes about their request. These notes help Ms. Pevensie select the best therapist to work with their personality and issues. Ms. Pevensie organizes this spreadsheet daily and uses it as her central repository of client data.

Therapists record the date of each session, the duration, and how much the client paid out-of-pocket. Client payments may cover the insurance deductible, the whole amount, or nothing. Ms. Pevensie copies these records into a Google spreadsheet for two purposes: 1) to determine payroll for that therapist this week (Ms. Pevensie completes payroll every Monday by end-of-day), and 2) to manage accounts payable. Ms. Pevensie uses the same software to submit claims to the insurance in batches from the therapist's entries and does some manual quality control to reduce the number of denials from misentered information. Every month she has a few denials, such as misentered claims numbers and lapsed insurance. She and Ms. Montagne tag team to review the denials on a semi-regular basis and contact Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBS) to see what they can do to resolve them. Narnian doesn't know why the claims are denied without a phone call. For example, there is a client with three claims pending over three weeks. BCBS had not processed the claim because there was a missing character in the member ID.

Ms. Pevensie uses the spreadsheet to track accounts payable with a column that represents the amount pending per session and two other columns separating the client's payable amount and the insurance's. This record is also copied to QuickBooks for tax purposes. Two months ago, Narnian hired an accountant to manage their accounting and tax records, and they send the requisite information via QuickBooks. In the past, they managed the tax requirements every month with QuickBooks.

For clients with pending payments, Narnian allows for a \$300 "tab," which is the cash amount for two sessions. A client whose insurance lapses could have no more than two out-of-pocket visits on the books before they must address their overdue balance. Narnian offers different payment plans for clients who are struggling to keep up with their tab.

6.2.1 Analysis

Process changes are driven almost entirely by Ms. Pevensie. While she collaborates with Ms. Montagne regularly, her carte blanche power to make process changes and

her process refinement skills are a crucial strength to Narnian. Ms. Pevensie worked at an exclusive Chicago restaurant before her work at Narnian. Today she brings the structure and rhythm acquired from her past to every part of Narnian's operations. She adds three elements to Narnian that stand out: a systematic means for client intake, a coordinated client session service, and a data-driven approach to process improvement.

First, Ms. Pevensie adds a systematic means for client intake. From the client's first contact with Ms. Pevensie to the intake session with a therapist, Ms. Pevensie has a personalized approach that's smooth and collaborative. As the central figure behind all scheduling and knowledgeable in the unique characteristics of every therapist, she's able to ascertain with reasonable accuracy where any given client could find a time slot for a new appointment and the therapist that best matches their needs. Ms. Pevensie's direction results in positive initial client experiences and a well-organized intake process.

Second, Ms. Pevensie adds a coordinated client session service. Therapists are free to focus on their therapy sessions with minimal reference to the logistical questions of payment and scheduling because of Ms. Pevensie's adept handling of these details. She coordinates each therapist's schedule to avoid double-booking office space and makes daily adjustments to therapist and client availability on short notice. Plus, she diligently records all the details necessary to keep Narnian's accounting books in order and to reach out confidently to clients with overdue payments. This service is crucial to Narnian's success and gives therapists a clutter-free environment in which to perform therapy.

Third, Ms. Pevensie adds a data-driven approach to process improvement. She collaborates with Ms. Montagne for all improvements to Narnian's processes, usually with documented evidence. For example, lengthy monthly tax preparation convinced them to hire an accountant to save their energy for other business needs. Ms. Pevensie continues to gather and organize the information necessary for those tax documents but no longer spends a tedious amount of effort compiling it for government consumption.

The process improvement efforts of Ms. Pevensie and Ms. Montagne have their flaws, however. Ms. Pevensie and Ms. Montagne are passionate about improvements to their business, but many of the tweaks they make to processes do not include the feedback of other therapists. The changes Ms. Pevensie has implemented in the business processes have been useful when the only person impacted are she and Ms. Montagne, such as improvements to their accounting processes. Still, changes to the therapy process don't necessarily include the therapists affected. Ms. Montagne is herself a therapist and has a close perspective on the needs of her therapists, but her experience does not guarantee that every decision brings improvement.

6.2.2 Recommendations

As Narnian grows in therapist and supportive employee count, it must adjust the way it accomplishes its processes and how it manages change. The stellar work of Ms. Pevensie has benefited Narnian in its first months. Still, she must transfer most tasks she does today to support staff if Narnian is to expand the number of therapists it's able to employ. Sometimes referred to as the "bus problem," Narnian has no contingency plan were Ms. Pevensie to be "hit by a bus." Her skills and knowledge of the counseling business are not readily available in the marketplace, and a sudden tragedy could devastate Narnian. I have two recommendations to prepare Narnian to expand its operations and to reduce the "bus problem" danger.

- Hire one full-time staff member for intake appointments and follow-up payment calls. With Ms. Pevensie's mentorship, a new hire could become adept with the intake process at Narnian in three months. Except for Ms. Pevensie's inviting presence at the front desk, the intake and payments process is entirely driven by email and phone conversations. The newly hired member could work remotely and manage all intakes and payments without taking any additional office space. While a part-time position might be attractive, I suspect that Ms. Pevensie's efficiency allows her to achieve more than most new people can handle on a part-time basis.
- Invite individual therapists to contribute to process improvement changes. As Ms. Montagne and Ms. Pevensie step back from direct therapy and operations, the temptation to make process improvement changes grows. At the same time that they'll have more opportunities to make changes, they're likely to believe that their improvements are practical because they've done the work themselves. Their improvements match reality for a short time, but Ms. Montagne and Ms. Pevensie inevitably discover that their understanding of the work becomes outdated as they manage rather than do the work itself. They can smooth this transition by offering authority to selected therapists and to new support staff to enact and challenge change. These employees who are still doing the boots-on-the-ground work are invaluable partners to help them make wise changes both in the near term and as their direct experience lessens with time.

6.3 Cloud Software

Like many other businesses, Ms. Montagne has chosen to pay another company to manage her data storage and security needs. She trusts that the mechanisms behind the "cloud" protect her client's data and are not accessible by the company she pays to store that data. There are real efficiencies to giving this responsibility to another company. First, her therapists can document their sessions from anywhere with an Internet connection. Second, Ms. Montagne does not need to hire a technical

employee to manage servers or data backups. Third, security updates to her software are expeditiously applied.

The flexible nature of a therapist's schedule begs for a flexible method to session documentation, and SimplePractice serves that need. If a therapist has a late-night client or needs to catch a train immediately after seeing a client, it's disruptive to be stuck in the office to complete the session charting. With accessibility anywhere with an Internet connection, a therapist can focus their office time on therapy sessions and meeting with staff and complete their remaining work on the same day from home or a nearby coffee shop.

It's costly to operate software. There's installation, upgrades, server migrations, and more. Narnian has legal requirements to maintain records for six years minimum, and it would be a costly approach to hire a software consultant every time there was an issue with their data backup. SimplePractice hides the effort required to manage these operations and takes responsibility for the longevity of the data, which leaves Narnian able to focus on data entry.

A security breach that leaks client data would be devastating for Narnian, yet the application of security patches and network security practices is unlikely if Narnian were required to manage it themselves. Even large companies struggle to keep up with security updates and migrations when software life-cycles expire; Narnian would not even know if their software was insecure. SimplePractice can focus their business on the security details instead and has the technical knowledge to achieve the security benchmarks without lengthy research and cost.

6.3.1 Analysis

The service Narnian offers requires no software, but it does offer many efficiencies to the business when it uses software to keep track of session and payment information. Ms. Pevensie can get information directly from therapists regularly through SimplePractice and via email, which would be difficult to achieve otherwise. The therapists that Narnian has hired today have sufficient skills to complete all their tasks in SimplePractice, even though therapists use a fraction of the available features.

6.3.2 Recommendations

Though I cringe at the risks inherent in dependence on proprietary cloud software, the efficient operation of Narnian is unlikely to continue if the business has to make adjustments to its core software at this stage. I recommend that Narnian continue to utilize its existing software and explore how they can get more from what the software it possesses.

Chapter 7

Accounting Strategies

Abstract

An accountant hire has enabled Narnian's growth and eased the stress of tax reporting, but there are three ways Ms. Montagne could better utilize her accountant. Accounts payable are a regular debit that takes a significant amount of Ms. Montagne and Ms. Pevensie's time, and it may be more valuable to hire a part-time employee to handle follow-up calls with insurance providers and clients. Narnian switched from bi-weekly paychecks to weekly to submit paychecks on Monday instead of Friday, which has been beneficial.

7.1 Introduction

Accounting is crucial for every business. Accounting books show a clear and accurate history of a business' operation, equip business leaders to make wise decisions, and allow for reasonable forecasts. When a business has poor financial records, business leaders cannot see where they've made mistakes or where the business is heading.

Ms. Montagne has slowly developed her accounting practices alongside the business in the two years Narnian has been incorporated. From tax reporting for only her revenue to the management of office space and a dozen staff, her methods have had to scale with the increased accounting complexity. Critical to her success has been the organized reporting of her office manager, Ms. Pevensie, who maintains a weekly account of financial transactions, accounts payable, and upcoming bills.

In late 2019, Ms. Montagne hired an accountant to organize and submit tax records and to supply her with balance and income statements. Ms. Pevensie continues to record all the information necessary for these records, but now she submits

the lot to their accountant. Since the beginning, Narnian submits its tax receipts monthly, and this cadence continues with its new accountant.

In the following sections, we'll consider benefits Narnian access by hiring an outside accountant. Then we'll review how Narnian deals with its backlog of accounts payable. Afterward, we'll explore the decision to adjust the frequency of employee paychecks from bi-weekly to weekly. Finally, we'll listen to Ms. Montagne and Ms. Pevensie's feedback.

7.2 Accountant Hire

Ms. Montagne and Ms. Pevensie account for therapy sessions, utility bills, and every week. In the first two years, they were able to manage the accounting needs of a small staff, but as their staff has grown and the complexity of Narnian's money and time management has expanded, all their efforts are absorbed in the maintenance of the status quo. To free up time for other business activities and to create a more transparent reporting function, Ms. Montagne decided to hire an accountant. Ms. Pevensie manages the daily and weekly recording tasks and has a tight grasp of the business operations. However, she no longer needs to prepare tax documentation and can now receive monthly accounting summaries. Ms. Montagne also gains the peace of mind that an accounting professional is reviewing their records.

Both Ms. Montagne and Ms. Pevensie have proven from their two years managing all of Narnian's financials that they are capable, but she still feels a measure of stress that they'll make costly mistakes. A mistake in tax reporting that causes an audit, or an overlooked hole in their accounting that causes them to lose significant revenue. The addition of an accountant has given Ms. Montagne comfort that a professional is double-checking their work and may catch mistakes earlier.

7.2.1 Recommendations

The submission of Narnian's tax information and organization of key documents for Ms. Montagne's business analysis is a significant benefit of a hired accountant, but Ms. Montagne could gain even more. This accountant has other counseling clients, and Ms. Montagne could gain valuable insight from the accountant's advice about her accounting practices alongside the other accounts he manages. Ms. Montagne's new accountant may also be familiar with tax credits that are unique to the mental health profession. Therefore I recommend that Ms. Montagne considers the following three actions:

- Interview her accountant after four months of collaboration to learn what improvements she could make that other counseling centers practice.

- Validate this accountant has the broadest available knowledge of her profession at his accounting staffing agency and, if there is a closer fit, that she investigates how to transfer to the most appropriate accountant.
- Request that her accountant prepares a contact list of delinquent clients from Narnian's weekly accounts payable.

7.3 Accounts Payable

One of the most significant potential sources of revenue loss is Narnian's delayed accounts payable. Every month there is an average of half a dozen delinquent payments, but Narnian has not had the bandwidth to pursue many of these accounts until six months to a year later. Frequently these delinquent payments are the result of a recording mistake that stops an insurance payment or a client misunderstanding rather than genuine payment avoidance. Either way, Narnian must intervene. There can be an average of forty delayed payments waiting for review, a monotonous task shared by Ms. Pevensie and Ms. Montagne.

Each account payable investigation requires Narnian to call the insurance provider. Often there's a hold of fifteen minutes or more per call, but the call itself takes five minutes or less. The typical resolutions are:

- To update the client's claim because of an invalid recording entry.
- To contact the client to notify them that their insurance doesn't cover therapy.
- To contact the client to notify them that they have exceeded the maximum number of visits insured by their provider.
- To contact the client to identify if they're insurance provider has changed.

