



# **Enhancing Student Well-Being**

Development of an E-Learning Course

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<p>Sammandrag:</p> <p>Detta examensarbete handlar om välbefinnande hos högskolestuderande. Syftet var att skapa en nätbaserad kurs riktad åt studerande för att främja deras välbefinnande och studieförmåga. Frågeställningarna var: Vilka aspekter påverkar välbefinnande och studieförmåga hos högskolestuderande? Hur ska en nätbaserad kurs som ska stöda och främja välbefinnande hos studerande byggas upp? Metoden som använts var en utvecklingsprocess speciellt utformad för nätbaserade kurser. Processen bestod av analys, design och utveckling. Genomförande och utvärdering var avgränsade. Allt material för kursinnehållet samlades in från existerande källor.</p> <p>I en nyligen utförd hälsoundersökning framkom det att yrkeshögskolestuderande önskade oftast stöd i stresshantering, tidshantering, studierelaterade problem, fysisk aktivitet, näring, studiefärdigheter samt problem med social ångest, självkänsla och humör (Kunttu et al. 2017). Baserat på aktuella kunskap om positiv psykologi och Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) kan personligt välbefinnande framgångsrikt upprätthållas och förbättras genom positiva känslor, tankar och beteende samt psykologisk flexibilitet (Sin &amp; Lyubomirsky 2009, French et al. 2017). Välbefinnande och studieförmåga kan främjas även genom effektiva beteendestrategier och hanteringsmetoder, samt praktiska studietekniker (Kunttu 2011, Ogden 2007).</p> <p>Arbetets resultat är en nätbaserad kurs som består av åtta enheter. Huvudtemana är välbefinnande, personliga resurser, värderingar och mål, stresshantering, tidshantering, godkännande av känslor och tankar samt inlärningstekniker. Kursen är i PowerPoint-format. Kursens målgrupp är Arcada studerande men går även att tillämpas för andra studerande, tack vare det allmänna innehållet.</p>	
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Abstract:	
<p>This thesis addresses wellbeing of higher education students. The aim of the thesis was to create an e-learning course aimed for students to enhance their well-being and promote study ability. The problem statements were: Which aspects affect well-being and study ability of higher education students? Which aspects are to be considered when developing an e-learning course for higher education students? The method used was a process specifically designed to develop e-learning courses. The process consisted of analysis, design and development. Implementation and evaluation were out of the scope. All material for the content of the course were collected from existing sources.</p> <p>Based on a recent health survey, Finnish higher education students hope to get help most often with stress management, time management, physical activity, study skills, nutrition, and problems related with studies, social anxiety, self-esteem and mood (Kunttu et al. 2017). Based on current knowledge from positive psychology and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) personal well-being can be successfully maintained and enhanced through positive emotions, thoughts and behavior and psychological flexibility (Sin &amp; Lyubomirsky 2009, French et al. 2017). Well-being and study ability can be promoted also through effective behavioral strategies and coping methods, and techniques regarding studying (Kunttu 2011, Ogden 2007).</p> <p>The result is an e-learning course consisting of eight units, with the main topics being well-being, personal resources, values and goals, stress and time management, acceptance of emotions and thoughts, and learning skills. The product was developed in PowerPoint format. The target group of the e-learning course are the students of Arcada. However, it is suitable for other universities' students, too, as the content was designed for students in general.</p>	
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OPINNÄYTE	
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<p>Tiivistelmä:</p> <p>Tämä opinnäytetyö käsittelee korkeakouluopiskelijoiden hyvinvointia. Työn tavoitteena oli luoda verkkokurssi, jonka avulla opiskelijat voivat ylläpitää ja edistää hyvinvointiaan ja opiskelukykyään. Tutkimuskysymykset olivat: Mitkä tekijät vaikuttavat korkeakouluopiskelijoiden hyvinvointiin ja opiskelukykyyn? Mitkä tekijät tulisi huomioida verkkokurssin suunnittelussa? Työssä käytettiin verkkokurssien kehittämiseen luotua menetelmää. Menetelmän prosessi muodostui analysointi-, suunnittelu- ja kehittämisvaiheista. Toteutus ja arviointi eivät kuuluneet työhön. Kaikki verkkokurssin materiaalit kerättiin olemassa olevista lähteistä.</p> <p>Viimeaikaisen terveystutkimuksen perusteella suomalaiset korkeakouluopiskelijat toivovat saavansa apua eniten stressin- ja ajanhallintaan, opiskelu-, itsetunto- ja mielialaongelmiin, jännittämiseen, opiskelutaitoihin, liikuntaan ja ravitsemukseen liittyen (Kunttu et al. 2017). Nykyisen positiiviseen psykologiaan ja hyväksymis- ja omistautumisterapiaan perustuvan tietämyksen perusteella henkilökohtaista hyvinvointia voidaan ylläpitää ja parantaa positiivisten tunteiden, ajatusten ja käyttäytymisen sekä psykologisen joustavuuden avulla (Sin &amp; Lyubomirsky 2009, French et al. 2017). Hyvinvointia ja opiskelukykyä voidaan lisäksi edistää toimivien käyttäytymisstrategioiden ja hallintakeinojen sekä opiskelutekniikoiden avulla (Kunttu 2011, Ogden 2007).</p> <p>Työn tulos on 8-osainen verkkokurssi, jonka pääteemat ovat hyvinvointi, henkilökohtaiset resurssit, arvot ja tavoitteet, stressin- ja ajanhallinta, tunteiden ja ajatusten hyväksyminen sekä opiskelutekniikat. Kurssi on PowerPoint-pohjainen. Kurssin kohderyhmänä on Arcadan opiskelijat, mutta kurssi soveltuu myös muille opiskelijoille yleisluotoisen sisällön ansiosta.</p>	
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis addresses wellbeing and study ability of higher education students. Well-being is a multi-dimensional concept that can be viewed from a global perspective or from the standpoint of a specific domain of life. In this case the perspective is specific to studying. The aim of the thesis is to develop an e-learning course that addresses various dimensions of student well-being and acts as a self-help tool in enhancing personal well-being.

After having expressed interest in well-being, the topic of the thesis was proposed to the writer by the commissioners of this thesis in May 2017. The commissioners are faculty of Arcada University of Applied Sciences, in the department of Health and Welfare, and Student Services. The requirement was to develop an online tool in English which would help students to help themselves enhance their well-being. Otherwise, the writer was given free hands concerning the content and execution. For a student of health promotion, the topic was found very appealing as it provided a possibility to apply the learned competences, learn even more, and position in the future field of profession.

Such an online tool will most likely be warmly welcomed by Arcada students. Well-being is something that touches us all, and investing in it pays off. High levels of well-being and good study skills usually translate into high working ability and well-being in other domains of life, such as workplace later in life, thus benefiting students even after their studies.

Universities have the chance to influence on students' well-being. In Finland, national recommendations have been given to promote student well-being and study ability. By promoting well-being of students, universities communicate of its importance and provide support systematically. Arcada does not yet have such a well-being tool aimed systematically for all of its students.

The thesis studies the current knowledge of general well-being and interventions that have been developed to enhance well-being. Also, the characteristics of student well-being as well as demands that higher education studies place on students will be studied. In addi-

tion, relevant theory and practice on developing online courses will be discussed. This information will be used to develop a tool to empower students to enhance their own well-being.

## **2 FRAME OF REFERENCE**

The theoretical frame of reference of this thesis comprises of three parts. First, the complex field of well-being research is introduced by focusing on the major research areas and interventions. Second, student well-being and its dimensions are discussed with special focus on Finnish higher education students. Third, a brief review of creating online learning courses and relevant recommended practices is done.

### **2.1 Well-Being**

Currently, there is no consensus around a single definition of well-being. Well-being is rather considered as an umbrella term for several concepts related to human wellness. Well-being encompasses a range of specific terms and definitions, such as subjective well-being, psychological well-being, as well as hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, that overlap to some extent, and are, thus, sometimes used interchangeably. (David et al. 2013 p. 3-4, Fisher 201 p. 10-12) In the following chapters the most common terms are explained and discussed in order to give an overview of the concept of well-being.

Furthermore, well-being can be described from an objective or subjective point of view. Objective state refers to objective facts of people's lives concerning, for example, education, health and employment, that a government or an organization regards itself to be responsible for; whereas subjective state of well-being refers to how people actually experience their lives. (Huppert 2014 p. 2) In this thesis, the point of view is subjective.

#### **2.1.1 Subjective Well-Being**

According to David et al. (2013 p. 2) subjective well-being (SWB) is currently the dominant conception of well-being. It has become a blooming area of science, with over

10.000 publications per year (Diener & Scollon 2014 p. 175). Various theoretical approaches to subjective well-being have been introduced, and although varying somewhat in detail, they possess three major commonalities that can be used to describe the general concept of subjective well-being. First, SWB includes an individual's cognitive evaluation of satisfaction with life as a whole. Second, SWB includes the positive affects (i.e. emotions and moods) experienced by the individual. Third, it includes also the negative affects, such as sadness and depression, experienced by the individual. The affective components are defined as separate components due to the empirical evidence showing that positive and negative emotions are experienced relatively independent of each other. (Pavot & Diener 2013 p. 134-135)

In scientific literature, subjective well-being is also referred to as hedonic well-being (e.g. Huppert 2014 p. 1), emotional well-being (Keyes 2002 p. 208), positive feeling, or happiness (e.g. Longo et al. 2017 p. 148). In fact, subjective well-being is the scientific term for happiness, according to Diener & Scollon (2014 p. 175). The term hedonia, in turn, dates back to ancient philosophers (from centuries before common era) who taught that happiness is the sum of one's pleasant moments (Ryan & Deci 2009 p. 143-144). The hedonic view of well-being includes the pursuit of positive emotion, maximum pleasure, and the absence of pain and discomfort (David et al. 2013 p. 4, Huta 2013 p. 201). However, as Huppert (2014 p. 1) notes, the role of negative emotions cannot be devalued as they play an important role in our lives when experienced in appropriate context, such as sadness following misfortune.

Although subjective well-being is defined as a global life satisfaction, researchers are interested in studying satisfaction with different domains of life, such as work or marriage. Assessing specific life domains can provide a more detailed view of the subjective well-being experienced by an individual or a group of individuals. The importance assigned to various domains of life is likely to vary between individuals. (Pavot & Diener 2013 p. 135-136)

## 2.1.2 Theories of Subjective Well-Being

As mentioned earlier, a number of theoretical approaches have been introduced to understand subjective well-being. According to Pavot and Diener (2013 p. 136-137) many of these approaches can be categorized as bottom-up or top-down models. Bottom-up models claim that an individual's overall experience of SBW comprises of the sum of positive and negative moments. The more positive events and emotions one experiences, the higher the level of well-being. Top-down models, on the other hand, assume that some underlying processes tend to affect the way individuals evaluate their life as a whole. Therefore, a person with a positive state of mind – proposedly due to a personality trait or cognitive processes – may interpret an event more positively than a person with a more negative perspective would. (Pavot and Diener 2013 p. 136-137)

Telic theories of well-being suggest that the source of happiness is the achievement of some desired end state, attainment of a goal, or fulfillment of a need; whereas relative standard theories propose that well-being results from a comparison between one's current state and one or multiple standards, such as past experiences, other people, goals or ideals. The degree of the discrepancy between one's present state or situation and a standard determines the level of satisfaction. If the current conditions of an individual are perceived as higher than the comparison standard, increased satisfaction will be experienced, and vice versa. However, as time proceeds, a phenomenon called the hedonic adaptation will cause the individual's standard to acclimate to the new conditions and become a new standard. Hedonic adaptation is the psychological process by which people become accustomed to a stimulus so that the resulting positive emotions lessen over time (Lyubomirsky 2011 p. 201). Hence, the increased subjective well-being experienced by the individual matters only in the short-term. (Diener & Ryan 2009 p. 395, Pavot & Diener 2013 p. 138)

Another theory often discussed in the context of well-being origins is the broaden-and-build theory by Barbara L. Fredrickson. It proposes that positive emotions affect people's thoughts and attention by broadening the thought-action tendencies, and consequentially

generate cognitive changes, i.e. flexible and creative thinking and problem-solving approaches. Over time, these cognitive changes build long-term intellectual, psychological, and social resources. (Conway et al. 2013 p. 18-25)

Today, it is necessary to consider and integrate various theories, as any of the approaches in itself will not be sufficient in interpreting the complexity of subjective well-being. In addition to theories, there are several factors that have been studied to understand the causes of well-being. However, researchers have not been able to comprehensively show whether the relationships are causal. Therefore, only correlations between well-being and the factors can be discussed (Diener & Ryan 2009 p. 396, Huppert 2014 p. 16-17) The correlations will be further discussed in chapter 2.1.5.

### **2.1.3 Psychological Well-Being**

The other major tradition within well-being research is eudaimonic well-being, which also has its origin in the ancient Greek philosophy. Eudaimonia can be described as striving to realize and develop the best in oneself in accordance with one's true self (Huta 2013 p. 201). The eudaimonic approach of well-being concentrates on positive psychological functioning i.e. engaging in behavior that is e.g. growth producing, meaningful and fulfilling, rather than subjectively feeling good, which describes its distinction from hedonia. Although the eudaimonic tradition is younger and less studied than hedonic tradition, there are a number of theories and models in the field. (Fisher 2014 p. 11-10, Huta 2013 p. 201-210)

The best-known model of eudaimonic well-being is Carol D. Ryff's psychological well-being (David et al. 2013 p. 4). The model includes six dimensions: personal growth, autonomy, self-acceptance, purpose in life, environmental mastery and positive relations with others. Thus, people are functioning well when they see themselves developing their potential, have a degree of self-determination, are aware of and accept their personal strengths and weaknesses, have a direction in life, are able to shape their environments to satisfy their needs, and have positive relationships (Keyes 2002 p. 208-209, Ryff & Singer 2008 p. 19-23). Environmental mastery is considered an important part of positive functioning since well-being is influenced by the surrounding contexts of people's lives, and

moreover, the opportunities for self-realization are not equal to all. Therefore, it is important for an individual to be able to manipulate and control complex environments as well as act on and change the surrounding world. (Ryff & Singer 2008 p. 19-23)

Another theory embracing eudaimonic well-being is the self-determination theory (SDT) by Ryan & Deci (2001 p. 146-147). The authors argue that satisfaction of basic psychological needs – autonomy, competence and relatedness - is essential for psychological growth, integrity, and well-being, indicating that need fulfillment is a natural human aim that fosters well-being rather than defines it. Furthermore, SDT posits that the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs fosters also subjective well-being since being satisfied with one's life and feeling more positive and less negative emotions are correlated with psychological well-being.

#### **2.1.4 Multidimensional Models of Well-Being**

Since emotions are transient by their nature, experiencing positive and negative emotions is only a part of well-being. Well-being involves a more sustainable experience that includes the functioning component of well-being, for example, being resilient when facing setbacks. Thus, the more general sense of well-being combines both SWB and PWB. Huppert (2014 p. 1-2) describes well-being generally as “the experience of life going well” which is a combination of feeling good and functioning well. This position has been taken by a number of researchers (e.g. David et al. 2013, Huppert 2014, Seligman 2011), although different terms and different lists of elements may be used. This general concept of well-being is adapted also for this thesis.

Keyes' (2002 p. 207-209) components of well-being consist of subjective well-being, Ryff's psychological well-being and an additional component of social well-being. According to Keyes, social well-being presents more public and social criteria whereby people evaluate their functioning than the social aspect introduced in PWB, i.e. the personal evaluation of having positive relations with others. Keyes introduces five social dimensions to well-being: social coherence, social actualization, social integration, social acceptance, and social contribution. That is, people are functioning well when they see so-

ciety as meaningful and having potential for growth, when they feel belonging and acceptance by their communities, when they accept most parts of society, and when they see themselves contributing to society.

Additionally, Keyes (2002 p. 209-211) approaches well-being from a mental health perspective by saying that mental health is a syndrome that combines symptoms of SWB, PWB and social well-being. Thus, well-being can be measured and diagnosed, like mental illness, on scales of emotional vitality (SWB) and functioning (PWB & social well-being). Keyes favors the proposition that mental health and mental illness are not at the opposite ends of a single measurement continuum, but form two different continua. On one end of the mental health continuum is the presence of mental health, called flourishing (i.e. high level of well-being), and on the opposite end is the absence of mental health, called languishing (i.e. low level of well-being). People who are neither flourishing nor languishing are moderately mentally healthy. Whereas, the mental illness continuum goes from severe mental disorder to no mental disorder (Huppert 2014 p. 6).

The two continua view supports the fact that well-being is more than the absence of mental illness, the position that also e.g. Huppert (2014) takes. To further study and understand the characteristics and causes of flourishing, Huppert & So (2013) explored on the idea that “flourishing could be conceived as the opposite of mental disorder”, indicating that there is only one mental health continuum with mental disorder at one end and flourishing at the opposite end. They identified the mirror opposite symptoms of depression and anxiety disorders, and derived ten features representing positive mental health: competence, emotional stability, engagement, meaning, optimism, positive emotion, positive relationships, resilience, self-esteem and vitality. Just as the diagnostic criteria for mental illness, the flourishing criteria does not require that all the symptoms are present. Therefore, it would be possible that symptoms of mental illness and flourishing coexist. (Huppert & So 2013 p. 838-855, Huppert 2014 p. 4-8)

Another recent and often reviewed (e.g. Huppert & So 2013, Fisher 2014) multidimensional model of well-being is called the Well-Being Theory or PERMA, introduced by Martin Seligman, one of the founders of positive psychology. Seligman (2011 p. 11-20) states that the topic of positive psychology is well-being, the standard of measuring well-

being is flourishing, and the goal of positive psychology is to increase flourishing. He also states that well-being is not measurable in itself because evaluation varies based on the present mood, but it is rather a construct that has several measurable elements which contribute to well-being. The elements of PERMA are positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment. While positive emotion includes feeling good and being satisfied with life, engagement is about flow: being completely absorbed by an activity. Flow requires deploying one's highest strengths and talents. Meaning, in turn, consists of belonging to and serving something that gives purpose to life, a greater cause or religion, for example. By accomplishment Seligman means pursue for success, achievement or mastery for its own sake, which boosts well-being. Seeking out positive relationships with other people, on the other hand, is considered to be a basic attribute to people. (Seligman 2011)

With the aim to develop and validate a new general well-being questionnaire, Longo et al. (2017) identified commonalities among six popularly reviewed conceptualizations of well-being, proposed by Huppert & So (2013), Keyes (2002) and Seligman (2011) among others. This resulted in 14 elements of well-being, presented in table 1.

*Table 1. Elements of well-being (Longo et al. 2017 p. 149, 157)*

<b>Element</b>	<b>Examples of content</b>
happiness	pleasant feeling happy, cheerful and pleased
vitality	feeling energetic and lively
calmness	feeling peaceful and relaxed
optimism	Having a positive outlook on and expectations about the future
involvement	feeling engaged in what one does
self-awareness	knowing oneself and being in touch how one feels
self-acceptance	experiencing different aspects of oneself in a tolerant and non-judgmental way
self-worth	positive evaluations and feelings about oneself
competence	feeling effective, and perceiving oneself as able to overcome challenges and achieve desired outcomes
development	experiencing continuous growth and improvement

purpose	having clear goals, a sense of direction and a larger aim in life
significance	feeling that what one does is important and worthwhile
self-congruence	perception that one's actions are compatible with one's interests, values and beliefs
connection	feeling of belonging and closeness with people around oneself

Longo et al. (2017) excluded autonomous behavior, intrinsic goals, effort, and emotional resilience since, according to them, they do not share the common property of consisting of subjective feelings and evaluations. Longo et al. note that, as previous findings in the field suggest, one element of well-being can be beneficial without experiencing it all the time, or at its highest level. Furthermore, they suggest that each element is likely to contribute to an individual's well-being to some extent and in some contexts. (Longo et al. 2017 p. 149-157)

To summarize, well-being is a subjective state which is dependent on the present mood. Well-being reflects the positive perspective of health, the concept that it is closely linked to. Although the experience of well-being can arise artificially through e.g. alcohol use, an authentic, sustainable well-being correlates with feeling empowered – the experience of being in control of one's life, being able to choose one's doings, and having the possibility to develop one's abilities. (Downie et al. 1996 in Savola & Koskinen-Ollonqvist 2005 p. 12) Diener & Ryan (2009 p. 393) note that it is not necessary for people to be euphorically happy all the time in order to achieve high levels of well-being. On the contrary, constantly striving for higher levels of well-being could lead to risk-seeking and potentially dangerous behaviors such as drug use.

### **2.1.5 Drivers and Benefits of Well-Being**

In general, well-being is dependent upon good health, positive social relations, and the availability of basic needs being met. In addition, strong positive associations between well-being and some other factors have been shown to exist. Such factors are often called the drivers of well-being, although a causal relationship cannot be established, as stated earlier. Instead, the relationship between the drivers and well-being may be bi-directional. For example, having a great number of friends and family members seems to enhance

well-being, however, people with high level of well-being tend to have closer relationships than those with lower well-being. (Diener & Ryan 2009 p. 392, Huppert 2014 p. 16-17)

Numerous studies reviewed by Diener & Ryan (2009 p. 396-399), Huppert (2014 p. 17-24), and Stoll et al. (2012 p. 12-48) indicate that the drivers of well-being include personal characteristics such as personality (e.g. extraversion) and personal values, work-related factors (e.g. income, quality of work and work-life balance), religiosity, and local environments (e.g. access to natural environment). According to studies, people with less materialistic values are more satisfied with their life than those whose values are more materialistic. This may be partially mediated by pursuing intrinsic goals, that is, those that are inherently rewarding, rather than extrinsic goals (i.e. external rewards such as wealth, status or image). With respect to health-related behaviors, physical activity has been found to have a beneficial effect on well-being. Also, optimal amount of sleep (typically 6-8 hours) has been associated with better psychological well-being. (Diener & Ryan 2009 p. 396-399, Huppert 2014 p. 17-24, Stoll et al. 2012 p. 12-48)

Looking at the relationship of well-being and the correlating factors from another direction, the benefits of well-being can be discussed. According to Diener & Ryan (2009 p. 392-393) there is evidence of high well-being significantly improving several areas of life. Individuals with high subjective well-being tend to be healthier. For example, they have healthier cardiovascular systems and stronger immune functioning. Individuals with high SWB are also more helpful and productive in the workplace, and engage more frequently in pro-social activities such as volunteer activities than those with lower SWB. Moreover, there is no evidence that chronically languishing individuals function well. (Diener & Scollon 2014 p. 176-177)

## **2.2 Enhancing Well-Being**

Although there is much more to be learned about the causes of sustainable, high level well-being, a great number of interventions have already been introduced to enhance well-being, ranging from self-help books and online courses to more formal programs. While a wide variety of interventions, often based on cognitive behavioral therapies, address

negative affect and depression, a shift in focus towards positive aspects of mental health can be seen. (Diener & Ryan 2009 p. 400, Huppert 2014 p. 29-32) In recent years, there has been an increase in studies on behavioral interventions that aim to enhance psychological well-being. Many of them are based on positive psychology, and acceptance and commitment therapy, or specific practices of above mentioned alone or along with other techniques. (French et al. 2017 p. 1, Weiss et al. 2016 p. 3)

In the following chapters, some often reviewed theories and approaches to promote well-being will be presented. Also, some examples of empirically studied interventions will be discussed, focusing on the content and outcomes of the intervention. First, however, interventions in general will be briefly discussed.

