In an ever-changing world characterized by rapidly expanding knowledge and technology, diversification should be part of every profession’s quest to thrive. We can no longer operate in our closed cubicles and speak in esoteric tongues. Companies and industries, which fail to innovate and adapt, run the risk of becoming obsolete and possibly collapsing. Therapeutic recreation (TR) is at a crossroads. Leadership and other pressures within the field are moving us towards a narrow and more specialized model. A vibrant future may lay in a clinical focus, but the value and power of therapeutic recreation services may have a more extensive role to play in today’s changing world. Further limiting the provision of our services is not in harmony with trends towards diversity. Creating, growing, and adapting services, whether in therapeutic recreation, community or business settings, requires the ability to lead with an “out of the box” perspective in order to flourish.

Traditionally, TR serves individuals and groups with disabilities and illness, using a variety of recreational modalities to promote positive change, higher quality of life and overall well-being. TR programs often provide powerful life changing experiences (Lundberg, Taniguchi, & McCormick, 2011). Ideally, the benefit of TR services and the potential to promote quality of life should be available to all people with disabilities and illness. In the context of diversification, we might also consider the value of TR services beyond our historical client base. The efficacy of TR services should not be limited to a select few. Although the traditional view of TR’s applications is focused on individuals with physical and/or psychological disabilities, these same applications potentially have a more comprehensive application. This brief addresses the possibility of such non-traditional applications.

**Keywords:** Diversification, TR process, adventure recreation

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In an ever-changing world characterized by rapidly expanding knowledge and technology, diversification should be part of every profession’s quest to thrive. Companies and industries that fail to innovate and adapt run the risk of becoming obsolete and possibly collapsing. Therapeutic recreation (TR) is at a crossroads. With the dissolution of the National Therapeutic Recreation Society (NTRS), we have gone from two professional organizations to one, the American Therapeutic Recreation Association (ATRA). ATRA represents a strong focus on health care with less emphasis on TR processes in community-based programs as evidenced by the accreditation standards adopted in 2010 by ATRA and the committee on Accreditation of Recreational Therapy Education (CARTE) (CAAHEP, 2010). More recently, a broader accreditation option from the Council on Accreditation of Park, Recreation, Tourism and Related Profession (COAPRT) has become available. Another potential factor influencing higher education is the small number of doctoral programs offering degrees or emphases in therapeutic recreation and the dearth of people graduating with doctorates in Therapeutic Recreation. It is likely programs will have difficulty replacing retiring faculty.

Clearly some leadership and other pressures within the field are moving us toward a narrow and more specialized focus on clinical applications. A vibrant future may lay in a solely clinical focus, but the value and power of therapeutic recreation services could also have other, potentially broader roles to play in today’s changing world. Creating, growing, and adapting services, whether in therapeutic recreation, community or business settings, requires the ability to lead with an out-of-the-box perspective in order to flourish.

Traditionally, TR serves individuals and groups with disabilities and illness, using a variety of recreational modalities to promote positive change, higher quality of life, and overall well-being. TR programs often provide powerful life-changing experiences, such as helping individuals with physical disabilities identify themselves as able and not disabled in recreational settings (Lundberg, Taniguchi, & McCormick, 2011). Ideally, the benefit of TR services and the potential to promote quality of life should be available to all people with disabilities and illness.

TR professionals’ understanding of how to provide specifically designed experiences to promote targeted outcomes also positions the field to capitalize on increasing interest from a variety of fields around experience provision. For example, Pine and Gilmore (2011) have argued that experiences have superseded goods and services as the most powerful economic driver. Ellis and Rossman (2008), building upon this claim, state:

Rather than continuing to focus attention solely on the unique features of specific industries (e.g., sport, event planning, tourism), the experience industry concept establishes a shared purpose and common social calling. The expanding set of industries that are related to traditional park, recreation, and tourism curricula share a common purpose: all are fundamentally in the business of staging quality experiences that are
valued by guests, participants, clients, patients, or students.
(p. 16)

From this perspective, TR professionals should consider themselves experience provision experts.