7.3.1 Analysis

It's common for businesses to manage a backlog of accounts payable, and Narnian is no different. The effort to keep Narnian's backlog of accounts payable short requires regular intervention by Ms. Pevensie and Ms. Montagne. While they could require therapists to manage their accounts payable, this would require additional access to the insurance claims process and a change in their payment structure to reimburse them for hours spent collecting payments.

Many follow-ups require a call to the insurance provider then the client and can last days and multiple follow-ups. These are an inefficient use of Ms. Pevensie and Ms. Montagne's time. I recommend they hire a part-time remote worker to manage their accounts payable.

7.3.2 Recommendations

It isn't a wise use of Ms. Montagne and Ms. Pevensie's valuable time to chase down insurance claims, and there isn't another position at Narnian that's a better fit. Therefore I recommend Ms. Montagne hire a part-time remote assistant to manage Narnian's accounts payable. There isn't enough work for a full-time position today, but the hourly wage of a part-time assistant is much lower than the time lost by Ms. Montagne. There is no space at Narnian's office for an in-office assistant nor any reason to have them present at the office, so a remote worker is the best option.

7.4 Weekly Paycheck

In the last quarter of 2019, Ms. Montagne decided to adjust the payment schedule for her employees. Previously, Ms. Pevensie submitted paychecks to therapists on a bi-weekly basis. Ms. Pevensie calculated the amount per therapist from the record of their client session hours every other Friday and submitted the paychecks the same day. Same-day pay calculation became a burden to Ms. Pevensie and was not the best option for Narnian's therapists.

This practice became increasingly challenging to maintain for Ms. Pevensie as the number of therapists increased, often over-filling Friday with work. Even though she ensured that all paychecks were submitted electronically on Friday, most banks would not have the paycheck processed before the next Monday. She would wait for therapists to submit their final hours, which often meant that she did not know how many hours to submit until all therapists had completed their records, often late in the afternoon.

Therapists prefer to have more frequent paychecks because of the variable nature of their client hours. One week may be over-scheduled with client intake meetings, while the next week may have half the hours with cancellations and a lack of new clients. The more frequent paychecks allow therapists to make weekly adjustments to their spending without the week's forecasting they had to do when their paychecks were bi-weekly. Because Narnian pays a flat rate per client hour, even when it subsidizes the client's expense, a therapist can accurately calculate their weekly income.

When Ms. Pevensie adjusted to a weekly paycheck, she also moved the final submission date to Monday. The paycheck calculation is faster because she has fewer days to manage, and she now requires all therapists to submit their hours by Friday. A Friday deadline prevents delays from waiting for therapists to submit their session hours since she has all the hours Monday morning.

7.4.1 Analysis

The benefits of a weekly paycheck for Ms. Pevensie and Narnian therapists are notable. The weekly paycheck calculations are simple for Ms. Pevensie to calculate and are not done at the last minute on Friday, while therapists receive their paychecks shortly after they've seen clients. Therapists readily answer Ms. Pevensie's questions about their sessions when the question comes only days after.

To accommodate this approach, Narnian requires a reasonable buffer of available cash to pay therapists. Every claim an insurance provider defers beyond the weekly pay period is absorbed by Narnian's cash reserves. A bi-weekly paycheck allows insurance providers an extended period for claims reimbursement before Ms. Pevensie sends paychecks, reduces the required cash buffer.

7.4.2 Recommendations

The decision to require therapists to submit their session information by Friday evening and then to send paychecks on Monday is superior to a Friday afternoon scramble, and I recommend Ms. Pevensie continue this process. The decision to move from bi-weekly to weekly paychecks does not have strong detractors and can remain, but it may need further adjustment in the future.

7.5 Feedback

About ways to get more from her accountant, Ms. Montagne thought it would be worthwhile to ask more from her accountant after Ms. Pevensie had developed repertoire.

The accounts payable follow-ups are a drain on both Ms. Pevensie and Ms. Montagne, and they have a potential candidate for a part-time position that includes this work as part of the job description. The candidate is also a friend, and Ms. Montagne has been waiting for her friend to become available to do this work. She felt that she might not be able to wait for her friend's availability and should consider announcing a job opening to gather additional candidates.

With the weekly paycheck, Ms. Montagne was aware that there's a delay between payment sent to therapists vs. payments received from insurance providers and feels that the benefit of a simple paycheck calculation outweighs the tension as Narnian waits for accounts receivable.

Chapter 8

Legal Strategies

Abstract

Client privacy regulations drive Narnian's business operations. Narnian delegates its client data security to cloud software providers, and this approach has two pros and two cons. Narnian employees have been the target of two scams, though neither has had a direct negative cost to the business. The building in which Narnian keeps its office has specific physical security measures, but there are opportunities to improve the physical security of the Narnian office.

8.1 Introduction

Businesses are subject to lengthy regulations that govern how they operate. Individual business domains differ on regulatory breadth and specificity. For example, food services require inspections and sanitary measures to protect customers. The counseling domain has a strict regulatory environment that focuses on protections for client privacy.

Client-therapist confidentiality is the foundation of Narnian's regulatory compliance, and many of its operations exist only to adhere to regulatory requirements and risk management. Their regulatory approach consists of two primary foci - client data privacy and client data retention. Narnian has adopted new technologies that streamline compliance, but their lack of technical acumen leaves them exposed to attack from that arena.

In the following sections, we'll review Narnian's client data privacy posture and how delegated security offers two pros and two cons. Then we'll hear a story about a scam one of the therapists endured and explore how these attacks affect Narnian.

We'll review the physical security measures present at the Narnian office. Finally, we'll listen to Ms. Montagne's feedback.

8.2 Client Data Privacy

Therapists are required to retain all informal notes about a client within a portfolio for at least ten years. Only the therapist and her direct colleagues may view these notes. Therapists submit diagnoses that they may also share with insurance providers, but no others.

Narnian's therapists document all notes and diagnoses within a single shared cloud platform. The platform manages data privacy and data retention on their behalf for a monthly fee. Narnian gives each therapist a platform account he may access from a home computer.

8.2.1 Analysis

When I've probed Ms. Montagne on her privacy posture, her view is that the cloud platform safely manages her client's data, and she sees no reason to implement further security measures. Her response is uneasy; however, because she knows that data breaches are a regular event in businesses of many flavors, but she does not have the expertise to recognize security vulnerabilities. The result of a client data breach for her business could be fatal; however, since it will not only harm the Narnian's relationship with its clients but could also result in hefty government fines.

Ms. Montagne's decision to delegate her data security needs to other companies has two positive and two negative legal ramifications. Positively, technological safety precautions are not limited to Ms. Montagne's expertise or that of a technical employee. Professionals who run the software expeditiously update it to protect against new security threats. Negatively, the client's data is no longer strictly under the purview of Narnian, and the shift of security ownership to another company gives Ms. Montagne a false sense of security about the security posture of her business processes.

Delegated Security - Pro

Technology has become engrained into Narnian's processes, as it has with most businesses, and each business balances the accessibility and efficiency of its software with the need to secure it from harm. Even a junior developer is better paid than a seasoned therapist, and Ms. Montagne can't afford to pay for the technical expertise necessary to manage a private server while also expanding her therapist pool. Cloud

software such as Google Drive gives her all the benefits of technology without requiring Ms. Montagne to invest in a tech team. The peace of mind she receives that one of the world's largest tech companies protects her client's data allows her to focus on running her business instead of running her software.

Secure software doesn't stay secure. Changes in both hardware and software frequently introduce new security vulnerabilities. Regular maintenance is a hassle for most companies, and even more so for Narnian, who depends on their systems to work every day without exception. The decision to delegate their software to another vendor places maintenance schedules and operations in their capable hands. It protects Ms. Montagne from mistakes in patching her software or delays in updating it.

Delegated Security - Con

The gains Narnian receives from offloading the technical security of their business to other companies has its downsides. If Ms. Montagne retained all client data on her own hosted servers, she could be sure that no third party would have access to confidential client information. Every security measure, high-quality or poor-quality, would be within Ms. Montagne's control. By leveraging the hardware and software of other companies, she loses a measure of control over the data that Narnian's clients trust her to protect and the location that customer data is stored. A data breach would damage Narnian's reputation, even if courts placed culpability for the breach upon its vendor.

Ms. Montagne has confidence that the businesses which host her client's data are keeping it safe, but this confidence has given her a false sense of security. No matter how effective the security measures of her vendors, she and her therapists are the weakest security links in her process. A poorly chosen password could give any attacker carte blanche access to the client's data, or a laptop mistakenly left open at a crowded coffee shop.

8.2.2 Recommendations

The benefits of a cloud service outweigh the risks, and I recommend that Narnian continues to use the products they use today.

8.3 Scams

Twice, Narnian's therapists were attacked by a malicious scam using their Grasshopper digital phone line. The first therapist did not divulge any privileged client information but was convinced to pay a sizeable amount of money. The second case,

knowing about the first, did not succumb to the scam but still found it convincing. The story that follows tells what happened.

In late 2019, a person impersonating a Chicago police officer left a voice mail for a therapist indicating that one of their clients was involved in a court case and that the therapist should call back immediately. The therapist didn't hear the message until the following day and called back that morning. The officer told the therapist the court had delivered a summons to appear in court, and that the court had a confirmation receipt that Narnian received the summons. The therapist had failed to appear in court, so the court placed a warrant out for the therapist's arrest. The therapist was quite upset about this news and asked what they needed to do. The officer explained that the therapist should come to the downtown police station and should bring bail with them so that they would not need to stay overnight in jail. The officer stated that no payment could be received except reloadable Visa cards, and instructed the therapist to go to a local grocery store and purchase several. The entire time, the officer required the therapist to remain on the phone or risk adding further charges. Finally, on the way to the downtown police station, the officer demanded that the therapist gives him the Visa card information over the phone. Once the therapist shared the information, the officer became abusive and threatened the therapist before the therapist finally hung up the phone, terrified.

When the therapist replayed the events, she recognized the clues that this was not a real police officer. Still, the stress of the moment revealed many misconceptions about how the court should give a real summons. The therapist was trained to keep client information confidential and was expecting that, if this were false, the fake officer would be after client information. Because the fake officer was careful not to ask for or divulge any client information, the therapist's warning signals were silent until she was too upset to make rational decisions.

There have been a few email phishing scams, but none have yet cost the company money or compromised client information.

8.3.1 Analysis

The sophistication of the fake police officer who scammed the therapist was exceptional. The scammer knew enough about counseling regulations and about Narnian to present a convincing case that would have duped any of Narnian's therapists. Even when a similar incident happened a few days later, and the therapist had been made aware of the first incident, the second therapist nearly sent money to the scammer. The rapid nature of the second incident and the preparations made by the scammer indicate that this was an attack by one or more scammers who were explicitly targeting counseling centers.

Ms. Montagne underestimates the damage that these attacks cause to her therapists and overestimates their knowledge of legal procedures relevant to their work. If

she does not take targeted scams more seriously, the next attack may not affect only the therapist's bank account - it could result in considerable loss to Narnian itself.

8.3.2 Recommendations

Ms. Montagne offers no training to protect therapists against phone or phishing scams. I recommended that Narnian provides quarterly scam training for therapists. Narnian needs to foster an environment where every therapist is aware of the possible threats and is sharing their experiences to protect the company and its clients from harm.

8.4 Physical Protections

Client confidentiality is critical to Narnian's protection as a successful counseling therapy company. However, physical security is still surprisingly relevant, even when all of Narnian's client charts are online. Except for threats to harm self or others, a therapist cannot act on any information that a client tells them. This freedom of private conversation can be threatening to others who have a relationship with the client, such as a spouse, a parent, or a boss, and intense emotions can lead people to act in unsafe ways.

Ms. Montagne stores physical records in a locked cabinet behind a locked office door. Although it is not required by law for Narnian to keep physical records, Ms. Montagne finds that printing out a client's billing records is a better way to review and resolve discrepancies than digital documents. These records, along with office insurance information, credit card information, and other sensitive data, is stored in the locked filing cabinet.

The office building has a 24-7 security guard. Access through the office lobby closes at 6:30 p.m. for any visitor. The front desk requires an individual to sign in and state the office they'll visit to grant entrance after 6:30 p.m. The security desk allows people to pass without supplying a name if they say that their meeting is confidential, but they must still say where they're going.

