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Exercise for Happier Employees

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Abstract

The MCHD Wellness Program serves all county employees around the Monterey area. Due to the pandemic, employees lack access to the free gym services offered to county employees and may be struggling to find resources to exercise. While working from home, employees are taking less personal time and have fitness routines interrupted due to gyms closing (Kaur et. al., 2020), causing burnout (Fox, 2020). Therefore, a plan to host a virtual 5k run was created. The virtual 5k was administered over one week and participants could run or walk 3.1 miles at their leisure as long as it was completed in one session. Participants were polled with a survey after completion and the results of this project were that county employees felt happy, more proud of their health and fitness, and some indicated that they would exercise more as a result of the challenge as well. I would recommend the event is run again.

Agency & Communities Served

The Monterey County Health Department (MCHD) is a public government agency. The Employee Wellness program was developed in 1985 to meet the needs of county staff. According to the MCHD Employee Wellness website, the mission of the program is to improve employee health and wellbeing, provide health education and lifestyle skill development opportunities that empower employees to achieve optimal well-being, to enhance employee morale and job satisfaction, and to improve performance and productivity through programs, services, policy development, and program planning. The agency is a micro-practice, primarily serving individuals via optional fitness and nutrition classes. They also offer a lending library where employees can check out books on a myriad of health and wellness topics for free. However, there are also some elements of macro-practice, found in the wide-scope social media outreach projects and health initiatives that the agency pushes. The fitness and nutrition classes span a wide range of activities, including yoga and zumba. The nutrition classes teach information about lifestyle diets like keto and offer information to people who may be interested in introducing the diet to their lives in some way. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, these programs are currently suspended, but the program is researching ways to implement an online curriculum so that these services can continue to be offered to employees. Additionally, sometimes other health services are offered, such as free health screenings and free vaccination clinics for both the flu and COVID-19.

The MCHD Wellness Program serves only government employees, and benefits of the wellness program can only be used by such people. The MCHD is based out of Salinas, CA, in Monterey County. Salinas is an agriculture-heavy large city. Salinas has a population of about

150,000 people and has a predominantly Hispanic population, with 78.7% of the population identifying as such according to the US Census. The second largest is white not identifying as Hispanic or Latino at 13.2%. There is a fairly large population of foreign-born persons, at 38%, likely because Salinas is such an agriculture-focused city and has a lot of migrant workers. The race and cultural origin statistics for Salinas are similar to Monterey County, which has predominantly Hispanic people, but are less similar than California as a whole at only 39.4% and even less so than the United States at only 18.5% Hispanic or Latino. 72% of the families in Salinas speak a language other than English at home, which is much more than the 44.1% in CA and merely 21.5% in the United States. 17.2% of people living in Salinas are living in poverty, higher than the US rate at 10.5%.

The MCHD Employee Wellness program aims to enhance the health of Monterey County employees. The available programs can help offer resources for exercise, fitness, and nutrition to people who may be living paycheck to paycheck at home and cannot afford a gym membership or expensive workout classes. The Wellness Program also educates county employees about lifestyle choices like breastfeeding, tobacco cessation, work-life balance, etc. These programs can help supplement educational opportunities that county employees would not be receiving at home or in other areas at work. If county employees are having trouble finding time to be active at home, they can utilize the free gym at the Schilling office in Salinas or attend a fitness class that is put on in their own building.

Community assets that benefit the wellness program include flexibility of use of county-owned buildings, where it's easy to put on a yoga class as long as there's a hallway large enough to do so.

Problem Description

The Exercise for Happier Employees project is meant on a micro level to provide relief from the monotony of working from home for months that MCHD employees are experiencing, and encourage a sense of fitness, pride, and accomplishment. It will also encourage fitness.

According to a survey by the online employment platform Monster, 69% of people are experiencing burnout symptoms while working from home (Fox, 2020). Additionally, gyms are closed, causing people to lose their personal fitness routines. The consequences of this include employees who are not taking personal time for themselves, are much more stressed out, and are exercising less. For county employees these effects may have caused decreased productivity and more stress in the workplace.

Contributing Factors

Many contributing factors have led to the need for a virtual 5k run. The stress of constantly trying to prove that one is actually working at home instead of slacking off has created an environment where employees always feel on call (Vanderkam, 2020). Additionally, employees are not used to working remotely. A Gallup poll found that prior to March 2020, only 31% of US workers had ever worked remotely, a number which quickly rose to 62% by the beginning of April (Vanderkam, 2020). Without practice on how to manage time effectively and in a healthy way, employees don't know what to do and that can create difficulties with time management and create feelings of burnout. Work from home burnout can also contribute to depression and other mental illnesses, a rampant pandemic problem (Ivanova, 2020). Additionally, the pandemic caused gyms, fitness studios, and other activity centers to close

indefinitely, which severely impacted the fitness routines of millions of people in the United States (Kaur et. al., 2020). The virtual 5k is hopeful to create a fun new project for employees to participate in and relieve some stress.