### **2.2.1 Interventions**

An intervention aims to modify the behavior of an individual. According to Huppert (2014 p. 32-34), there are two types of interventions. One type involves changing external circumstances, such as living conditions or quality of education, while the other involves changing internal experiences, i.e. attitudes, emotions and behaviors. Both types of interventions consist of a variety of approaches. Approaches that focus on altering external conditions include, for example, regulations, mandated changes to public services (e.g. requirement to teach social skills in schools), and nudge techniques meaning contextual changes that encourage people to make personally desirable changes (e.g. displaying healthy food in the most prominent places in supermarkets). The approaches that focus on internal changes involve training individuals to develop the skills for sustainable well-being. Approaches that can be used include psychoeducation, self-help courses, and formal training of techniques such as mindfulness. Psychoeducation alone is limited in changing behavior, and thus, needs to be combined with practicing the learned skills. However, the strongest evidence of well-being benefits arises from formal technique training.

Interventions may be targeted at individuals, groups of people, organizations, communities, regions or whole nations. They may be universally applied to a whole group or just for those who are considered to be most in need. Interventions may focus on a particular

stage in life, such as school years or older adulthood. Although the greatest benefits are likely to occur at the early stages of the life course, interventions can also be effective in later stages of life. (Huppert 2014 p. 28-29) The focus in this thesis is on approaches that are used in nonclinical contexts, aimed at changing internal experiences, and applied universally.

## **2.2.2 Theories and models of Health Psychology in Promoting Well-Being**

Health psychology is a discipline of psychology that emphasizes the role of behavior in determining individual's health status. Health psychology claims that health and illness are caused by a combination of the body and mind, i.e. biological, psychological, and social factors. There are several theories and models aiming to understand, explain and predict health related behavior (e.g. eating, exercising, or smoking). These models are used in preventing illness and promoting health. (Ogden 2007 p. 3-6)

Some theories focus on the predictors of health behavior (e.g. Health Belief Model), some on the relationship between attitudes and behavior (e.g. Theory of Planner Behavior), and some on the process of behavior change (e.g. Transtheoretical Model of Change). The Health Belief Model (HBM) suggests that behavior is a result of core beliefs about health risks and their severity, the benefits and disadvantages of carrying out a behavior, as well as cues to action. Whereas, Theory of Planner Behavior (TPB) proposes that behavior results from behavioral intentions that, in turn, are the outcome of a combination of several beliefs (attitudes towards a behavior, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control). An intention is seen as plans of action in pursuing behavioral goals. Thus, individuals' behavior can be predicted by knowing their intentions. The Transtheoretical Model of Change (TMC) describes behavior change as dynamic process which consists of five stages. In the pre-contemplation stage, an individual has no intention to make any changes, while in the contemplation stage the individual is considering a change. In the preparation stage, the individual is making small changes, and then actively engaging in a new behavior in the action stage. The final stage of maintenance involves the individual sustaining the change over time. (Andersson 2009 p. 79-92, Ogden 2007 p. 21-32)

Some models aim to explain health behavior based on a single factor such as attitude, personal control, self-efficacy, locus of control, self-esteem, sense of coherence, hardiness, resilience and social support. Control - in the sense of perceived personal control over matters - is a key term in many of them. Self-efficacy means having confidence in one's ability to control a certain situation or handle it in a certain manner, whereas locus of control refers to whether individuals regard situations as controllable or uncontrollable by them. Sense of coherence expresses the extent of one's confidence in the predictability of one's inner and outer world, and in the likelihood of things working out as well as one can reasonably expect. Hardiness involves that an individual has a sense of strong control and commitment, and sees change as a possibility to develop oneself. Resilience is defined as the ability to manage threats and problems, or a successful adaptation in the face of adversity. (Andersson 2009 p. 55-74)

These factors partly explain the differences in people's health behavior and in their reaction to stress, for example. People possessing such qualities and factors are likely to manage stressors without them having any effect on well-being, whereas people who lack in those qualities are more likely to experience stress as harmful to their well-being. Stress and coping are, in fact, among the key terminology of health psychology. Stress is seen as a part of life and it has consequences to health through e.g. how stress is managed. Stress management is a method to cope with stress, whereas coping is defined as the ability to face problems by developing strategies in an attempt to return to normality. (Andersson 2009 p. 113-124; Ogden 2007 p. 3-6, 53-54)

Stress can be defined as a biochemical, physiological, behavioral and psychological response to a stressor. According to the work of American psychologist Richard Lazarus (1984 in Andersson 2009 p. 119) psychological stress can be described as a relationship between an individual and environment, where the degree of stress experienced is determined by cognitive appraisals of the individual. First, the individual evaluates the stressfulness of the situation (irrelevant, mild and positive, threatening, or harmful and challenging). Second, the individual evaluates his possibilities to manage the situation. The process leads to a stress response which can take a form of direct action, information seeking, doing nothing, or developing a means of coping with the stress. When it comes to coping, a division can be made between problem focused and emotion focused coping strategies.

Problem focused coping strategies aim to solve the problem in the environment while emotion focused coping strategies are focused in regulating one's emotional tension (e.g. relaxation), of which the latter dominates in situations that cannot be controlled. (Andersson 2009 p. 119-125, Ogden 2007 p. 221-227)

### **2.2.3 Positive Psychology Based Interventions**

Positive psychology is an umbrella term for the study of positive emotions and positive character traits with the aim of understanding the human suffering and happiness (Seligman et al. 2005 p. 874-875). Positive psychology interventions (PPIs) are treatment methods or intentional activities that aim to build the positives, as opposite to attempting to fix deficiencies. PPIs include diverse strategies that target positive behaviors, cognitive strategies and the practice of emotional skills. Positive behavior includes activities such as identifying one's strengths of character and using them in new ways, and engaging in social connections by e.g. performing acts of kindness. Cognitive strategies include e.g. expressive writing about one's goals or good things in one's life, and reminiscing pleasant memories. Practicing emotional skills include mindfulness and acceptance. (Parks et al. 2013 p. 964-969; Seligman et al. 2005 p. 878-879; Sin & Lyubomirsky 2009 p. 468, 482)

According to a meta-analysis of PPIs conducted by Sin & Lyubomirsky (2009) positive psychology interventions are effective in enhancing well-being and alleviating depression. Basing on both empirical and theoretical evidence, Lyubomirsky & Layous (2013 p. 57-60) created a positive-activity model to understand the optimal conditions under which positive activities improve well-being. The model, in Fig. 1, illustrates that positive activities increase positive emotions, thoughts and behaviors as well as need satisfaction, all of which in turn increase well-being; whereas features of positive activities and those of the individual determine the extent, in which positive activities enhance well-being. An optimal person-activity fit is attained by determining the ideal activity features such as dosage (i.e. frequency and timing) that fit the attributes of the person engaging in the activity.

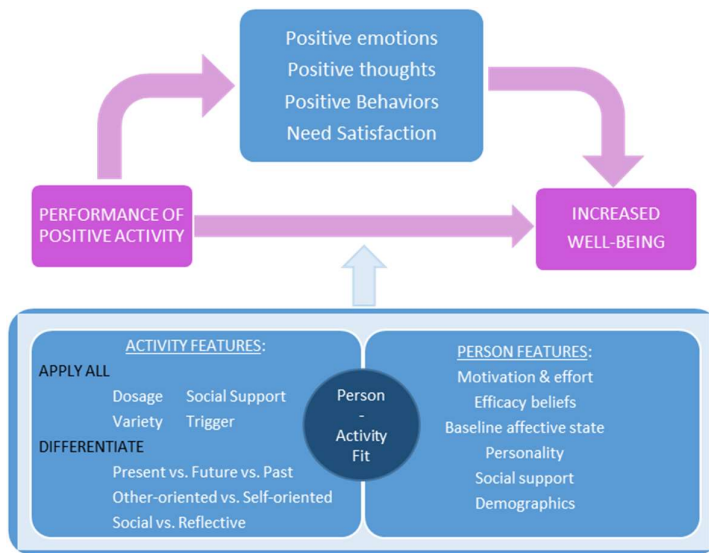


Figure 1. The positive-activity model (modified from Lyubomirsky & Layous 2013 p. 58).

Studies have shown that frequency and timing of positive activities matter, and should be considered in any activity. Spreading out the performance of an activity might limit the efficiency, for example performing five kind acts throughout the week was less effective as compared to five kind acts in one day each week. Other positive activities, however, could be overdone, and thus, be less efficient (e.g. counting one's blessings was less effective three times per week than once per week). While the ideal dosage of positive activities is likely to vary by activity and person, studies have suggested that once a week is maximally effective. (Lyubomirsky et al. 2005 in Lyubomirsky & Layous 2013 p. 58-59)

Another key feature is variety. In order to avoid the impact of hedonic adaptation (discussed in chapter 3.1.2), individuals should be assigned multiple and different positive activities. Also, some studies (e.g. Layous et al. 2012 in Lyubomirsky & Layous 2013 p. 59) suggest that some activities such as writing gratitude letters are more efficient as starter activities than others (e.g. performing acts of kindness), as they trigger immediate positive emotions. The success of positive activities can also be increased through social support, or even virtual social support (e.g. through social media). (Lyubomirsky & Layous 2013 p. 59)

Features that differentiate positive activities from one another cause certain activities to work best for certain people. For example, self-oriented activities such as reflecting on personal strengths are more effective for individualists, whereas other-oriented activities (e.g. acts of kindness) might be more suitable for people who value prosocial activities. Furthermore, positive activities may be focused on the past, the present or the future. When deciding on a positive activity, one might consider that older adults may benefit from reflecting on their legacies, whereas young adults may benefit more from visualizing their futures. (Lyubomirsky & Layous 2013 p. 59, Sin & Lyubomirsky 2009 p. 483-484)

In addition to activity features, features of the person matter in promoting sustainable well-being. To benefit from positive activities, people have to engage in them, be motivated to enhance their well-being, and believe that they can succeed in doing so. Also, personality may affect how much an individual will gain from the positive activity. Sin & Lyubomirsky (2009 p. 479-484) found that individuals who elected to participate in a positive intervention benefited more from positive activities than their non-self-selected peers. The authors did not find this surprising, as self-selected individuals are assumed to be more motivated or to have more positive, optimistic expectancies, and thus work harder, show greater commitment and take their assignments more seriously. They also found that the benefits of PPIs increase with age, and that individual therapy was the most effective format, followed by group-administered PPIs, and finally self-administered PPIs. Furthermore, longer interventions are likely to produce greater gains in well-being, as the participants have more time to convert the positive activities into habits. Therefore, Sin & Lyubomirsky recommend that individuals should be encouraged to devote more effort and commitment in the activities (especially the younger individuals) and to incorporate the positive strategies into their daily lives. (Sin & Lyubomirsky 2009 p. 479-484)

#### **2.2.4 Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Based Interventions**

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is an intervention approach aimed to increase psychological flexibility i.e. the “ability to contact the present moment more fully as a conscious human being” (Hayes et al. 2004 p. 4-5). ACT is based on Rational Frame Theory (RFT) which explains how people link and create meanings between things, experiences, words, thoughts and emotions through language. RFT explains the ability to

learn even without having direct experience of the matter. The downside of this ability is that it can lead to psychological distress, as problematic, harmful behavior is often caused by complex cognitions that are rarely in touch with reality. (Kangasniemi & Kauravaara 2016 p. 21-23)

According to ACT, a higher level of psychological flexibility can be achieved by lessening the impact of distressing relational links. It is done by altering the function with the help of six core processes: acceptance, cognitive defusion, self as context, being present, values, and committed action. Acceptance involves being aware and embracing the experience of thoughts, feelings and sensations as they occur – without resisting them, running from them or getting overwhelmed by them. Cognitive defusion means separating or detaching from one's thoughts, images and memories. Defusion aims to break down literal meaning and teach people to observe thoughts as what they are, nothing more or less than words or pictures. Self as context or the observing self is the other element of our minds, which observes what we are thinking, feeling, sensing, or doing in any moment. The other element, the thinking self, generates thoughts, memories, judgements, plans and so on. While the thinking self changes over the course of life, the observing self remains the same, as "pure awareness". Being (psychologically) present means consciously connecting with and engaging in what is happening in the present moment. ACT teaches people to first observe and noticing the physical environment and the psychological experiences, and then to describe them without excessive judgement or evaluation. Values describe how people want to behave on an ongoing basis. ACT challenges people to consider what they want their lives to stand for in different life domain such as career, relationships and personal growth. Committed action means taking value-guided action. It involves defining goals and then acting on them while anticipating psychological barriers. (Harris 2009 p. 9-11, Hayes et al. 2004 p. 6-12)

ACT relies on metaphors, stories, behavioral tasks, experiential processes, and exercises, such as mindfulness techniques. Mindfulness is also used as a stand-alone technique. Harris (2009 p. 8) sums up the definition of mindfulness as "paying attention with flexibility, openness, and curiosity". First and foremost, mindfulness is an awareness process, as opposed to a thinking process. It involves paying attention to one's experience in the present moment. Second, mindfulness involves an open and curious attitude towards the present

moment. Third, mindfulness involves the ability to consciously direct, broaden, or focus one's attention on different aspects of the present experience. Mindfulness can be used to appreciate each moment of life, to connect with oneself and others, to improve self-knowledge by learning about how we feel, think and react, and to consciously influence one's behavior and increase the range of responses to the surrounding world. (Harris 2009 p. 8, Kangasniemi & Kauravaara 2016 p. 60-61)

Although traditionally face-to-face, ACT is delivered also in self-help formats. French et al. (2017 p. 1-12) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis on ACT self-help interventions. The interventions focused on various issues ranging from anxiety and depression to management skills and smoking, had either none or some distance support (phone or email), and continued typically for 7-12 weeks. According to the study, self-administered or predominantly self-administered computer and book-based ACT interventions can increase psychological flexibility to a level that is meaningful to the individual. Another form of ACT interventions is a guided intervention, which contains both self-help and guidance from a coach. An example of such intervention is that of the University of Jyväskylä – a program that included two face-to-face meetings with a coach and a five-week internet-based program with weekly online feedback. When the effects of the intervention were studied on university students with symptoms of distress, the researchers reported reduction in depression symptoms, increased satisfaction with life, and higher self-esteem immediately after the intervention and at 12-month follow-up. (Räsänen et al. 2016 p. 31-40)

## **2.3 Student Well-Being**

The second part of the theoretical framework focuses on well-being among students. In this chapter, student well-being will be studied through introducing a study ability model, discussing common challenges and threats that students may face, as well as presenting the current status of Finnish university students' well-being based on a recent survey. This is done to understand which challenges should be addressed, and to determine the skills that can help them deal with the stressors as well as prevent later problems. After all, research indicates that students who develop essential skills in psychosocial well-being are likely to adapt to university most successfully (Conley et al. 2012).

### **2.3.1 Introduction to Student Well-Being**

After having passed the entrance examination, most students begin their studies excited and motivated. Their expectations are high not only concerning the subject of studies but also the new phase in life which creates independence, new relationships and a future career. During their studies, university students will grow to be professionals but also adults. The path will include challenges and stressors but also enjoyable flow experiences when being able to fully utilize the capacity they possess. (Heikkilä et al. 2011 p. 31-33) Life events, working during studies, personal psychological resources, stress management and life management skills, as well as social relations and support are known to have an impact on students' perceived well-being (Sulander & Romppainen 2007 p. 15).

Noble & McGrath (2013 p. 569-570) define student well-being based on a consensus of 30 researchers, theorists and writers with expertise on the field as follows:

Optimal student well-being is a sustainable emotional state characterized by (predominantly) positive mood and positive relationships at school, resilience, self-optimization and a high level of satisfaction with learning experiences.

By optimal the experts mean a level of well-being which is desirable and likely to lead to positive learning outcomes. Self-optimization refers to students' willingness to strive to get the best out of themselves with respect to realistic evaluations of their abilities, strengths, behavior and learning capacity.

### **2.3.2 Study Ability**

Study ability can be described as the work ability of a student. It can be illustrated by the dynamic study ability model introduced by Finnish Institute of Occupational Health and Finnish Student Health Service (Kunttu 2011 p. 34). The model contains the important aspects that affect students' health and well-being, consisting of 4 components: personal resources, study skills, study environment and teaching (see Fig. 2). The components have effect on each other, and help to maintain a balance even though one component would be lacking. For example, if a challenging life situation temporarily weakens personal resources, good study skills or supportive study community can help to cope with it. In the

background, there are common socio-economical, cultural and environmental circumstances and attitudes that either strengthen or weaken students' resources and study skills as well as study environment and teaching. (Kunttu 2011 p. 34-35)

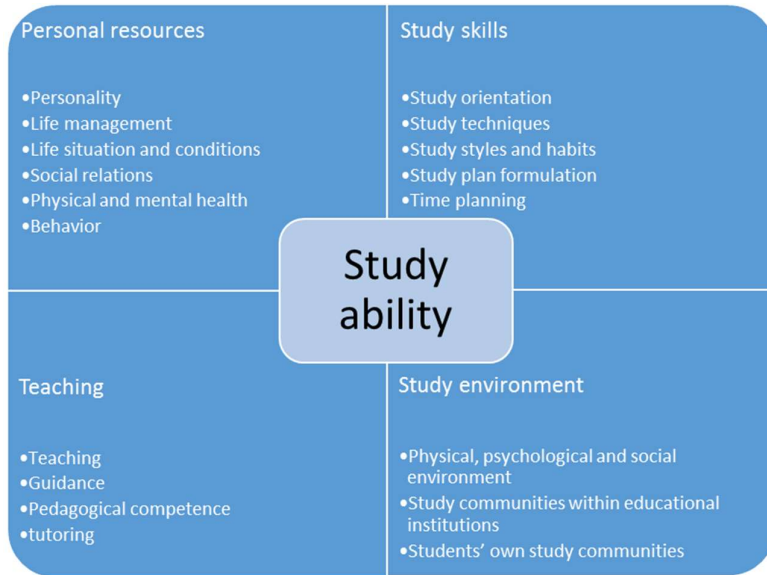


Figure 2. Dynamic model of study ability (modified from Kunttu 2006 in Kunttu 2011 p. 34).

Personal resources include e.g. personality, life situation, social relations, physical and mental health and health related behavior. Particularly important for student well-being and the progress of studies are one's perception of life management and sufficiency of personal resources and abilities, as well as social support. Study skills represent students' professional skills which consists of learning skills and academic skills. Learning skills include e.g. the meaning of studying to the individual, time management skills, and learning techniques, whereas academic skills include critical thinking, problem-solving and communication such as presentation skills. Teaching and guidance contain aspects such as adequate communication between a teacher and a student, giving and receiving feedback and integrating to the study community. Study environment comprises of the physical learning environment and circumstances, teaching arrangements, equipment, spaces for spending breaks, staff, study climate and services offered, to mention a few. (Kujala 2011 p. 154, Kunttu 2011 p. 34-35)

According to Kujala (2011 p. 154-156) promoting study ability in learning institutions supports progress in studies, improves learning results, prevents study related problems,

decreases social exclusion and promotes early identification and interference of problems. The benefits will expand also to working life when students learn to take care of their own well-being. As universities have the chance to influence on all these dimensions, national recommendations have been given to promote study ability in Finland. One of the seven recommendations is to promote study skills and physical and psychological well-being. Universities can support students' physical and psychological well-being by e.g. providing sport activities and teaching study ergonomics and stress management.

### **2.3.3 Threats and Challenges in Higher Education Studies**

Studying is a demanding, creative work that involves high-levels of self-responsibility, planning and time management. It requires good cognitive skills, creative thinking and data processing skills, which all are easily disturbed as the result of sleep deprivation, depression or poor study conditions, for example. Falling sick or having life crisis complicates planned studies since being absent on a sick leave is not as simple as at work. (Kunttu et al. 2017 p. 4)

The challenges university students face are mainly linked to study ability, independence and social integration. There are several factors that regulate study ability. First, the way students approach studying is affected by what they consider learning to be. A superficial approach to learning something by memory through mechanical repetition without full attention to comprehension can be overloading and does not produce good learning outcomes in the long run. Learning by memory does not develop working skills or the ability to reflect, nor does it increase motivation. A more profound approach to learning demands for deep understanding and evaluation of information, which, especially in the beginning, is a slow and laborious process. (Heikkilä et al. 2011 p. 32-33)

Another factor regulating study ability is the way students think of themselves and their abilities. People succeed in things that they feel they are good at, and are motivated to work for things that they believe they will succeed in. In higher education, the trust in one's own abilities is emphasized due to the fact that individual feedback on one's actions and success is very limitedly available. Third factor regulating study ability is the expect-

tations and requirements of the surrounding environment. University students are expected to be self-initiative actors who find out about, plan and work on matters on their own - often without having support or guidance from teachers in e.g. how to make notes or what is to be learned. Such an environment is heavily burdening on students whose study skills are undeveloped. Approximately half of one's studies is done independently which sets high demand for time management skills. This new freedom and independence may cause unproductiveness in some students. In fact, 80-95% of Finnish students procrastinate with different tasks, and approximately half of them regard it as a problem. Working independently and productively requires resilience, orderliness and practice. (Heikkilä et al. 2011 p. 32-33)

Mikkonen & Nieminen (2011 p. 40-42) further elaborate on why some students experience high levels of stress frequently, some only occasionally, and some barely at all. The phenomenon can be explained by roughly two reasons: expectations and unproductiveness. Much of the insufficiency experienced by students can be eased simply by prioritizing and making choices. Students must be willing and have the ability to set and adjust goals, and plan time schedules realistically according to the current life situation. Unproductiveness occurs in the form of procrastination when reality and expectations do not meet. Failing to meet the goals or expectations, whether they are external or set by the student him/ herself, impacts negatively on some students' self-confidence and mood, which further increases the avoidance of tasks. Focusing on the progress and working on the tasks instead of worrying and setting too high requirements on oneself increases students' motivation and belief in their abilities.