Therapists don't stay in the office after 8:00 p.m., and if they're the last person, then they lock up behind themselves.

8.4.1 Recommendations

While the main office door has a lock, the individual therapy offices do not. I recommend Ms. Montagne purchase new doorknobs with locks to give therapists and their

clients a greater sense of safety. These locks should have a mechanism to allow Ms. Montagne or Ms. Pevensie to open them in an emergency.

8.5 Feedback

About scams, Narnian was ambivalent. Ms. Montagne felt sorry for the therapists who had been scammed through the digital phone line but was not open to taking further preventative action. Ms. Montagne did not consider phishing scams a threat.

Regarding physical security, Ms. Montagne would like to have locks on the therapist's doors to help the therapist and their client feel safe, but they're expensive. Ms. Montagne estimates it will cost \$1500 to replace all interior office locks. She thinks it's worth exploring the cost again to see if she can find a cheaper option. She will also post the security desk phone number in the office so that therapists in the office after 6:30 p.m. can get a notify them in an emergency.

Chapter 9

Employee Strategies

Abstract

Therapists operate as independent counseling providers, and their isolation risks burnout. Ms. Montagne wants the Narnian culture to encourage collaboration and protect against isolation and has established ways to engage therapists individually and together. She has also selected ways to evaluate the performance of her therapists without viewing their sessions directly. There is one way she could grow collaboration and three additional ways she could evaluate the performance of her employees.

9.1 Introduction

Employee engagement and performance determines the success of a business just as much as a valuable service. Traditional businesses create a hierarchical organizational structure where employees at higher rungs are responsible for their direct reports. Counseling services, however, operate more like consultancies, where each therapist operates independently. Independence raises challenges with isolation, performance measurement, and engagement.

In the following sections, we'll consider how Narnian fosters a collaborative environment to reduce the risk of isolation, consider how Ms. Montagne assesses employee performance, where performance measurement lacks needed sophistication, and what Narnian does to raise employee engagement. Finally, we'll hear Ms. Montagne's response to my recommendations to add more performance metrics.

9.2 Employee Collaboration

Before Ms. Montagne incorporated Narnian, she worked as a private therapist in a small counseling organization. Her experience there shaped a desire to create a counseling organization that fosters interaction between therapists and protects from isolation and burnout. She gives employees at her company space to share experiences and training in bi-weekly hour-long group case consultations. Group case consultations used to be weekly and mandatory, but as the team has grown, Ms. Montagne has shifted to meet her employee's needs.

Ms. Montagne encourages knowledge sharing by offering to pay for materials that can remain at the office for everyone's use and sometimes covering a portion of the cost for her employees to attend training. Ms. Montagne actively pursues innovation in learning, currently by offering on-site training to cultivate a culture of peer instruction.

9.2.1 Analysis

The independent nature of counseling therapy, untraditional business hours, and empathetic desire puts therapists at risk of isolation, burnout, and career stagnation.

Each therapist selects when their client availability, what therapy approach to take, and when to reschedule. The pressure to make all of these decisions with little collaboration burdens some therapists, especially those new to the field.

Because customers must fit therapy around their working hours, most therapists choose hours outside the customary eight-to-five. The untraditional nature of a therapist's work hours impacts when they can accomplish weekly personal activities such as doctor visits and grocery runs. Each therapist makes openings for clients on different days, which places therapists alone or with only one other therapist in the office.

Many enter the counseling field from an empathetic desire to help others experience healing in their personal lives and relationships. When there is little perceived growth, therapists are at risk of disappointment. If left untreated, disappointment can lead to disillusionment and burnout.

Ms. Montagne's addresses the risk of isolation and burnout by creating collaborative environments for her therapists to engage with one another. She structures these environments as learning opportunities and encourages her therapists to share their professional experience.

To address career stagnation, Ms. Montagne offers training incentives. Most therapists do not take advantage of these incentives and are rarely aware when other therapists do.

9.3 Employee Performance Measurements

Referrals are a priority for Ms. Montagne and constitute a measurement of therapeutic success, not unlike the practice of the employee satisfaction score based on the question, “how likely would you refer another to this company?” When existing clients refer new clients, this validates the value that the original client received at Narnian and causes new clients to stick. A new person whose experience had some bumps but has his friend’s glowing referral in mind looks for their friend’s perspective, while a fresh client sees only reasons never to return.

Another measure of employee performance is the number of one-time customer visits. A therapist who does not retain customers may not be serving their customers in the way that Narnian requires. Client retention is the primary measurement Ms. Montagne uses to assess her employee’s performance and the measurement she uses to confront poor performers and make firing decisions. The following story from early 2019 illustrates.

Ms. Montagne had hired Mr. Smith in the middle of 2018 as her only current male therapist. Mr. Smith was a recent Wheaton graduate, a single man with few commitments who quickly build a full-time client caseload - about 25 clients per week.

Ms. Montagne questioned Mr. Smith’s fit from the day she interviewed him. Still, her desire to diversity her therapist team with a male therapist overrode her inhibitions. These may not have been strong inhibitions; as they say, hindsight is 20/20.

Ms. Montagne’s concerns were piqued when a pattern of one-time intake visits formed around Mr. Smith. The majority of new clients sent to Mr. Smith were unwilling to return for a second or third visit. While there is a segment of clients who opt for another counseling center after the first visit, Ms. Montagne noticed that the turnover rate for Mr. Smith exceeded the rate for her other therapists. She engaged Mr. Smith about this pattern and directly asked for his input to verify that another reason for high turnover didn’t exist. Mr. Smith admitted that there were parts of this work that he did not enjoy and that he was wondering if he needed to make a transition. His admission allowed Ms. Montagne to encourage Mr. Smith to leave Narnian without further confrontation about his approach and how new clients perceive him.

Ms. Montagne’s story illustrates a conscious effort to deliver quality therapy throughout her organization and a willingness to part ways with poor performers even when aspects of the loss impact her business, such as a temporary loss in gender diversity. She is cognizant of collecting data to measure performance to validate her decisions and avoid discriminatory bias. The independent nature of her therapist’s work makes confrontation of individual behaviors impossible because her therapists, like Mr. Smith, perform their work entirely behind closed doors. Though Ms. Montagne has a decent start, there are some ways she can strengthen her performance

measurements.

9.3.1 Analysis

While the return rate of new clients is an excellent measurement for Ms. Montagne to assess her employee's performance, the use of a single measurement is not a wise long-term approach. Too many other variables may be involved in the client's decision to leave. For example, Narnian's primary client is young professional women, and many of them may have come to Narnian under the expectation that Narnian would place them with a female therapist. However, new clients are distributed among all therapists unless a new client explicitly asks for a single therapist. Unmet expectations may explain a subset of clients who do not return after the first visit.

Another reason this measurement is insufficient for Narnian is the effect that measurement has on employee behavior. If therapists become aware that Narnian predicates their performance on returning clients, therapists may focus effort to keep clients. Fear of a negative performance review robs therapists of the freedom to assist clients with deciding whether Narnian is their preferred place to receive therapy, or whether the therapist performing the intake meeting is the therapist they'd like to see long-term. "You get what you measure" was coined by someone, and this business principle affects Narnian's future business operations.

9.3.2 Recommendations

To determine a complete battery of performance requirements for her therapists, Ms. Montagne needs to focus her energy on defining their roles and responsibilities. What does she want a junior therapist to achieve in their first six months at Narnian? What about a senior therapist? By focusing her thoughts on therapeutic activities and the goals she wants her therapists to achieve, Ms. Montagne can guide her metrics to align with the behaviors and propel her business towards her goals.

Ms. Montagne's stated approach for her staff is that they are licensed, professional therapists. She breaks this down to mean that they are highly trained and able to offer support and also to challenge clients in counseling sessions. Therapists have integrated their Christian faith into their approach and can safely include spiritual components. This approach offers a wealth of new measurements Ms. Montagne could implement, which would more closely align with the work she wants her therapists to achieve. Here are three that I'd recommend.

- Measure learning achievements. Ms. Montagne already encourages her therapists to pursue continuing education and offers a small library of books for study. Therapists are already required to attain continuing education credits to retain their licenses and are likely to consider this metric helpful. This measure-

ment could look like a simple log of hours spent in continuing education this year and could be public to the entire team. This log is necessary for individuals to submit for recertification.

- Measure the sentiment of clients before and after therapy sessions. One approach that may be a useful sentiment gauge is a brief survey, preferably completed when the client is still in the office, which asks the minimum number of questions to gauge whether the therapist both supported and challenged the client. I recommend two surveys instead of a single post-therapy session so that the first survey may serve as a baseline for the second. Since many clients face negative emotions before the therapy session begins, success is better measured by incremental improvement rather than smiling clients. I learned from one therapist that a Trinity professor had developed an iPad application to collect this information in three short questions before and after his therapy sessions, so there is a precedent.
- Measure the therapist's growth in Christian integration. This metric emphasizes the first measurement, to measure learning achievements, by requiring that a therapist set one spiritual integration learning goal. This measurement has the least precedence of the three but presents an opportunity for Narnian to distinguish itself from other Christian Counseling organizations in the area and what Ms. Montagne believes is a fundamental value of the organization.

9.4 Employee Engagement

A key reason Ms. Montagne chose to leave private practice to launch Narnian was her isolated experience as an individual therapist. She views the communal experience of her therapists as a critical value for her organization and builds team time into the business' weekly rhythm. Ms. Montagne believes that her employees are more engaged with clients when they have positive relationships with other therapists.

To foster a communal atmosphere, Ms. Montagne started a weekly team meeting. The style is flexible, but most meetings are used for a single counselor, rotating through the entire team, to give short case summaries and to ask for feedback from the others. These meetings primarily allow therapists who face demanding clients to receive comfort and encouragement from others, but they also permit therapists to share advice or guidance.

One employee I interviewed had the following experience with their first team meeting.

“As a new employee in a counseling center, I didn't know any other therapist except Ms. Montagne. When I went to my first team meeting, I was a little nervous about how others would share feedback and whether I needed to contribute. Instead of the typical case summary, Ms. Montagne asked each therapist to ask a fun question

to another therapist to help me get to know each of them. We spent the rest of our time getting to know one another and laughing at funny stories, and my initial tension eased. I especially enjoyed how the questions were about topics that everyone in the office knew about but that I would never have thought to ask. It gave me a great feel for the people I would be working alongside.”

While the benefit this new employee received from staff meetings is clear, Ms. Montagne has since decided to slow the frequency of these meetings to once a month and use the time saved to offer sporadic, optional training.

9.4.1 Analysis

The typical therapist at Narnian has little control over their weekly schedule, with blocks of time that may suddenly open with a last-minute cancellation or an open slot that’s filled by an intake session. With the full-time therapist averaging 25 clients per week, most schedules keep therapists inside their offices seeing one person after the next until the end of the day. “Water cooler chats,” frequent in other businesses, do not naturally occur in the Narnian atmosphere, and to foster therapist relationships takes intentional, unpaid effort. The work itself is also emotionally distressing, which requires therapists to take deliberate measures to recharge to reduce the danger of burnout. Without established, meaningful relationships with other therapists, few therapists at Narnian are likely to seek the companionship of their colleagues to recharge.

While Ms. Montagne is keenly aware of these dynamics, her approach has not demonstrated an appreciable difference in the experience of her therapists. There is a cordial relationship between therapists, but no more than amiable strangers with a common interest might exhibit. Deeper relationships that involve vulnerability and mutual commitment do not appear to be present among her staff. The shared passion and workplace is an excellent foundation for friendship, or I might consider that friendship is too elusive a target for Narnian to target. I think it’s more likely that the fact that employee’s pay is solely dependent on their client hours and that their hours are so unpredictable are the primary reasons friendships don’t develop beyond the office.

Every minute a therapist spends in conversation with another therapist or a weekly meeting is unpaid time. After six hours with strangers, even a therapist convinced of their need for friendships at work won’t have the motivation to stick around. Therapists with numerous home responsibilities must count their hours wisely, which makes them less likely to participate.

For those who have the time and willingness to offer considerable time to develop relationships with colleagues, the unpredictable nature of their schedules presents a significant obstacle. Ms. Pevensie manages the schedules of each therapist, but there is no visibility into one another’s calendars. There is the concept of blocks

of unscheduled time, but most full-time counselors do not currently make room for overlapping time with other therapists, nor would they know when that overlapping time might take place.

