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**MANAGEMENT OF FITNESS AND HEALTH CENTRES FOR EFFECTIVE
SERVICE DELIVERY**

IDOU KEINDE

Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education
Faculty of Education
University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria.
ikeinde@unilag.edu.ng

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MANAGEMENT OF FITNESS AND HEALTH CENTRES FOR EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY

IDOU KEINDE

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Abstract

The changing lifestyles and the general awareness on the importance of healthy living in modern day Nigerian societies have suggested more needs and demands for appropriate settings to actualize optimal fitness for the body. Various centres are being established for this purpose but for efficiency in meeting the objective of their establishment, these centres must be effectively managed. This paper aims to fulfill this gap and suggests a pragmatic approach to managing health and fitness centres. The basic requirements for the operation of a fitness and health centre are examined to identify ways and strategies of managing and supervising fitness and health centres effectively. It examined steps for setting up clientele services mainly for effective service delivery; organogram for the operation of good management; typical rules and regulations; identified the constraints involved; and made provision for typical personnel that will drive the management of the fitness and health centres with a view to maximizing financial benefits offered in present day awareness of seeking wellness, healthy lifestyles, and longevity.

Introduction

The exigencies of modern-day living now motivate more people to appreciate the need to be more active. In realisation of the age-long adage, health is wealth; individuals strive to stay healthy, live longer and retain their youthfulness for as long as possible. As the major basis for good health and well-being, regular physical activity is now enjoyed and embraced by many individuals, especially in urban centres. Regular physical exercises and sports are avenues to achieving desirable physical fitness. According to Nabofa and Money, (2011) and Emiola (2008), physical fitness is more than being or not being sick, just as health is more than being free from disease. Physical fitness is the ability to carry out daily tasks with vigour and alertness without undue fatigue and with ample energy to enjoy leisure-time pursuits and to meet any

unusual situation and unforeseen emergencies (Otinwa, 2010). It is an essential quality of a good life. As a condition, it helps us to look, feel, and do our best.

The subject of health and fitness is one that cuts across all national boundaries and ideologies. It is universal in nature as many now realise the relationship of fitness to health. Studies (Hastrup, 2011; Makubuya, 2018.) have shown that participation in sporting activities and exercises is essential to an individual's health. Keeping fit is therefore related to a higher degree of health. Literature (Akeredolu, 2004; Emiola, 2008) have also suggested that physical fitness is basic to forms of fitness mental, social, emotional, and spiritual. Though there are different degrees of fitness among individuals, physical fitness is the most essential to life. According to Cheng (2013), participation in regular physical activities develops the health-related fitness components, which in turn improves basic energy levels and places a person at a lower risk of common diseases.

The implication of this lower risk is that individuals seek to achieve their fitness and wellness in gymnasiums, fitness, and health centres where various physical exercises and sporting activities are offered. This calls for sound managerial acumen on the part of proprietors and managers of such centres, especially if they desire effective and efficient management as well as high patronage by members of the public. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine ways and strategies for managing and supervising various fitness and health centres as well as steps for setting up various clientele services with a view to maximising accruable financial benefits and delivering effective services. Above all, this paper provides a guide to successfully cope with the challenges of managing a fitness and health centre.

The Fitness and Health Centre

The fitness and health centre, also called a health club, a fitness studio or exercise centre, is a place which houses exercise equipment for the purpose of physical exercise. It could be a gymnasium, or a large hall where the equipment is housed (Freitas & Lacerda, 2019). Usually, there are courses at the health club for aerobics or yoga. It is not unusual for a sauna or wellness area to be present at one of these facilities, and health clubs generally charge a fee to allow visitors to use the equipment, courses, or any other provided services.