Consequences

The closure of gyms and fitness studios in addition to the requirement to work from home had many consequences for county employees. While working from home it is harder for employees to draw boundaries and they feel pressured to constantly be responding to emails, available/on-call constantly, etc. This is very stressful for employees and has many consequences, which include decreased productivity, increased sick days, and likelihood to search for another job: burned out employees are 2.6 times more likely to look for another job (Vanderkam, 2020). One poll found that burned out employees are 2.6 times more likely to be actively seeking a different job and 63% are more likely to take a sick day (Vanderkam, 2020). Additionally, Wellness has suspended in-person fitness classes, so there are less opportunities for physical activity and recreation. Additionally, the closure of gyms and fitness studios led to a widespread decrease in physical activities, a 28% increase in daily sitting time, and an increase in unhealthy food consumption and eating habits (Kaur et. al., 2020).

Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
COVID-19	Fitness centers and gyms are closed due to the pandemic	Employees may be less productive
Working from home		Employees are exercising less
Lack of stimulus		

Capstone Project Description and Justification

Capstone Project & Project Purpose

My capstone project is a “virtual” 5k run. Participants walked or ran in the traditional format, but the activity itself was an individual event to ensure that proper social distancing protocols were followed as opposed to a traditional 5k race event where all participants gather together and start at the same time. The purpose of the project is to help participants exercise more, inspire increased exercise habits, and to foster a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Project Justification

The monotony of working from home for several months has left MCHD employees feeling a bit strained and burned out, with no end to WFH in sight right now. The aim of this project is to break up the routine of MCHD employees a bit and provide a recreational activity that is both fun and physically beneficial. Additionally, due to coronavirus, Wellness has struggled to administer fitness classes in the traditional in-person format. The virtual 5k will seek to amend this difficulty. After the 5k is administered, it will be important to collect data from MCHD employees to understand and reflect on how they felt about the project, so it is best understood what works well for virtual fitness events and what doesn't. Success of the project will be determined by the amount of people who register for the event and their feedback on the event once it is completed.

Project Implementation

The virtual 5k run was a community event, for the purpose of engaging county employees and breaking up the monotony of the work from home environment that the pandemic has created. In order to create and implement the virtual 5k, participant recruitment, content

development, promotion, logistics, and event activities were needed, as well as assessing success at the end of the project. After the event was implemented, a post-survey was created to measure participant's responses to the event.

Assessment Plan

To assess the success of my capstone project, Qualtrics was used to devise a four question survey that was sent to all participants in the final wrap-up email. Four statements were provided and the survey gave participants five different answers per statement so they could select which statement was most accurate for them. The statements were "The challenge rules were easy to understand"; "I enjoyed participating in the challenge"; "I will exercise more as a result of this challenge" and "I would recommend this challenge to a coworker". The answers provided for participants to select were strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree.

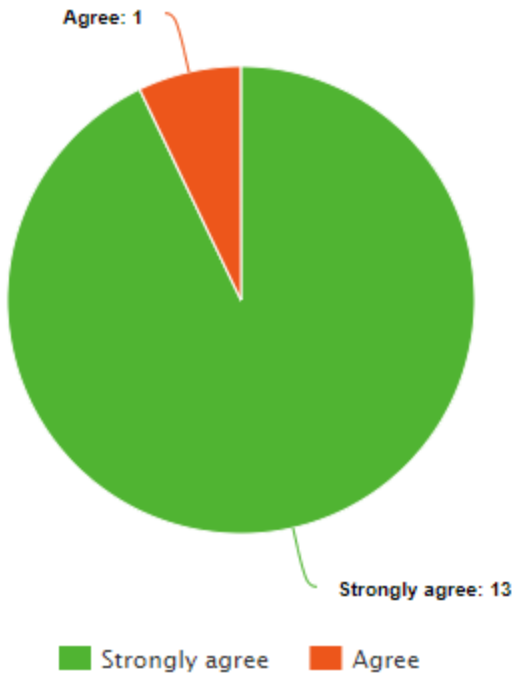
Expected Outcomes

The expected immediate outcome of the capstone project was for participants to exercise more and feel a sense of accomplishment about their achievement, with the hope to solidify the sense of accomplishment by sending participants who successfully completed the challenge a Wellness gold apple medal. Face masks were also sent to everyone who successfully completed the challenge. The short term outcome is self-identifying, because if participants do successfully complete the challenge, they will have hit the target goal of exercising more. The responses to the survey sent out to all participants helped to determine if the event was recommended to be ran again.