#### **2.3.4 Student Well-Being in Finland**

The University Student Health Survey 2016 was conducted to investigate physical and psychosocial health, health-related behavior, study ability and the use of health services among Finnish university students, including universities of applied sciences (UAS). The survey is carried out nationwide every four years. In 2016, a total of 3018 students under 35 years old responded, of which 65.5% were women. Well-being experienced by the students were surveyed in dimensions of physical, psychological, social and overall well-being. Good or very good physical well-being was experienced by 76% and social well-

being by 72% of students, whereas good or very good psychological well-being was experienced by only 66% of the respondents. (Kunttu et al. 2017 p. 5, 12, 31)

According to the results of the survey, 30% of students suffered from mental problems. The most common problems were continuous overstrain (43%), feeling unhappy and depressed (27%), difficulties concentrating on tasks at hand (32%), loss of sleep caused by worrying (23%), and loss of self-confidence (23%). One third of students reported experiencing considerable stress. The most common causes of stress were performing in public and difficulties in getting a grip on studies. The survey revealed also that the share of students facing a risk of burnout has increased from 2012. Students reported being commonly worried about their studies, and 28% of female and 19% of male students reported they worry a lot over study-related matters even in their free time. (Kunttu et al. 2017 p. 34-37, 68-72)

Kunttu et al. (2017 p. 47) states that when asked about students' own wishes on getting help in various problems, the answers were well in accordance with the impression of need for assistance obtained by other research questions. This suggests that students are very familiar with the problems in their lives. The issues that emerged as most important were related to study-related problems and mental well-being. UAS students hoped to receive help and support most commonly in stress management, time management, study related problems, social anxiety problems, physical activity, self-esteem issues, study skills, mood related issues, and nutrition as seen in Fig. 3.

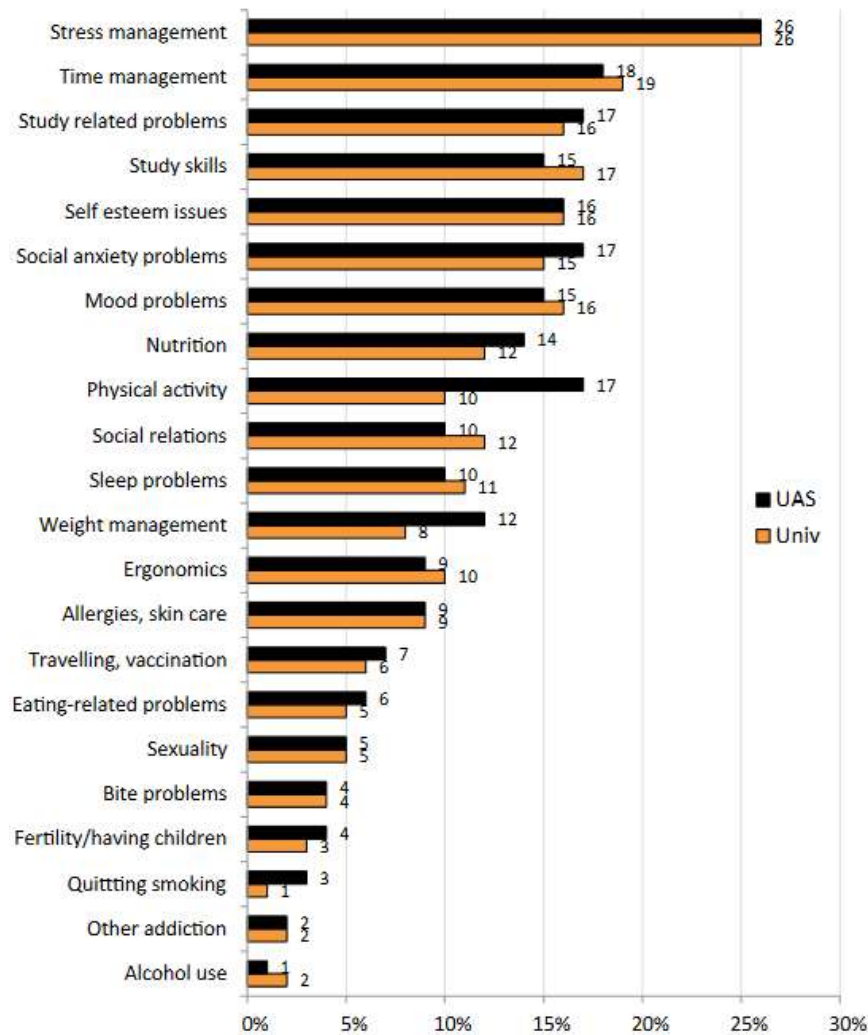


Figure 3. Students' hopes for support and help for different problems in 2016 (%) (Kunttu et al. 2017 p. 47).

Regarding health behavior, students were asked about overweight and physical activity, among others. 31% of men studying in UAS assessed themselves being overweight while based on BMI (Body Mass Index) 43% were overweight, whereas 46% of women in UAS assessed themselves being overweight but based on BMI 32% were considered overweight. 60% of students exercised at least twice a week, while 11% did not train at all or trained very rarely. The survey investigated also the sedentary behavior of students. Only 16% of students estimated that they are sedentary less than 8 hours a day, the median being 10,75 hours a day. 50% of men and 39% of women in UAS sit more than 12 hours a day. (Kunttu et al. 2017 p. 41-51)

## **2.4 Development of E-Learning Courses**

The third and final part of the theoretical reference frame discusses the development and design of online learning material. It will act as a guideline for selecting material for and constructing the final product.

### **2.4.1 E-Learning**

E-learning can be defined as “the use of computer and Internet technologies to deliver a broad array of solutions to enable learning and improve performance” (E-learning methodologies: A guide for designing and developing e-learning courses 2011 p. 3). The benefits of e-learning include lower delivery costs compared to traditional classroom training and reaching a wider target audience. Via e-learning it is possible to engage learners who are geographically dispersed, cannot attend courses with a fixed schedule and appreciate proceeding at their own pace, are restricted in their mobility, or are facing difficulties with real-time communication (e.g. foreign language skills or ineffective listening skills). In addition, e-learning is a good option when the content is to be delivered to a large number of learners, learners have at least basic computer and Internet skills, learners are highly motivated to learn, and the course addresses long-term rather than short-term training needs. Furthermore, e-learning is suitable especially for developing cognitive skills, which can involve understanding concepts, following instructions, and applying methods in new situations to solve problems. (E-learning methodologies: A guide for designing and developing e-learning courses 2011 p. 8-10)

E-learning can be carried out self-paced, facilitated/ instructor-led, or as a combination of the two above. Self-paced learners are studying independently, while facilitated and instructor-led e-learning courses are scheduled and led by an instructor or facilitator. Self-paced learners learn at their own pace instead of being managed or tracked by e-learning providers. The e-learning content is developed according to the learning objectives and is delivered using different media elements (e.g. text, graphics, audio and video). The content must provide as much support as possible through e.g. explanations, examples, interactivity, feedback and glossaries in order to make learners self-sufficient. A facilitated or instructor-led e-learning is developed to integrate several content elements and activities

into a chronological course curriculum. Such e-learning content can contain both individual study and instructor's lectures, as well as collaborative activities among learners through an online learning platform (discussion forums, chats, whiteboards, application sharing, video conferencing etc.). Finally, the assignments are typically assessed to measure learning. (E-learning methodologies: A guide for designing and developing e-learning courses 2011 p. 10-11)

E-learning approaches can combine different components: non-interactive resources, interactive e-lessons, e-tutoring or e-coaching, collaborative learning, and virtual classroom to mention a few. Non-interactive learning resources such as documents, PowerPoint presentations or videos can only be read or watched without performing any other action. The benefit of non-interactive resources is that they can be quickly developed. A common approach for self-paced e-learning is web-based training consisting of interactive e-lessons which can include text, graphics, animations, audio, video and interactivity in the form of questions and feedback. E-lessons may also include recommended reading and links to online resources, to provide learners additional information on specific topics they are further interested in. Highly interactive approaches e-tutoring and e-coaching provide learners individual support and feedback through online tools, while collaborative learning allows learners to discuss, share knowledge and work together online. A virtual classroom, instead, is an e-learning event where an instructor teaches a group of learners remotely and in real time. (E-learning methodologies: A guide for designing and developing e-learning courses 2011 p. 11-13)

#### **2.4.2 Planning Good Quality E-Learning Courses**

An e-learning course is of good quality when the content is learner-centered, granular, engaging, interactive and personalized. An e-learning course should be relevant and specific to learners' needs, roles and responsibilities. By granularity it is meant that e-learning content should be segmented in order to facilitate adjusting to new knowledge and to allow flexible scheduling. E-learning content should also enable an engaging and motivating learning experience which requires using instructional methods and techniques creatively. Interactivity is needed to sustain attention and to promote learning. Finally, e-

learning courses should be customized to reflect learners' individual interests and progress or performance. (E-learning methodologies: A guide for designing and developing e-learning courses 2011 p. 14)

Löfström et al. (2006 p. 20) noted that teaching is of good quality when it leads to deep understanding. Learning objectives, course content and learning methods should support this objective. In order to define the essential knowledge and skills to be learned, the core theories, models and principles of the topic must be defined. In addition, the learning experience should be meaningful. Meaningful learning can be achieved through promoting the activity level, intentions (personal objectives) and reflection of the learner, and introducing learning methods that are collaborative and interactive. Encouraging learners to share information, give feedback and support each other, even in self-paced e-learning, may promote learning. Connecting the learning content to authentic situations or examples also supports meaningful learning. (Löfström et al. 2006 p. 22-28)

Good design and planning are very important for e-learning projects. The structured materials must be self-containing so that they can be reused in different contexts. For example, interactive content developed for a self-paced e-learning course can be integrated into facilitated courses or become part of another self-paced e-learning curriculum later. In addition, well-developed e-learning courses can be delivered many times to different learners without making ongoing adjustments to the materials. (E-learning methodologies: A guide for designing and developing e-learning courses 2011 p. 20)

To produce and deliver e-learning, technology is required. Different tools can be used to produce e-learning content, depending on the desired final product. Microsoft PowerPoint or Word can be sufficient to create simple non-interactive learning resources (e.g. a presentation or a tutorial). However, education institutions are increasingly turning to learning platforms to deliver e-learning courses. A learning platform is a set of interactive online services that provide access to information, tools and resources to a wide user base. (E-learning methodologies: A guide for designing and developing e-learning courses 2011 p. 24)

When it comes to the language style of e-learning content, it is recommended to write directly, simply and clearly. This is accomplished by keeping sentences short, using bullet lists when appropriate, and writing as one talks. However, it is recommended to avoid culture-specific slang and examples. To involve the readers and personalize the instructions, personal pronouns (e.g. “you”) can be used. Also, using active voice instead of passive voice should be favored. (E-learning methodologies: A guide for designing and developing e-learning courses 2011 p. 61)

### **3 PROBLEM DEFINITION AND DELIMITATIONS**

The primary aim of the thesis is to create a product – an e-learning course aimed for students to enhance their well-being and promote their study ability. The secondary aim is to document the working process of developing an e-learning course.

The problem statements are:

- Which aspects affect well-being and study ability of higher education students?
- Which aspects are to be considered when developing an e-learning course for higher education students?

The perspective of the thesis is health promotive, thus leaving out physical and mental illness. The scope of this thesis is limited in developing the e-learning course. Thus, implementation and evaluation of the course are out of scope. Furthermore, the thesis does not cover how the course should be implemented – as a course with grading and credits, or as a non-mandatory support material. In addition, developing new interactive content is out of the scope. The course content will be constructed using existing material.

The primary target group of the e-learning course are the students of Arcada University of Applied Sciences. However, it does not exclude other universities’ students, as the content is aimed for students in general.

## 4 METHOD

Vilkka & Airaksinen (2003 p. 9) define a degree thesis that results in a concrete product as a functional thesis. A functional thesis consists of two parts: a practical product and a report of the working process. Whether the product is a written production or an event, they have one thing in common: the general view of the product must reflect the objectives. Thus, the product is to be planned to serve the target group, the aim and the means of communication. (Vilkka & Airaksinen 2013 p. 51)

The working process, i.e. how the final product is constructed, will be described following the process in *E-learning methodologies: A guide for designing and developing e-learning courses* (2011). The process consists of analysis, design, development, implementation and evaluation illustrated in figure 4. While process descriptions often follow the same process phases, this method was chosen because it is specifically aimed at developing e-learning and contains elements that are relevant for this thesis.

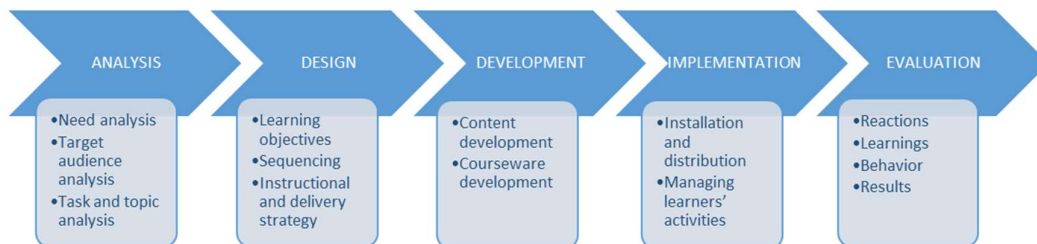


Figure 4. Working process description (modified from *E-learning methodologies: A guide for designing and developing e-learning courses* 2011 p. 21).

Analysis phase includes need analysis, target audience analysis and identifying course content. Need analysis is for identifying the general, high-level course goals, while target audience analysis determines the key characteristics of the learners, such as their previous skills, learning context and access to technology. Analysis is also needed to determine the course content. It can be either task analysis that identifies the knowledge and skills needed to be developed or reinforced, or topic analysis that identifies and classifies the course content when the course type is primarily designed to provide information. (*E-learning methodologies: A guide for designing and developing e-learning courses* 2011 p. 21)

The design phase includes several steps: defining a set of learning objectives required to achieve the high-level course objective; defining the course sequence i.e. the order in which the objectives should be achieved; and selecting strategies concerning instructions, media, evaluation and delivery. The outcome of the design phase is a blueprint that will be used to develop the course. The blueprint illustrates the structure (e.g. units, lessons, activities) and the learning objectives of each unit, as well as the delivery methods and formats of each unit. (E-learning methodologies: A guide for designing and developing e-learning courses 2011 p. 21)

In the development phase, the e-learning content is produced. The content can vary considerably. E-learning content may consist of only simple materials, such as structured documents, which can be combined with other materials (e.g. audio or video files), assignments and tests. In that case, development of multimedia or interactive content will not be conducted as part of this phase. (E-learning methodologies: A guide for designing and developing e-learning courses 2011 p. 22)

In the implementation phase, the course is delivered to learners. In facilitated and instructor-led courses, this phase also includes managing and facilitating learners' activities. In the evaluation phase, the e-learning project is evaluated for specific purposes, such as measuring the achievement of learning objectives or the impact of the course on the target audience. (E-learning methodologies: A guide for designing and developing e-learning courses 2011 p. 22)

## **5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This thesis is written according to Good Scientific Practice in Arcada (2014). There is a requirement that literature, research and other sources used are reliable, valid and relevant. Research and data-collection are conducted accurately and meticulously. The work of others is respected by giving them the appropriate credit, and by referencing accurately. Data is presented as intended in the original sources. To make sure the material selected to the e-learning course is from valid, reliable and relevant sources, only peer reviewed

articles, as well as books and internet resources by academic professionals or official bodies will be used.

Any copyright material is distributed only as permitted. Copyright materials are cited according to good practice, and referenced accurately. Internet based materials are distributed by providing a link to the original source, unless they are under free license (e.g. Creative Commons) or the author has granted permission to copy. (Keränen & Penttinen 2007 p. 150-156)

## **6 RESULTS**

The results of this functional thesis are presented in this chapter. First, the working process is described, and then the final product is presented.

### **6.1 Process Description**

This chapter describes the process of developing the e-learning course aimed to enhance student well-being and study ability. Due to the fact that implementation and evaluation are out of scope of this thesis, only the first three process phases, i.e. analysis, design and development, were conducted according to the method chosen.

#### **6.1.1 Need and Target Audience Analysis**

The need analysis was conducted based on the assignment from the commissioners and the theoretical framework. The aim was to provide UAS students a means for enhancing their personal well-being and study ability, which is available online in English. After studying the existing research and theory on general well-being and student well-being, as well as the current state of well-being among Finnish university students, the high-level course goal was defined. The course objective is that the participants will *develop skills and abilities to maintain and enhance personal well-being and study ability*.

The primary target audience is young adults studying a bachelor degree at Arcada University of Applied Sciences. Arcada has 17 bachelor degree programs, of which three are

in English, the rest in Swedish. In 2016, there were 2077 registered students (Education Statistics Finland 2016), including approximately 70 exchange students studying (annually) at Arcada. Each first-year student is provided with support and tools to successfully study at Arcada including ICT (Information and Communication Technology) skills. Arcada students are also provided with Microsoft Office package as well as access to computers and internet at Arcada premises. (Arcada 2017) It is assumed that Arcada students represent the general higher education student population in Finland.

### **6.1.2 Topic Analysis**

According to the aim of the thesis, the product should enhance personal well-being and study ability. As the perspective of the e-learning course is empowering students to help themselves, external components of study ability, i.e. teaching and environment, were excluded. Thus, only two components of the study ability model, that is, personal resources and study skills were included. After discussing the content with Arcada study counsellor, one of the commissioners, it was mutually decided to exclude academic skills from the e-learning course due to its broad scope, and due to an upcoming project at Arcada Study Services that will address this topic. Hence, only personal resources and learning skills of the study ability model were finally included.

The course content was determined in more detail by analyzing the knowledge, skills and abilities that higher education students need to develop in order to enhance their study ability and well-being. The needs were adopted from the issues Finnish UAS students hope to get help with most often, which were stress management, time management, study related problems, social anxiety problems, physical activity, self-esteem issues, study skills, mood related issues and nutrition. In addition, sleep, recovery and sedentary behavior were included in order to provide a wider perspective on health behaviors, and to provide course participants wider range of alternatives to identify to.

To identify the course topics, the learnings from the theoretical framework were applied. Well-being in general consists of subjective well-being and psychological well-being. Based on current knowledge derived from positive psychology, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and health psychology research, personal well-being and study ability can

be successfully maintained and enhanced through positive emotions, thoughts and behavior, psychological flexibility, effective behavioral strategies and coping methods, as well as practical techniques regarding studying. As a result, the topics of the e-learning course were defined as illustrated in Fig. 5 below. The course topics identified are well-being, personal resources including strengths and healthy life style (physical activity, sedentary behavior, nutrition, sleep and rest), values and goals, stress management including relaxation, time management, acceptance of emotions and thoughts including mindfulness, and learning techniques.

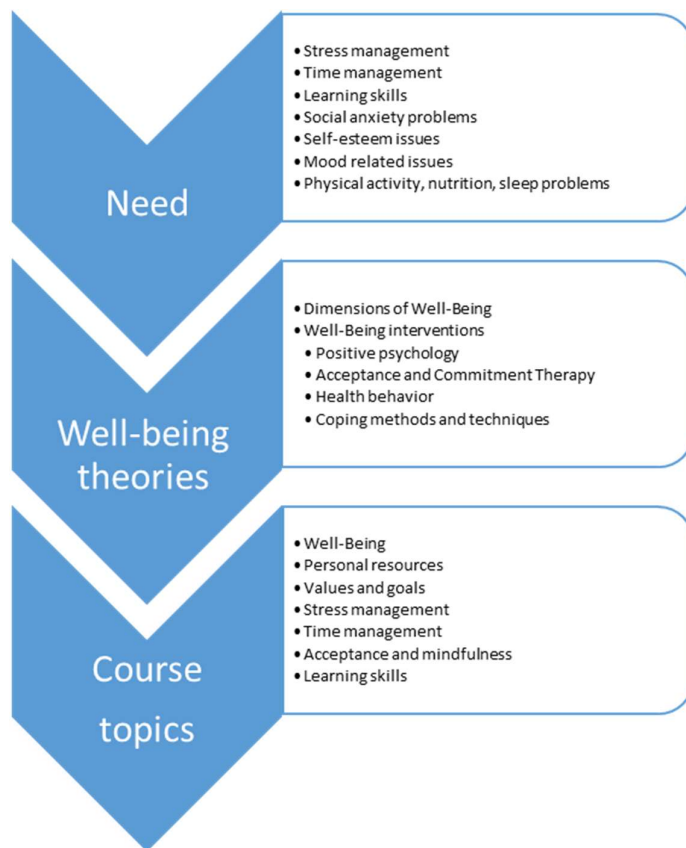


Figure 5. Course topics identified through needs, well-being theories and interventions.

Some of the needs, i.e. study related problems, social anxiety and self-esteem problems were not included in the content as such, but they are rather dealt with by strengthening personal resources and developing learning skills.

### **6.1.3 Design of E-Learning Course**

The design phase began by defining learning objectives for each topic and course sequence in which the objectives should be achieved. In this phase, the course activities were also defined along with respective learning objectives. The delivery and instructional strategies were also defined. In addition to actual course topics, an introduction and summary unit were added to the course. The outcome of the design phase is a blueprint including course topics, sequence, exercises and learning objectives. The blueprint is found in appendix 1.