In the context of experience provision and diversification, we need to consider the value of TR services beyond our historical client base, such as applications in adventure recreation, in employee engagement, or talent development for example. Although the traditional view of TR is focused on individuals with physical and/or psychological disabilities, more comprehensive applications are possible. This paper addresses the possibility of such nontraditional applications and attempts to establish a connection between the diversification of TR and the continued development of the field using theories such as positive psychology in the TR Process.

**TR Process**

The TR process involves assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation (APIE) (O’Morrow & Reynolds, 1989 as cited in Austin, 2009). The process begins by identifying the client’s need through assessment. The use of triangulated assessment procedures, including psychometric instruments, systematic observations, and interview, leads to the identification of a client’s needs and the associated targeted outcomes. Planning involves the selection of a recreation or other activity modality (e.g., social skills and assertiveness training) best suited to facilitate the desired outcome. Ideally, planning also integrates a model or theory that explains the mechanisms of change and will also enable the achievement of the outcome. Planning further involves writing a program plan addressing issues around process, equipment, staffing, and other logistics. Once the plan is in place, implementation occurs. The final step involves evaluation. Evaluation may include measuring participant satisfaction, adherence to the program plan, and the extent to which the targeted outcomes were achieved (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2003). This process should be evidence-based, outcome-oriented and focused on strengths, as suggested by (Carruthers & Hood, 2007).

**Using the TR process in adventure programs and organizational development.** The speed and magnitude of change is dynamically increasing (Black & Gregersen, 2008). We witness these changes in technology, in demographic characteristics, and in the access to information. As a health care profession, we face constant changes due to the economy, political influences (e.g., health care legislation), and education and certification requirements. Being aware of our environment and responding quickly to opportunities is key to the future health of the profession. One potential opportunity for change was suggested by Carruthers and Hood (2007) who recommended the adoption of a strengths based model focused on the development of positive assets. “The focus of the new paradigm is on understanding and cultivating the strengths and capacities of individuals and the institutions and society that allow them to thrive” (Carruthers & Hood, 2007, p. 279). Clearly the TR process can be used along with a strength-based approach to assist individuals in institutions that are struggling.

Many individuals and institutions struggle to thrive in the face of change
and the inherent challenges of life and work. For example, organizational pathology in the corporate world can lead to conflict, lower job satisfaction, loss of jobs and decreased market share. Just as addicts often resist change to a life free of substance abuse, individuals and groups also resist change in the face of adversity in organizations. Individuals and groups seek homeostasis, even when the homeostasis means continued dysfunction. Corporations pay large fees to consultants who assess corporate dysfunction and plan and implement a treatment strategy. The success of their strategies depends on the efficacy of their intervention as determined by key organizational indicators such as employee satisfaction, employee retention, and return on investment. With some training and familiarization with principles of business, CTRSs could possibly use the APIE process to provide similar services.

In the past, one popular intervention strategy was the use of recreational activities to address organizational pathology. More specifically, adventure recreation was used to promote team building and other desired outcomes in business. These experiential programs have fallen out of favor and have been criticized as lacking theory-based protocols.

Ropes courses and other experiential team activities seem to have lost some of their luster over the last 10 years and deservedly so. Still, many teams do them with the hope of building trust. And while there are certainly some benefits derived from creative and rigorous outdoor activities involving collective support and cooperation, those benefits do not always translate to the working world. That being said, experiential team exercises can be valuable tools for enhancing teamwork as long as they are layered upon more fundamental and relevant processes (Lencioni, 2002, pp. 200-201).

The TR process provides an ideal framework to enhance the ability of adventure recreation to produce meaningful and lasting strength based outcomes for individuals and organizations. Applying theory-based TR processes to address organizational pathology holds great potential to diversify the application of TR beyond traditionally served populations.