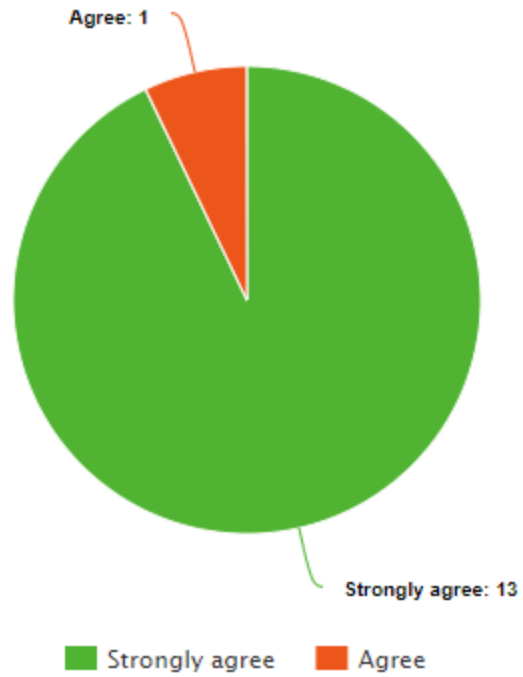
Project Results

14 participants responded to my post-survey. 92.9% of respondents strongly agreed that they enjoyed participating in the challenge, with the remaining 7.1% of respondents (just one person) agreed. The following statement, the challenge rules were easy to understand, had identical data. 92.9% of respondents strongly agreed, and 7.1% of respondents (just one person, again) agreed. The most polarizing statement was “I will exercise more as a result of this challenge”. For this statement, 42.9% of respondents strongly agreed; 28.6% agreed; 21.4% did not agree nor disagree; and 7.1% disagreed. The final statement was “I would recommend this challenge to a coworker” and it was exciting to see that 78.6% of respondents strongly agreed with this statement, with the remaining 21.4% agreeing. The project results determined that the capstone project did achieve its expected outcomes by helping participants exercise more and even changing exercise habits for nearly 43% of participants, which was a more lofty goal. Pictured on the next two pages are the graphs showing the same data explained above. The statement that corresponds with the data is shown at the top of the graph.

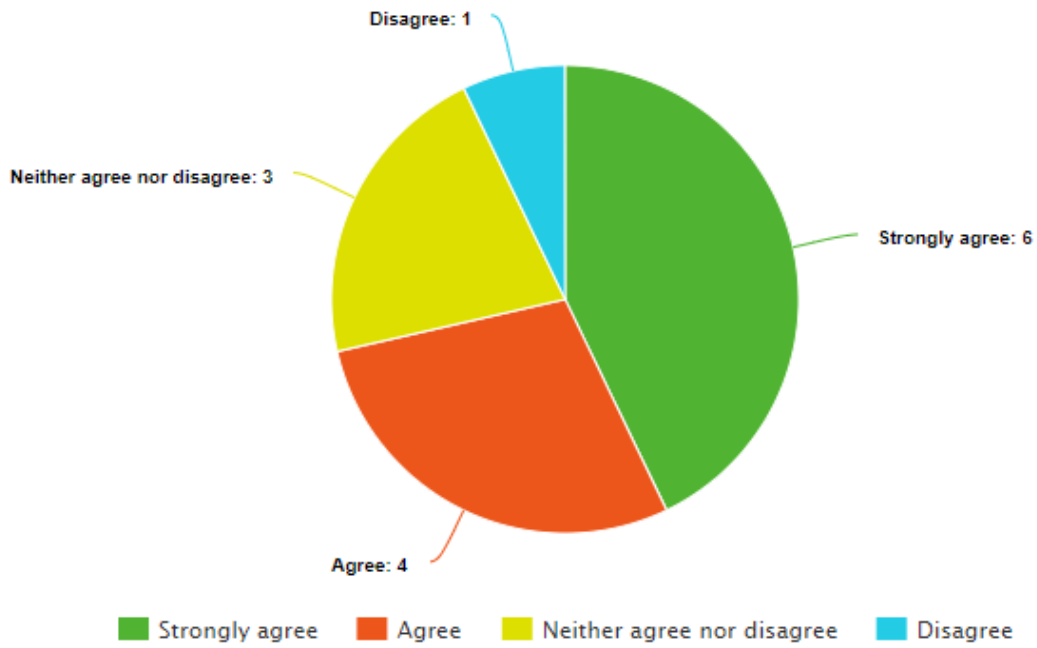
The challenge rules were easy to understand