Though employee engagement, mainly measured in collegiate relationships, is a felt need in the counseling community, Ms. Montagne has not yet struck on a sustainable approach to foster these relationships. The limited engagement that employees have with one another hinders a commitment to the team and organization and is a crucial reason that there has been high turnover in the first two years of Narnian's existence. Simply put, most employees at Narnian do not feel a personal commitment to one another but only a commitment to the ideals of their work - ideals which they may pursue at any other counseling center equally as well as Narnian.

9.4.2 Recommendations

While employee engagement, particularly measured in collegiate relationships, is a felt need in the counseling community, Ms. Montagne has not yet struck on a sustainable approach to foster these relationships. One recommendation may help foster relationships:

- Ms. Montagne may offer a limited amount of paid time for relationship building activities. These activities may be formal, like the staff meeting, or informal time that individual therapists coordinate with one another. Relational activities ought to forge relationships and collaboration, though the confidential nature of their work makes public space such as a local bar or restaurant less conducive. These activities could be reported to Ms. Pevensie for inclusion in the weekly paycheck.

9.5 Feedback

This recommendation was a good follow-up to the first since Ms. Montagne explicitly stated that if I had any better way to track the performance of her therapists, she'd love to hear it. Ms. Montagne had mentioned training activities that her therapists were doing in the last recommendation, and she thinks tracking the number of continuing education hours might be the right measurement. She also resonated with the idea that "you get what you measure." After all, there is precedent for tracking client sentiment before and after a session. Ms. Montagne also sees Christian integration as a crucial differentiator, but I think we're all uncertain exactly how integration becomes a metric. She and her supervisor therapist make it a point to tell all therapists regularly that business continuity does not precede getting a client the service they need. If a client should go somewhere else or ought to end therapy, Ms. Montagne doesn't want therapists to try and keep them for monetary reasons.

Chapter 10

Corporate Communication Strategies

Abstract

Narnian communicates to its clients via its website and social media platform, while internal communication is primarily via monthly staff meetings. The biographical videos have been most successful at attracting clients, but blog posts may be overly frequent. Staff meetings are an effective means to build unity.

10.1 Introduction

How a business communicates with its customers and its employees affects the effectiveness of its operation. Clear, audience-minded business communication draws customers and binds employees in harmony. However, unclear or irrelevant communication obscures a business's value and slows down its processes.

Corporate communication usually refers to internal communication only, while customer-facing communication is called marketing. This chapter addresses both.

Narnian markets itself to customers primarily through its website. The website consists of static information about the company, biographical information about each therapist, and a regularly updated blog. To communicate internally, Narnian uses a monthly staff meeting for business updates, group email for updates that fall outside the staff meetings, and sometimes group texts for last-minute updates.

In the following sections, we'll look at the video biographies Narnian publishes to communicate to clients about its therapists, then we'll explore their prolific blog mar-

keting strategy. Finally, we'll explore the primary internal communication medium; the weekly staff meeting.

10.2 Biographical Video Introductions

The blog posts themselves are unique to the therapist, being their writing, and give potential clients an avenue to learn about Narnian therapists. Still, the five-minute introductory videos are much more powerful. Ms. Montagne hired a professional videographer for a full day of recording; each therapist gave a brief answer to a standard set of questions. She was present for each video and coached each therapist to help them feel comfortable and present well. After editing, each video was added to the therapist's biography page and are regularly posted on Facebook to introduce new therapists.

10.2.1 Analysis

Video introductions are Narnian's defining external communication characteristics. Other counseling centers publish blogs or have short biographies of their therapists, but short, professional videos make such a better impression. Even if a viewer doesn't run the video, the tasteful images of each therapist in the opening pane is the most appealing biography I've seen on a counseling website in the Chicago Loop.

New customers have also requested a therapist based on information they must have obtained from the therapist's biography. For example, on at least two separate occasions, a new customer requested a therapist with a nursing background because the customer felt that a therapist with a background in medicine would be more direct and outcome-focused like a nurse who was seeing a sick patient. A review of that therapist's blog posts didn't reveal the therapist's background - only on the biography page could the customer have learned this fact about the therapist's history.

10.2.2 Recommendations

The video introductions are useful media for Narnian. I recommend that Ms. Montagne invests in professional videos as she on-boards new therapists to ensure that each therapist has a video. Now that some do, it is even more apparent when a therapist has no video introduction. Narnian has set the expectation that every therapist has an introduction, and this should be maintained.

Narnian may also consider videos to introduce other parts of the business. For example, if Ms. Pevensie often explains billing details with clients who are nervous about their costs, a five-minute online explanation might give potential clients a satisfying explanation even before they've met Ms. Pevensie. The office space itself

constitutes a business character and is a vital way Narnian helps its clients feel comfortable. An office tour video may highlight the best characteristics of the office and perform the same benefit as the therapist’s video introductions.

10.3 Blog Posts

Narnian’s public communication is more prolific than similar companies in Chicago, with ten times the number of employees. When each therapist writes a new blog every week, there is enough for Ms. Pevensie to post one a day. Every post is shared on Facebook and Twitter for a constant barrage of Narnian tailored content to the public.

The purpose of Narnian’s external communication barrage is primarily Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Although blog readers may gain valuable insight, Ms. Montagne does not believe digital therapy replaces the therapeutic relationship. With the number of blog posts, Narnian stays within the first page and top ten links when searching for counseling in the Chicago Loop using Google’s search engine.

A second reason to have regular blog posts on their public website is to introduce clients to the therapist personalities working at Narnian. Ms. Montagne wants clients to see therapists as relatable and warm people. When clients read a therapist’s blog, they form an opinion of the therapist’s personality.

10.3.1 Analysis

Blog posts are one of the currently effective ways to ensure a website stays at the top of a Google search because the regular updates to the website communicate to the search engine’s web crawlers that it’s active. Then Ms. Pevensie publishes blog post links to websites like Facebook and Twitter to keep them uppermost in client news feeds. The result has been that, even with competition from dozens of other counseling centers for search engine hits, Narnian has managed to remain in the top ten links for “Chicago counseling” as of October 2019. However, search engine creators are fickle and regularly modify their algorithms to hinder companies from gaming the system without having to pay for better results. When I performed the same search in December 2019, Narnian wasn’t even in the top five pages. I couldn’t get them to appear even when I cheated and searched for keywords I knew were on their website like “Christian,” and “clinical.” I did notice that competitors listed above Narnian in October have also fallen to later pages on a Google search, which renders them practically irrelevant to a potential customer.

Narnian shares the effort to communicate to customers with every therapist, and this allows the company to produce a prodigious amount of content per week. However, the quality of the content differs substantially between therapists. A short

review of Ms. Montagne's blog post and the post of a new hire demonstrates a vast difference in the writing skill and effort given to the post. A visitor can narrow down the posts they want to read by therapist name or subject because each post is tagged, but if a visitor just looked at the latest three blogs, they'd have different experiences with each. Varied style can be positive or negative.

The varied post style can be positive when the writing reveals the unique character of the therapist. A prospective customer may gain insight into the therapists available at Narnian and be interested enough to schedule an intake session based on reading a therapist's blog post.

The varied post style can be detrimental when the writing is sloppy, and the main point unclear. All writing, be it a book or a blog post, require an attention-grabbing introduction, an organized structure, and a final summary. When I take blog posts at random, I find that the quality varies primarily by the author and that the difference is noticeable. If a customer were to decide to schedule an appointment based on the quality of a post they reviewed on Facebook, the success rate depends on the author of this week's post.

10.3.2 Recommendations

Narnian depends on its online presence to attract customers and is likely pressured by the small business that runs their website to keep up a constant blog presence. When Narnian acquires 75% of its new business through its public website, there's no surprise that they're willing to make sacrifices to keep that intake funnel open. However, the brutal pace to keep results uppermost in a Google search is a sacrifice that Narnian should consider backing off. I recommend that Narnian reduces the number of blog posts to one every week. With the slower speed, Narnian should put greater emphasis on the quality of each post. Though I believe Narnian can reduce their blog presence without dramatically affecting their customer intake, numbers should be gathered before and after the change to verify the impact.

Even in the digital age, Narnian should utilize other avenues of customer access. Dependency on Google searches has put hundreds of businesses at the whim of a company that has no direct investment in their business and sucks them into an ever costly battle to be the number one search hit. Word of mouth remains one of the most successful ways to acquire new customers, and Narnian can press into creative new ways to encourage customers to share their experiences. Narnian already posts positive customer quotes about their experience on their landing page, but there may be other ways to get the word out without directly using the website.

10.4 Staff Meetings

For the first two years of Narnian's history, Ms. Montagne required all therapists to attend a weekly staff meeting Wednesday afternoon. Each therapist independently coordinates their weekly schedule and may never be in the office at the same time as another therapist. This weekly meeting has been the primary way Ms. Montagne communicates and elicits information with all her therapists.

As Narnian began to hire more part-time therapists, the weekly staff meeting became too burdensome for every therapist to attend. Part-time therapists may not see any clients on Wednesday, which forces them to travel to the office for a single one-hour meeting. To accommodate part-time therapists, after two years of weekly meetings, Ms. Montagne decided to reduce the meeting frequency to once per month.

10.4.1 Analysis

Staff meetings have many functions at Narnian, but four are primary: unity, overturn, business updates, and case counsel.

First, staff meetings promote unity. It represents the only time all therapists are required to congregate together and has the most potent effect on the unity of the company.

Second, staff meetings honor the arrival and departure of new employees. With new therapists a constant in the last few months, staff meetings have served primarily as a means to introduce new therapists to the rest of the staff and share stories about each therapist to help the new therapist feel welcome. Departures have been similar; for example, each therapist shared encouragement at the last staff meeting with the most recent therapist to leave Narnian, and Ms. Montagne wrote her a lengthy letter.

Third, staff meetings give calendar space for Ms. Montagne to share business updates, such as changes with therapists. This allows her to see their physical reaction to her changes and opens a way for therapists to share direct feedback. When the change affects a therapist, this is far superior to a cold email blast.

Fourth, staff meetings can be used by a therapist to share a case their working on to get direct feedback and encouragement. Shared cases allow therapists to lean upon the combined wisdom at Narnian and reminds therapists that each of them has challenging clients.

10.4.2 Recommendations

Monthly staff meetings are both meaningful and infrequent enough that they have not become a burden to therapists. I recommend that Narnian retain the monthly

staff meeting and continue to shape it after the needs of the business at that time, whether it be to honor a departing therapist, to discuss a business change, or to have an informal space to share therapy experiences. It's working well for Narnian today to flex their meetings for the circumstances instead of creating a consistent template.

Chapter 11

Leadership Strategies

Abstract

Narnian requires every therapist to be a leader, whether the therapist is responsible for supervising others or works independently. Leadership growth in the counseling domain is primarily through apprenticeship, and Narnian embraces this trend. Ms. Montagne's vision and example are major contributors to employee's leadership skills.

11.1 Introduction

Leadership influences the success of a company more than a bursting bank account or a genius business plan. The quality of the leaders determines the success of the business, or as Maxwell's "Law of the Lid" states, "Leadership ability determines a person's level of effectiveness."¹ Of a business's leaders, the owner is most critical because no leader attracts stronger leaders than themselves. If the owner's leadership skill is weak, the leaders attracted to their business are weaker.

Ms. Montagne is a servant leader. She launched Narnian first to be a blessing to her fellow Chicago therapists and to empower lasting change in young, professional women. This vision drives her to sacrifice time and personal financial stability to bolster Narnian in hard months so her employees can enjoy stable income and career advancement opportunities. If she asks for therapists to sacrifice for her, her request comes from a leader who already sacrifices far more for them.

Before Ms. Montagne incorporated Narnian, her passion was to empower female leaders. She launched a group for female leaders in the Chicago Loop months before

¹John C. Maxwell. *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You*. Thomas Nelson, 2007.

Narnian had more than two employees, and kept the group running in tandem with the growth of her business. She accepts periodic opportunities to speak at events in the Chicago area to foster leadership skills and to build networks of women in business.

Ms. Montagne hired the first supervisor at Narnian in early 2018 and has worked closely with her to develop leadership skills and empower her supervisor to make autonomous business decisions and to lead her employees.

In the following sections, we'll compare the leadership expectations at Narnian with a McDonald's restaurant to highlight the ways a counseling center requires every therapist to be a leader. We'll finish with how Ms. Montagne's vision and personal shape the way therapists lead in their work.