**Adventure Recreation**

TR has a rich history in adventure recreation contexts. Adventure recreation provides opportunities for novel experiences, interacting in unfamiliar environments, and confronting challenges and risks. Research findings suggest such experiences provide a powerful context for meaningful change (e.g., Duerden, Taniguchi, & Widmer, 2012; Duerden, Widmer, Taniguchi, & McCoy, 2009; Taniguchi, Freeman, & Richards, 2005; Wells, Widmer, & McCoy, 2004). Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards (1997) identified features common to most adventure recreation programs including:

(a) wilderness or backcountry settings, (b) a small group (usually less than 16), (c) assignment of a variety of mentally and/or physically challenging objectives, such as mastering a river rapid or
hiking to a specific point, (d) frequent and intense interactions that usually involve group problem solving and decision making, (e) nonintrusive, trained leader, and (f) a duration of 2 to 4 weeks. (p. 44)

Research documents a variety of outcomes from adventure recreation programming for groups and businesses. The results from two such studies suggested an increase in organizational commitment and improved communication skills resulted from participating in an adventure recreation intervention (Daniels, 1994; McEvoy & Buller, 1997). Wagner et al. (1991) reported an improvement in conflict management as a result of participation in an adventure program. Teamwork and group problem solving are also among the main characteristics common to adventure recreation programing (McEvoy & Buller, 1997). Adventure recreation activities help foster teamwork through increasing participants’ awareness of their co-participants’ strengths and weaknesses. Participants increase in morale and camaraderie as they help the group achieve goals throughout different obstacles (McEvoy & Buller, 1997). Although somewhat complex (e.g., Lind, Kray, & Thompson, 1998; Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009), trust is another potential benefit of adventure programming (Daniels, 1994; Fletche & Hinkle, 2002).

Buller, Cragun & McEvoy (1991) identified other benefits associated with adventure recreation including developing self-awareness, risk taking, problem solving, giving and receiving feedback, managing conflict, and assessing and using resources. Additional important benefits from adventure programming include developing an internal locus of control, increasing awareness of personality, enhancing creativity, increasing problem-solving styles, and increasing time management. From the review of research, enhancing leadership skills, building teams, improving problem-solving skills, increasing trust, and improving interpersonal communication represent the most commonly cited outcomes of adventure recreation programming.

Applying the TR process in diverse settings. The diversification of the TR process can be illustrated through two examples from practice and research. The first, an adventure recreation program for disadvantaged youth, directly employed the APIE process. The second was a program designed to enhance skills and efficacy around leading strategic change, to strengthen individual resiliency and to strengthen the corporate culture at a major corporation. Both of these programs are drawn from the personal experience of one or more of the authors.

Program #1. Over a period of four years, the authors of this paper drew upon the existing adventure recreation literature to develop and implement a theory-based adventure recreation program for disadvantaged youth. The overall design followed the APIE process and was founded on a strength-based approach.

Assessment involved measuring outdoor recreation and academic efficacy based on the work of Bandura (1997) and Pajares and Schunk (2005), identity development using the Erickson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (Rosenthal, Gurney, & Moore, 1981), and the Identity Style Inventory (White, Wampler, & Winn, 1998), and ethical leisure be-
behavior using the Aristotelian Ethical Leisure Behavior Scale (Widmer, Ellis, & Munson, 2003). This last measure is associated with character strengths from positive psychology. In addition, semistructured interviews were conducted with both parents and potential participants to assess the needs of participants. Based upon the results of these assessments, specific outcomes were targeted. For the purpose of this example, the process of targeting academic efficacy will be described.

Planning involved identifying a theoretical framework for the adventure recreation program focusing on building strengths. The overall theoretical foundation was based on Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997). Staff were then recruited and provided systematic training on Self-Efficacy Theory. The staff worked collaboratively with researchers to write a program plan based on Self-Efficacy Theory, targeted at increasing outdoor recreation efficacy and systematically generalizing (Weitlauf, Cervone, Smith, & Wright, 2001; Weitlauf, Smith, & Cervone, 2000) these increases to academic efficacy.

This adventure program, called Camp WILD (Wilderness Instruction and Leadership Development), was implemented in the mountains of north central Idaho along the Main Salmon River. Evaluations were conducted to measure the impact of the experience on the targeted outcome, academic efficacy. Findings of this quasi-experimental study supported the ability of the program to successfully promote academic efficacy among participants (Widmer, Taniguchi, Duerden, & Freeman, 2005). Additionally, the researchers studied other developmental impacts of the experience. For example, researchers also examined youth identity development (Duerden et al., 2012; Duerden et al., 2009), positive psychology (Widmer, Taniguchi, & Duerden, 2010), the construct of fun (Taniguchi, Ward, Widmer, Duerden, & Larsen, 2010) and effective camp counselor attributes (Taniguchi, Widmer, Duerden, & Draper, 2009).