The learning objectives of each topic and exercise were defined based on the high-level course objective and the topic analysis. According to well-being theories and interventions, sustainable well-being can be achieved through elements such as the presence of positive emotions and moods, sense of meaning in life, self-awareness and acceptance, sense of competence, sense of autonomy, and having positive relations. Also, resilience, self-esteem and self-optimization contribute in students' abilities to cope and manage their lives. In addition, promoting healthy lifestyle and supporting learning skills are beneficial for students. Procrastination was added under Time management topic as it is common problem among Finnish higher education students.

It was decided that the entire e-learning course material is delivered as a PowerPoint file via the learning platform ItsLearning. This delivery strategy was chosen because ItsLearning is the preferred communication channel between teachers and students at Arcada, therefore commonly known by students, and thus, does not require additional ICT skills, nor software development in development phase. ItsLearning enables also interactivity in the form of questions, feedback, and group discussion. A PowerPoint file, in turn, is quickly developed and enables versatile content. A majority of the content can be accessed offline after downloading the PowerPoint file on a computer. However, some of the content can be accessed only online through links to video, audio and text material on the internet. PowerPoint also enables granularity, reuse in different contexts, and repeated delivery. By dividing each unit in its own PowerPoint file enables flexible delivery and making adjustments if needed.

The course was designed to be self-paced to give participants room for flexibility and autonomy. However, each unit has a time limit of one week, in order to motivate finishing the exercises within reasonable time. The course activities are individual due to their personal nature, but it is possible to encourage participants to engage in group discussions on ItsLearning discussion forum. Although the course can be carried out self-paced, the delivery via ItsLearning enables a facilitator to be involved.

#### **6.1.4 Development of E-Learning Course**

In the final phase, the actual e-learning course content was produced. The selection of the material was done based on the defined learning objectives and the findings discussed in the reference frame. The content was constructed to include educational material (e.g. what is stress) combined with practicing the skills (e.g. relaxation) in order to support behavior changes. The language style was kept simple and clear by keeping sentences short and using bullet lists. Active voice was used to involve the participants. Pictures, videos, lists, and links were added to make the content more versatile and to consider different learners. Relevant material was collected using books, articles and existing online material. Text and pictures were produced mostly by the author using existing sources, and video and audio material were attached as links to existing sources on the internet. Materials were chosen based on their reliability, validity and relevance.

To make the content relevant for student needs, examples related to studied were given. Some of the examples given were modified to student needs from examples of working life found in the source materials. To provide a good quality learning material, each unit includes essential knowledge of the topic and skills to be learned. To make the learning experience meaningful, the participants are encouraged to be active and reflect as well as fit and apply the exercises in their personal lives. The ethical requirements for material combined with requirements of meaningful learning experience and copyright matters, made the collection of materials quite challenging. However, valuable tips for good quality content were received from Arcada student counsellor.

The first unit combines the introduction to course and introduction to personal well-being and study ability. The final unit includes a summary of the course and suggestions how

to continue the work started during the course. Each unit begins with introducing the learning objectives. The content of each unit was developed so that the topic's relation to well-being becomes clear. Each unit includes at least one exercise. The exercises were chosen from reliable material that bases on positive psychology and ACT. The purpose of the exercises was to deepen the understanding of the topic, make the learning experience more practical, and to encourage the learners to take action. Some freedom of choice was given when possible in order to motivate the learners and to give them the possibility to fit the exercises to their needs and values. Each exercise was given detailed instructions to enable learning without the possibility to ask advice and support from a facilitator.

## **6.2 Final Product**

The product of this functional thesis is an e-learning course titled "Personal Well-Being and Study Ability". It consists of eight units, of which each is recommended to be completed in one week. The total duration of the course would then be eight weeks. The product was developed in PowerPoint format, and is designed to be implemented on Arcada's learning platform ItsLearning. A copy of the product is to be found in appendix 2. The course is designed to be implemented according the course curriculum presented in the blueprint in appendix 1.

## **7 DISCUSSION**

The aim of this thesis was to create an e-learning course aimed for students to enhance their well-being and promote their study ability, and to document the working process of developing such a course. The work begun by studying the aspects that affect higher education students' well-being and study ability, and aspects to be considered when developing an e-learning course, as stated in the problem statements.

Theory and research on well-being was found to be complex, and answering the problem statement concerning aspects of well-being was not straightforward. Instead of specific aspects or factors, well-being is a construct that has several measurable elements which contribute to well-being, as Seligman (2011) stated. Therefore, the first problem statement could have been specified into two questions: "What is well-being?", and "How to

successfully enhance student well-being and study ability?”. To answer those questions, well-being is being satisfied with life, having positive feelings more frequently than negative feelings, and functioning in a way that promotes personal growth, autonomy, self-awareness and acceptance, meaning in life, environmental mastery, and positive social relations (Pavot & Diener 2013, David et al. 2013). Well-being can be successfully enhanced through interventions that address those elements, and based on positive psychology and ACT (Sin & Lyubomirsky 2009, French et al. 2017).

When looking at the specific domain of life for students, studying, well-being further includes the specific elements that studying – or young adulthood involves. Studying is demanding work that involves high-levels of self-responsibility, planning and time management (Kunttu et al. 2017), and trust in one’s own abilities (Heikkilä et al. 2011). Working independently and productively requires resilience, orderliness and practice. Thus, it was important to provide tools for developing skills, abilities and techniques to address the most common problems students face - in addition to building the positives (i.e. strengths, resources). A key finding used in developing the final product was, therefore, the issues Finnish UAS students hope to get help with most often, which were stress and time management, study related problems, social anxiety problems, life style, self-esteem and mood related issues (Kunttu et al. 2017).

The answer to the second problem statement concerning aspects to be considered when developing an e-learning course, is also two-fold. There are technical and practical aspects, which have with e.g. delivery to do, as well as content-specific aspects, which are important in creating a good quality, meaningful learning experience for the participants. The technical part of the e-learning course was easily developed, following the chosen method (i.e. *E-learning methodologies: A guide for designing and developing e-learning courses* 2011). It described the development of e-learning courses in very detailed manner and provided a variety of useful tips from analyzing needs to developing the content.

Conversely, creating a meaningful learning experience was much more complicated matter. A meaningful learning experience, according to Löfström et al. (2006), can be achieved by promoting participants’ activity level, intentions, reflection, and interaction with each other, and connecting the learning into authentic situations. When combined

with the ethical requirement of using relevant, reliable, and valid sources, collecting material for the e-learning content became challenging. Finding such material specific to students' needs and interests, turned out to be harder than expected. Also, developing content that is engaging and motivating, was challenging, and would have required more practical guidelines than discussed in the frame of reference. This problem was solved mostly by selecting exercises that enable personal reflection, giving participants some freedom of choice regarding exercises, and modifying examples from original sources to better fit student life.

Other problems related to the final product arose from the delimitations of the thesis. Since implementation and evaluation were out of the scope, some essential aspects were left out. According to Löffström et al. (2006) interaction and feedback are important parts of good quality e-learning. However, not knowing how the e-learning course will be implemented in practice – with or without a facilitator – they were deliberately left out. Evaluation, in turn, is an important part of the development process. Only after evaluation it is known whether the content is suitable for the target audience, and the delivery format works as designed. The e-learning course developed relies solely on existing research of well-being and student needs when developing the content.

Considering the limited scope of a bachelor thesis, the final product is, however, comprehensive. It includes important elements of well-being, relevant parts of study ability, as well as many essential aspects of good quality e-learning courses. Some other approaches to developing the content might have been something to consider. A more limited content would have enabled a more focused perspective. Then, more effort could have been set to the quality of the learning experience. This could have been done, for example, by limiting the topics into some certain areas of well-being, perhaps only personal resources and study ability. Another alternative could have been to limit the intervention strategies, perhaps only ACT could have been chosen. However, only after implementing and collecting systematic feedback from the participants will we know how successful the e-learning course is in enhancing student well-being and study ability.

It is recommended that the e-learning course is implemented for and evaluated by Arcada students, or a smaller test group of students. Doing this will help to discover the potential

problems of the course, whether they are related to the content or delivery. Within implementation it needs to be determined when and how to implement. By self-selecting to participate a non-mandatory course will most likely attract those who are motivated. Self-selected individuals benefit more from positive activities than non-self-selected peers, as stated by Sin & Lyubomirsky (2009). When it comes to timing, one might consider that when beginning their studies, most students are excited and motivated with studies (Heikkilä et al. 2011), and not yet acquainted with the challenges studying may bring along. Therefore, students may benefit more from the e-learning course later in their studies. Within evaluation, it should be measured, for example, if the learning objectives are achieved, as recommended in *E-learning methodologies: A guide for designing and developing e-learning courses* (2011).

Sin & Lyubomirsky (2009) recommend that individuals participating in a positive intervention should be encouraged to devote effort and commitment in the activities. Löfström et al. (2006), too, note that, even in self-paced e-learning, encouraging learners to share information, give feedback and support each other may promote learning. Therefore, it is recommended that the course is facilitated to provide support, encourage participants to engage in the activities and to discuss the topics with each other in online discussion forum.

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## Appendix 1. Blueprint of e-learning course

Wk	Topic	Contents	Learning objectives	Exercises	Objectives of exercises
	Introduction to the e-learning course	Purpose of the course, practicalities	Understand the working methods and course objective		
1	Introduction to Well-Being	Personal wellbeing	Understand what is meant by well-being and learn scientific facts about it. Understand how positive mood can be enhanced through positive activities.	Practice doing positive activities	Enhance positive mood
		Study ability	Understand how you can self enhance your study ability		
2	Personal resources	Strengths	Identify personal strengths, and use them in life management	Defining character strengths and using them	Learn to use strengths to manage problems
		Life style and health risks & benefits	Understand how life style choices affect on well-being		
		Social relationships and skills	Understand how social relations affect on well-being and learn about social skills.		
3	Values and goals	Values and values-based acts	Understand what is meant by values and the meaning of values to your life. Learn to connect your actions to your personal values.	Clarify personal values, and Connecting acts to your values	Understand what is important to you in life Understand how values help make decisions
		Goals	Learn to set effective, value-based goals	Setting value-guided goals	To start planning and acting towards a life
4	Stress management	Stress and stress management	Understand what is harmful stress vs positive stress Understand the causes stress Learn how to recognize and manage stress	Identifying the causes and signs of stress Identifying ways to manage stress	Learning to recognize the stressors, and how stress affects you. Learning to separate harmful methods from helpful methods
		Relaxation	Learn some relaxation techniques	Relaxation exercises	Learn efficient ways to
5	Time management	Time management	Understand what is time management Learning ways to manage stress by developing time management skills Learn time planning and prioritizing techniques	Prioritizing and time planning	Learning how to plan, prioritize and anticipate activities
		Procrastination	Recognize procrastination and learn how to overcome it	Recognizing and overcoming	Recognize procrastination and
6	Emotions, thoughts, and mindfulness	Self-awareness and acceptance	Understand how thoughts and emotions affect well-being Understand what is meant by acceptance Continue learning ways to manage stress Learn to identify your emotions and thoughts	Observing your thoughts	Understand defusion
		Mindfulness	Understand what is meant by acceptance Learn mindfulness techniques	Mindfulness exercise	Learn to be mindfully present
7	Learning skills	Learning techniques	Understand what learning skills entail Learn about some learning techniques Get tips on effective studying and note-taking Practice using a new learning technique	Using a new learning technique (+ Reflecting on positive activity started in week2)	Learn efficient techniques that enhance learning outcomes
8	Recap and how to continue	Summary of the course	Recap the source content and learning outcomes		
		How to continue?	Decide on how to continue	Pick one exercise/ act that you will continue	Encourage to continue developing oneself

## Appendix 2. E-learning course

# Personal Well-Being and Study Ability

E-Learning Course



### Content of the Unit

This unit is about:

- Introduction of the course
- Personal well-being
- Positive activities

You have one week to complete this module.

In this unit you will:

- Learn about the purpose and practicalities of this course
- Understand what is meant by well-being and study ability
- Learn facts about well-being
- Understand how positive mood can be enhanced through positive activity
- Practice doing positive activities

# Welcome!

This e-learning course is an introduction to your well-being. You will learn some scientifically proven facts about well-being in general, but mostly you will learn about how *you* can affect your personal well-being.

During the course you will learn to develop skills and abilities to maintain and enhance personal well-being and study ability.

By the end of the course you will be able to:

- Recognize possibilities for personal development and enhancing your own well-being
- Identify personal values and set value-based goals
- Recognize personal resources
- Recognize and manage stress
- Plan and manage your time
- Study more efficiently

There are 8 units, each containing fact, tips and exercises. The course is spread out into 8 weeks. You will have one week to complete each unit.

3

# Course Content

1. Introduction to well-being
2. Personal resources
3. Values and goals
4. Stress management
5. Time management
6. Emotions, thoughts and mindfulness
7. Learning skills
8. Recap and how to continue

4

## Notes about the course and recommendations

Each unit contains exercises. They are scientifically proven, and/ or based on different fields of psychology, mostly Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and Positive Psychology.

It is recommended that you create a portfolio (a notebook or electronic document), where you create and collect all exercises, and additional notes and reflections. Each exercise – as the units – are interconnected. You are sometimes asked to look back on a earlier exercise and use it as basis for another one.

To get the most out of this course, you are encouraged to put time, effort and commitment into it. To achieve anything substantial in life - learn a profession or master a sport, for example - a good deal of effort is required. Making permanent changes requires effort and commitment every day. It may be the most rewarding work you'll ever do.

Having an open and curious attitude towards the course will get you far. Enjoy the journey!

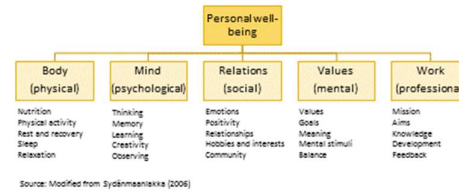
5

## Introduction to Well-Being

1. Introduction to Well-being
2. Values and Goals
3. Personal Resources
4. Stress Management
5. Time Management
6. Emotions, Thoughts and Mindfulness
7. Learning Skills
8. Recap and How to Continue

# Personal well-being

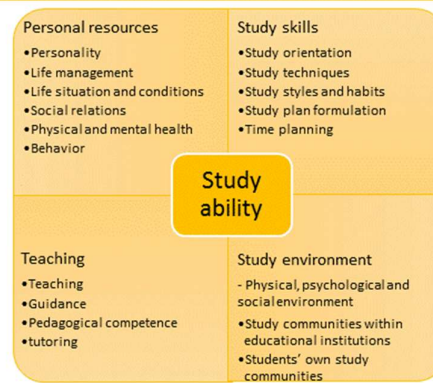
- The term personal well-being in this course refers to a comprehensive approach to managing your life and yourself, to enable living a full and happy life.
- It consists of 5 components, shown in the picture, which will be covered during this course.
- Terms life management, self-management or personal leadership are closely related to the topic, which, in this course, is called personal well-being.



7

# Study ability

- Study ability can be described as the work ability of a student.
- It consists of personal resource, study skills, teaching and study environment, which all impact each other.
- They also help to maintain a balance even though one component would be lacking. For example, if a challenging life situation temporarily weakens personal resources, good study skills or supportive study community can help to cope with it.
- As you can see, many of the components are the same as components of personal well-being.
- This course focuses on aspects of personal well-being, which, for students, include the two personal components of study ability: personal resources and study skills.



8

# Scientific facts about well-being

Well-being is the experience of life going well. It includes both feeling good and functioning well.

The feeling good part is known as *Subjective Well-Being* in the scientific literature. It consists of:

- Satisfaction with life
  - Frequent positive emotions and moods
  - Infrequent negative emotions and moods (relative to positive emotion)
- It has also been said that subjective well-being is the scientific term for *happiness*.
  - There is no single source or origin for happiness, but some interesting statements have been made:
    - The more positive events and emotions we experience, the higher the level of well-being
    - The more optimistic view on life or the more positive state of mind we have, the more positively we interpret events

The functioning well part is known as *Psychological Well-Being*. It means engaging in behavior that is, for example, growth producing, meaningful and fulfilling.

- We can say that people are functioning well when
  - they see themselves developing their potential
  - have a degree of self-determination (autonomy)
  - are aware of and accept their personal strengths and weaknesses
  - have a direction in life
  - are able to shape their environments to satisfy their needs, and
  - have positive relationships

Well-being is dependent upon good health, positive social relations, and basic needs being met. It has also been shown that physical activity and optimal amount of sleep affect positively to well-being.

Happy people are healthier - they have for example healthier cardiovascular systems and stronger immune functioning, more helpful and productive in the workplace, and engage more frequently in pro-social activities such as volunteer activities than unhappy people.

9

# Positive activity

- To enhance well-being and become happier with our lives, we can **intentionally** engage ourselves in activities and behavior that is known to positively impact on mood (see list on the right).
- Activities such as expressing gratitude, helping others, and appreciating life makes us simply feel good.
- These are called positive activities - intentional activities that aim to build the positives, as opposite to attempting to fix deficiencies.
- It's important to understand that the aim of positive activities is *not* to think positively, but to appreciate the positives in your life, and do acts that raise positive emotions, and consequently, enhance your mood.

## According to studies, the happiest people:

- Devote a great amount of time to their family and friends, nurturing and enjoying those relationships
- Are comfortable expressing gratitude for all they have
- Are often the first to offer helping hands to coworkers and passersby
- Practice optimism when imagining their futures
- Savor life's pleasures and try to live in the present moment
- Do physical exercise on a weekly or even daily basis
- Are deeply committed to lifelong goals and ambitions
- Have their share of stress, crises, tragedies – but they cope successfully in the face of challenge

10

# PRACTICE: Expressing Gratitude

## WHAT?

Gratitude is appreciation, looking at the bright side of a setback, thanking someone in your life, not taking things for granted, noticing how fortunate you are, savoring positive life experiences.

## WHY?

Gratitude promotes taking the maximum satisfaction and enjoyment from your current circumstances, and boosts positive emotions. Gratefulness can help you unlearn the habit of focusing on failures and disappointments. It may help you reinterpret stressful or negative events as positive. It can help you strengthen existing relationships and build new ones. Expressing gratitude focuses your attention to what you have, instead of what others have.

## HOW?

- There are many things in our lives, both large and small, that we might be grateful for (past and present)
- Find a time when you have several minutes to step outside your life and reflect (e.g. Sunday evening)
- Think back over the past week and write down three to five (3-5) things for which you were thankful

*This week I am grateful for:*

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# PRACTICE: Optimism

## WHAT?

Optimism is looking at the bright side, finding the silver lining in a cloud, feeling good about your future, trusting that everything will turn out all right in the end.

## WHY?

While gratitude focuses on the positives of the past and present, optimism is about anticipating a bright future. When you perceive a goal as achievable, or see a possible future for yourself, you are likely to persist in the plan regardless of obstacles. Optimism motivates you and leads you to take initiative. It prevents you from giving up easily. Optimistic thinking also promotes positive mood. It simply feels good to believe that your prospects are bright.

## HOW?

- Sit in a quiet place and reserve 20-30 minutes to think about what you expect your life to be in one, three, five years from now – whatever timeframe feels good to you.
- Visualize a future for yourself in which everything has turned out the way you've wanted: You have tried your best, worked hard, and achieved your goals. Imagine the best possible life for you. Consider all of the relevant areas of your life: career or job, relationships (family, romantic life, social life), hobbies or interests, and health.
- Write down what you imagine. It may not come naturally at first but don't give up. You may discover new insights into yourself!
- Be as creative and imaginative as you desire. Don't worry about grammar and spelling.

*The Best Possible Self Journal by X.X.*

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# PRACTICE: Acts of Kindness

## WHAT?

Doing acts of kindness is about being kind, generous, and willing to share, helping those who are in need, having compassion, making others happy.

## WHY?

Practicing acts of kindness is not only good for the recipient but also for the doer. Helping others shifts your focus from you and your troubles to somebody else. It relieves distress or discomfort over others' difficulties, and makes you appreciate your own good fortune. Helping others highlights your abilities, resources and expertise. You may also learn new skills or discover hidden talents. It is a boost on your sense of confidence and accomplishment. Doing acts of kindness also leads people to like you, to appreciate you, to smile at you, to thank you. It connects you with others.

## HOW?

- Choose one day of this week, and commit three to five acts of kindness.
- The acts of kindness may be small or big, and done for different people. Examples include donating blood, helping a friend with homework, thanking someone for his hard work, giving a homeless person money, volunteering.
- It is likely that you do numerous kind acts every day, or volunteer at e.g. an elderly home. Make sure the acts are new and special, something extra that you don't do normally.
- The options are unlimited. Open your mind to the possibilities of kindness, they are all around you.
- At the end of the day, describe the acts of kindness you have done, to whom, and when.

*Kindness report by X.X.*

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# PRACTISE: Making positive activities a habit

## WHAT?

Continue doing a positive activity for the next 6 weeks of the course.

## WHY?

Doing positive activities that fit your personality and making it a habit is likely to produce greater, long-term gains in well-being.

## HOW?

- Choose one (or two) of the positive activities that you practiced during this week. Which one fits you best? Which one you benefited the most of?
  - Gratitude journal
  - Optimism: Best Possible Self journal
  - Acts of Kindness
- Practice the chosen exercise **once a week** for 6 weeks, that is, until the final week of this course.

If you selected practicing optimism, continue your best possible self imagination from where you left at. Add to your vision whenever you feel like it, taking as much time as you like.

Read what you wrote last week. Does it raise thoughts or ideas? Write about them and make your best possible self more detailed. Identify your long term goals. Then, write about the steps you'll take to reach the long term goals.

Remember that there may be many steps or paths. Try to generate alternative scenarios.

You may be tempted to think about how accomplishing goals has been difficult for you in the past, or the possible barriers of making the goals to happen. For the purpose of this exercise, however, focus on the future.

If a pessimistic thought come to mind, write it down and try to generate alternative scenarios or possible resolutions. This exercise is most useful when it is very specific—if you think about a new job, imagine exactly what you would do, who you would work with, and where it would be. The more specific you are, the more you'll get out of it.