11.2 Leadership in the Counseling Domain

Most businesses require only managers and executives to possess leadership qualities. A MacDonald's restaurant has many contributors responsible for burger preparation, customer service, janitorial efforts, and one or two individuals are responsible for supervising contributor's work. A counseling center does not operate like a MacDonald's at all.

First, MacDonald's requires at least one supervisor to operate. A key element of its business model is hiring young workers to staff all its contributor roles, and it is rare to find developed leadership qualities or sufficient experience to manage exceptional circumstances. Narnian, however, could operate without any supervision, with each therapist responsible for their contribution and sufficiently skilled to offer their services independently.

Second, MacDonald's requires ongoing training. Employees cycle with school years as students transition to other opportunities. At least one individual who can train employees in their diverse role across the restaurant is required to maintain business operations when overturn is a constant factor. Narnian acquires therapists with years of education and hundreds of hours of internship experience before they even apply for a position. Instead of a training model, the counseling domain operates an apprenticeship model where development is supervised by experts who often don't even work in the same counseling center.

11.2.1 Independent Contractors

Each therapist is a leader in the field of counseling. Each therapist operates similarly to an independent contractor, with an influence that extends to other contractors, to clients, and to the business who hires them. The American Counseling Association

(ACA) recognizes the need for leadership in every therapist by requiring the therapist to acquire supervisory continuing education credits to maintain their license.

11.2.2 Apprenticeship

After a therapist achieves their final license, supervision is more closely associated with apprenticeship than with oversight. It is common for a therapist to learn a new skill by asking for short-term, direct supervision from a therapist who possesses the skill. Therapists who are not presently learning a new skill may not have a supervisor at all.

For example, a therapist at Narnian without her full license must acquire a set number of direct supervision hours in tandem with client hours to achieve the final stage of her license. The supervisor coaches the therapist in her therapy approach and ensures a high degree of professionalism. Every therapist must receive supervision and, once a therapist has completed her license, she is likely to supervise others.

11.2.3 Analysis

The result of the independent nature of the counseling domain and the tradition of apprenticeship is that every therapist is a potential leader, which means that every therapist ought to be a subject of leadership development. At Narnian, every therapist is a leader responsible for themselves, sometimes other therapists for whom they supervise, and between ten and thirty customers.

Narnian applies the minimum amount required by the ACA through direct supervision for therapists seeking their final license tier but offers no additional leadership development opportunities in-house. The monthly gatherings at Ms. Montagne's home could include leadership training because of the flexible nature of the training content. However, Ms. Montagne hasn't dedicated the venue to leadership development, nor can every therapist at Narnian regularly attend such events.

Similar to independent contractors in consulting services, leadership growth is entirely in the hands of the contractor. Although Narnian has not established a formal means of leadership development among its therapists and has exclusively relied upon the stipulations already present in ACA license requirements, there won't be a strong business reason to add further leadership training. If Narnian never takes another step towards leadership development, it's on the same footing as its competitors.

11.2.4 Recommendations

Ms. Montagne might accept that her business could compete in the counseling market without intentional leadership development. Still, her commitment to leadership empowerment represents a unique strength that distinguishes Narnian as an excellent place to work and a counseling center that delivers customer results. Because leadership development is a broad category, I limit my recommendation to what's likely to produce results in a few months.

- Establish what leadership development means at Narnian. Use tools like the Strengths Finder 2.0 assessment or lists like Maxwell's Laws of Leadership to explain the leadership qualities that Narnian wants its employees to grow, and directly apply them to the daily work of therapy.

11.3 Leadership by Example

Ms. Montagne's leadership example has a tremendous effect on the perspective and purpose of each therapist's contribution. Whether through one-on-one supervision meetings where Ms. Montagne shares therapy advice and examples or how she leads staff meetings, Ms. Montagne's vision and presence shapes her therapist's view of their work, its impact, and how they fit in the organization.

It's uncommon for therapists to consider their work as a means of leadership empowerment or to reflect on the lives changed through the healing of the individual with whom they weekly meet. It is common for therapists to work with individuals ambivalent about their healing. In time, the almost imperceptible growth of their clients can cause therapists to shorten their vision for influence to the maintenance of a few struggling individuals instead of the grand vision of leadership development among young professionals in the Chicago Loop that Ms. Montagne champions.

A subject every therapist studies in their graduate programs is the impact of their presence. The way a therapist behaves with clients is a centerpiece in healing because how they respond when faced with suffering and secrets either open clients to expose more of themselves or to shrink away. In the best cases, the therapist's presence begins to reshape how the client views themselves and others. In the worst cases, the therapist enforces the client's negative experiences and shuts down exploration.

11.3.1 Analysis

Ms. Montagne leads with a strong vision. She exudes focused energy towards her vision to serve young, professional women in the Chicago Loop and persuasively communicates her vision. Although she's worked to develop a concise vision and

applies it to her work, it's less clear that she regularly communicates the vision to her employees in a way that rallies them to a unified purpose. Ms. Montagne wishes to protect her therapists from experiencing isolation and burnout by giving them ample opportunities to share their experiences. Still, it's not evident that she realizes the effect her vision, communicated regularly and applied often, could have to unify her therapists and give them the sense that their contribution is meaningful.

Ms. Montagne's presence strikes an impressive balance between a patient, listening presence, and purposeful, engaged interaction. Her presence is consistent and fosters trust. When she interacts with her employees, they experience her presence as an example that they can absorb and reflect in their client therapy sessions. Ms. Montagne's put extensive effort into the way she shows up with people and has a strong leadership charisma that inspires her therapists.

11.3.2 Recommendations

One would be hard-pressed to find a better example of servant leadership than Ms. Montagne, and her commitment to leadership growth is a crucial factor in Narnian's success. If she turns her vision into a regular part of her employee interactions and draws them into a unified purpose, I think she'll discover that her concerns about therapist isolation diminish. For this reason, I recommend that Ms. Montagne:

- Integrate her vision into daily conversation and staff meetings. Repetition is crucial to remind employees of the company's purpose and where they fit.
- Open a channel of communication, perhaps at staff meetings or by electronic means, to share success stories where Narnian succeeded in blessing young, professional women in Chicago. Stories both reinforce the vision and encourage therapists to see the leadership elements of their work.

Chapter 12

Cultural Strategies

Abstract

Narnian prioritizes its business culture. Culture influences hiring decisions, but there is a risk that quality candidates may be filtered out because they don't share the Christian faith. The culture affects Narnian's advertisements, and two adjustments may add to Narnian's cultural diversity. However, Narnian has experienced tremendous growth in cultural diversity over the last three months.

12.1 Introduction

Ms. Montagne believes the culture of Narnian is critical to her business and considers the cultural impact of all her decisions. She's convinced that therapists from different ethnicities, Christian denominational traditions, genders, and life experiences enrich Narnian's culture. She pursues therapist referrals to acquire therapists who differ from those who are already employees, but also recognizes that the preservation of their existing culture is essential.

In the following sections, we'll explore how employees influence the cultural diversity at Narnian and the effect this has on hiring practices. Then we'll review the language used in Narnian's advertisements. After that, we'll review the explosion of diversity in the final months of 2019. Finally, we'll hear Ms. Montagne's feedback about her business advertisements.

12.2 Hiring Evaluation Practices

One cultural absence in Narnian is their faith background. While there exists a variety of Christian denominational backgrounds, every therapist is a self-described Christian. Ms. Montagne has had the opportunity to hire non-Christian therapists in the past, but the effect on their existing culture has given her employees pause.

Earlier in 2019, Ms. Montagne had a candidate she wanted to offer a therapist position. Although she did not typically involve all her therapists in hiring decisions because the potential hire did not share the team's Christian faith, she proposed the choice to her staff. While the team was supportive of the decision to hire a non-Christian therapist, they had concerns that this would affect the office culture. For example, they thought that their conversation would be more guarded because they'd feel that they needed to filter their conversation more in the presence of a therapist that didn't share their faith. Also, they felt it would make spontaneous prayer together more awkward. These cultural impacts made the team wary of the decision even though their ethical stance supported it. She never hired the therapist, but Ms. Montagne still receives applicants who do not identify themselves as Christians in any public way.

12.2.1 Analysis

I sympathize with the community sense that faith diversity could influence office culture. Oddly, Ms. Montagne's hiring policy changed when the question of a non-Christian applicant arose. Typically, therapists don't learn they have a new colleague until the new hire's first day. Yet, Ms. Montagne includes the entire body of therapists when she must decide on a non-Christian therapist. The response of Ms. Montagne's therapists indicates that she could have some passive resistance to hiring non-Christian therapists. What is not clear, however, is whether therapists base their resistance on previous experience in a mixed-faith environment or whether the resistance lacks a foundation. For Ms. Montagne to validate this, she may need to approach her staff in an environment that allows them the freedom to share.

12.2.2 Recommendation

The resistance that Ms. Montagne's staff towards non-Christian therapists is worth exploring if she intends to hire a mixed-faith therapy staff. I recommend she send an anonymous survey to document each person's concerns about the effect a non-Christian would have on the Narnian culture. The authority differential is too high for Ms. Montagne to approach therapists directly, and an outside consultant may be too costly. A survey breaches the subject at a minimal cost.

My second recommendation is to fill a non-therapist position with a non-Christian

first. The relationship between the therapist's view of their healing work and their faith may be close enough that the thought of hiring a non-Christian therapist links with the offering of sub-par service. If a visible position as an intake professional or blog manager were filled by a non-Christian, this could allay fears that the Narnian culture would be significantly affected by the presence of a non-Christian minority.

12.3 Advertisement Language

Imagine you are a therapist looking for employment. Your Internet search brings back several promising options in the Chicago Loop, and you make your way to Narnian. Narnian's website landing page opens with a flashing text billboard of clients they help. "Overwhelmed women", "Transitioning Millennials", and "Struggling Couples" are a few examples.¹ The first paragraph about Narnian includes their dedication to helping people from diverse backgrounds, and the second highlights the diversity of skill and experience the Narnian staff offer. The final paragraph calls out Christian faith integration as a general skill for all therapists.

You peruse the resources and select "Christian Counseling." This link brings you to a separate page that gives further detail about Narnian's faith approach by promising Narnian therapists couple their professional training with a background in Christian culture and faith.

Finally, you navigate to "Counseling Jobs at Narnian" to review the qualifications.² Here you find a list of values and requirements. The highest values are workplace culture, diversity, and service excellence. The requirements list many of your expectations for a professional license, quality of service, schedule flexibility, and diversity. You also read about the demographics of the clients you're likely to interact with: individual Christian professionals.

If you are a Christian therapist, everything you've read on Narnian's website resonates with you, and you'll likely apply. If your faith background is Hindu, however, you may disqualify yourself before you even apply. You've received a mixed message about your welcome at Narnian. The job posting web page may match your values and skills, but you're unsure whether you can live up to the openly Christian message in the customer advertisements.

12.3.1 Analysis

The subtle hints that only Christians may be all who are welcome to join Narnian is not likely a conscious decision by Ms. Montagne or Ms. Pevensie. Cognitive bias

¹Aravis Montagne. *Narnian Home Page*. URL: <https://wardrobes.com/>. (accessed: 16.07.2019).

²Pevensie, *Join Our Team! Careers at Narnian*.

is, by definition, challenging to pick up on without feedback from an outside source. Unanimity gives bias even greater strength. Unless Ms. Montagne hires a therapist from another faith background, she's not likely to have anyone offer her a conflicting opinion on the underlying message of her website.

12.3.2 Recommendation

The Christian advertisement that may self-disqualify the non-Christian applicant does not appear to reflect the diversity principle Ms. Montagne operates within her hiring decisions. To more closely match her hiring expectations with the client advertisements, I recommend she make two adjustments to her website.

First, that minor adjustments first be made to the landing page. It is not necessary or beneficial to remove the reference to faith integration or even Christian faith integration. Still, the promise that all therapists are trained and experienced in Christian faith integration is immediately false were Ms. Montagne to hire a non-Christian therapist.

Second, that the web page about Narnian's counseling approach removes the words "Christian Counseling." Everything on this page is already generic enough to apply to any faith integration, and the inclusion of the term "Christian" does not add meaningful information to the Narnian approach.