The findings from Camp WILD also support earlier research on the ability of theory-based adventure programs for families to produce targeted treatment outcomes (Huff, Widmer, McCoy, & Hill, 2003; Wells et al., 2004). This body of research demonstrated theory-based programs can produce specific outcomes for adolescents and families, particularly if the APIE process is followed. The strength of the evidence supporting the benefits of a TR theory-based adventure recreation program indicates similar programs, designed for community-based programs or corporations, could produce similar positive outcomes.

Program #2. An international corporation, highly regulated by governmental agencies and facing fierce competition and ongoing dramatic change, was interested in identifying an effective intervention to strengthen individuals and the organization. Internal corporate assessments identified three primary needs: (a) increasing capability around leading strategic change, (b) promoting resilience in the face of adversity, and (c) developing an engaging corporate culture. After learning about the aforementioned APIE research program, the corporate leaders requested a program proposal, based on a theory-based intervention, targeting the identified needs.

In response, a program plan was developed utilizing principles from Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and Self-
determination theories (Ryan & Deci, 2000) to promote skills related to leading strategic change, developing resilience and fostering an engaging corporate culture (Black & Gregersen, 2002; Black & Gregersen, 2008; Kotter, 1996; Kotter & Rathgeber, 2006). Five, three-day programs were implemented with groups ranging between 17 and 22 participants. The first day involved an orientation session where participants introduced themselves and then completed the change style indicator assessment (Musselwhite & Ingram, 2000). This was followed by a two-hour presentation introducing the key principles of the theory-based model. After receiving instruction on basic outdoor skills and safety, participants engaged in the adventure activities. These activities included two-day adventures in mountain biking, white water rafting, canyoneering and rock climbing. During the activities, participants confronted and dealt with mental and physical challenges requiring the application of principles of change. Front loading and debriefing during and after each activity were used to identify key sub-skills necessary to lead change in both adventure activities and business. Further, key principles from Black’s and Gregersen’s (2008) Change Model and associated theories about increasing perceptions of resilience were revisited. The final experience was designed to allow participants to use the principles of leading strategic change to successfully complete an outdoor challenge. This involved participants taking the lead on problem solving, planning, implementing, and facilitating a climb up to the top of a 180-foot natural arch followed by a controlled rappel off of the same arch. Following this program component, a dynamic, facilitated discussion was conducted. The discussion was designed to systematically layer and generalize principles of change from the adventure experience to the workplace.

To evaluate the efficacy of the intervention, qualitative procedures (Molyneux, Widmer, & Taniguchi, 2012) were conducted in addition to administrations of the change style indicator (Musselwhite & Ingram, 2000) and various participant satisfaction items. Results indicated employees showed appreciation and gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the program. Eighty-four percent of the participants commented on how the company’s investment in adventure learning for employees increased team members’ motivation and dedication toward job performance. Fifty-seven percent of the members mentioned they recognized the investment made in them, and in turn, they felt more inclined to give back to the company. Participants indicated the change model provided important and useful skills. They expressed greater confidence in their ability to lead strategic change.

Analysis of the data identified three primary emergent themes associated with the interviews and with observations of the participants. These included confidence and motivation (i.e., resilience), trust, and culture. Of these, the two most salient were culture and motivation. The findings can be viewed or better understood from the perspective of the Social Exchange Theory (Cook & Rice, 2003) and Self-determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Social Exchange Theory corresponds with the data related to cultures and the increasing loyalty that follows when companies invest in employees’ well-being. Self-determination Theory supports the findings related
to motivation, and how one can perform intrinsically through autonomous choices.

