

Intrapreneurship Through Uncertain Times: Exploring Innovation Strategies Among Campus Recreation Employees

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Background and Significance



The **COVID-19 pandemic** has shifted how sport and recreation organizations operate (Hammond, 2020; Smith, 2020).

This study examines **the challenges faced by employees in the campus recreation environment** during the pandemic.



Research purpose

The purposes of this study are **to examine the relationships among campus recreation center employees' engagement, resilience, and the ability to design creative mechanisms** to overcome work challenges.

We focus on how employees have been supported (and limited) by their organizations. There have been several attempts to find ways **to promote a culture of wellness** (Hunt & Griffeth, 2020), **enhance job/organizational engagement** (Hazzaa et al., 2021), and **decrease burnout** (Taylor et al., 2021) among campus recreation employees.

Literature Review



One of the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic for sport and recreation organizations has been the **need to generate solutions to unique or novel problems**.

One avenue to address this challenge could be **to utilize the human capital of their workforce via intrapreneurship**, which emphasizes internal processes to develop a new product or system (Pinchot & Pellman, 1999).

Furthermore, by engaging in intrapreneurship, individuals are likely to **experience a heightened sense of psychological well-being** as their tangible improvements to the organization complement their sense of fulfillment and environmental mastery (Ryff, 1989).



Methods

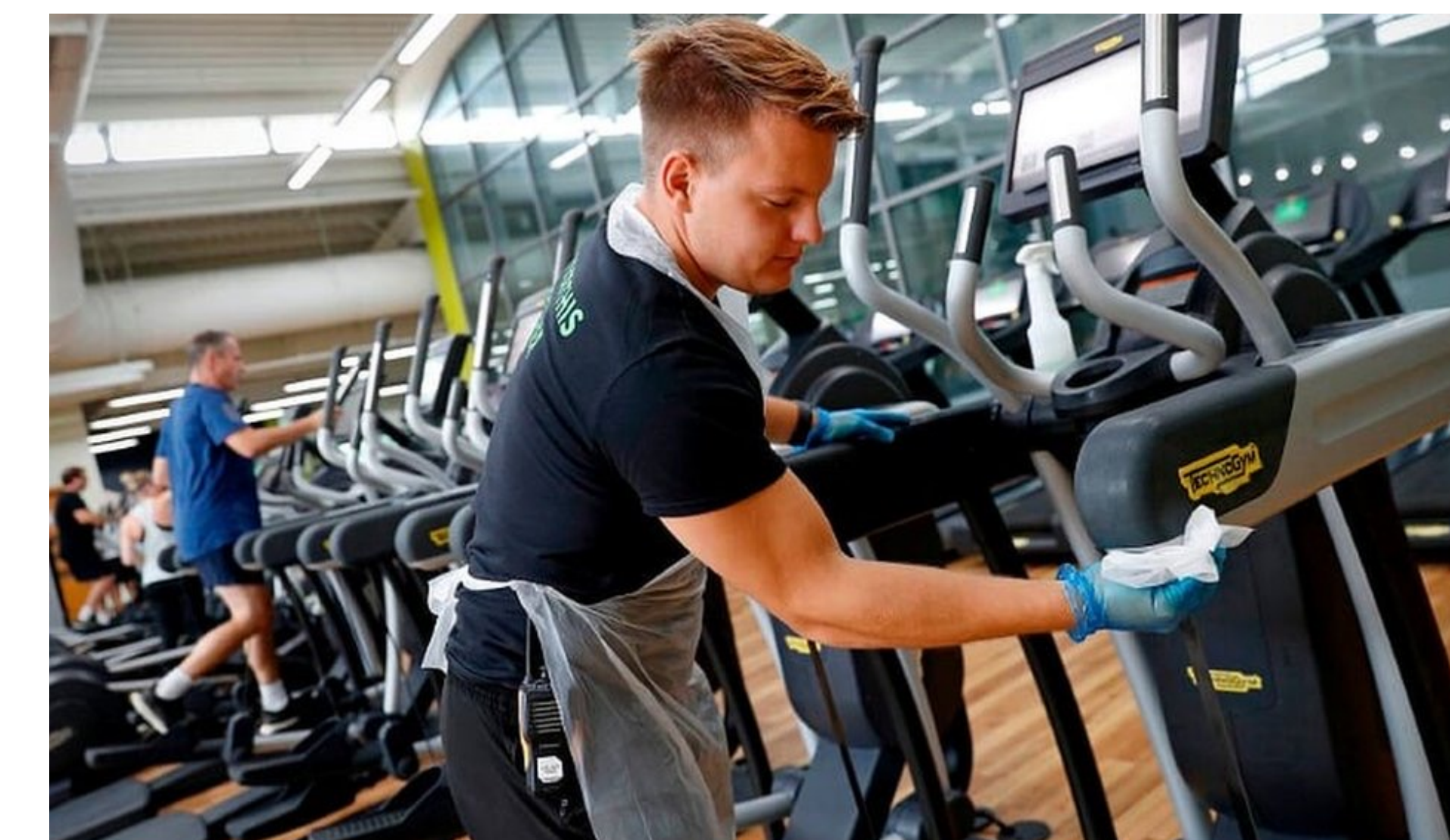
- ✓ **16 campus recreation center employees** (across 13 different colleges and universities from 10 different states the United States)
- ✓ **Semi-structured** Zoom interviews
- ✓ The authors independently coded the transcribed interviews, utilizing Braun and Clarke's (2006) **thematic analysis processes**.
- ✓ **Age** of interviewee ranged from **19 to 28** (*M*: 24.3).