On week 2 imagine the best possible family life in the future

On week 3 imagine the best possible career or job in the future

On week 4 imagine the best possible (physical and mental) health in the future

On week 5 imagine the best possible hobby or interest in the future

On week 6 imagine the best possible social life in the future

On week 7 imagine the best possible hobby or interest in the future

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## Personal Resources

1. Introduction to Well-being
2. Personal Resources
3. Values and Goals
4. Stress Management
5. Time Management
6. Emotions, Thoughts and Mindfulness
7. Learning Skills
8. Recap and How to Continue

## Content of the Unit

This unit is about:

- Personal strengths
- Healthy life styles as a resource
- Social relations and skills resources

You have one week to complete this module.

In this unit you will:

- Understand how life style choices affect on well-being
- Understand how social relations affect on well-being
- Learn about social skills
- Identify your personal strengths

2

## Character strengths

- Strengths are personal characteristics that allow us to perform well or at our personal best.
- When we use our strengths we are usually energized and feel at our best. We find ourselves drawn to using them in different areas of our lives, e.g. at work, at home and our during our leisure activities.
- It's been shown that people who use their character strengths experience a higher level of self-esteem. When we focus on developing and using our strengths, it help us to get the best from ourselves and feel happier.
- Using your strengths doesn't mean that ignoring our weaker areas. Of course we need to manage our weaker areas - especially those that are holding us back - but being good enough at these is usually good enough.

3

# PRACTISE: Identifying and using your strengths

## WHAT?

Using your strengths in a new way. The first step is identifying your character strengths.

## WHY?

Applying your strengths can have a positive impact on your life. Using your strengths helps you buffer against, manage and overcome problems, and enhances well-being.

## HOW?

- Click the link on the right. Register to start the test. After completing the test, you will receive the results in the given e-mail address.
- Read the results and the descriptions of your top 5 strengths. More detailed descriptions are available [here](#).
- Ask yourself: *Do I feel naturally drawn to this strength? Is this the real me? Do I feel excited or energized by it? How much do I use this strength currently – at work, at home, in my hobbies, in my community?*
- Then, select one of your top 5 strengths – perhaps the one that you would like to use more, or one that you are most drawn to. Ask yourself: *How do I use this already? In what areas of my life do I use it? What other areas of life I could use it? How do I use it already? What other ways I could use it?*
- Use this character strength every day during this week. Try to think of new and different ways of using it, and how you can use in new areas of your life.
- At the end of the week, reflect on your learnings, observations, feelings that you noticed when using your strength. Write them down in your well-being portfolio.

## VIA Character Strength Test:

<https://www.viacharacter.org/survey/account/register>

## Tips for using your strengths:

- *340 Ways to Use VIA Character Strengths* by Tayyab Rashid & Afroze Anjum (2005): [http://www.actionforhappiness.org/media/52486/340\\_ways\\_to\\_use\\_character\\_strengths.pdf](http://www.actionforhappiness.org/media/52486/340_ways_to_use_character_strengths.pdf)

My top 5 signature strengths:

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4

## Life style choices and well-being

- You can maintain and enhance your well-being even with the smallest choices you make daily
- *What do I eat? Do I get enough rest and sleep? What kind of physical activity brings me joy and pleasure? Which are the moments in my every day life that make me feel good?*
- Taking care of your body is taking care of your well-being
- Physical well-being includes
  - Nutrition
  - Physical activity
  - Sleep and rest
  - Relaxation
- Relaxation is also a means for taking care of our mind, especially when stressed. Therefore, relaxation is discussed in unit 4.



5

# Nutrition

- A healthy diet is the foundation of health and well-being
- The right diet protects your brain, heart and digestive system, strengthens your bones and immune system, and gives you energy
- There is no food or nutrient that is better than others, rather, it is the big picture that matters in the long run
- A healthy diet is balanced and versatile to ensure vital vitamins and minerals
- Another key factor is eating regular meals to keep your blood glucose levels stable, control the feeling of hunger, support weight management and protect your teeth from decay.

## TIPS FOR HEALTHY EATING

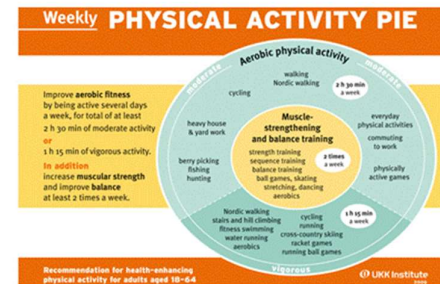
- Eat regularly, about every 4-5 hours
  - Breakfast gives you fuel for the day
  - Lunch gives energy to be active until afternoon
  - Snacks between meals keeps energy levels up and prevents you from overindulging in the evening
  - Dinner gives energy to the evening
- Put together a balanced meal with the help of [the plate model](#)
  - Fill 1/2 of your plate with vegetables
  - Fill 1/4 of your plate with potato, rice, pasta or other cereal products
  - 1/4 of the plate is left for a fish, meat or egg dish, which can be replaced by a vegetarian dish containing legumes, nuts or seeds
  - Drink milk or water
  - Add a slice of wholegrain bread with some spread with good vegetable oils in it
  - Complement the meal with a dessert of berries or fruit, or have it as a snack later in the day
- Drink 1-1,5 liters of water a day

6

# Physical activity

- Physical activity is the other cornerstone of health and well-being, along with healthy diet
- Healthy physical activity is fun, versatile, effective, regular, and involves both body and mind
- Physical condition includes:
  - Cardiovascular (aerobic) endurance
  - Flexibility
  - Coordination and balance
  - Muscle strength and endurance
  - Body composition (e.g. amount of fat)
- Aerobic training develops aerobic endurance and promotes the health of heart, blood circulation, and lungs. Physical activity in general helps control weight
- You can promote health by doing (minimum):
  - 2 h 30 min of moderate intensity aerobic exercise per week
  - Or alternatively, 1 h 15 min of high intensity aerobic exercise per week
  - PLUS muscle-strengthening and balance training twice a week
- Suitable activities are, for example:
  - Moderate-intensity aerobic training: walking and cycling (e.g., in commuting to and from work), Nordic walking, or heavy house and yard work
  - High-intensity aerobic training: uphill walking or climbing stairs, running, cross-country skiing, water running, fast racket or ball games, and aerobics
  - Balance: Ball games, skating, and dancing

## RECOMMENDATION FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



Source: UKK Institute (2015)

7

# Sedentary behavior

- Did you know that Finnish university students spend on average 10,75 hours sitting daily? (\*)
- Nowadays, our lifestyle involves a great deal of sitting. Even though we exercise regularly, most of the day is spent sitting in school, work, institutions, vehicles and at home.
- Sedentary behavior, that is excessive sitting or remaining stationary (standing still, laying down) has negative impacts on cardiovascular and musculoskeletal systems: it is associated with obesity, type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome among others.
- Therefore, we should avoid excessive sitting by walking or cycling short distances, and maintaining physically active ways of working or studying.

\*) Source: Kunttu, Pesonen & Saari (2017): Korkeakouluopiskelijoiden terveyskysely 2016, Finnish Student Health Service.

## TIPS FOR MORE ACTIVE LIFE STYLE

- While studying or working, change position and stand up at least once an hour, and have breaks
  - It boosts your alertness and improves efficiency
- Set an alarm to interrupt sitting
- Use a gymnastics ball as a chair
- Walk or cycle the distances from home to the university, to work, and to your hobbies, and back
- If you commute from a longer distance, get off the bus a few stops earlier and walk the rest of the way
- Choose stairs instead of elevator

8

# Sleep and rest

- Sleep is an important part of well-being and should not be neglected
- During sleep:
  - Body recovers from physical strain
  - Muscle growth and healing of injuries are at their fastest
  - Brain charge energy and process what happened during the day
  - The skills learned during the day refine
- It is normal to have occasional problems with sleep:
  - difficulties falling asleep
  - waking up early in the morning (especially when stressed)
  - broken sleep
  - Poor quality of sleep
- Sleep problems are often triggered by a change in life situation
- Only when you start worrying about sleeping, it becomes problematic, and can turn into a long-term issue. When the stressful situation is over, the sleep problems remain.
- What you do during the day has an impact to your sleep. Regular physical activity, healthy diet and good social relations promote good sleep. Processing your thoughts and emotions during the day prevents unprocessed problems disturbing your sleep.
- Sufficient and good quality sleep alone isn't enough to recover. You also need unwinding and pleasant moments in your daily life. Often the smallest activities are the most enjoyable, for example having a cup of coffee, seeing a friend or watching TV.

## TIPS FOR SLEEP AND REST

- Sleep 7-8 hour per night
- Follow a regular sleep schedule
- Exercise regularly and eat healthy
- Avoid heavy food, alcohol and caffeine before going to sleep
- Avoid heavy exercising late in the evening
- Relax your muscles
- Turn of your busy mind with the help of relaxation or mindfulness techniques
- Arrange time for rest and doing nothing during the day
- Have breaks, especially during intensive work
- Arrange time for doing something you enjoy daily

9

# Social relationships and social skills

- One of the factors that comes up frequently in well-being research is social relationships. Spending time with friends and family is a major resource.
- Your social network includes people that are meaningful to you: family, friends, girlfriend/boyfriend, relatives, study and work mates, people you spend time with in your hobbies etc.
  - It's natural that some relations last long, and some end sooner
  - It's important that your social network meets your needs - whether it's a few close people, or a range of both close and more distant relations
  - Not all meaningful relations are close and personal, it can be more superficial - as long as you receive the support you need, when you need it
- Sometimes a relationship can become a burden. Poor relations are a cause of stress. In such situation, think how you can relieve the burden.
- Everyone needs also some alone time - some more, some less than others. Spending time alone is a positive resource: learn to enjoy it.
- Note that being alone and being lonely are not the same. People never choose to be lonely.
  - Loneliness is the experience of lacking social relation, or not being seen and heard by others. You can be lonely even in an intimate relationships, or despite being a part of a big family or a group.
- Mood affects how you behave and how you feel.
  - When you're feeling down, you might avoid other people, feel uncomfortable around others, be unusually quiet and less confident than normally, feel lonely or sad, think that no one cares, or be more sensitive to critique.
  - It's natural to feel down occasionally. However, go spend time with people whose company you enjoy, it will probably boost your mood.
- Social skills means simply the ability to be with other people.
- Social skills are used, for example when meeting new people, having conversations, building and maintaining friendships, working in groups and communicating.
- Social skills include
  - Basic skills of introducing oneself and others, listening, conversation skills, asking advice, giving and receiving compliments
  - Advanced skills of working in group: giving instructions, apologizing, influencing others, the ability to cooperate
  - Emotional skills of recognizing and expressing own emotions, empathy, facing other people's emotions

**TIPS FOR DEVELOPING SOCIAL SKILLS**

- Introduce yourself to new acquaintances
- Greet people
- In a conversation, give others a say, and listen what they have to say
- Show with gestures, facial expressions and words that you are listening
- Look into eyes when talking to someone
- Show interest in other people
- Express your opinion
- Remember to say thank you, you're welcome, and excuse me
- Learn from people whose social skills you admire

# Extra material

- Meal journals
  - Meallogger: <http://www.meallogger.com/>
  - Fineli food diary: <https://fineli.fi/fineli/en/ruokapaivakirja>
- 10 sleep apps to help you relax, track your sleep, and wake up gently: <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/317816.php>
- 16 physical activity apps to motivate you: <https://www.active.com/fitness/articles/16-best-health-and-fitness-apps-of-2017>

**How does your life style look like?**  
Evaluate different areas by reflecting on the questions below.

<p><b>Nutrition</b></p> <p>When, how and what do you eat? What would you like to change in your diet or eating habits?</p>	<p><b>Social relations</b></p> <p>Who can you turn to when you need support? What would you like to change in your social network? What kind of social skills do you need in your future profession?</p>
<p><b>Sleep and rest</b></p> <p>What does your sleep pattern look like? What would you like to change in your sleep pattern?</p>	<p><b>Physical activity</b></p> <p>What does being physically active/ exercising mean to you? What is your preferred way of exercising? What would you like to change in the way you exercise?</p>

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Don't forget to continue  
your positive activity!

Gratitude journal  
Optimism: Best Possible Self journal  
Acts of Kindness  
(see unit 1, slide 14 for instructions)

# Values and Goals

1. Introduction to Well-being
2. Personal Resources
3. Values and Goals
4. Stress Management
5. Time Management
6. Emotions, Thoughts and Mindfulness
7. Learning Skills
8. Recap and How to Continue

## Content of the Unit

This unit is about:

- Personal values and value-based goals

You have one week to complete this module. It is recommended that you reserve a couple of hours to read through the unit and complete the exercises at once.

In this unit you will:

- Understand what is meant by personal values
- Understand the meaning of values in your life
- Clarify what is important to you in life
- Learn to set effective, value-based goals
- Learn to connect your actions to your personal values

# Values

*It's not hard to make decisions once you know what your values are.*  
— Roy E. Disney

- A value is something that we find important. It is a belief on what is an acceptable or desirable way of acting in life.
- Values guide our lives often unconsciously, and impact on our experiences
- Our values may also conflict with each other
- By being aware of our personal values we can:
  - guide our lives to the desired direction
  - control the choices we make daily
  - choose the things that are important to us and make them priorities

*"I want to carry out a healthy life style and maintain good health. It is one of my values. However, I tend to eat fast food often, drink alcohol, and don't exercise as often as I should. The value of enjoying life conflicts with the value of healthy life style. When I choose to indulge momentarily, I set it higher in priority than achieving a more long-lasting state of feeling good. With that choice I show that I value enjoying life in the present more than I value health."*

- When the things that we do and the way we behave match our values, we are content. But when these don't align with our personal values, it can be a real source of unhappiness.

*"I have a great job, a beautiful and smart wife, a big house, and two kids. Yet I am depressed because it is somebody else's dream, not mine. I'm busy and productive so that I don't have to stop and listen to myself asking: "Why can't you be happy when things are going so well for you?""*

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# Values vs. goals

- A value is like a compass point - you can navigate towards where it points but you will never reach a destination.
- Goals, on the other hand, are concrete legs in your course that can be reached and completed.
- To understand the difference between values and goals, and the challenge with goals, watch the video:
  - Dr. Russ Harris - The Values-Focused vs The Goals-Focused Life:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eiPxLpYlw4I>

→ Living only through your goals may be dissappointing – not all of them come true.

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# PRACTICE: Clarifying your personal values

## WHAT?

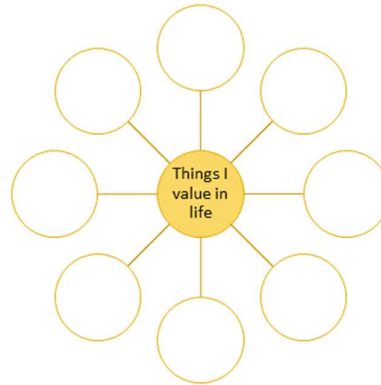
Define or clarify your personal values that you believe in. Then choose the most important or relevant values for you now.

## WHY?

Clarifying your personal values gives you a direction in life, and helps you clarify how you want to spend your life and time. Determining what you value the most is needed when you need to make the best choice in a situation where there are many reasonable options, and/or some values conflict with each other. It's helpful and comforting to rely on your values, and use them as a guiding force to point you in the right direction.

## HOW?

- Write down things or values that are important to you. Use the tips and questions on next slide to help you get started.
- Rate them based on their importance in scale 1-10 (1 = not important at all, 10 = very important).
- Then evaluate how well they are fulfilled in your life at the moment in scale 1-10 (1 = not at all, 10 = fully).
- Ask yourself: Does your current life situation reflect your values? Are you spending most of your time on the things that you value the most? Write down your reflections on your well-being portfolio.



Source: Modified from Lappalainen & Turunen (2006) in Kangasniemi & Kauravaara (2016)

# Clarifying personal values – How to?

- Ask yourself: *What is important in my life? What do I value in my life? What kind of person do I want to be? What kind of life do I want to live?*
- Or list things that bring you joy and energy. Which values do those activities represent?
- It might help you to think about the different areas of your life. Which ones are the most important to you, and which specific activities or features do you find important in them?
  - Romantic relationship
  - Family relations
  - Friendship and social relations
  - Work and career
  - Parenthood, caretaking
  - Education, personal development and growth
  - Free time, hobbies, interests
  - Spirituality, religion, ideology, culture
  - Societal activities and influencing
  - Health and well-being

• Read even your "Best Possible Self" journal. Which areas of life did you write about?

• You may also think about the different roles you have. Which roles are the most important to you? What kind of student, friend, child, partner, parent, employee, boss, volunteer etc. do you want to be?

## TIPS:

- Values are those of your own, not those of your parents.
- Values are tied to action, not to feelings. If you are doing nothing to practice a value, you do not find it truly important. If you are doing things only to feel good, it is not value-based action.
- Although values are relatively constant they develop over time and are likely to change during the course of life. So, what you valued when you were younger, might not apply anymore.

## Some typical values:

Honesty	Humbleness
Respect	Self-respect
Loyalty	Power
Love	Self-actualization
Family	Creativity
Health	Career
Good social relations	Beauty
Wealth	Nature
Success	Trust
Hard work	Enthusiasm
Responsibility	Friendliness
Forgiveness	Courage
Gratitude	Acceptance

A more extensive list of values can be found, for example, in here: [https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED\\_85.htm](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_85.htm) (MindTools: What are Your Values? Deciding What's Most Important in Life)

# Taking action

- Taking values into practice means taking value-based action
- We can plan our lives and ponder our mission in life. In the end, however, it's our acts that count.
- Acts are single steps we take every day
  - For example, going for a run is an act by which the value of healthy life style is practiced
- Acts are choices between options
  - We make dozens of choices a day: **What to have for lunch? Do I spend the evening working on a school assignment, or do I spent it with my friends?**
- Some of the acts that are connected with our values may be unpleasant. Note that here are also routines and obligations we need to carry out.
  - It helps to get them done by remembering why they are important to us
  - It also requires self-discipline

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## PRACTICE: Connecting acts to your values

### WHAT?

List the acts and choices you made during the last 24 hours, and connect them to you most important personal values.

### WHY?

Connecting your daily action to your personal values helps you to understand how your values impact your decision making. It helps you to recognize the choices that support and don't support your values.

### HOW?

- Think through the last 24 hours hour by hour. What did you do?
- Write down the acts and choices you made that are connected with your values you defined in the earlier exercise.
- List also the acts and choices you made that conflict with your top values.
- Ask yourself: Do you spend most of your time doing things that are important to you? Which acts are you willing to put (more) time and effort in? Which acts you do are not based on your most important values? Can you remove them or spend less time doing them? Write down your reflections in your well-being portfolio.

### Acts that support my most important values:

Example: exercising 3 times a week (value: good health)

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### Acts that conflict with my most important values:

Example: cancelling to meet a friend (value: friendships)

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# Dealing with barriers

- We are likely to encounter various barriers when acting on our values
- Those barriers can be either external or internal
- External barriers are factors such as distance or financial situation. They require problem solving skills.
- Internal barriers are psychological barriers such as fear and insecurity, that make us stop acting or turn away from our values.
- We'll go into the barriers more deeply in the later units of this course. At this point, it's good to understand that it's normal to find it difficult to engage in value-based action.

Internal barriers	Strategies to win over the barriers
Believing in our negative and judgemental thoughts ("I will fail anyway", "I can't take it")	Learning to be aware of emotions and thoughts, and understanding that we are not our thoughts (introduced later in the course)
Setting goals that are out of our reach, or for which we don't have the needed skills or resources	Splitting goals into subgoals, changing the goal, learning new skills etc.
Avoiding unpleasant emotions, unwillingness to accept all of our emotions	Learning acceptance (introduced later in the course)
Distancing ourselves from our values, forgetting what is important and meaningful in life	Clarifying personal values and connecting them to goals. Ask yourself: <i>is this important to me? Does it take me where I want to be?</i>

Source: Pietikäinen (2010)

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# Goals

*There is one thing which gives radiance to everything. It is the idea of something around the corner.*  
- G. K. Chesterton

- When the desired direction in life is clear, we have the motivation. Then, concrete goals are set to help us strive our vision.
- A goal gives us something to work for and to look forward to. Having meaningful goals enhances our self-esteem, and makes us feel confident and efficacious.
- Pursuing goals adds structure and meaning to our daily lives: responsibilities, deadlines, timetables, opportunities for mastering new skills and for social interactions with others. It increases the feeling of control over our lives.
- It's important to set both long-term goals and short-term sub-goals, which are steps or milestones that take us closer to the end goal, one by one.
- The accomplishment of every sub-goal is yet another opportunity for an emotional boost. It **motivates** us to continue striving.
- Committing to goals means taking action. Being committed to our goals helps us learn to master our use of time: to identify higher-level goals, to subdivide them into smaller steps or sub-goals, and to develop a schedule to accomplish them.

## What kind of goals should you pursue?

- **Intrinsic**: personally involving and rewarding and meaningful to you, which allow you to grow as a person, satisfy basic psychological needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness
  - As opposite to extrinsic goals: what other people approve or desire for you
- **Authentic**: satisfies your true values and needs, a goal you "own" and consistently makes you feel good
- **Approach-oriented/ positive**: approaching a desirable outcome (e.g. making three new friends)
  - As opposite to *avoiding* an undesirable outcome (e.g. trying not to feel guilty)
- **Harmonious**: goals should complement one another
  - As opposite to *conflicting* with each other
- **Flexible/ appropriate**: the right tasks at the right time, as the priorities we place on our goals change over time
- **Activity-based**: allows you *continually* experience new challenges, take on new opportunities, and meet a variety of experiences
  - As opposite to *circumstance-based*: moving to a nicer apartment, for example, makes you momentarily satisfied but the satisfaction wears off soon. That is, you adapt to it quickly and begin to desire ever-higher pleasures.

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# PRACTICE: Setting value-based goals

## WHAT?

Set long-term goals that are based on your most important values. Then, set short-term sub-goals to achieve long-term goals. Commit to the goals by planning acts and prepare yourself for possible barriers.

## WHY?

Value-based goals take you towards a life that you value. Goals add structure to your daily life. They give you purpose and a sense of control over your life.

## HOW?

- Pick one of the values you defined in the earlier exercise, and want to develop. What specifically do you want to become or have in your life?
- Then, set a long-term (a year, or more, whatever timeframe is realistic) goal that will take you to the desired direction. Formulate the goal according to the characteristics on the right. Review also previous slide.
- Then, set short-term sub-goals that are steps that will get you closer to the long-term goal. Apply same goal setting instructions.
- Then, think about concrete action that you can begin with, and will take you closer to achieving the sub-goals.
- Finally, ask yourself what barriers you may face when acting towards your goals.

## A clear goal is

**Positive**  
(where you want to be, not what you want to avoid)  
**Specific**  
(as concrete as possible: which action does it involve)  
**Time-bound**  
(trackable, set deadline)  
**Measurable**  
(to follow up on progress)  
**Realistic**  
(achievable)

Value/ area of life that I want to develop	My long-term goal	My short-term goals	Acts that help to achieve the short-term goals	Barriers that I might face
Example: friendships: I want to be a caring friend and share things and time with my friends	Example: By the end of the year, I contact the friends that I think about often, and meet them.	Example: By end of next month I invite X and Y over and cook dinner for them. I visit my cousin.	Example: I find out their phone numbers and call both of them.	Example: They might be too busy to meet me. I put off calling because I feel ashamed of not being in contact for a long time. Thinking: What if they don't want to meet me?

## References (and further reading)

- Kangasniemi & Kauravaara (2016): *Kohti muutosta – Arvo- ja hyväksyntäpohjainen lähestymistapa liikunnan ja terveyden edistämisessä*, Liikunta- ja hyvinvointiakatemia oy.
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- Rytikangas, Iina (2009): *Tehokas ajankäyttö – vähemmän stressiä, enemmän tuloksia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Helsingin seudun kauppakamari / Helsingin Kamari Oy.

Don't forget to continue  
your positive activity!

Gratitude journal  
Optimism: Best Possible Self journal  
Acts of Kindness  
(see unit 1, slide 14 for instructions)

## Stress Management

1. Introduction to Well-being
2. Personal Resources
3. Values and Goals
4. **Stress Management**
5. Time Management
6. Emotions, Thoughts and Mindfulness
7. Learning Skills
8. Recap and How to Continue

## Content of the Unit

This unit is about:

- Stress
- Stress Management
- Relaxation

You have one week to complete this module.

In this unit you will:

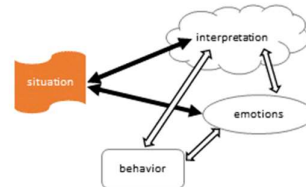
- Understand what is stress and stress management
- Understand the difference between harmful stress and positive stress
- Learn to recognize the causes and signs of your stress
- Start learning ways to manage stress
- Learn some relaxation techniques

2

## What is stress?

*"If you are distressed by anything external, the pain is not due to the thing itself, but to your estimate of it; and this you have the power to revoke at any moment."*  
— Marcus Aurelius

- Stress is a reaction to a **situation** where the challenges and demands we are faced with exceed our resources. The way we perceive stress is highly individual. A factor causing one stress may be a resource to another.
- The original means of stress is of good cause: it's the body's natural protect mechanism against threatful situations. When the body is stressed, the sympathetic nervous system generates the "fight or flight" response. The body shifts all of its energy resources toward fighting off a life threat, or fleeing from an enemy. The body starts releasing hormones adrenaline and cortisol that cause the heart to beat faster, respiration rate to increase, digestive process to change and blood glucose levels (sugar energy) to increase to deal with the emergency.
- This is called acute stress - stress that is momentary or short-term such as meeting deadlines, being stuck in traffic or suddenly slamming on the brakes to avoid an accident
- Once the crisis is over, the body usually returns to the pre-emergency, unstressed state. However, experiencing stressors (= stimuli causing stress) over a prolonged period of time can result in chronic stress.
- Chronic stress contributes to long-term problems for heart and blood vessels. As the sympathetic nervous system continues to trigger physical reactions, it causes a wear-and-tear on the body.



When we are in a stressful situation, we immediately start an assessment of it: Is it threatful, dangerous, unpleasant? Should I defend myself? Our mind is warning us of a threat and wants us to become alert.

We react with our thoughts, body, and behavior. These three also activate each other, for example our own behavior can cause stress or make it worse.

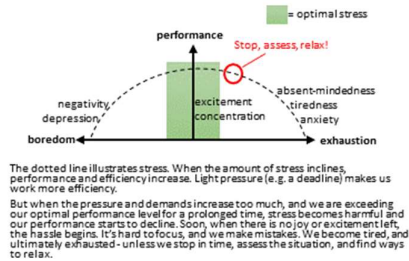
The stress reaction is activated no matter if the threat is real or imagined.

Source: Pietikäinen (2010)

3

# Good vs. bad stress

- Not all stress is harmful
- **Positive** stress prepares us for new situations, gives energy and makes us act. It makes us do our best.
- When we are excited and focused on what we're doing, we are at our best. It's motivating, rewarding, and we're in control of the situation. A state of flow can be reached.
- At the optimal level of stress, we're using 75-100 % of our capacity.
- When stress levels rise too high, stress becomes **negative** and weakens our performance
- On the other end of the spectrum, there is boredom. When we're not having enough stimuli, we get bored, and our performance levels decline.



Sources: Sydönmesniikka (2006) & Katsajainen, Lipponen & Utoeväste (2008)

# Causes and signs of stress

- Stress can be **triggered** by many factors such as:
  - Changes in relationships and life situation
  - Lack of social relations and loneliness
  - Lack of support
  - Financial problems
  - Unreasonable demands and schedules
  - Health problems
  - Bullying and discrimination
- Factors that **maintain** stress are, for example:
  - Poor eating habits
  - Lack of physical activity
  - Stressors that persist
  - Worrying
  - Lack of resilience
  - Stressful life style (constant hurrying, drinking too much alcohol etc.)
  - Sense of lacking meaning in life
- Chronic stress arises from having to **struggle** at the upper limits of our resources for a prolonged time
- We tolerate pressure for long, are diligent and resilient, and tend to start thinking that abnormal situations are normal. It delays breaking off the stressful spiral.
- It is important to recognize the individual limits of tolerance and signs of stress, and stop the spiral in time by managing stress

## Signs and symptoms of stress

<p><b>Physical:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Muscle tension or pain</li> <li>Headache</li> <li>Stomach pain and digestion problems</li> <li>Sweating, shortness of breath</li> <li>Shaky hands</li> <li>Difficulties sleeping</li> <li>Reduced sexual desire</li> </ul>	<p><b>Emotional:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tension</li> <li>Anxiety</li> <li>Feeling down or depressed</li> <li>Feeling powerless or hopeless</li> <li>Irritation</li> <li>Feeling moody</li> <li>Inefficiency</li> </ul>
<p><b>Behavioral:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unproductiveness</li> <li>Changes in drinking or eating habits</li> <li>Avoiding other people</li> <li>Isolating oneself</li> <li>Emotional outbursts</li> <li>Arguing with other people</li> <li>Impatience, indifference</li> </ul>	<p><b>Cognitive:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Distressing or frightening thoughts</li> <li>Worrying</li> <li>Difficulties concentrating</li> <li>Memory loss</li> <li>Difficulties making decisions</li> <li>Pessimism, self-criticism</li> <li>Lack of creativity</li> </ul>

# Stress management

- By learning to manage stress, we can keep the stress at a level which is not harmful
- Through stress management we can
  - Manage the stressful situation
  - Manage our own thinking processes
  - Reduce the effects of stress
- There are several strategies that can be applied to manage stress
  - Relaxation
  - Time management
  - Problem solving
  - Investing in social relationships and physical well-being
  - Being aware and accepting our thoughts and emotions
- To be able to make changes to stressful situations, we must first learn to recognize the most relevant stressors, and how we react on them

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## PRACTISE: Identifying your stressors and reactions

### WHAT?

Identify the most relevant factors that cause and maintain stress in your life, and the ways you react on them.

### WHY?

Learning to recognize the stressors – external and internal – helps you to manage the situation before it gets exhausting and affects on your well-being. Understanding the ways stress effects on you, on your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, helps you to identify which strategies are helpful and which reactions are, in fact, harmful. Does your way of thinking or behaving actually make the situation worse?

### HOW?

- If you feel stressed at the moment, make a list of the current stressors in your life. Think of aspects in your every day life and in your life situation, or single situations that you find stressful.
- If you are stress-free, think back to a situation/ situations that you found stressful. Write down examples of stressful situations: When was the last time you experienced stress? What happened, who were there etc.?
- Then, think about the reactions you experience(d) on those situations, or after the situations. How does it feel in your body? What kind of thoughts and emotions do you notice having? What do you do to handle those thoughts, emotions and sensations? How do you act and behave? You may find it easier to recognize the reactions by writing a stress diary for a week if you feel stressed currently.

### My stress

Stressful situations/ stressors	Signs of stress: my sensations	Signs of stress: my emotions	Signs of stress: my thoughts	Signs of stress: behaviors
Example: Having presentations	Example: Shaky and sweaty hands, dry mouth	Example: Nervousness, anxiety	Example: "Everyone will notice how nervous I am"	Example: Not being able to sleep well the night before, acting nervous

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# Coping with stress

- Coping is the ability to face problems by developing strategies in an attempt to return to normality
- There are various coping strategies that we use when facing a stressful situation: some work hard to solve the problem, some start exercising more, some become cranky and take it on their close ones, some rely on their close ones for support, some go shopping because it makes them feel good, some worry but don't do anything about it, some avoid the whole issue
- Some coping strategies help us in the long run (e.g. social support), some provide only momentary relief (e.g. shopping). Some coping strategies are, in fact, harmful.
- When the stressor is an external problem that can be solved, analyzing the situation and finding solution will help. But when the stressor is not under our control, we can only manage our reactions to it.
- We should not try to control natural stress, its symptoms, or our thoughts and emotions. By trying to control our reactions, we make the situation worse.
- It's important to recognize what is learned, harmful behavior, and what actually helps you manage stressful situations. We will continue this topic in unit Emotions, Thoughts and Mindfulness.

Harmful strategies are, for example:

- Avoiding unpleasant feelings by e.g. focusing strongly on something else
- Resisting and suppressing unpleasant feelings, thoughts and memories (e.g. trying not to think about it)
- Worrying, ruminating
- Visualizing an escape (e.g. quitting your job) or a revenge
- Dreaming about future
- Thoughts like "This is not fair", "If only..."
- Self-blame (e.g. blaming oneself for the stress symptoms)
- Blaming other people/ organization/ society
- Logical reasoning
- Analyzing oneself ("Why am I like this?"), the situation ("Why did it happen?"), or other people ("Why is he like that?")
- Positive or negative inner talk

Stressful situations/ stressors	Bodily sensations	Emotions	Thoughts	Behavior	Harmful coping strategies	Helpful coping strategies
Having presentations and speaking in front of the class	Shaky and sweaty hands, dry mouth, increased heart rate, sensing my cheeks blushing	Nervousness, anxiety	Worrying that I will say something stupid and that others will notice how nervous I am	Not being able to sleep well the night before, acting nervous, not being able to eat before the presentation	Trying not to think about it, trying to control the nervousness and keep it a secret from others	Accepting the nervousness and talking about it to others, facing presenting situations to have more experiences that help to understand that nothing bad happened after all
Upcoming exam	Muscle tension, back pain, stomach ache	Irritation, anxiety, feeling powerless	"I should be studying", "I have to study", "I can't manage this stress"	Procrastination, not getting anything done	Not allowing yourself to enjoy anything, worrying	Focusing on the present, allowing yourself to relax and enjoy life, making a plan how to study to the exam

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## PRACTISE: Identifying your ways to manage stress

### WHAT?

List your ways and means to manage and reduce stress.

### WHY?

### HOW?

- List your ways to manage stress. What do you usually do to manage stressful situations? How do you relax?
- Reflect on each means you listed: does it help you in the long run, momentarily, or is it not helping you at all?

*My ways to manage stress:*

Example: watch TV, go for a walk, talk to a close friend, eat candy

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9

# Ways to reduce stress

- The more stress management strategies you have, the better. Try different ways and find ones that suit you best. Some ideas are listed on the right and below, and on next slide.
- Social support received from friends, co-workers, relatives, and/or companions helps at times of chronic stress and crisis
- Regular physical activity relieves stress, anxiety and tension
  - As discussed in unit 3, physical activity is one of our supporting resources
  - Physical activity secretes hormones that make us feel good, and increases blood flow to brain. After exercising we are able to concentrate better, are more creative and happy with ourselves.
  - However, when highly stressed, too intense exercise can be harmful. When the autonomic nervous system is already overloaded, light exercising such as yoga or a walk is preferred.
- Nature has a calming effect on us
  - Being in nature, or even viewing scenes of nature, reduces anger and stress, and increases pleasant feelings
  - Exposure to nature reduces blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, and the production of stress hormones
  - Spending time in nature increases our ability to pay attention. This also provides a break for our overactive minds, refreshing us for new tasks.
- There are as many ways to relax as there are people
  - Some relax when watching a movie, others going for a run – but are not enough to reduce the damaging effects of chronic stress
  - Relaxation techniques are particularly effective in reducing long-term stress symptoms

## Tips to reduce stress

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Thinking processes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When being stressed or feeling a constant sense of urgency, stop and assess your situation</li> <li>- Recognize your limits of tolerance</li> <li>- Re-assess the requirements you set on yourself against your resources</li> <li>- Be compassionate towards yourself and appreciate what you have already accomplished</li> <li>- Instead of worrying, try to think of concrete solutions to the situation</li> <li>- Accept what has happened in the past and focus on the present</li> <li>- Trust in your ability to influence your life</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Social relations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seek support from your friends and family</li> <li>- Accept the support offered to you</li> <li>- Talk about the stressful situation with someone. By saying it aloud you may find new ways to reduce stress</li> <li>- Despite of feeling tired, keep in contact with other people</li> <li>- Look after your limits. Be assertive with people who demand too much from you</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Physical well-being</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Exercise regularly and by listening the signals of your body</li> <li>- To counteract exercise, rest and relax</li> <li>- Have minibreaks throughout the day                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sleep sufficiently</li> <li>• Eat healthy and regularly</li> <li>• Drink alcohol only in moderation</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Follow your natural daily rhythm: do the most difficult tasks when you are at your best</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Relaxation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Utilize your breaks creatively: go for a 33 minutes walk or have a chat with a friend over coffee</li> <li>- Spend time outdoors and in nature</li> <li>- Do relaxation exercises regularly</li> <li>- Do things that make you feel good</li> <li>- Find a hobby that takes your mind of stressful things</li> </ul>

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# Relaxation techniques

- Relaxation helps to counter the stress response
  - A relaxation response can be achieved by deep abdominal breathing, muscle relaxation, mindfulness, focusing on a soothing word (such as peace or calm), visualization of tranquil scenes, repetitive prayer, and yoga among others
- Relaxation results in both immediate and long-term effects:
  - The immediate effects include reduced blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension and breathing
  - Practicing relaxation exercises regularly reduces anxiety, prevents the accumulation of stress, improves the quality of sleep, the ability to concentrate and memory, and increases productivity
- The most common relaxation techniques are
  - Breathing exercises
  - Muscle relaxation (or active relaxation)
  - Visualization exercises
  - Mindfulness exercises

## GETTING STARTED WITH RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

- Start by listening to guided relaxation exercises at least once a week for a couple of months
- Try different techniques. It's important to find one that suits you best.
- You can also listen to relaxing music or sounds of nature, which increase the effect of relaxation
- When getting the hang of it, start practicing relaxation independently.
- Use your skill to relax to recover more efficiently, and in situations where you feel stressed, anxious, restless, or experience physical symptoms such as headache.

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## PRACTISE: Breathing relaxation

### WHAT?

Learn more about breathing relaxation and practice it through this video.

### WHY?

Breathing relaxation activates the parasympathetic nervous system to counteract the sympathetic nervous system, which has a calming effect on body functions.

### HOW?

- Find a time that you won't be disturbed.
- Watch the video (the link on the right).

- Therapist Aid - How to Do Deep Breathing:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYQsRBNYdPk>

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## PRACTISE: Muscle relaxation

### WHAT?

Practice muscle relaxation through this guided exercise.

### WHY?

Through muscle relaxation you learn to recognize the difference between tensed and relaxed muscles. When practiced regularly, you learn to notice when e.g. your shoulders are tense. Then, by relaxing your muscles, you can prevent them from becoming sore, and avoid headache, for example.

### HOW?

- Find a time that you won't be disturbed.
- Listen to the guided exercise (the link on the right).
- You don't have to know or try anything. Just let it happen.

- Therapist Aid - How to do Progressive Muscle Relaxation:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nZEdqcGVzo>

13

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Don't forget to continue  
your positive activity!

Gratitude journal

Optimism: Best Possible Self journal

Acts of Kindness

(see unit 1, slide 14 for instructions)

# Time Management

1. Introduction to Well-being
2. Personal Resources
3. Values and Goals
4. Stress Management
5. Time Management
6. Emotions, Thoughts and Mindfulness
7. Learning Skills
8. Recap and How to Continue

## Content of the Unit

This unit is about:

- Time Management as a part of Stress Management

You have one week to complete this module.

In this unit you will:

- Understand what is time management
- Continue learning ways to manage stress by developing your time management skills
- Learn time planning and prioritizing techniques
- Recognize procrastination and learn how to overcome it

# Time and Sense of Urgency

- The way we experience time is individual. Sometimes time flies, sometimes it stays still.
- We experience a variety of emotions associated with time.
  - Frustration and impatience** when we need to carry out something but end up in a queue that goes slow, or waiting for the computer to start.
  - Insufficiency** when we don't have time to do everything we want to.
  - Guilt and anxiety** when we leave things until the last minute. We start feeling a sense of urgency - that we are constantly in a hurry, and that we are unable to do anything about it.
- There are three ways we can look at the future:
  - Worry about the future and that there's not enough time for everything
  - Dream about the future, but do nothing about it
  - Plan the future
- Worrying is trying to solve problems that don't have solutions, whereas planning results in concrete ideas for action

## Where does the sense of urgency and stress arise from?

- The illusion that we should be constantly available
  - Do you really need to reply to the messages, emails and calls immediately, and interrupt what you were doing?
- The amount of information increases constantly
  - More information than ever before is offered to us but has it made you any wiser? Do you really need to know it all?
- Ambitiousness and drive for success
  - When turned into "nothing-is-enough" attitude, ambition can lead to burn-out
- Aiming for perfection
  - High working moral, wanting to do everything perfectly - even the most insignificant little things - is often unnecessary and pays a high price at the expense of your resources
- Hurrying causes more hurrying
  - Doing things at the last moment and in a hurry increases the possibility for mistakes. Keeping things only causes more hurrying.

## Consequences of constant hurrying:

- Poorer results of work
- Poorer quality, more mistakes
- Being late of schedule
- Stress, burnout, illness
- Neglecting oneself, family, children, and friends
- Creativity weakens
- Ability to learn declines
- Problems with memory increase
- The illusion of being irreplaceable

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# Time Management

- Time management is not only about time and managing it but also about **managing ourselves**, and planning our actions
- Time management relies on focusing on the most important (values) and knowing where we're headed (goals)
- Time management is a skill that can be developed
- Time management starts by setting value-based goals and making a plan of action to achieve them. Then, action is taken.
- Skillful time management also requires that we are able to:
  - assess and plan the need and use of time realistically
  - assess our resources
  - change a plan flexibly if needed
  - separate the most important things from the less important
  - say "no" when needed
  - delegate
  - be mindfully present - focus on the task at hand
  - show self-discipline
- While time management enables us to spend time on things we value, it must be acknowledged that there are also obligations and daily routines that have to be carried out

## Think about your time use using the questions below:

- Do you tend to underestimate the time needed in a task?
- Do you tend to do too many tasks in a short time so that you end up hurrying?
- Do you find it difficult to let go on a task you set out to do? Does it result in not having time to move on to the next task or finish the task?
- Do you find it difficult to set priorities on your tasks, i.e. to do the most important tasks before the less important ones?
- Do you find it difficult to let someone else do the tasks?
- Does it often feel like you don't have enough time for everything you have to or wish to do?

If you answered yes to several questions, it might be useful to re-assess your time management skills.

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# Time Planning

*"Well begun is half done"*

- Time planning sets the ground for time management. It adds structure to our daily lives.
- Planning involves splitting goals into smaller steps or subgoals, and scheduling them
  - When planning on a big task, divide it into smaller subtasks. A task sized of a mountain causes anxiousness and makes you put off starting it.
  - A good schedule is doable: it is realistic, motivates you to carry on, and has room for breaks and rest
- Anticipate and plan to do tasks well before their deadlines
  - Plan the most important tasks for next week, the week after that, following month and even the months after that
  - Avoid leaving things until the last minute. It will give you time for research, asking advice, or asking help if needed.
  - Ask yourself: How can I get started with this task with the least possible? For example, looking through the material for an upcoming exam, gives you an understanding of the time needed to study it through.
  - Even though the deadline would be several months from now, stop for a moment and think about the task and the desired outcome. You may write down thoughts and ideas that come to mind. Then leave it be. This activates your subconsciousness. It will pick up relevant things from what you read, hear and see, and when you start working on the task, it will "print out" the information you've worked on subconsciously.
- Develop a time planning system that suits you and is functioning
  - A paper calendar, mobile calendar, a notebook etc.
  - Use only one calendar in which you mark all your appointments, regular events and activities etc.
- Reserve enough time for the tasks
  - "Work expands to fill the time available for its completion" (Parkinson's law) means that we use the time we have reserved for the activity. If we reserve two hours for a task, it'll take two hours to complete it. If we reserve a week for an assignment, it'll take a week.
  - Note that we tend to underestimate the time needed for easy and pleasant tasks, and overestimate the time needed for difficult and demanding tasks
  - Avoid overbooking your calendar. Reserve extra time for routines, obligations, flexibility, surprises, creativity and well-being.
- Note that planning is only the beginning. Instead of spending excessive amounts of time on planning, start taking the steps.

5

# Setting Priorities

- It's not possible to achieve all things at the same time. This is where you put your value-based choices and time use together. When you know what is important to you,
- Yet, there are times when there are several activities and tasks that need to be taken care of at the same time. To avoid the pressure of unfinished tasks stressing us, it's vital to recognize the ones that have to be taken care of first.
- There are various techniques that can be used in categorizing activities. One of them shown on the right.
- Simply listing the unfinished activities will help you to structure your time use. With a list you can prioritize, check what is yet to be done and what has already been done. Striking over a task on your list is rewarding – it's a concrete reminder of accomplishment.

	Urgent	Not urgent
Important	<b>1. Important and urgent</b> - The tasks you've left until the last minute - Tasks that you couldn't have foreseen	<b>2. Important but not urgent</b> - Activities that help you achieve your goals, and complete important work - Taking care of your well-being
Not important	<b>3. Not important but urgent</b> - Typically some emails and meetings - Can you delegate or reschedule these? Or say no to the task?	<b>4. Not important and not urgent</b> - These activities are just a distraction - Simply ignore or cancel many of them

Categorizing tasks based on their importance and urgency helps to understand in which order they should be done. Category 1 includes tasks with first priority, category 2 includes tasks with second priority, and so on. Start scheduling from tasks with priority 1.

Source: Rytikangas (2008)

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# PRACTICE: Prioritizing tasks and planning my week

## WHAT?

List all tasks that need to be done, and prioritize them. Then, decide on the next action for each task. Organize them in to-do lists and/or your calendar. Then plan your next week.

## WHY?

Listing everything that is on your mind clears your mind; you no longer need to use your brain capacity to remember them. Instead, you can use the capacity for organizing tasks, having ideas, being creative and solving problems. Learning how to plan, prioritize and anticipate activities develops your time management skills. Planning your time uses structure to your daily life. Reasonable organization and routine improve your well-being, self-esteem, and study habits.

## HOW?

- Start by following the first step of 5 steps to Get Things Done: List all assignments, exams, other deadlines, and tasks or activities related to personal life, work and studies that needs to be done during the current period, or even later.
- Prioritize them into 4 categories: 1) important and urgent, 2) important but not urgent, 3) not important but urgent, 4) not important and not urgent. If there are tasks in categories 3 and 4, consider if you could reschedule, cancel or ignore some of them.
- Continue to step 2 of 5 steps to Get Things Done: process the tasks with priority 1 and 2. Determine the next action you can take to reach the desired outcome.
- Step 3: organize the actions you determined into to-do lists or set them in your calendar.
- Plan your next week. Which actions do you need to do next week? How much time should you reserve for them? Which actions in category 2) you can get started already next week even though the tasks' deadline is further away? Reserve also time for your hobbies, interests, daily routines, and spare time.
- Steps 4 and 5: act based on your plan next week. During the week: check what you need to do next.
- At the end of the week: review your to-do lists and/or calendar. Mark tasks completed and update your lists if needed. Review your plan: Did you do everything you planned to do? Were there any changes to the plan? Was there flexibility in your schedule?

## 5 Steps to Get Things Done by David Allen:

1. Write down all unfinished and unorganized tasks
  - include everything that is on your mind: little, big, professional, and personal things.
  - Write them down in one single place, a notebook, mobile phone, electronic document, whatever suits you best.
2. Process everything you listed: what is the desired outcome, and what is the next action needed to reach the outcome?
  - if it is something that cannot be acted on, delete or strike through it
  - if the next action can be done in less than 2 minutes, do it now, if it can be done by someone else, delegate it.
3. Organize the actions
  - Put the next actions where they belong: on a to-do-list, on your calendar, in whatever system you are using.
4. Review your lists frequently
  - Check what you need to do next as often as necessary
  - Do a weekly review to clean up and update your lists (and to clear your mind)
5. Simply do

Sources: Allen (2017) & Rytliangas (2009)

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## Taking Action

*"The fastest way to do many things is to do them one by one"*

- Do the tasks one by one following the schedule you defined
- You may have several tasks in progress at the same time, but don't try to do them at the same time.  
**Focus on one task at a time.**
- You'll save a lot of time by focusing and doing things right on the first time you set to do it.
- Reward yourself after finishing a step or completing a goal. Decide beforehand what the reward will be.

### Tips for taking action effectively

- Do the most demanding tasks during your natural efficient working time of the day
  - For most it's before noon between 9 and 11 a.m., for night owls it might be in the afternoon or late evening
- Minimize distractions
  - Close the door, mute or set your phone on flight mode, close email and other unnecessary applications on your computer
  - Study in the library if there are too many distractions at home

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# Procrastination

- Procrastination means:
  - putting off a difficult, important task in favor of something easier, quicker, and less anxiety-provoking (for example, cleaning a desk before writing)
  - delaying vital actions until the performance and the results are less than they would have been if done in timely fashion
- Nowadays there are plenty of opportunities to put off tasks. Surfing online, checking emails, chatting, watching TV.
- Procrastination is normal to people, and it happens in all areas of life. It's a way of motivating ourselves: we do things only then when we *really* have to.
- We tend to put off tasks that we view as uncomfortable. When putting off a task in an attempt to avoid failure or anxiety, we get a momentary satisfaction, a relief, of not having to put up with unpleasant feelings.
- But in the long run, procrastination causes us more distress, anxiety, guilt and practical problems. It may even stop us from achieving our goals in life.
- Note that *planning* to do a task later, by setting it less urgent than other tasks and giving it a date, is *prioritizing*. Procrastination is not doing the task when you planned to do it.
- Note also that spending a lot of time planning is a form of procrastination if it is done to avoid starting to take action!
- The good news is that procrastination is a behavior pattern that can be changed.

*"I don't feel like doing this now, I'll do it tomorrow"*

*"I don't have time for it now"*

*"I don't know how to do it"*

*"I'll start when I'm inspired"*

*"I work better under pressure"*

*"What if I fail?"*

*"What if I'm just not good enough?"*

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# Tips

## Time planning

- Plan free time slots also. It gives you room for flexibility.
- Learn to say NO
- Learn to delegate
- Break the perfectionism. Good enough is often enough, especially when it comes to the less important and insignificant tasks.
- Knowing how you spend your time is important especially when feeling stressed. Keep a diary of time use for one day.
- Use task- and time-management apps to help you be more organized. Apps you might find helpful:
  - To understand your time use: <https://www.smartertime.com/>
  - Time management: <http://www.redmondpie.com/pomodorable-for-osx-is-a-beautiful-task-management-app-that-redefines-to-do-lists/>
  - To-do-list gamified: <https://habitica.com/static/home> or <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.supermono.epi.cwm&hl=en>
  - Following up on goals: <http://www.goalsreaks.com/>

## Overcoming procrastination

- Begin before feeling ready
- Minimize distractions
- Work in brief, daily sessions
- Have planned breaks, stop early, and use external reminders. For example, decide that you will work for 20 minutes, set an alarm to go off in 20 min. Then have a break.
- Plan your breaks: when is the best times to have breaks, and what will do on your break.
- Be prepared with an response if someone tries to talk you into doing something when you are planned to work on your task
- Take notice of how a task is connected to your values and long-term goals
- Get those tasks you find least pleasant out of the way early
- Tell someone about your goal or ask someone to check up on you. Peer pressure works!
- Stop to notice how you feel after completing a task or a subtask
- Appreciate the progress you've done
- Monitor your thinking. Rephrase "I have to" into "I choose to".
- Combine the unpleasant task with something you enjoy doing. For example, listen to music while you study, go to a cafe to study, study together with friends.
- Set a picture on your desk or to the background of your computer to remind you of your goal.
- Moderate your impulsiveness. It requires self-discipline!

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# PRACTICE: Recognizing and overcoming procrastination

## WHAT?

Recognize your procrastination and learn ways to overcome it.

## WHY?

Procrastination brings neither happiness nor efficiency in the long run. The first step to overcoming procrastination is to recognize the problematic behavior. By overcoming procrastination you will save effort and time, and avoid hurrying and unnecessary distress. You'll become more flexible in allocating your resources, and be able to utilize your potential.

## HOW?

- Describe an activity or a task that you put off regularly or have been putting off lately
- Then list things that usually distract you when you work and/ or prevent you from working focused on your task
- Then formulate a goal and make a plan to get the task done. Write down your answer to each point on next slide.

### A task that I put off:

For example: To study for an exam

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### Things that distract me:

For example: The problem is that I'm studying on my computer, and I usually end up surfing online and doing something else. Also, I'm easily distracted by everything else I should do at home, for example, do the laundry.

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# PRACTICE: Overcoming procrastination

- Why is it in your interest to complete your task? What reward do you get from carrying out your work?  
Example: To be well prepared for the exam and get a good grade. It gets me closer to my goal of graduating with good grades.  
My interest:
- How long do you have before your task has to be ready? Is it possible to break up your work in smaller and more manageable parts?  
Example: The exam is in 2 weeks. I don't have study all of the material once, I can break it up in smaller slots.  
My schedule:
- Define a goal for yourself to work towards. Describe a goal that is positive, as specific as possible, time-bound and realistic.  
Example: I will study two hours a day for two weeks  
My goal:
- Describe three things that you can do to reduce the risk of being distracted  
Example: Close internet browser and other applications while I'm on my computer, turn off all reminders on my phone, study in the library instead of home.  
My preventive actions:
- When, where and how will you start acting towards your goal?  
Example: I will go to the library and study between 14:00 and 16:00 tomorrow  
My action:
- Describe a minimum effort – the smallest and easiest subtask that gets you closer to achieving your goal, and that you could do already today.  
Example: I will collect all needed material in one place  
My effort:
- After finishing the minimum effort subtask, describe how you feel.  
Example: It feels okay, it's not very hard to collect all the material.  
My feelings:

### A good goal is

- Positive**  
(where you want to be, not what you want to avoid)
- Specific**  
(as concrete as possible: which action does it involve)
- Time-bound**  
(trackable, set deadline)
- Measurable**  
(to follow up on progress)
- Realistic**  
(achievable)

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Don't forget to continue  
your positive activity!

Gratitude journal  
Optimism: Best Possible Self journal  
Acts of Kindness  
(see unit 1, slide 14 for instructions)

# Emotions, Thoughts and Mindfulness

1. Introduction to Well-Being
2. Personal Resources
3. Values and Goals
4. Stress Management
5. Time Management
6. Emotions, Thoughts and Mindfulness
7. Learning Skills
8. Recap and How to Continue

## Content of the Unit

This unit is about:

- Being aware of emotions and thoughts
- Accepting emotions and thoughts
- Mindfulness

You have one week to complete this module.

In this unit you will:

- Understand how thoughts and emotions affect well-being
- Understand what is meant by acceptance and mindfulness
- Continue learning ways to manage stress
- Learn to identify your emotions and thoughts
- Learn some techniques to observe your emotions and thoughts

# Importance of Emotions and Thoughts

- Our mind produces thoughts and emotions constantly. They are important messages that we should learn to listen to.
- By being aware of and understanding your thoughts and emotions, you understand yourself. By accepting your thoughts and emotions as they come, you can also **accept yourself** as you are.
- Knowing yourself and liking yourself despite of your weaknesses and imperfection is a sign of a healthy **self-esteem**. It makes you feel good to be you.

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# Emotions

- Emotions are spontaneous, short-term and passing reactions to a external or internal stimulus.
- Emotions are part of our daily life. They guide how we feel and affect our mood - which is more long-term state that isn't necessarily caused by anything specific.
- Emotions give and release energy, and catch easily. Emotions come and go, and are easily mixed with each other.
- Emotions are usually divided into positive and negative emotions. However, many of the emotions we usually experience as negative begin a process that results in a positive outcome. They are a sign of a conflict between the current situation and a need or goal that is important to our well-being.
  - For example, fear tells us to pull out from a dangerous situation.
- We all experience emotions in our own ways. For example, some experience being nervous as exciting, while other get anxious.
- However, emotions are only a part of our experience. They are not the whole truth or do not define us as people.

Words describing happiness, sadness, fear and hate

<b>Happiness</b> Joyful Safe Relaxed Peaceful Gentle Grateful Excitement Satisfied	<b>Sadness</b> Longing Melancholic Depressed Tearful Feeling blue Feeling empty Downbeat
<b>Fear</b> Frightened Helpless Scared Worried Insecure Shy Terrified Panic	<b>Hate</b> Revengeful Infuriated Offended Grumpy Bored Irritated Resentful Angry

Source: modified from hytti ry (2016)

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# Thoughts and behavior

- Mind is a complex set of cognitive processes, such as analyzing, comparing, evaluating, planning, remembering, visualizing etc.
- Our mind produces a variety of thoughts:
  - Observations about the present (what we see and experience now)
  - Reminiscence of the past
  - Evaluations of things being good or bad, right or wrong
  - Explanations on why things occur or happen
  - Thoughts about the future (planning, fantasizing, predicting, what if...)
- Our mind creates both useful and unhelpful thoughts. Some of our thoughts act as barriers that prevent us from reaching our full potential and achieving our goals.
- We tend to take our thoughts literally and perceive as the Truth, for example about ourselves: "I'm quiet and shy", "I'm lazy".
- When we then let those thoughts guide our behavior, we restrict ourselves without even noticing.
  - For example, thinking that you're lazy may quit and give up on things. Thinking that you're shy might hold you back in starting conversations with strangers. In the end, you'll miss out on things you wanted to do or on new exciting relations.
- Whatever the thought in your mind wants you to do, you can always choose to act differently.
  - For example, you're feeling anger towards someone but still treat him politely, or do something scary even though your mind is screaming to run away from it as fast as you can.
  - Can you remember a situation when you didn't listen to your thoughts and did something that you valued?

## Examples of some common harmful thinking patterns

- Negative self-talk: judging, invalidating or underrating yourself and others
  - Example: "All my study mates are better than me at this"
- Generalization: using words like always, everyone, all the time, never, every time, nothing
  - Example: "No one likes me"
- Either-or thinking: black-or-white thinking, believing in extremes
  - Example: good – bad, stupid – wise, perfect – complete failure
- Negative predictions of the future
  - Example: "Everyone in my family is like this. I'm not never going to succeed in life"
- Mind reading: thinking that you know what other people think of you
  - Example: "She's thinking for sure that I can't do this"
- Exaggeration
  - Example: "I'm never going to graduate, or get a job in my own field"
- Should thinking: thinking that you should do or be something else than you are
  - Example: "I should get excellent grades for the course, even though I can't"
- Paying attention to the negatives, not the positives
- Blaming oneself when unpleasant things occur
- Not giving credit to oneself: thinking that positive outcomes happen thanks to luck or other people, never you

5

# Self-awareness and acceptance

- Wanting to solve a problem, when coming across one is in the human nature. We try to change it, get rid of it, or avoid it, it works well in the material world, but when we try this with our private experiences, it creates problems.
- Trying to avoid, suppress, or get rid of unwanted thoughts, feelings, or memories even when it's harmful or ineffective to do so, is associated with e.g. higher anxiety, more depression, poorer work performance, inability to learn, and lower quality of life.
  - We can control our actions and choices, but not our emotions and thoughts.
- By accepting unpleasant or painful thoughts and emotions - which are inevitable part of life, we can create a rich, full and meaningful life.
- Watch the video:
  - Internal Struggles by Dr. Russ Harris: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8p5p\\_ned4v8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8p5p_ned4v8)
- Acceptance includes
  - Being aware of our thoughts, emotions and sensations as they occur
  - Embracing the experience of thoughts, emotions and sensations without judging or trying to control them
- When we are able to be aware, open to, and engaged in our present experience, we are able to control our behavior.
- The skills included in acceptance are
  - defusion: distancing from, and letting go of unhelpful thoughts, beliefs and memories
    - that is, noting thoughts, rather than being entangled in thoughts. Observing thoughts as they are, not what they say they are. Understanding that thoughts are nothing more or less than words.
    - For example, the thought "I'm lazy" can, in fact, be experienced as "I notice that I have feelings of laziness"
  - acceptance: making room for painful feelings, urges and sensations, and allowing them to come and go without a struggle
  - contact with the present moment: engaging fully with our here-and-now experience, with an attitude of openness and curiosity
- These 3 skills require you to use the observing self, which is one of the two parts to the mind:
  - the thinking self - the part that is always thinking, and responsible for all your thoughts, beliefs, memories, judgments, fantasies etc.
  - the observing self - the part of your mind that is able to observe your thinking self and the bodily sensations (the physical self). It is the part of you that is aware of everything else: every thought, every feeling, everything you see, hear, touch, taste, smell, and so on at any moment.

You are separate from your thoughts and emotions



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## PRACTICE: Observing your wandering mind

### WHAT?

Practice being aware of your thoughts, emotions and sensations as they occur through this guided exercise.

### WHY?

The first step of accepting your thoughts, emotions and sensations is to become aware of them. You will learn to observe your wandering mind, and eventually let go of the unhelpful thoughts and unpleasant emotions. You'll no longer be guided by the harmful or stressful thoughts.

### HOW?

- Find a time that you won't be disturbed.
- Listen to the guided exercise (the link on the right).
- Reflect after the exercise: What did you notice? Any recurring thoughts that arise to your mind? Was it easy or difficult to let go of the thoughts?

Inner Melbourne Clinical Psychology - Defusing From Your Thoughts (Leaves on a Stream):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00AbNXNLUUs>

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## Mindfulness

- With the help of the observing self, you can develop mindfulness skills.
- Mindfulness is a mental state of awareness, focus and openness, which allows you to engage fully in what you are doing at any moment.
- Mindfulness is:
  - Paying attention to your experience in the present moment
  - An open and curious attitude towards the present moment
  - Ability to focus your attention on different aspects of the present experience
- In a state of mindfulness, difficult thoughts and feelings have much less impact and influence over you – it is useful for everything from depression to enhancing athletic or study performance
- Watch the video:
  - Andy Puddicombe - All it takes is 10 mindful minutes:  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/andy\\_puddicombe\\_all\\_it\\_takes\\_is\\_10\\_mindful\\_minutes](https://www.ted.com/talks/andy_puddicombe_all_it_takes_is_10_mindful_minutes)

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# PRACTICE: Being in contact with the present moment

## WHAT?

Practice being mindfully present in your daily life for 5 days.

## WHY?

Mindfulness helps you to connect with the present and appreciate each moment of life. Being mindful helps you to distance from your thoughts and emotions. Instead of being guided by your thoughts and emotions, you can choose to act based on your values and towards your goals.

## HOW?

- Read the descriptions of the two exercises. Pick either exercise A or B that you will practice once a day during the next five days. If you picked exercise B, decide the activity now.
- After each practice, reflect on the following: What did you notice? Any recurring thoughts that arise to your mind? What did you feel? Was it easy or difficult to let go of the thoughts?
- Pick one thought you noticed having. Then do the following exercise:
  1. Write it down. Then say it out loud. How does it feel?
  2. Write down the thought by beginning with "I have a thought that..." Then say the phrase out loud. How does it feel now?
  3. Write down the thought by beginning with "I notice I have a thought that..." Then say the phrase out loud. How does it feel now?
  4. Reflect on: Do you believe in the thought? What did you notice during the exercise? Are there any alternative perspectives that you could think of?

## A. Mindfulness in Your Morning Routine

Pick an activity that constitutes part of your daily morning routine, such as brushing your teeth, shaving, making the bed, or taking a shower. When you do it, totally focus attention on what you're doing: the body movements, the taste, the touch, the smell, the sight, the sound, and so on. Notice what's happening with an attitude of openness and curiosity.

For example, when you're in the shower, notice the sounds of the water as it sprays out of the nozzle, as it hits your body, and as it gurgles down the drain. Notice the temperature of the water, and the feel of it in your hair, and on your shoulders, and running down your legs. Notice the smell of the shampoo, and the feel of it against your skin. Notice the sight of the water droplets on the walls or shower curtain, the water dripping down your body and the steam rising upward. Notice the movements of your arms as you wash or shampoo.

When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, and let them come and go like passing cars. Again and again, you'll get caught up in your thoughts. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what the thought was that distracted you, and bring your attention back to the activity.

## B. Mindfulness of Pleasant Activities

Pick an activity you enjoy such as cuddling with a loved one, eating lunch, playing with the dog, walking in the park, listening to music, and so on. Do this activity mindfully: engage in it fully, using all five of your senses, and savor every moment. If and when your attention wanders, as soon as you realize it, note what distracted you, and re-engage in whatever you're doing.

Source: Harris (2009b)

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## References (and further reading)

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Don't forget to continue  
your positive activity!

Gratitude journal  
Optimism: Best Possible Self journal  
Acts of Kindness  
(see unit 1, slide 14 for instructions)

## Learning Skills

1. Introduction to Well-being
2. Personal Resources
3. Values and Goals
4. Stress Management
5. Time Management
6. Emotions, thoughts, and mindfulness
7. Learning Skills
8. Recap and How to Continue

## Content of the Unit

This unit is about:

- Learning skills

You have one week to complete this module.

In this unit you will:

- Understand what learning skills entail
- Be introduced to some learning techniques
- Get tips on effective studying and note-taking
- Practice using a new learning technique

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## What is Learning?

- **Learning is a process**
  - The starting point is being curious, wonder and question things around us
  - It involves observing our surroundings and systematically collecting experiences, thoughts, and ideas
  - The next step is to analyse and reflect on the experiences and thoughts
  - A deep reflection leads into comprehension
  - When the learned content is applied in practice, only then the learning process is completed
- **Learning to learn is a skill that can be developed**
- **Learning skills involve:**
  - A positive attitude towards learning
  - Planning
    - Make a plan – what, when, and where – and stick to it
    - Set goals, follow up on them, and reward yourself
  - Learning techniques
    - Taking notes, memorizing, and reading/ studying
- **A superficial approach to learning is through mechanical repetition - learning by memory without full attention to comprehension**
  - It does not produce good learning outcomes in the long run
  - It does not develop working skills or the ability to reflect
  - It does not increase motivation, and can be overloading
- **A more profound approach to learning is through deep understanding and evaluation of information**
  - It requires patience and perseverance, but is rewarding in the long run.