The culture, perceived as one of high organizational support, explains, employees’ commitment to the organization is strongly influenced by their perception of the organization’s commitment to them. Perceived organizational support [POS] is assumed to increase the employee’s affective attachment to the organization and his or her expectancy that greater effort toward meeting organizational goals were rewarded. (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986, p. 501)

Employees with higher levels of POS are more likely to value the organization and show higher levels of job commitment (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Consequently, employees with higher POS are also inclined to personally invest time and effort in the organization. To the extent the company commits to an employee’s personal and professional growth, the employee can be expected to dedicate greater effort toward the organization (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). This study suggests promoting POS should be part of any organizational strategic plan. Providing opportunities for employees to experience short-term guided challenges is one way this can be accomplished. We believe theory-based adventure recreation interventions are an excellent modality to promote increased well-being and effectiveness among corporate leaders.

TR is a profession with practitioners trained and positioned to apply the APIE process effectively in this setting. Additional training in business, or other diverse areas may position TR professionals to expand the scope of our services.

**Conclusion: Looking to a Future of Diversification in TR**

Diversification should be part of every profession’s strategy to thrive. Therapeutic recreation is at, or perhaps even beyond, a professional crossroads. Narrowing and specializing on a strictly clinical focus is the antithesis of diversification. The value and power of TR services hold the potential to benefit individuals and groups well beyond the field’s traditional focus on individuals with illness and disability. TR can effectively promote well-being for a much wider range of individuals, families and organizations. As illustrated in the two aforementioned cases, TR services using the APIE process, based on sound theory or models, hold the potential to benefit a wide range of clientele.

The proposed diversification of TR parallels the work of Martin Seligman. Seligman, former president of the American Psychological Association, and founder of the Positive Psychology movement recently published the book Flourish (2011). In our view, this movement is in harmony with Carruthers and Hood’s (2007) call for a strength-based approach to TR. Seligman argues that beyond training people for the workplace, we should be training people to live good lives and, therefore, to flourish (Seligman, 2011). He defines flourishing as a construct that moves beyond authentic happiness (Seligman, 2002). Seligman (2011) defines it specifically as “well-being” (p. 24), a con-
struct with five measurable elements: (a) Positive emotion, (b) engagement, (c) positive relationships, (d) meaning and (e) accomplishment. He suggests the research indicates Positive Psychology interventions prove to be more effective than medication or traditional psychotherapy for individuals with certain mental illnesses (Seligman, 2011). He goes on to say, “we can now teach skills of well-being—of how to have more positive emotion, more meaning, better relationships, and more accomplishment” (Seligman, 2011, p. 63). In his book, he describes how this movement does not fit within the traditional psychology political model or even within the political framework of his own department at the University of Pennsylvania. It is, to some extent, a rebellion challenging the establishment, against the narrow, illness based focus of psychology.

Seligman’s research and theory provide specific techniques and strategies leading to well-being in individuals with mental illness, but also to other populations including students, soldiers suffering from PTSD, and individuals working in organizations. In fact, a line of research and programming is thriving in the area of positive youth development (Larson, 2000). The University of Michigan’s Ross School of Business has established a center for positive organizational scholarship. Both experience and research, using adventure based recreation, leads us to believe the application of the APIE model within recreational modalities may be one of the most effective contexts to implement the techniques and strategies of Positive Psychology. As a field, we are about well-being. Perhaps, now is the time to consider the diversification of TR services and capitalizing on movements such as Positive Psychology to share the power of our services.

TR professionals and scholars alike might consider the implications for the future of TR and opportunities to diversify the services and programs we offer. For example, diversifying beyond a clinical focus is likely to stimulate greater interest among students. Curriculum options may be structured around certification requirements, but include other coursework around business, family life, or community programming. We can strengthen what we do in traditional TR clinical settings and community settings by providing services in youth programming and even in nonprofit and for-profit organizations. TR scholars may seek opportunities to study the application of the APIE model in promoting well-being through principles of Positive Psychology in business, in the contexts of adventure, and other forms of recreation. Certainly, Positive Psychology provides a strong framework of theory and research to move forward. Other models may also be useful in the quest to build the profession.

The invitation to consider diversification of TR services is an invitation to reflect, create, grow, and adapt services. It is an invitation to apply principles of innovation in order to help TR flourish as a profession.
References