The facilities and equipment at the centre may include varieties and models of the following in the gym -treadmills, elliptical/cross trainers, stationary bikes, weight machines, multi-station gyms, full strength circuits, bow flex, full/half cage, leg extension, press/squat/curl machine, stair steppers, racks, benches, bars/attachments, flooring/mats, balance tools, weeble boards, high/low pulley, electrical modalities for fitness test e.g. electro cardiogram (EGG); body composition facilities e.g. skin fold calipers, cue tape, etc. (Powers & Howley, 2001). There will also be lockers for clients to keep their valuables, a reception hall and clock/changing rooms. Facilities could also be provided for sauna, massaging, restaurants, barbing/hair dressing saloon and sports -swimming, tennis, table tennis, volleyball, and minor indoor games (ludo, chess, monopoly, scrabble, draughts, archery, 'ayo', snookers, etc.). Essentially, the fitness and health centre is managed for the purpose of meeting the needs of clients through the use of human, material, financial and physical resources. The centre must therefore evolve a mechanism by which clients' membership is retained from time to time and the business goal of the centre is attained.

Managing such centre therefore requires such a visionary, dynamic and astute leader who is well grounded in the art of management of human, physical, financial and material resources. According to Lam, Zhang, & Jensen (2005) and Mulrooney & Styles (2005) foresightedness,

innovativeness, creativity and human relations are needed in the management of the fitness and health centers which, like the hospitality industries, are many and clients are free to choose and free to change as the case may be. Managing the fitness and health centre must therefore be considered from the viewpoint of many factors which determine the overall success of the centre. Efforts in this direction are strategic planning on availability of resources, provision of quality services, membership drive, human relations, and marketing drive (French, 2007; Horine, L. & Stotlar, 2004).

Planning as a Strategy for Managing Fitness and Health Centre

In every organisation, the need for planning becomes imperative since resources are fundamentally scarce and must be judiciously used in meeting the varying needs of individuals within the organisation as well as those of the organisation. All sport organisations undertake the function of planning, either formally or informally. It is an aspect of management which runs through every aspect and area of an organisation. Planning has become an important tool in the management of fitness centres as a result of changes expected and experienced in such sport organisations. Such areas as finance, facilities and equipment, programme services, personnel, research, and statistics as well as administration of the organisation require adequate planning (Bucher & Krotee, 2002).

From the management perspective, planning describes those activities carried out by administrators or other personnel by which they itemise programmes and analyse actions to be carried out on how to accomplish them prior to the execution of the programme. It is a strategy used in managing the fitness and health centre because it enables the management team to carry out all administrative activities needed to actualise organisational performance. Hence, it is described as the blueprint for organisation's actions. According to Garcia-Fernandez, Bernal-Garcia, Fernandez-Gavira, and Velez-Colon (2014), organisations that plan and plan well are more effective and efficient, and those that refuse to plan are planning towards failure. Hence the phrase, to fail to plan is to plan to fail.

As a strategy, planning for the fitness and health centre will involve decisions in advance on what to do, how to do it, when to do it, and who to do what. It provides answers to the following questions:

- a. What specific services and events/activities should the fitness and health centre engage in?
- b. Which activities/services are compatible with top management defined mission statement/goal?
- c. What course of action should the fitness and health centre pursue?
- d. Should it be profit or non-profit centered?
- e. What type of members of the public or clients should the centre provide for?
- f. What are the strategies for membership/client drive?
- g. What type of resources will be required to accomplish the goals of the centre?

Planning involves setting the goals for the fitness centre and its members and specifying the activities to achieve the stated goals. According to Horine and Stotlar (2004), planning requires determination in advance of action and decision making occurs throughout the action. Decision making without action is not planning. Planning process for the fitness centre will involve:

- a. identifying the constraints (mainly resources) with which the fitness and health centre must operate.
- b. ensuring that the goals set up for the centre and the selected means of achieving them are within the financial capabilities of the centre.

- c. ensuring that the goals set are acceptable to the larger society in which the centre operates and the clients to be served.
- d. forecasting for the future affairs of the fitness and health centre.