Over the years, you have probably developed learning habits that help you benefit more from some experiences than from others. You might learn best by doing, thinking, watching or feeling.

Are you an activist, theorist, pragmatist, or reflector? Do the test in link below to find out your preferred learning styles).

Learning Styles Quiz: <http://www.emtrain.eu/learning-styles/>

1. Read the Quiz Statements and tick the boxes for those that are usually true for you.
2. After submitting, review your results in the Learning styles pie chart.
3. Read the Learning methods that suit you.
4. Think how you could apply your preferred learning style in studying.

3

## Some learning techniques

- **Elaborative interrogation:** Generating an explanation for why a stated fact or concept is true
    - After reading a few paragraphs of text ask yourself to explain why the stated facts are true, and use your answers to form your notes.
    - This technique enhances learning by supporting the integration of new information with prior knowledge. This is a simple method that anyone can apply.
  - **Self-explanation:** Explaining how new information is related to known information, or explaining steps taken during problem solving
    - Explain how you solve or understand problems as you work and give reasons for choices that you made
    - Suitable for abstract learning
  - **Summarization:** Writing summaries of to-be-learned texts
    - After reading a page, or a chapter, summarize the main points with your own words
    - Suitable for preparing for written exams, and for learners who are already skilled at summarizing
  - **Highlighting/underlining:** Marking potentially important parts of to-be-learned materials while reading
    - Underline, highlight, or otherwise mark important information in the material as you try to learn it
    - This technique is simple, takes practically no additional time, and involves very little thought - and for that reason it has been shown to be inefficient
  - **Keyword mnemonic:** Using keywords to associate verbal materials
    - Memorize information by linking words to meanings through associations based on how a word sounds
    - Useful for memorizing information in the short term when e.g. learning foreign language, scientific terms, or people's names and occupations. Inefficient as long-term memory aid.
  - **Imagery for text:** Forming mental images of text materials while reading or listening
    - After reading a text visualize the content using simple and clear mental images, or draw pictures that represented the content.
    - Limited suitable for imagery-friendly materials and to tests of memory
  - **Rereading:** Restudying text material again after an initial reading
    - After reading the material once, repeat it.
    - Beneficial for memorizing, not necessary for understanding, therefore inefficient in the long run.
  - **Practice testing:** Self-testing or taking practice tests over to-be-learned material
    - After learning the material, test yourself by e.g. completing practice problems or questions (often included at the end of textbook chapters), completing practice tests (often included in the electronic supplemental materials), creating flashcards, or noting questions in a column next to their notes as they learn.
    - Practice testing is effective especially when you create the questions yourself
  - **Distributed practice:** Implementing a schedule that spreads out study activities over time
    - Divide your studying into several sessions over a period of time
    - Spreading out learning over time is significantly more efficient - and beneficial in the long term than cramming studies prior to exams.
  - **Interleaved practice:** Implementing a schedule that mixes different kinds of problems, or a schedule that mixes different kinds of material, within a single study session
    - When learning many different subtopics or problems of many different kinds - instead of studying all content from one subtopic or practicing all problems of one type before moving on to the next set of material - alternate the studying of different kinds of items or problems
    - Suitable for learning e.g. mathematical skills, shown to be moderately efficient.
- Source: Dunlosky & et. (2013)

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## Learning efficiently

- The most efficient learning techniques based on the study were those marked in **red**, followed by those marked in **gold**
- Most of them support *deep understanding* of the to-be-learned material
- Students typically use techniques such as highlighting and rereading - memorizing the material, which is relatively inefficient as compared with deep comprehension

To summarize the most efficient techniques:

1. create a schedule to spread out your learning over time
2. while you're reading, write yourself some practice questions with a special focus on *why* questions
3. when you are learning a new skill, write a detailed explanation of how you answer the questions

Incorporate also what you have learned in the previous units of this course:

- In class, be mindfully present, pay attention to the experience in the present moment, and have an open and curious attitude towards what can be learned.
- On your next assignment, focus on the task at hand (minimize distractions, and so on)

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# Taking notes

- Notes are taken to learn, to enhance long-term retention, and to document events
- Note-taking allows us to outsource our memories to an external source (paper), helps us think about course content to better understand it upon later review, facilitates processing and making connections between ideas, and can result in broader learning
- Learning can occur during both the production and review of notes
- While writing down or generating content is beneficial for learning, if everything that the teacher says during lecture is written down, it is taxing to the working memory. It reduces our ability to comprehend content. Overly wordy notes may also make it difficult to go back and review specific content.
- A recommended format of taking organized notes is [Cornell Notes](#)
  - pages of notes are split lengthwise: the right side of the page is used for formal notes while the left side of the page is reserved for keywords and questions
  - At the bottom or footer of each page, write a brief summary of that page of notes
  - While easiest to create with pen and paper, you can do it in e.g. Word document on a laptop

## TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE NOTE-TAKING

- Consider how you want to take notes
  - Handwriting: you are forced to be more selective in what you write down
  - Typing on laptop: you may find yourself recording more information in your notes than you would otherwise - making your notes too dense and a less effective study aid. There is also the additional temptation to multi-task on other things.
- Write notes in your own words
- Review your notes early and often
  - Review your notes shortly after lecture - ideally on the same day of the lecture - to clarify any questions you may have lingering from lecture
  - Write down any questions or important keywords in margins
  - Write brief summaries of your notes' contents at the bottom of each page
  - Spacing your learning over several study sessions is more effective for long-term learning than cramming all of your studying at once
- Test yourself
  - Helps you detect what content you do and do not know, i.e. what material you still need to review
  - Effective strategy compared to passively rereading content your notes

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# PRACTICE: Using a learning technique

## WHAT?

Use one of the two learning techniques or Cornell Notes for taking notes. Practice the technique over the week.

## WHY?

Challenge yourself to try new things and be curious towards learning. Taking a new perspective to learning might push you to the next level and result in great learning outcomes and excellent grades.

## HOW?

- Read the descriptions of all three techniques. Pick one of the techniques that you haven't used before, which you will practice during this week.
- If you chose note-taking, apply the technique at least on one lecture per day you're attending this week. Make a plan when you will reread the notes.
- If you chose either of the learning techniques, choose a course that you're currently attending, and is particularly challenging or important to you, and has an written exam upcoming.
  - Make a plan to study at least twice a week, for at least an hour. Use the technique while studying.

- **Elaborative interrogation** = After reading a few paragraphs of text, ask yourself to explain why the stated facts are true, and use your answers to form your notes. Study your notes way before the exam or test, and preferably several times.
- **Practice testing** = While reading/ learning the material, write questions about the content as you learn (e.g. in a column next to your notes). After reading, test yourself by asking the questions and answering them. You may even ask a friend to quiz you. Note what content you knew and didn't know. Reread the content you didn't know.
- **Cornell Notes** = Divide a paper into three sections. Write short notes on the right during lecture. After the lecture, review your notes and write main ideas, key points etc. on the left. Then, write a summary of the main ideas in the bottom section. Finally, study your notes - mostly the left and bottom sections - again, way before the exam or test, and preferably several times.

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## Extra material

Find more useful tips for studying in:

- University of Copenhagen & University of Southern Denmark - *Studying effectively every day:*

[http://socialsciences.ku.dk/students/study\\_techniques/videos/studying\\_effectively/](http://socialsciences.ku.dk/students/study_techniques/videos/studying_effectively/) OR <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2mjb-tJOsqM>

- University of Copenhagen & University of Southern Denmark – *The reading process from start to finish*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PELOZ6l4ld4>

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## References (and further reading)

- Dunlosky, Rawson, Marsh, Nathan & Willingham (2013): Improving Students' Learning With Effective Learning Techniques: Promising Directions From Cognitive and Educational Psychology, *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, vol. 14(1), p. 4–58.
- Friedman, Michael C.: *Notes on Note-Taking: Review of Research and Insights for Students and Instructors*, Harvard Initiative for Learning and Teaching, Harvard University. [http://hilt.harvard.edu/files/hilt/files/notetaking\\_0.pdf](http://hilt.harvard.edu/files/hilt/files/notetaking_0.pdf)
- James Madison University: *Cornell Notes*. <http://coe.jmu.edu/learningtoolbox/cornellnotes.html>
- Skillicorn, David: Learning Techniques. <http://research.cs.queensu.ca/~skill/learning.html>
- Sydänmaanlakka, Pentti (2006): *Älykäs itsensä johtaminen. Näkökulmia henkilökohtaiseen kasvuun*, Talentum Media Oy.

# It's the final week of doing your positive activity!

Gratitude journal  
Optimism: Best Possible Self journal  
Acts of Kindness

After completing, review your notes on your portfolio. What do you notice?

## Recap and How to Continue

1. Introduction to Well-being
2. Personal Resources
3. Values and Goals
4. Stress Management
5. Time Management
6. Emotions, Thoughts and Mindfulness
7. Learning Skills
8. Recap and How to Continue

## Content of the Unit

This unit is about:

- Summarizing the course
- How to continue

In this unit you will:

- Summarize your learning outcomes
- Decide on how to continue

2

## Congratulations!

You have come a long way. Hopefully, you found the time and motivation to focus on each exercise and learned new positive things about yourself.

### You have learned about

Well-being in general  
Dimensions of personal well-being  
Personal resources: strengths and life style choices  
Values, goals and acts  
Stress management and relaxation  
Time management  
Mindfulness  
Learning techniques

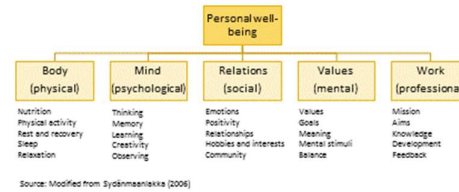
### You have taken it into practice by

Practicing positive activities  
Identifying your character strengths  
Possibly evaluating your lifestyle  
Defining your values, setting value-based goals and planning how to achieve them  
Identifying some of your stressors, stress reactions and your ways to manage stress  
Practicing different relaxation techniques  
Practicing time planning and overcoming procrastination  
Practicing mindfulness techniques  
Practicing new learning techniques

3

## Your personal well-being

- You have probably noticed that the dimensions of personal well-being are connected with each other. For example, taking care of your body has a positive impact on your mood as well as ability to concentrate and learn.
- You have begun to learn how to enhance your own well-being.
- Now, the journey **continues**.



Source: Modified from Sydönmanenika (2006)

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## How to continue?

Use your strengths and resources to give you energy in your daily life.

**Dare to dream.**

Use your skills and techniques you have learned to achieve your dreams.

- Pick at least one exercise or concrete act learned during the course, which you will take in use and try to make it a habit.
- Ask yourself: *Which of the dimensions of well-being are most important to you currently? Which of the dimensions you want to develop further?*
- Set a goal and plan how you will achieve it.
- You can go back to your well-being portfolio and the topics of this course anytime.

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## Extra material

Did you know that Arcada provides its students various services?

- Get support regarding, for example, learning skills, motivation, time management, and stress management from study counsellor and study psychologist:

<https://start.arcada.fi/en/study-support>

- Seek psychosocial and spiritual support from student pastor:

<https://start.arcada.fi/en/health-and-wellbeing>

- Get physically active at the Starcis Gym:

<https://start.arcada.fi/en/starcis-gym>

- Get socially active and influence the community through student associations:

<https://start.arcada.fi/en/student-associations>

## **Appendix 3. Extended abstract in Swedish**

### SVENSKSPRÅKIG SAMMANFATTNING

#### **INLEDNING**

Detta examensarbete handlar om välbefinnande och studieförmåga hos högskolestuderande. Välbefinnande är något som rör oss alla, och det lönar sig att investera i det. Hög nivå av välbefinnande och bra studieförmåga översätter vanligtvis till hög arbetsförmåga och välbefinnande på andra livsområden, till exempel arbetslivet, och således gynnar eleverna även efter studierna.

Högskolor har möjlighet att påverka sina studerandes välbefinnande. I Finland har det satts nationella rekommendationer för att främja studerandes välbefinnande och studieförmåga. Arcada har inte ännu ett systematiskt sätt att främja välbefinnande av alla studerande.

#### **SYFTE OCH FRÅGESTÄLLNINGAR**

Först och främst, syftet var att skapa en produkt – en nätbaserad kurs riktad åt studerande för att främja deras välbefinnande och studieförmåga. Det andra syftet var att dokumentera arbetsprocessen bakom utvecklingen av en ny produkt. Frågeställningarna var: Vilka aspekter påverkar välbefinnande och studieförmåga hos högskolestuderande? Hur ska en nätbaserad kurs som ska stöda och främja välbefinnande hos studerande byggas upp?

#### **TEORETISK REFERENSRAM**

För närvarande finns det ingen konsensus kring definition av välbefinnande. Välbefinnande betraktas snarare som ett paraplybegrepp för flera begrepp relaterade till mänskligt välbefinnande. Välbefinnande omfattar en rad specifika begrepp som överlappar en viss mängd. Subjektivt välbefinnande består av tre komponenter: kognitiv utvärdering av tillfredsställelse med livet som helhet, positiva känslor och stämningar och negativa känslor upplevt av individen (Pavot & Diener 2013, 134-135). Psykologiskt välbefinnande gäller om att fungera positivt, dvs. engagera sig i beteende som är t.ex. meningsfullt och uppfyllande (Fisher 2014, 11-10; Huta 2013, 201-210). Enligt en nyare synvinkel innefattar välbefinnande både subjektivt välbefinnande och psykologiskt välbefinnande. Huppert

(2014, 1-2) beskriver välbefinnande som "upplevelse att livet går bra" vilket är en kombination av att må bra och fungera bra.

Det finns ett stort antal interventioner för att förbättra välbefinnandet, allt från själv-hjälpböcker och nätbaserade kurser till mer formella program (Huppert 2014, 29-32). Många av dem baserar på positiv psykologi, hälsopsykologi och Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) eller metoder av ovanstående enskilt eller tillsammans med andra tekniker (French et al., 2017, 1; Weiss et al. 2016, 3). Positiv psykologi är ett paraplybegrepp för studier av positiva känslor och positiva karaktärsdrag med syftet att förstå människans lidande och lycka i livet (Seligman et al., 2005, 874-875). Positiv psykologi försöker främja välbefinnande genom positiva aktiviteter som syftar till att bygga det positiva, istället för att lösa brister. Enligt en studie av Sin & Lyubomirsky (2009) positiva aktiviteter förbättrar välbefinnandet och lindrar depression effektivt. ACT är ett interventionsätt som syftar till att öka psykologisk flexibilitet dvs. förmågan att medvetet vara närvarande i nuet och med öppenhet möta vad som kommer. ACT består av sex olika processer: medveten närvaro, värderingar, handling, observerande jaget, kognitiv defusion och godkännande (Hayes et al. 2004, 4-5).

Studieförmåga kan beskrivas som arbetsförmåga av studerande. Studievälbefinnande består av fyra komponenter som påverkar studerandes hälsa och välbefinnande: personliga resurser, studiefärdigheter, studiemiljö och undervisning. (Kunttu 2011, 34-35) Enligt Hälsoundersökning av högskolestuderande 2016 är de problem som högskolestuderande upplever som viktigaste relaterade till studierna och psykiskt välbefinnande. Yrkehögskolestuderande hoppades kunna få hjälp och stöd oftast i stresshantering, tidshantering, studierelaterade problem, fysisk aktivitet, näring, studiefärdigheter samt problem med social ångest, självkänsla och humör. (Kunttu et al. 2017, 5; 12; 31)

## **METOD**

Vilkka & Airaksinen (2003, 9) kallar ett examensarbete som resulterar till en konkret produkt för ett funktionellt examensarbete. Ett funktionellt examensarbete består av två delar: slutprodukt och rapport av arbetsprocessen.

Arbetsprocessen beskrivas genom att följa processen presenterad i E-learning methodologies: A guide for designing and developing e-learning courses (2011). Processen består av analys, design, utveckling, genomförande och utvärdering. Analysfasen innefattar behovsanalys, målgruppsanalys och identifiering av kursinnehållet. Inom behovsanalys identifierar man kursens inlärningsmål, medan målgruppsanalys syftar till att kartlägga de viktigaste egenskaperna hos studerande, till exempel deras tidigare färdigheter. Även kursinnehållet identifieras under analysfasen. (E-learning methodologies: A guide for designing and developing e-learning courses 2011, 21-22) Genomförande och utvärdering är avgränsad av detta arbete.

## **RESULTAT**

Resultat består av själva produkten och processbeskrivningen. Processbeskrivning följer den valda metoden. Grunden till kursens målsättning var uppdraget och den teoretiska referensramen. Kursens huvudmål definierades som ”deltagarna ska utveckla färdigheter och förmågor för att upprätthålla och förbättra deras personliga välbefinnande samt studieförmåga”. Den primära målgruppen är unga vuxna som studerar på bachelorutbildningar vid Arcada.

Kursinnehållet bestämdes genom att analysera kunskap, färdigheter och förmågor som högskolestuderande behöver utveckla för att förbättra deras studieförmåga och välbefinnande. Behovet hämtades från de problem som studenterna oftast önskades få hjälp med. Dessutom inkluderades sömn, återhämtning och stillasittande för att ge ett bredare perspektiv på hälsofrämjande livsstil och ett bredare utbud av alternativ man kan identifiera sig på. Lärdomarna av den teoretiska bakgrunden tillämpades för att identifiera kursens huvudteman. Baserat på aktuella kunskap om positiv psykologi, ACT och hälso-psykologi, kan personligt välbefinnande och studieförmåga framgångsrikt upprätthållas och förbättras genom positiva känslor, tankar och beteende, psykologisk flexibilitet, effektiva beteendestrategier och hanteringsmetoder, samt praktiska studietekniker.

Designfasen började genom att definiera lärandemål för varje tema, kurssekvens samt kursaktiviteter. Leveransstrategi för kursen bestämdes att vara en PowerPoint-fil via inlärningsplattformen ItsLearning. Denna leveransstrategi valdes eftersom ItsLearning är den föredragna kommunikationskanalen mellan lärare och studerande på Arcada och den

är bekant för alla studerande. Därmed krävs det inga ytterligare IKT-färdigheter eller programutveckling i utvecklingsfasen. I sista fasen producerades innehållet av kursen.

Produkten av detta verksamhetsinriktade slutarbete var en nätbaserad kurs med titeln "Personal Well-Being and Study Ability" (personligt välbefinnande och studieförmåga). Kursen består av åtta enheter, och huvudtemana är välbefinnande, personliga resurser, värderingar och mål, stresshantering, tidshantering, godkännande av känslor och tankar och inläringstekniker.

## **DISKUSSION**

Arbetet påbörjades genom att studera de aspekter som påverkar yrkeshögskolestuderandes välbefinnande och studieförmåga samt aspekter som ska beaktas när man utvecklar en nätbaserad kurs. Teori om välbefinnande visade sig vara komplex, och det var inte enkelt att svara på frågeställningarna om aspekter av välbefinnande. Istället för specifika aspekter eller faktorer är välbefinnande en konstruktion som har flera mätbara element som bidrar till välbefinnande, enligt Seligman (2011). Därför skulle den första frågeställningen kunna ha beskrivits med två skilda frågor: "Vad är välbefinnande?" Och "Hur kan man effektivt förbättra studerandes välbefinnande och studieförmåga?". Välbefinnande innebär att vara nöjd med livet, att ha positiva känslor oftare än negativa känslor och att fungera på ett sätt som främjar personlig tillväxt, autonomi, självmedvetenhet och acceptans, mening i livet, förmågan att påverka sin miljö, och positiva sociala relationer (Pavot & Diener 2013, David et al. 2013). Välbefinnande kan framgångsrikt förbättras genom interventioner som behandlar dessa element och baserar sig på positiv psykologi och ACT (Sin & Lyubomirsky 2009, franska och al 2017).

Svaret på den andra frågeställningen om aspekter som ska övervägas när man utvecklar en nätbaserad kurs är också tvådelat. Det finns tekniska och praktiska aspekter som har med t.ex. leverans att göra, samt innehållsspecifika aspekter som är viktiga för att skapa en meningsfull inläringssupplevelse för deltagarna. Kursens tekniska del var lätt utvecklat enligt den valda metoden (dvs. E-learning-metoder: En guide för att utforma och ut-

veckla e-learning-kurser 2011). Den valda metoden gav en bra utgångspunkt till produktutvecklingen eftersom processbeskrivningen var mycket detaljerat och det gav till och med en mängd användbara tips allt från behovsanalys till innehållsutveckling.

I stället var det mycket mer komplicerat att skapa en meningsfull inlärningsupplevelse, vilket kan uppnås, enligt Lofström et al. (2006), genom att främja deltagarnas aktivitetsnivå, intensioner, reflektion och interaktion med varandra och koppla in lärandet till autentiska situationer. I kombination med de etiska kraven att använda relevant, pålitligt och giltigt material blev det en utmaning att samla material till kursens innehåll. Att hitta sådant material, vilket också skulle vara specifikt för studerandes behov och intressen, visade sig vara svårare än förväntat. Att utveckla innehåll som är engagerande och motiverande, var också utmanande och skulle ha krävt mer praktiska riktlinjer än vad som diskuterades i referensramen.

Andra problem med slutprodukten var på grund av avgränsningen. Eftersom genomförandet och utvärderingen avgränsats, några väsentliga aspekter såsom interaktivitet och feedback bortföll. Först efter utvärderingen kan man se om innehållet är lämpligt för målgruppen, och om leveransstrategin fungerar som designat. Med tanke på den begränsade omfattningen av examensarbetet är slutprodukten dock heltäckande. Den innehåller komponenten på välbefinnande, relevanta delar av studieförmåga, samt många väsentliga aspekter av nätbaserade kurser av god kvalitet.

Det rekommenderas att kursen genomförs och utvärderas med hjälp av Arcada-studenter eller en mindre testgrupp av studenter. Genom att göra detta kommer man upptäcka eventuella problem med kursen - relaterade till innehållet eller leveransen. Det bör exempelvis mätas om lärandemålen uppnås. Det rekommenderas även att kursen underlättas av en handledare för att ge stöd och uppmuntra studerande att aktivt delta i kursaktiviteter. Vidare rekommenderas det att deltagarna ska diskutera teman med varandra på diskussionsforum för att göra lärandet mer meningsfullt.