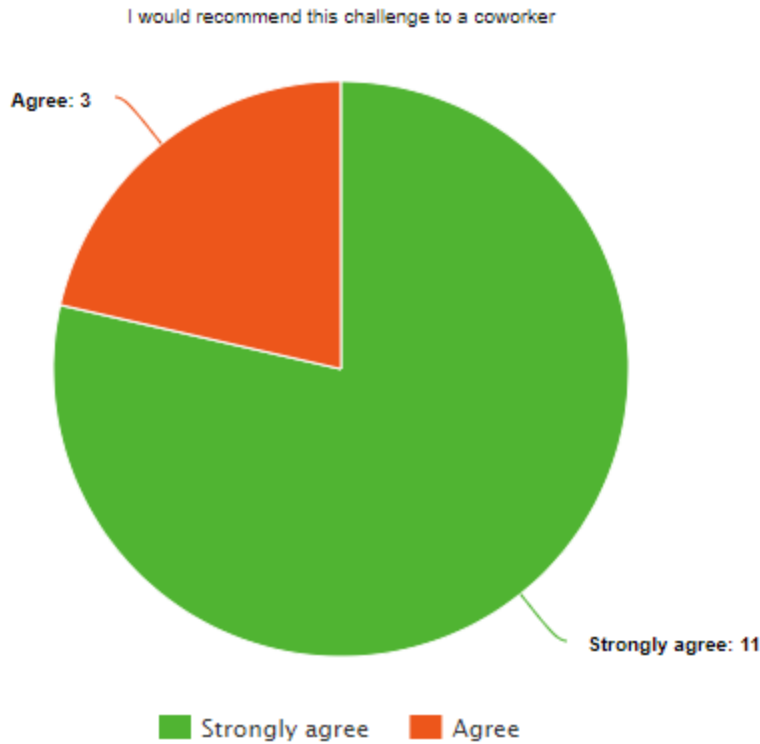


I enjoyed participating in the challenge



I will exercise more as a result of this challenge





Conclusion & Recommendations

Due to the success of the project, I would recommend that it is implemented again in the future, especially if there is another crisis that causes Monterey County to implement work-from-home orders again. Wellness has implemented fun run type activities in the past with good results, so I believe that continuing to occasionally offer events like this is a fun and unique way to help county employees get up and exercise. The results of my post-survey showed that the 5k was a sufficient way to help break up the environment of working from home and provided a way for participants to get out and exercise despite gyms and fitness studios being

closed. Providing incentives is very helpful to encourage participation, so I would consider that to be a crucial element of the event design and implementation process as well.

Personal Reflection

It's a bit difficult to comprehend that I am finally at the end of the Capstone journey! This process has been so intense and it really demanded a lot from me academically, but I feel like I rose to the challenge, and I am really happy with the end result. It was so exciting to see the positive feedback from participants, and it really made me proud of my accomplishment with this project. I have very few academic accomplishments, or really anything related to academics that I feel true pride in, so it's been a unique experience to operate a project of this magnitude and I'm truly proud of both my efforts and the success of the project. I even ended up in some situations that tested my own weakest points professionally, which was really scary, but I feel like I dealt with those situations appropriately and I was proud of my resolve to push through it. Completing virtually my entire internship remote was so difficult, but I did it!

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Appendix A

Scope of Work

Phases		Activities/Tasks	Deliverables	Timeline	Supporting Staff
Select capstone project	1.1	Discuss capstone ideas	Generate list of ideas	September 2020	Debra, Janet
Narrow down capstone idea	1.2	Discuss ideas with agency staff	Submit a list of potential ideas for approval	October 2020	Debra
Plan project	2.1	Plan the SOW and project details with mentor	SOW and project plan	November 2020	Debra
Develop SOW and project plan	2.2	Work on developing the scope of the project and planning materials	Materials for selected capstone project	November/December 2020	
Implement project	3.1	Create promotional material and surveys	Administer promotional material and surveys to target audience	December/January 2021	Debra
Host project	3.2	Put on the event	Virtual 5k!	March 2021	Debra, Janet
Reflect on project	3.3	Reflect on project implementation and gather data	Surveys for project assessment	March/April 2021	
Assess project	4.1	Create surveys to assess how	Data on how the event went	April 2021	

		the target audience thought about the project			
Project reflection	4.2	Analyze data to understand project scope	Report on project implementation	April 2021	
Report on project findings	5.1	Complete reporting requirements	Final agency and capstone reports	April/May 2021	
Work on capstone report	5.2	Prepare capstone report	Present at dress rehearsal	April/May 2021	
Present final material	5.3	Final preparation for Capstone Festival	Present during Capstone Festival	May 2021	Stephanie, cohort members