It is part of planning to formally state the policies, procedures, method standards and rules for achieving identified goals. As emphasised by Mulrooney and Styles (2005), the purpose of formally stating these is to clearly outline to staff and clients what is to be done and how it is to be done. The statements should also indicate to clients patronising the centre what can be expected of the centre and its members.

Planning for the fitness and health centre is carried out at the top level by the Manager/Director of the centre who, as the chief executive, is the most visible and most important strategist. As the head, he bears full responsibility for staffing, leading the tasks of providing different personnel for the centre. He is directly responsible for providing fitness instruction, training programme, exercise classes, nutritional guide and sport-specific training services. Since planning is the beginning of other management activities, the chief executive of the fitness and health centre should always think of what is desirable for the centre, and how it will be achieved. Apart from the above, part of what should be planned for include programme services, resources to prosecute programme, equipment and facilities, space, sporting games, clientele services, and facility management.

Financial and Personnel Management of the Fitness and Health Centre

Financial and personnel management facilitate smooth administration of the fitness and health centre. It has considerable influence on the general condition of the centre. Due consideration must therefore be given to financial and personnel functions. The role of financial and personnel management in the fitness and health centre is crucial to the entire management of the centre (Fairly, Schenadel, Gladden & Sutton, 2012). The need to have adequate, accurate and up to date records of the centre cannot be over emphasised.

Many fitness and health centres in Nigeria pay little attention to financial and personnel management. All that they are after is maximizing, to the fullest, their personnel time schedules and doubling the activities of staff in other areas of the centre. Putting an effective and knowledgeable person in charge of a specific area of the centre is as important as the services offered by the centre. Bucher and Krotee (2002) observed that huge investment is now a major factor in sports business, and that if human resources are developed to match investment, success will result from such business venture. Clients will have value for their money and the organisation will have a competitive edge. For the fitness and health centre, clients pay for services rendered. The employment of individuals with charisma, marketing skills, good human relations, good programming acumen and result focused will guarantee client membership and satisfaction, as well as give the centre the competitive edge.

Management of the centre deals with the administration of all sections of the centre as there are many specialised areas in the fitness and health centre. The professionals involved in the day-to-day administration of the centre are expected to be exposed to a series of training, courses, seminars, and workshops in various areas of fitness and health apart from the basic educational and professional training. All the personnel of the centre also need appropriate training in the techniques of fitness and health management to be able to use whatever natural gifts they may have to their advantage. In other words, the personnel need to demonstrate their expertise to reflect successful and effective management of the centre.

Financial management is a very important skill relevant to the smooth running of the fitness and health centre. This is because the success of the various programme of the centre depends to a large extent on the prudent management of available resources. Resources are naturally limited and need to be managed well. The management of the centre needs to show competence in areas of financial accounting and management as they relate to preparing realistic budgets and prudently spending available funds (Ham, 2005).

In view of the importance of effective financial and personnel management in the fitness and health centre, the following are carefully suggested for yielding desired results.

- a. There should be availability of financial and human resources in the centre.
- b. Adequate control must be exercised to carefully monitor program implementation.
- c. Administration of programme guidelines must be fair to all personnel and clients of the centre.
- d. Effective communication is an essential tool in the administration of the centre: so this must be adhered to for good interpersonal relationships.
- e. Active participation of the personnel in the running of the centre should be sought. This will motivate them to perform optimally and give a sense of belongingness to the centre.
- f. Adequate facility management must be carried out in all areas of the centre in such a manner as to help attain the sports business objective of the fitness and health centre.