- ✓ **5** interviewees self-identified their gender pronouns as he/him/his (**11** as she/her/hers).
- ✓ **3** worked in campus recreation **part-time as undergraduate students** (8 graduate assistants; 5 full-time employees)
- ✓ **13 interviewees** self-identified as **White/Caucasian** (2 as African American; 1 as Hispanic)
- ✓ **Example interview guide questions** included:
 - What makes you feel most engaged at work?
 - What have you learned about yourself this past year?

Findings and Discussion

- ✓ **Levels of engagement (e.g., patron and co-worker interaction)** were severely altered due to the pandemic and restrictions on interpersonal interaction. Interviewees had to be **intentional in warding off burnout, remaining engaged in work, and adapting for both professional development and promoting health and wellness programming** (e.g., creative virtual courses, virtual meetings, outreach initiatives to other institutions about their creative and innovative strategies to engage patrons during the pandemic).
- ✓ The pandemic significantly hindered their ability to do so, especially in live settings that tend to generate greater social interaction. Moreover, **the smaller number of patrons produced a reduced experience with challenge**, causing our participants to feel as if they were struggling to learn and grow at the same rate.
- ✓ In significantly changing their work lives, the pandemic also **brought our participants opportunities for personal growth**. The most common sentiment was a notion of "**rolling with the punches**," best understood as the ability to adapt to new situations.
- ✓ Additionally, some spoke on the issue of **work-life balance**, and how the pandemic forced them **to confront their own behavior and make adjustments to their work habits**.
- ✓ Participants often felt they were receiving instruction from people who were **unable to effectively lead because of their own level of disconnect with the campus recreation community** during the pandemic.



"I try to communicate more like 'alright guys, these are the polices, let's make sure that this is what we're doing.' Trying to make sure that we are all on the same boat and all on the same page as far as like what we're communicating to patrons." (Participant 3).

- ✓ Participants **leaned on their peers for effective communication**, attempting to find some small level of uniformity. Even if they did not always agree with policy, with whom they shared the trenches. **they sought to ensure that those policies were understood by their coworkers**.
- ✓ Without the guidance of senior management, many of our participants felt that they **needed to be more proactive about their professional development** during the pandemic.
- ✓ It should be viewed as promising that our participants were **still motivated to challenge themselves**. It would have been much easier in an environment where they often felt abandoned to do the bare minimum that was required of their jobs without growing professionally. Yet they sought these opportunities of their own accord, indicating that **they have a certain level of ingenuity, proactivity, and independence**.
- ✓ Participants engaged in innovation to design **improved mechanisms for engagement during the pandemic in the form of collaboration and outreach**. As the world eagerly awaits a return to normalcy, practical lessons from this study such as **the benefits of collaboration amongst organizations and a willingness to adapt** can be utilized to improve the functionality of sport and recreation organizations in the future.