The client demographics and the Christian background of individual therapists both advocate for Christian therapy as a core component of Narnian's service, and these adjustments do not reflect the removal of this business advantage. Instead of opening with exclusively Christian promises, I recommend the website emphasize Christian integration and therapeutic practices on individual therapist biographies. If therapists advertise their Christian faith independently of Narnian, this allows greater freedom to hire faith diversity without diminishing the Christian presence of the company.

12.4 Diversity Growth

From my first meeting, Ms. Montagne reiterated how critical she felt a diverse therapist staff was to the success of Narnian. The majority of her staff at that time were young, Caucasian, Christian women who'd recently received the first tier of their counseling license. Ms. Montagne had hired her first African American therapist and the only therapist who had her full counseling license a few months prior. She also had one white male on staff, but now there are two. It is impossible to identify a majority ethnic culture at Narnian today.

12.4.1 Analysis

The expansion in Narnian's diversity exceeds that of most small businesses only two years into their development. Ms. Montagne's determination contributes significantly to the current diversity, and a large city supplies her with a diverse pool. This shows a strength of leadership that bodes well for the future of Narnian since most budding leaders are inclined to hire those who are like themselves to reduce potential conflict and protect their self-esteem. By building a diverse foundation for her business, Ms. Montagne makes future diversity a core part of the business' identity instead of a beneficial feature to pursue when she's comfortable with her business' profitability.

12.4.2 Recommendation

My recommendation is to maintain this trend towards diversity. Continue to look for underrepresented therapist demographics. Record the demographics of your clients and what they look for in a therapist. Communicate the diversity of your therapy staff with detailed biographies, video interviews, and blog posts.

12.5 Feedback

My recommendation that Ms. Montagne modifies the language of her website to reduce the number of therapists who disqualify themselves as applicants because they lack a Christian worldview was well received. Even though the website might discourage some, Ms. Montagne still receives a steady stream of non-Christian applicants, though she has not hired any to-date. This adjustment may still be worthwhile, but the evidence does not suggest that it's been a limitation to non-Christian applicants.

Chapter 13

Moral and Ethical Strategies

Abstract

A comprehensive body of ethics guides counseling therapy in the United States. Adherence to its ethics code is required for therapists to retain their licenses. Narnian holds therapists accountable by depending on their instincts to make ethical decisions. Tension exists between Christian and secular ethics. Therapists at Narnian also differ in their perspectives about client diagnosis.

13.1 Introduction

More than most business domains, counseling has a large body of preexisting ethical standards. Similar to the medical field, the ethical standards that govern the practice of counseling therapy are comprehensive and managed by a body of professionals. Narnian is legally bound to comply with the state and federal regulations placed upon them. Then therapists are bound by the American Counseling Association (ACA) code of ethics, and then Ms. Montagne calls herself and her therapists to yet another ethical standard because of their identification as a Christian counseling center.

In the following sections, we'll explore how Narnian complies with ACA ethical guidelines. After that, we'll consider the tension between secular and Christian ethics. Finally, we'll review the ethical boundaries of client diagnosis and hear from the two perspectives among Narnian therapists.

13.2 ACA Code of Ethics Compliance

Ms. Montagne is well versed in many of the ethical and legal implications of therapy and has developed a sound instinct about the right approach to take in critical circumstances. She has confidence that her therapists also have sound ethical instincts but need support in times of crisis to follow through with their instincts.

Recently a therapist was called by a hospital who stated that the therapist's client had been hospitalized and would not be released unless the therapist supplied authorization. The hospital pressured the therapist for rapid response because it was already late on a Friday. If the therapist gave no authorization, the client would remain at the hospital all weekend. The therapist was not in the office to ask her colleagues for help. The therapist called Ms. Montagne to review the circumstances and get her advice about how to respond to the hospital's request. As Ms. Montagne and the therapist spoke, it became clear that the therapist knew the correct approach but was flustered by the hospital's demands and uncertain of their instincts. Ms. Montagne gave them a few additional suggestions but primarily validated what the therapist was inclined to do.

13.2.1 Analysis

The ACA ethical guidelines hang in the office, but it's not likely that anyone reviews them before making decisions. Ethics ought to be internalized and applied from one's worldview, not as a set of laws to reference when a therapist finds herself in a specific circumstance. The individual nature of ethical compliance makes it nearly impossible to measure, and no business can enforce ethical guidelines without considerable oversight and a unanimous workforce. The individual nature of each therapist's work makes the necessary oversight impossible, and Ms. Montagne has little recourse but to trust the instincts of her therapists.

13.2.2 Recommendations

In another business domain, where documented ethical guidelines are rare, it would benefit Ms. Montagne to align her company to a published list of ethical values. In the counseling domain, she may depend upon a baseline understanding of ethical treatment. I recommend that Ms. Montagne incorporates a simple reminder of ethical conduct in her monthly staff meetings to remind them of their obligation.

13.3 Christian Ethical Tension

The field of ethical studies in counseling therapy shifts emphasis every decade. In the past, the highest good a therapist could achieve was to cause a change in societally disruptive people. Abuses of power and the rise of postmodernist thought in America have swung the ethical emphasis away from causing change to avoiding harm and embracing an individual's right to think and behave as they choose. In either decade, the emphasis has contentious points with a Christian worldview that challenges Christian therapists to find creative ways to provide therapy without compromising their faith or putting themselves in legal trouble.

For example, a rising outrage with therapy designed to modify the sexual desires of individuals places therapists in a defensive posture. Even if a client were to seek out therapy to change their sexual practices, therapists are bound by ACA guidelines to avoid anything that clients might perceive as an influence towards abstinence or any other practice. Christians feel this acutely as their beliefs indicate a way of life that's good for humans, yet ethics codes handcuff them from suggesting it. Instead, therapists leave clients to flounder about trying to figure out their version of the truth.

13.3.1 Analysis

While Ms. Montagne knows how far she can go with clients without overstepping ACA guidelines, new therapists are tentative and more likely to withhold care when they're uncertain about the consequences. Uncertainty is prevalent at Narnian because, for many therapists, this is their first counseling center experience after college.

Other organizations exist that translate ethical guidelines from a distinctly Christian perspective. The Christian Association of Psychological Studies (CAPS) publishes an ethical statement that closely aligns with the ACA Code of Ethics with additions specific to a Christian worldview.¹ The CAPS ethical statement is less directive than other Christian guidelines. Still, it can offer new therapists confidence that a body of professionals publicly agrees to these standards and applies them in therapy.

13.3.2 Recommendations

Narnian asks each therapist to present a case study at their staff meeting, and these presentations normalize ethical standards. When a therapist describes an approach that a new therapist was uncertain could be applied, the example bolsters their confidence to try it in their sessions. Likewise, case studies allow Ms. Montagne to make

¹Christian Association for Psychological Studies. *Ethics Statement*. URL: <https://www.caps.net/ethics-statement>. (accessed: 09.01.2020).

ethical course corrections or highlight areas for consideration. I recommend Ms. Montagne retain case studies as part of her staff meeting and add her case studies that illustrate ethical decision-making.

Also, I recommend that Ms. Montagne adopts one Christian ethical code, such as the CAPS ethical statement. If posted alongside the ACA Code of Ethics, a Christian-based ethical guideline could give new therapists greater confidence without adding decision-making complexity.

13.4 Diagnosis

Insurance providers require therapists to supply a diagnosis at the intake meeting, or they'll refuse to cover the visit. The selected diagnosis does not have to meet any criteria, but it must be applied. There is a general anxiety diagnosis that Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBS) accepts when a more specific diagnosis is not possible. Each diagnosis has a list of criteria that must be met by the client, or the diagnosis is inaccurate.

For example, say that a therapist sees a new client. In the intake session, the therapist assesses the client for depression. In the diagnosis requirements for general depression, clients must meet six criteria, but the client seems to meet only four. The therapist decides to apply a diagnosis of depression, even though the criteria are incomplete.

The ethical dilemma above is common among therapists. The insurance provider trusts that the therapist has accurately identified all six criteria for depression, but the therapist has not. However, the therapist believes that the client does need counseling, even for depressive symptoms, and ought to be covered by insurance without meeting all six criteria. If the therapist chose instead to apply the general anxiety diagnosis and regularly applies this diagnosis for new clients, the insurance provider will investigate the therapist's claims and begin to deny claims which use the generic anxiety code.

13.4.1 Analysis

Narnian's therapists face less pressure to decide whether to prioritize the insurance provider or the client's needs because BCBS is more flexible than many insurance providers and less likely to deny claims for generic diagnoses. Still, it is present every time a therapist takes on a new client.

Each therapist faces this dilemma in different ways. Some always select the generic diagnosis on the first therapy session and add more diagnoses on the second and third sessions. Their intake sessions rarely include detailed assessment material because they aren't trying to make a diagnosis. These therapists tend to view their work

primarily as client healing and the diagnosis requirements of the insurance provider as a demand that's irrelevant to their work. Other therapists consider diagnosis a crucial part of their therapy and stress assessment and accurate diagnosis in the first session. Because these two therapists operate independently, there has been little conflict; however, if Narnian were to specify an ethical guideline around diagnosis, it would split the therapists into two opposing camps.

Chapter 14

Social Impact Strategies

Abstract

Narnian weaves social impact into its therapy service, and many of its therapists entered their professions to make a social impact. The core service has a social impact on target customer demographics and expands the effect through reduced-cost therapy. Individuals choose their social impact opportunities, but pooling employee effort might have a more significant effect on the community.

14.1 Introduction

Narnian is staffed by many who entered their work explicitly because of their compassion towards others. Half of the therapists have degrees in social work (social work and counseling are closely tied degree programs) and have prior work experience in community service and social work organizations. Narnian is staffed by individuals whose leaning is towards social impact by default, and Ms. Montagne needs no effort to motivate her employees in this direction.

In the following sections, we'll explore how Narnian's core service makes a societal impact and how therapists, out of compassion, engage in social projects on their own time.

14.2 Existing Social Enterprise

Narnian's core service is toward hurting members of the community and is a type of social impact. Professional women in downtown Chicago are often at a disadvantage

compared to their male counterparts, particularly in engineering and leadership positions. Ms. Montagne's effort to target this demographic in their core service may lead to social transformation by supporting women leaders in downtown Chicago through difficulty towards more equitable business relationships.

Ms. Montagne is also aware that Narnian's target demographic requires either quality insurance or a sizable amount of disposable income to utilize Narnian services. To offer therapy to financially disadvantaged clients, she negotiates a sliding fee price or a payment plan on a per-client basis.

At the beginning of Narnian, Ms. Montagne offered regular group therapy for female leaders in the Chicago Loop. She has discontinued this practice to focus on Narnian's counseling service, but she maintains an active involvement in the welfare of other women leaders and entrepreneurs in Chicago.

14.2.1 Analysis

Though Ms. Montagne and her staff heavily lean towards social impact already, Narnian does not coordinate their efforts. Therapists meet their desire for social impact through therapy work and private decisions to serve in other ways outside the organization. Ms. Montagne is careful not to promote any means of social enterprise outside of the individual therapy her employees already offer. Her hands-off approach requires no conscious effort because it's entirely employee-led. Still, it does limit the effect Narnian can have on the community through alternative pro bono services. This unintentional model also misses an opportunity for additional team building that would be a blessing to both employees and their community.

While the addition of social opportunities is an obvious choice, the core business of Narnian directly impacts the social well-being of its community. Even if insurance-bearing clients were the only impacted individuals, the services offered by Narnian improve the lives of both the clients they see, and the network of relationships they represent. The reduced rate service that Narnian supplies to less advantaged clients open healing to a broader audience than those who can afford their services.

14.2.2 Recommendations

Ms. Montagne cannot pursue every opportunity for social impact and still have a profitable business. If she were to pursue a single channel for social impact that resonated with the majority of her therapists, the result could be a more substantial impact than the dispersed effect individuals have today. Turning the same recommendation to the therapists, a social engagement that was done by the entire team would also build camaraderie.

Even better than social sponsorship, Ms. Montagne could double-down on the ex-

isting ways she benefits her community with the core business. Offering reduced rates for less advantaged people is an excellent addition to a strongly beneficial business model, and therapy may be the primary way she and her staff bring social well-being to their neighbors.

Chapter 15

Environmental Impact Strategies

Abstract

Narnian operates an invitingly minimalist environment. From the use of mugs to the management of electricity use, Ms. Montagne runs an environmentally-conscious business.

15.1 Introduction

Narnian's environmental footprint is tiny. The physical resources they use consist of limited paper for assessments and fliers, furnishings for their office and therapy rooms, and machines for white noise and pleasant smells. Nearly all of Narnian's communication is electronic via email and digital telephone, as are their session and financial records.

In the following sections, we'll walk through the Narnian office to experience the office environment. Then we'll consider operating costs and make two recommendations to cut the environmental impact further.

15.2 Office Environment

To arrive at the Monadnock building, you pass many towering buildings and noisy vehicles. A glance at the public square adjacent to the Federal Post Office across the street shows a pavilion filled with booths, people perusing merchandise, and homeless individuals asking for food and money. Walk into the entryway, and the smell of coffee from the corner Intelligentsia coffee shop greets you, along with the low hum of coffee and tea drinkers making orders and discussing business over hot beverages.

Carry on down the corridor, and you find a small bank of elevators, one of which you ride to the 12th floor.

Off the elevator, it's a short walk to the embossed office door, "Narnian Clinical Counseling". On entrance, your first sight is a low well-stocked bookshelf and a vaporizer pouring white steam. Tasteful but unremarkable furniture and wall decorations adorn the room. You turn left to a minimalist desk and stool oriented against the wall where Ms. Pevensie sits, with a potted yellow cactus on a desk nearby. A small break room is visible past Ms. Pevensie's desk, and to your right, an open door reveals a welcoming room with a sofa, desk, and two chairs.

Like Ms. Montagne, the Narnian office is minimalist and not flashy – all business. She's designed each element of the office to be pleasant but unremarkable so that your time spent there can be focused solely on the therapeutic relationship and not the environment. This minimalist approach keeps Narnian's waste minuscule and unlikely to grow even as the company expands.

15.2.1 Analysis

Ms. Montagne and Ms. Pevensie embrace many principles that make for an environmentally friendly business. Whether from an environment-conscious decision or sheer necessity, they have kept their business lean and resourceful with the natural resources necessary to operate.

15.3 Operating Costs

Narnian leases its office space from the Monadnock building. Their electricity, heat, water, and security costs are all funneled through the building management, who supplies them with a monthly bill. Some are fixed costs, such as security, while others are variable, namely, electricity, heat, and water. It's common for heating to be a fixed expense in Chicago because steam heat is cheap.

There is almost no water bill for Narnian because the only water source is a break room that's used by the staff to make tea or fill water bottles. Electricity, however, is a variable cost that could be more affected by new habits. The entire office uses regular incandescent light bulbs, no different than one might find in a living room. Both the entryway lights and every office's lights remain on from the beginning of the day until the last person leaves. The last therapist is responsible for turning off all lights; otherwise, they would remain on all night.

Ms. Pevensie manages the office temperature with a thermostat situated in the entry room. Therapist offices can become cold during the wintertime because cold air enters from large, full-length windows overlooking the alleyway. Ms. Montagne keeps

the thermostat set to a higher temperature during winter months to compensate for the temperature difference.

Near the end of 2019, Ms. Montagne approached her therapists about their paper use. She wants to reduce the amount of paper her therapists print. Many of her therapists print several pages for each client intake, and sometimes for individual sessions.

Therapists and clients often enjoy tea or coffee during sessions, and Narnian provides a selection of mugs in place of disposable cups. Therapists wash the client mugs after the session is over, and each therapist brings a mug from home.

15.3.1 Recommendations

- Supply small, portable electric heaters for the coolest therapists' offices to run for a set time every morning to make the rooms comfortable. The drop in overall heating costs offsets the additional electricity cost of the heaters, and overall heating use decreases. If therapists run these heaters continuously, however, this may not be the most cost-effective alternative.
- Replace lighting with lower watt fluorescent light bulbs. These last longer because they use less electricity to operate. The white light of an efficient fluorescent light bulb may improve the ambiance of the space also, which is currently set to a dull yellow tone by incandescent bulbs.

Chapter 16

Social Impact Strategies

Abstract

Ms. Montagne weaves social impact into Narnian, and many of its therapists entered their professions to make a social impact. The core service has a social impact on target customer demographics and expands the effect through reduced-cost therapy. Individuals choose their social impact opportunities, but pooling employee effort might have a more significant effect on the community.

16.1 Introduction

Narnian is staffed by many who entered their work explicitly because of their compassion towards others. Half of the therapists have degrees in social work (social work and counseling are closely tied degree programs) and have prior work experience in community service and social work organizations. Narnian is staffed by individuals whose leaning is towards social impact by default, and Ms. Montagne needs no effort to motivate her employees in this direction.

In the following sections, we'll explore how Narnian's core service makes a societal impact and how therapists, out of compassion, engage in social projects on their own time.

16.2 Existing Social Enterprise

Narnian's core service is toward hurting members of the community and is a type of social impact. Professional women in downtown Chicago are often at a disadvantage

compared to their male counterparts, particularly in engineering and leadership positions. Ms. Montagne's effort to target this demographic in their core service may lead to social transformation by supporting women leaders in downtown Chicago through difficulty towards more equitable business relationships.

Ms. Montagne is also aware that Narnian's target demographic requires either quality insurance or a sizable amount of disposable income to utilize Narnian services. To offer therapy to financially disadvantaged clients, she negotiates a sliding fee price or a payment plan on a per-client basis.

At the beginning of Narnian, Ms. Montagne offered regular group therapy for female leaders in the Chicago Loop. She has discontinued this practice to focus on Narnian's counseling service, but she maintains an active involvement in the welfare of other women leaders and entrepreneurs in Chicago.

16.2.1 Analysis

Though Ms. Montagne and her staff heavily lean towards social impact already, Narnian does not coordinate their efforts. Individual social responsibility happens through therapy work and a therapist's personal decision to serve in other ways outside the organization. Ms. Montagne is careful not to promote any means of social enterprise outside of the individual therapy her employees already offer. Her approach limits the social impact on what an individual may accomplish. It requires no conscious effort because it's entirely employee-led, but it does limit the effect Narnian can have on the community through alternative pro bono services. This unintentional model also misses an opportunity for additional team building that would be a blessing to both employees and their community.

While the addition of social opportunities is an obvious choice, the core business of Narnian directly impacts the social well-being of its community. Even if insurance-bearing clients were the only impacted individuals, the services offered by Narnian improve the lives of both the clients they see, and the network of relationships they represent. The reduced rate service that Narnian supplies to less advantaged clients open healing to a broader audience than those who can afford their services.

16.2.2 Recommendations

Ms. Montagne cannot pursue every opportunity for social impact and still have a profitable business. If she were to pursue a single channel for social impact that resonated with the majority of her therapists, the result could be a more substantial impact than the dispersed effect individuals have today. Turning the same recommendation to the therapists, a social engagement that was done by the entire team would also build camaraderie.

Even better than social sponsorship, Ms. Montagne could double-down on the existing ways she benefits her community with the core business. Offering reduced rates for less advantaged people is an excellent addition to a strongly beneficial business model, and therapy may be the primary way she and her staff bring social well-being to their neighbors.

Chapter 17

Spiritual Openness Strategies

Abstract

Narnian differentiates itself from other Christian counseling centers by presenting itself as a faith-based organization. While Ms. Montagne would never limit her clients based on faith background, she does filter staff by their faith background. The business reasons behind this are difficult to justify, and the opportunities provided by hiring non-Christian therapists are noteworthy. I recommend two changes to make Narnian more spiritually open, but Ms. Montagne has some wrestling to do with the implications.

17.1 Introduction

Narnian is an openly Christian counseling business and perceives its faith orientation as a key differentiator among competitors, even Christian competitors. Employees are respected for their Christian faith and encouraged to lean upon the principles of Christianity in their work. When clients are willing to include their faith in therapy dialog, therapists are encouraged to join them in that discussion.

In the following sections, we'll investigate Narnian's hiring bias towards Christian therapists. Then we'll consider the barriers that non-Christians face to employment. Finally, we'll hear from Ms. Montagne about hiring non-Christian therapists at Narnian.

17.2 Faith Bias

Ms. Montagne seeks to serve primarily Christian professional women, not women from all faith backgrounds. To supply therapists who share the faith background of her target client is a good match and improves the quality of her service towards the Christian demographic by lowering the barrier to entry. The remaining 20% who do not share the Christian faith is still attracted to her business in part because of the faith orientation, even if the client does not share the same faith. It is not incumbent upon Narnian to offer service to meet every demographic's needs - in a diverse city, impossible - but it is necessary to offer the best service to the target customer. An openly Christian business accomplishes the best service for Christian professional women. Where a Christian bias becomes more difficult to justify is the selection of employees.

Discrimination is a hot topic in the United States, but especially in liberal cities like Chicago. A cursory review of Ms. Montagne's therapists proves she only hires Christian therapists, and this has always been the case. Ms. Montagne wants diversity of ethnicity, culture, age, and gender for her therapy staff, but her staff does not represent a diversity of faith.

17.2.1 Analysis

Is Narnian biased towards the Christian faith? Though my first inclination is to deny the claim, it may be due to my matching faith orientation. If Narnian were a Hindu-based counseling business, I would conclude they were biased. However, it is not enough to determine bias; one must also demonstrate that their bias is harmful to their customers and employees.

To argue for her position from a customer's perspective, the customers Ms. Montagne wants are seeking Christian counselors. Were Ms. Montagne to hire therapists from other faith backgrounds, she may turn away some clients who expected to receive therapy from an openly Christian individual.

To argue against her position, the 20% who do not share the Christian faith are unlikely to be affected by the diversity of faith, and an unknown percentage of her Christian clients are ambivalent about the faith background of their therapist. Narnian matches prospective clients with the therapist who is most likely to connect with them and has the most appropriate therapy technique. Even if 50% of Narnian's clients explicitly want a Christian therapist, it is trivial to direct those clients to Christian therapists.

From a client business perspective, Narnian does discriminate in its employment to those with Christian faith backgrounds, but Narnian does not discriminate towards clients.

17.3 Barriers to non-Christian Employment

Although Narnian has historically hired only Christian therapists, the business advertisement itself may not encourage other faith backgrounds to apply for a position. A Hindu therapist who desired to work at Narnian would need to be comfortable at a company that was openly advertising for and attracting predominantly Christian professional women. Though the Hindu therapist may be ambivalent towards the types of clients, the therapist may not be comfortable in their direct association with a publicly Christian organization. For example, on the front page of Narnian's website, all their therapists are described as having "experience and training in integrating [a] Christian worldview into [a client's] care."¹ It's likely that Narnian is not turning away dozens of non-Christian applicants in the interview process but filters out most of the non-Christian therapists by their public presence.

17.3.1 Analysis

What does it cost Narnian to perpetuate a business that hires only Christian therapists?

First, Ms. Montagne loses an opportunity to demonstrate love to the non-Christian therapy community. Christian therapists may face an uphill battle with a subset of Christians who think their work is unimportant, but their communities even more malign those from other faith backgrounds. Often the only option for a Muslim therapist is to take work at an entirely secular counseling center and to divorce their faith from their work. Narnian could be a place where a Muslim therapist could find the freedom to express their faith background without fear of repercussion.

Second, Ms. Montagne loses an opportunity to bless individual non-Christian therapists. Ms. Montagne knows that the therapist's work is draining and isolating and intends her policies to ease her therapist's burdens. These benefits are not valuable to Christians alone; any therapist who worked in her business would be blessed by the way she operates Narnian.

Third, Ms. Montagne loses an opportunity for her therapists to integrate their faith. Although they are called upon to assist their clients to understand their faith in a world of mixed allegiance, Narnian therapists live in a homogeneous environment.

17.3.2 Recommendations

Counseling therapy, like other business domains, is easily trapped in the bifurcated belief that business must either be entirely secular or fully faith-oriented. However, Narnian need not choose one route over the other. It benefits Narnian to adjust its

¹Montagne, *Narnian Home Page*.

advertisements to attract non-Christian therapists in addition to Christian therapists. Two adjustments could lean Narnian in this direction.

- Retain faith integration language on the company website but broaden the language to make it inclusive to other therapist faith backgrounds.
- Communicate an openness to hire therapists from other faith backgrounds to Narnian's employees and encourage them to refer positions to non-Christian friends.