Specific Administrative Consideration for Effective Clientele Service of Fitness and Health Centres

- a. **Staffing:** The acquisition and placement of qualified employees in various jobs of the fitness and health centre is dependent on the talents and skills of such employees. In the view of Freitas and Lacerda (2019), staffing in sports organisation must consider relevant areas and fields which have bearing on aspects of the organisation. The health and fitness centre must ensure that competent and qualified professionals handle the services required. French (2007) as well as Horine and Stotlar (2004) noted that depending on the scope of services rendered and the size of the centre, the staff personnel of a typical fitness and health centre will include gym instructors, administrative officers, human resources manager, office assistants, marketing executives, technical/maintenance officers, quality control officers, aerobics instructors, sports instructors, masseurs, beauticians, consultants, practitioners (dietician, physiotherapy cardiologist). (*See Figure 1 for a Typical Organogram for a Fitness and Health Centre*)

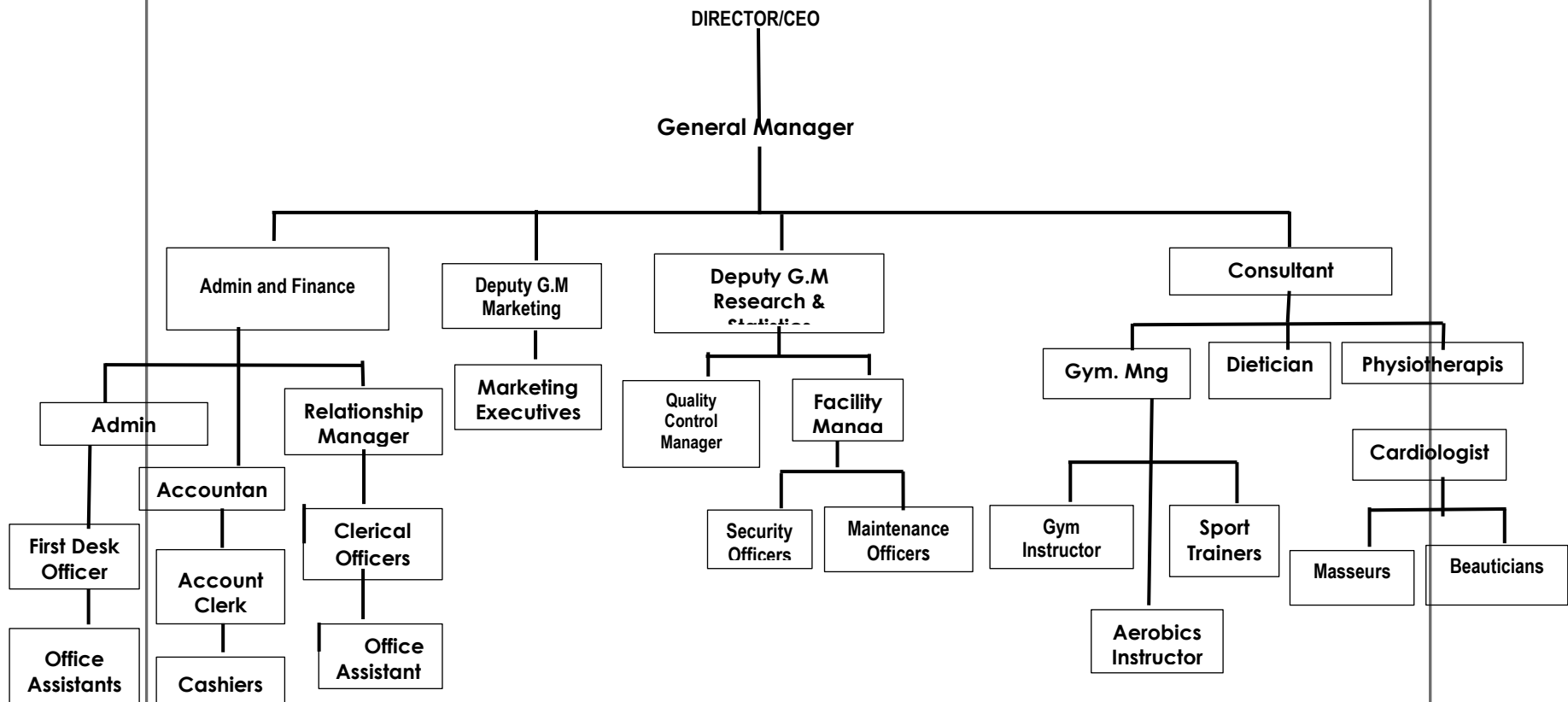


Figure 1: A Typical Organogram for a Fitness and Health Centre

b. Clientele Registration: This could be based on individual family corporate category. However, every client must be registered to be a member of the centre. Every prospective member must fill the following forms:

