

Character strengths use and performance

A positive psychology goal-setting experiment

Jennifer H.K. Wong, Ph.D.

Fleur Pawsey, Ph.D.

Katharina Näswall, Ph.D.

Christchurch I/O Special Interest Group
29 January 2020

Character strengths



PSYC106 - UC

- Introductory Psychology
- Term 2, Semester 2, 2018
- 689 students – approaching end of first year at university



Experimental design

Baseline survey at the start of Psychology 106 course (N = 689)

Random assignment

Three signature strengths
(n = 108)

One signature strength
Two weakest strengths
(n = 114)

Three random strengths
(n = 105)

“Universal” strengths
(n = 116)

Three chosen mid-strengths
(n = 63)

Experimental design

Semester start character strength assessment



Session 1 Weekly SMART goal-setting



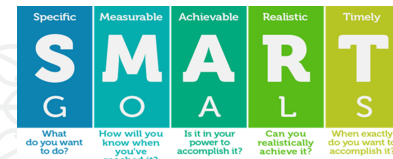
Session 2 Weekly SMART goal-setting & progress check-in



Session 3 Weekly SMART goal-setting & progress check-in



Session 4 End of semester survey & progress check-in



Goal-setting sessions

Session 1: How to turn a regular goal into a **SMART** goal

- Did I specify **what** I am trying to achieve?
- Did I specify **how** I am going to accomplish it?
- Did I specify **who** is involved in this goal?
- Would a classmate be able to carry out the goal the **same way** as I?
- Is there an actual **number** in this goal?
- Is this goal a **challenge** from my regular routine?
- Can I realistically achieve this goal **within a week**?

Each participating student received a personalized goal-setting survey

Students can choose to have their goals emailed to them



Goal-setting sessions

Session 1: How to turn a regular goal into a **SMART** goal

Session 2: How to modify goals

Session 3: What are the common goal attainment barriers?

Session 4: How are students celebrating successes?



Goals

This week, I will use my strength of **Gratitude** to thank those who assist me in my everyday life. For example, retail workers, or my friends that I am studying for a test with.

This week, I will use my character strength of **Curiosity** to make a new connection with someone new, ask their name and what they study.

This week, I will use my character strength of **Self-control** to make sure I complete my HSRV Essay on time by Friday before I sit down and watch Netflix during the day.

This week I will use my character strength of **Spirituality** to take 10 minutes to reflect on my purpose at UC and how it is going to effect me in the long run.



Goals

This week, I will use my character strength of **Appreciation of Beauty** to take three photos of something I find beautiful in nature.

This week, I will use my character strength of **Perspective** to explain an assignment to someone who is struggle for them to get a better understanding of it.

This week, I will use my character strength of **Modesty** to acknowledge my friend's accomplishments, and congratulate them instead of myself.

This week I will use my character strength of **Honesty** to take responsibility for my anger or stress during this week of many engagements.



Feedback from students

“[I enjoyed t]he fact it gave us time to sit down and make **constructive goals** - that we were taught what a **realistic goal** is.”

“I have enjoyed the frequent reminders (weekly in tutorials). They have really helped with **accountability** and reminding me to keep pursuing the goals I have set.”



Feedback from students

“It's forced me to **slow down and reflect**, seeing as the end of year can be a busy time.”

“I enjoyed taking time to reflect on my well-being. Having a **space to be honest** about myself.”

“I have liked [**keeping**] **in touch with my mum** by setting a goal about it and also I liked that **I can stay healthy** by setting a goal about it.”



Feedback from students

“I hate goals. :)”

“I did not really participate in the goal-setting exercise, **I was too busy with other things in my life** to set really short term goals. I did not really find it relevant to what I was going through at the time.”

“I find it pointless to make weekly goals, **I already have my own goals** for university...”

“...it feels that I am only setting goals **because someone told me to** and not because I actually want to achieve great things.”



Feedback from students

“I appreciated the way ideas were shared at the beginning of every session. This enabled us to **think outside the box** and look in a **[new] direction** may have never thought of heading.”

“It made me think about areas in my life that I haven't looked at before, I've mostly concentrated on my strengths but **having the the weaknesses brought up has been an eye opener.**”

“I have achieved goals I never even thought about setting before and I would like to **continue working on those goals next year.**”




Feedback from students

“I have already set up quite a lot of goals in my life that are a lot more meaningful and important than these ones. I prioritize and think about those goals a lot more, and as a result, have left these goals to be kind of **auxiliary to my main goals.**”

“...I found it difficult to set a goal based on my "strengths" and felt they did not suit my true goals well. This made it quite difficult to achieve the alternative goals I had set because **I didn't really feel they were that important to me...**”

“I think that making the goals specific to the character strengths might not be the best thing, because I enjoy setting goals and working towards them, but I didn't really like having them so pre-defined because it meant the **goals weren't really things I actually cared about.**”



Reflections

- Methods – measurement and timeframe for change
- Attrition and representativeness
- Moving from one-on-one to group coaching
- Key stakeholder engagement relationships
- Participant needs and readiness
- Technical glitches



Thank you for listening!



wisdom

courage

humanity

transcendence

justice

moderation

Creativity

Curiosity

Judgement

Love of learning

Perspective

Bravery

Perseverance

Honesty

Zest

Love

Kindness

Social intelligence

Appreciation of beauty

Gratitude

Hope

Humor

Spirituality

Teamwork

Fairness

Leadership

Forgiveness

Humility

Prudence

Self-control