17.4 Feedback

Ms. Montagne's response to this feedback was reserved. The opinion of her therapists has a stronger impact on this area of her business than perhaps any other, which indicates she may be uncertain about whether her business ought to hire spiritually diverse therapists. The emphasis Narnian portrays as a Christian-based counseling center would be impacted by a shift in the therapists hired, which makes the admirable idea of hiring non-Christian therapists a more weighty decision to adjust the identity of the business. I think Ms. Montagne wants to be a Christian business person who can bless non-Christian therapists. Still, she may need to wrestle with the implications of that decision for her business identity and how her Christian therapists must adjust to meet her ideal.

Chapter 18

Reflections and Learnings

18.1 Introduction

There's a monumental reward in consulting and writing for six months. The one-hundred-page thesis is impressive, but the insights I've gained will stay with me forever.

I've learned lessons to apply when selecting and pitching to a client. I'm more familiar with imposter syndrome than ever before. I've adapted my definition of consulting and where it diverges from coaching. I've faced barriers from perfectionism. I've experienced tension between writing and consulting. I've had a stressful, enlightening, invaluable journey.

18.2 Client Engagement

How does a consulting student with no prior consulting experience find a client? The answer is two-fold. First, you must find the right client. The client must be small, desperate, and accessible. Then you must remove some barriers to the service. You must forget about making an impact, abandon hope of remuneration, and embrace that the client gives a fraction of the data.

18.2.1 Client Selection

The client must be small. The daunting size of the MBA thesis might persuade a student that a large company with well-established practices is an ideal first consulting client. After all, a small company may not offer the quantity of material needed to fill ninety pages of observations, analysis, and recommendations. In practice, however, a large company requires exponentially more effort to obtain information for even one

chapter. As a company grows, it splits more functions into separate departments, each of which requires separate interviews. The possibility that one or more of these departments are unwilling to assist in the project is high, and the lack of cross-over roles means that there may be no recourse if the finance department won't give the student the time of day.

The client must be hungry. Not physically, of course, but the client must hunger to grow their business and explore new ideas. A student is unlikely to offer a high quantity of useful insights, but a hungry business looks for value even in the questions that the student asks. The process is much more engaging for the student and client when there is mutual eagerness to explore and improve the business.

The client must be accessible. The consulting process is both relational and process-driven. If it's challenging to get to the client's location or to connect with them in-person, the entire consulting process breaks down. A semi-regular in-person meeting reminds the client that the student is still invested in their business and is actively thinking about how to help it grow. Regular email or text communications offer another touch-point to keep the relationship fresh and mutually beneficial.

18.2.2 Consulting Offer

The service does not need to be incredibly valuable. If a student finds a hungry client, they don't need to promise that their services are the best around. Any student who attempts to create the ultimate consulting experience will disappoint themselves and may annoy their client. Business owners who agree to student consulting have low expectations of the benefit they'll receive, and it's best to stay humble and keep the relationship foremost rather than seeking to offer astounding insights.

The service does not have to cost anything. The principle that "skin in the game" keeps people involved may apply, but it's not likely that student consulting is valuable enough to pay. Also, if you've taken to heart the first point and have sought out a small client, they may not have any money to offer the student. Don't let price become a barrier rather than a means to keep the client engaged.

The service does not need to wring every drop of information from the client. The temptation for a student is to acquire all the detail they've read about in their business books. A student thinks financial analysis happens on balance sheets, cultural analysis through business interactions, employee strategies through interviews with every employee because that's what he's read. The student will discover, however, that the client is either unwilling or unable to provide the detail he seeks. An entrepreneur feels deeply about their business and is reticent to expose every aspect of their business to a person they hardly know. Even if there were no feelings, most small businesses have a fraction of their processes documented. While a complete financial statement may excite a student, a business won't suspend its operations to write it up.

18.3 Imposter Syndrome

The human experience of work: there's always a chance you'll fail. Failure looms even more terrible when the cost applies to more people, and when no prior experience can be drawn upon to offer navigation. This environment causes most to feel that they are pretending to be someone who can finish the work while all along they are not. That's the essence of the Imposter Syndrome, and this thesis was tailor-fit to bring it out in me.

Each person's management of Imposter Syndrome is a little different. My approach was to emphasize the work I felt most comfortable doing and which I had the most experience while limiting the new. After two years of writing short, pithy analyses from books I'd read, the writing portion of the thesis seemed trivial to me, and I spent the majority of my time writing. Not just at the end alone, but at the beginning, when my only task should have been to learn everything I could about Narnian.

The first official consulting meeting with Ms. Montagne and Ms. Pevensie was nerve-wracking. With high personal expectations combined with the absence of a practical strategy, I walked into the Narnian office with sky-high stress levels and fear of failure that made listening impossible. I came prepared with questions, and I did follow up on my questions as curiosity got the better of my nerves. Still, when the whirlwind was over, I left unsure I'd done any consulting and reasonably sure I'd wasted their time. It was a crisis that arose after the third meeting that forced me to envision my work in a new light.

My third meeting with Ms. Montagne and Ms. Pevensie was on a Zoom call because my work circumstances were in flux, and I couldn't make it to downtown Chicago that day. I chose to review the business model canvas, thinking that by doing so, I would both learn about their business as we filled out the canvas and offer a tool that would be beneficial to their work. Two-thirds through the meeting, I was interrupted to question the value of the repetitive work we were doing. Ms. Pevensie and Ms. Montagne were already familiar with the facets of business we were exploring and thought that I was rehashing earlier meetings. My repetitive verification doubled the time it took to cover the material. When the meeting was over, I felt a simultaneous wave of gratitude and dismay. I was grateful for the chance to change my tactics but overwhelmed by the confirmation that I was wasting their time. I finished my work day in a distracted state and pondered my situation on the drive home. The essential question that formulated in my mind, after I dug underneath the "What on earth am I doing?!" anxiety was the question, "Am I a coach or am I a consultant?"

18.4 A Consultant or a Coach?

Imposter Syndrome led me to a crisis that forced me to formulate what was the essence of my consulting work at Narnian. After the tension between consulting and writing, which I'll address in a later section, this question was vital to answer. My thoughts on these have developed throughout the thesis, and here is where I land today.

I began my work at Narnian as a coach. My role as a coach was to train and advise Ms. Montagne. Training meant I'd select the best tools and concepts and teach Ms. Montagne how to use them so that, by analysis, the tools would improve her business. Advising meant that I'd synthesize the wisdom in dozens of business books with all the business data I could obtain at Narnian into sets of catchy three-point recommendations that Ms. Montagne could directly apply to improve her business. The problems I faced with my "coaching" approach were two-fold.

First, Ms. Montagne didn't want to learn about or use any of the tools I prepared to teach her. While I geeked out about business models, she saw a tool that repackaged ideas she'd spent months refining. She was not an analyst looking for tips on how to consult for her own business; she wanted to answer my questions and let me use whatever tools I wanted to analyze her answers.

Second, my advice was muddled together with the details of Narnian's business domain. To step in and analyze Ms. Montagne's business, I felt that I needed all the detailed information available: financial records, sanitized customer data, and employee demographics. While I didn't expect to become adept at running Ms. Montagne's business, I did think I must know it as well or better than she does. I would be an extension of her, an expert in the business processes, but with more time to perform analysis and craft recommendations. What I discovered was that I was hopelessly behind in my grasp of the counseling business, and it would take dozens of hours for Ms. Montagne to teach me and no immediate benefit to her business.

When I realized that the tools I had learned weren't for teaching and that I wouldn't ever get the detailed picture of the business I'd hoped, I questioned what benefit I could have. A call with Bob Goldmann changed my view of the work.

The first change was how I communicate with Narnian. Bob Goldmann clarified that most executives don't want a review of the analysis process or the tools used. Executives want the final product. Only if the product is impressive might the executive be curious about how it came to be. I ceased teaching about the tools and began to share final analysis and recommendations alone. Our meetings were more poignant, shorter, and full of productive discussion than they had ever been.

The second change was my thoughts about what I offer Narnian. I believed that I should become a domain expert. No one at Narnian should be more informed than I about the business. Counseling expertise was a futile goal since it would take me years to overtake Ms. Montagne's expertise. Instead, my expertise is limited to business

processes and change. I offer a broad perspective on business operations, but not a complete perspective on Narnian's operations. My service is to listen carefully to Ms. Montagne, dig further where she is dissatisfied, and offer a smorgasbord of options.

18.5 Perfectionism

Bob Goldmann explains that his consulting experience has developed in him a “dimmer” on the dial of his perfectionist tendencies, and this MBA thesis has had the same effect on me. Though my wife is a therapist, and I've had a long-standing interest in the mental health domain, I lack the time or opportunity to develop the proficiency and knowledge of my clients. Without certainty that my understanding of the business domain or the specifics of this business' operations, I am tempted to spend all my limited time verifying facts. Fact-checking was a barrier to my thesis completion because, though fact-checking is critical in a research paper, consulting does not require detail as much as an ability to listen to the customer's stories and offer a few thoughts about their position. I'm learning to digest what I've heard from the client and throw out ideas to see what sticks.

18.6 Writing and Consulting

When I began this project, I had no idea the tension between writing and consulting would cause me so much stress. The activities which make for quality consulting are entirely different than the activities which result in a high-quality MBA thesis. Three elements were in continual tension: the audience, the headspace, and the medium.

First, there's the audience. Ms. Montagne expects to offer her time in exchange for insight, and she doesn't care how I come by it. I could doodle a business model on a Starbucks napkin after an interview and, if the insights I shared with her afterward were helpful, she'd be ecstatic. A one-hundred-page stack of papers is the last deliverable she'd request. Contrast that with my professor's expectations. He requires every observation, analysis, recommendation, and feedback to be documented, written in concise, grammatically pure, organized paragraphs.

Second, there's the headspace to produce consulting insights vs. thesis chapters. I found that writing helped organize my thoughts and led to better analysis and recommendations when I forgot about submitting it to my professor. My mind was free to wander down trails of incomplete thoughts, through broken sentences, and past half-finished diagrams. Likewise, when I forgot about Ms. Montagne, I wrote a quality thesis. I could write a brief, detailed analysis for my professor with organized paragraphs and make recommendations without the nagging concern that Ms. Montagne would find them silly or offensive. The difference applies to writing and also to my interviewing.

When I interviewed Ms. Montagne, I was torn between competing goals. Had I been only consulting, I would have listened for irritations she had with her business and narrowed my questions towards those areas. Because I needed to write chapters for every business segment, I could afford only a cursory glance in any segment, so I would have time to address the entirety of Ms. Montagne's business. It didn't matter if Ms. Montagne had little concern about her corporate communications, I needed to go there. When I did make useful recommendations, I could not delve further into that area of her business because I must move to the next area.

Third, there's the narrow medium of a thesis vs. the expansive tools of a consultant. Business model canvases, flow charts, swimlane charts, scribbled notes, presentations, voice mail, and text messages; these are the tools of a consultant. Compare this variety with a double-spaced, 12-point, 16 chapter thesis. Every minute spent with a consultant's tools was a minute lost writing the thesis. Every hour spent aligning paragraphs was an hour lost analyzing Narnian.

Through this thesis, I've discovered that a thesis is opposed to consulting. Each discipline is excellent and worthy in its own right, but should the two be mixed? Hell no!

Chapter 19

Appendix and Bibliography

Table 19.1: Core Values

Diversity
Well-paid clinicians and affordable services
Taking care of clinicians first
Making Optimum Joy fit a clinician's life
Collaboration and thirst for learning
Giving back
Christian integration in services
Caring for each other through prayer and relationship

Table 19.2: Gender

Female	68.6%
Male	27.8%
Couples	3.6%

Table 19.3: Client type

Family	2.8%
Couples	3.6%
Individuals	93.6%

Table 19.4: Payment method

Self-paying	30.8%
Insurance	62.1%
Reduced fee	7.1%

Table 19.5: Race

Other	14%
Latino	10.7%
Caucasian	49%
African-American	22%
Asian	4.3%

Table 19.6: Payment method

Non-faith	30%
Faith	70%

Table 19.7: Timeline

2016 - November	Incorporated
2017 - April	First client
2017 - August	First therapist hired
2017 - December	Second therapist hired
2018 - July	Six therapists
2018 - August	Two therapists leave
2018 - September	Office moves to downtown Chicago
2018 - December	Another therapist hired, one left
2019 - May	Another therapist hired
2019 - June	Another therapist hired, six total

Table 19.8: Expenses

Wages	70%
Rent/Utilities	15%
Advertising	4%
Office Supplies/Software	3%
Professional Services	1.5%
Training/Resources	1.5%

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