- i. Membership application form
- ii. Rules and regulations form
- iii. medical history form

(See Appendix A, B & C for samples of these forms)

Registration is mainly to have an up-to-date data base for members and non-members who patronise the centre. It also facilitates scheduling of programme for users.

c. Fees and Charges: Whatever might be charged as fees for the centre's services should be in line with current economic realities in the country. The following could serve as a guide for charges on services rendered by the fitness and health centre:

- i. Registration and ID card.
- ii. Membership fees - 1 year, 6 months, 3 months, 1 month
- iii. Categories: individual, family, married, corporate.

Each of these will attract different fees and charges. However, each of the services should attract specific charges, especially for non-members. (Fairly, Schenadel, Gladden & Sutton, 2012).

d. Range of Services: Depending on the size of the centre, a range of services could be provided for different categories of people. Such services could include aerobics, sports training, exercise classes, fitness instruction and evaluation, nutritional guide, games, and sports.

e. Facilities Maintenance: Tied to the range of services are the range of equipment and facilities available at the centre. These must not only be adequate, but they must also be maintained from time to time. Products or equipment purchased must be guaranteed and service after sales provided. A better way of facilitating this is for the centre manager and the facility manager to know the facilities to be managed (Mulrooney & Styles, 2005).

f. Security: Reputable security outfit should be in place manning observation posts located within the centre and at strategic points, especially during opening hours. Security is an important consideration since different people in society will patronise the centre.

g. Operating Hours: This depends on the type of clients using the fitness and health centre. Depending on flexibility and peculiarities of location, the centre could however remain open on these schedules: Monday-Saturday: 7am - 10pm; Sunday & Public Holidays: 10am - 7pm.

h. Marketing: Management of the centre needs to adopt outdoor advertisement and marketing strategies to present the centre to the public. These will further promote its image and facilitate patronage.

i. Management Software: Technology should be deployed into the administrative set up of the centre. This enhances efficiency, especially in maintaining facilities. It is difficult for

proprietors and managers to properly maintain various facilities if they are unaware of what is happening and cannot be around to inspect everything personally. Having management software helps with member management, staff recruiting and monitoring, payment collection, marketing, scheduling, promotions, upkeep, and many more aspects.

Conclusion

The present-day realities of lifestyles have placed an additional burden on every individual in terms of ensuring healthy living, physical fitness, and general well-being. Fitness and health centres come with the challenge of effective management and achieving the objectives of their establishment. Fitness and health centres thrive on membership drive, and they offer a wide range of services, catering for exercisers, workout sessions, games/sports training, and nutritional programming. As an integrative process, managing such centres involves harnessing a gamut of activities geared towards meeting the needs and demands of clients. From a pragmatic approach, the centres must meet the basic requirements of facilities and equipment, planning strategies, programming, financial and personnel outlay, and good clientele services. These considerations are crucial for the management of fitness and health centres in general but specifically for effective service delivery.

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APPENDIX A
A TYPICAL MEMEBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

FORM A

Affix Current Passport Photo here:

Complete in Duplicate. For Official use only

Date Received _____

Membership Card No _____

MEMBERSHIP FORM

- 1. Name:
 (Surname) (Others)
- 2. Gender: (Male or Female).....
- 3. Residential Address:
- 4. Telephone No:
- 5. E-mail Address:
- 6. Present Business Address:
- 7. Marital Status:
- 8. No of Children: Date of Last Delivery:
- 9. Family Town/Village:
- 10. Do you belong to any other Gym/ Fitness Centre? Yes/No
 If yes, which Gym/ Fitness Centre?
- 11. Have you recently been medically examined? (If yes, attach photocopy of the
 examination).
- 12. Have you any physical problem or disease? If yes, state the condition.....
- 13. Have you been proved as having bones or nerves disorder? Yes/No
- 14. Have you been proved as having increased risk of heart disease? Yes/No
- 15. Have you had any medical operation? Yes/No
 If yes, state type
- 16. State specific ways this centre can help you.
 - (a).....
 - (b).....
 - (c).....

Date

Signature of Member

APPENDIX B
A TYPICAL RULES & REGULATIONS FORM
FORM B

RULES & REGULATIONS

1. Members are to carry their identity card while coming to the gym.
2. Members are to demand for receipts for any payment made.
3. Members are to appear properly dressed to be allowed the use of the gym.
4. Visitors are to wait in the reception room. Visitors are not allowed in the gym (except if taken around by an instructor).
5. New members are to take instruction from the instructors on how to use the equipment in the gym.
6. Members are to safe guard their precious articles in their lockers.
7. Smoking within the centre is prohibited.
8. The use of alcoholic drinks is restricted to the restaurant.
9. The female clock room is prohibited to men (vice-versa).
10. Relaxing on the equipment or idling on the machines is not allowed.
11. Reception seats are not for members' workout.
12. Report immediately to the instructor or management should you feel uneasy or dizzy while working out.
13. Book for the hours to use any of the games/sports facilities or for the instructor.
14. Report any unruly attitude of a worker, or a member to the management.
15. Quarrelling or the use of abusive language by any member could attract withdrawal of membership if found guilty.
16. Regular medical check-up is highly recommended.
17. The management is willing to listen to all complaints and advice.

Pledge: Having read the above rules and regulations of the centre, I
.....of...
.....
.....do hereby pledge to abide by the rules and regulations of this
Fitness and Health Centre.

Name of Member

Signature & Date

Centre Official

Signature & Official Stamp

APPENDIX C

A TYPICAL MEDICAL HISTORY DATA FORM

FORM C

Registration No:

Read carefully the following statements on your medical health history and tick \checkmark either Yes or No to respond to the questions honestly.

Note: All information supplied are held confidential.

1. Has your doctor ever told you that you have any heart related disease? Yes No
2. Has your doctor ever told you that you are asthmatic? Yes No
3. Has your doctor ever told you that you had rheumatic fever, growing pains or twitching of the limbs? Yes No
4. Have you ever had a real or suspected heart attack? Yes No
5. Do you feel pain in your chest during any physical activity? Yes No
6. Do you feel any pain in your shoulder area, neck, upper back or hip? Yes No
7. Have you ever had an abnormal electro cardiogram (ECG)? Yes No
8. In the last one month, have you ever felt pain, pressure, or a squeezing feeling in your chest?
 - a. During exercise: Yes No
 - b. While walking: Yes No
 - c. During sexual activity: Yes No
9. Are you currently taking any medication for heart-related disease, blood pressure? Yes No
10. Do you have, or have you had diabetes, high blood sugar, or sugar in your urine? Yes No
11. Do you smoke cigarettes at present? Yes No
12. Do you find it difficult to bend down, lace your shoes, or cut your toe nails while sitting? Yes No
13. Do you get exhausted easily at the end of the day's job? Yes No
14. Do you find it difficult to get up from your sitting or lying position? Yes No
15. Do you gasp for breath after lovemaking? Yes No
16. Do you sleep soundly? Yes No
17. Are you easily tensed-up or stressed? Yes No
18. Do you, at present, find it difficult controlling your appetite? Yes No
19. Do you sometimes get fed lip with life? Yes No
20. Do you at present have waist or back pains? Yes No
21. Are you overweight? Yes No

Name:

Membership Registration No:

Signature:

Date: