PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences
ISSN 2454-5899

Akhtar & Payen, 2019

Volume 5 Issue 2, pp. 193-211

Date of Publication: 19th August 2019

DOI-https://dx.doi.org/10.20319/pijss.2019.52.193211

This paper can be cited as: Akhtar, F., & Payen, M., (2019). Can Happiness and Resilience be Cultivated? Evaluation of a Ten Week Pilot within a UK HEI. PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences, 5(2), 193-211.

CAN HAPPINESS AND RESILIENCE BE CULTIVATED? EVALUATION OF A TEN WEEK PILOT WITHIN A UK HEI

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Abstract

This paper considers whether the traits of happiness and resilience can be cultivated within a higher education institution (HEI) setting. It does this by exploring the development, implementation and evaluation of a ten-week pilot programme carried out on staff and students within a UK university.

The programme involved receiving an email every weekday for ten weeks, which covered a range of themes connected with happiness and resilience. Participants were invited to carry out daily reflections and tasks. They also had access to an online discussion page hosted on the University's virtual learning environment (VLE), called Canvas. Both staff and students across all campuses and directorates were eligible to participate. The results indicated that participants found the structure of the programme helpful and reported greater subjective levels of happiness and resilience as a result of the project.

Significance of Research: *The research points to the value of HEIs developing quality enhancement measures that contribute to staff and student well-being thereby strengthening their employability and soft skills.*

Keywords

Happiness, Resilience, Higher Education, Employability and Soft Skills, Health

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increasing focus on broadening and enhancing curricula to maximise the student experience, (Higher Education Academy, 2006) as well as a growing awareness around the graduate attributes needed for a contemporary job market. Employers have re-iterated their preference for 'soft skills' over academic ability (Andrews and Higson, 2008). This is taking place within a rapidly changing higher education landscape. The implementation of the Teaching Excellence Framework (Fanghanel, 2016) which aims to assess the quality of institutional teaching and changes in student finance leading to the marketization of higher education (Molesworth, 2010) are two examples.

These changes have contributed to the ongoing debate about the nature and purpose of study at universities (Barker and Martin, 2009; Collini, 2012). For example, Elwick and Cannizzaro, (2017) argue that rather than pursuing knowledge, for its own ends, the pressure is now on academics preparing students to lead successful careers and equip students to work in a global and diverse world. Universities have moved from being seen as places where 'primarily happiness and contentment could be pursued, to places where instead satisfaction and economic reward are sought' (Elwick and Cannizzaro, 2017, p. 205). The National Student Survey (NSS) is an example of the emphasis that is placed on student 'satisfaction' which focuses on students as consumers, rather than exploring deeper, more holistic experiences that might ask students to consider the wider impact a course has had on their personal and professional lives. For some, this is an indicator of how far down the road of consumerism higher education has travelled (Cheng and Marsh, 2010).

Other researchers have questioned whether being a graduate can contribute to longer term happiness. Cunado and De Gracia (2012) found that people with a higher education degree tended to have a greater income and higher levels of reported happiness. They attributed this in part, to the processes of higher education in increasing one's self-confidence. Chen (2012) looked at four different eastern Asian countries and attributed the greater levels of happiness of graduates to the more extensive social networks they had formed whilst studying in higher education. They saw education as enhancing subjective well-being by increasing the individual's ability to connect with their wider world.

Whilst the employability factor of a degree has increasing importance, these findings also point to the 'soft skills' that graduates are expected to have in an evolving jobs market, such as interpersonal skills, the ability to work in teams; to think innovatively (Andrews and

Higson, 2008) as well as possessing self-confidence and empathy (McLoughlin, 2012). Vocational courses, such as those in the helping professions have also added attributes such as emotional resilience (Grant and Kinman, 2013).

However, it could be argued that this separation of happiness from satisfaction and economic reward is an artificial one. Keyes (2015) cites Ryff, Schmutte, and Lee's study (1996) which found that most parents' aspirations for their children centre on them being happy, and well educated, making the point that the focus has now shifted towards attainment at the expense of happiness.

Another perspective is that happiness is not dependant on one's location on the socio-economic scale, but on one's direction in life. Elwick and Cannizzaro (2017) link this to the Aristotelian concept of eudaimonistic happiness, arguing that the goal of education is not necessarily to instil happiness, but that an education that incidentally contributes to doing so is better than one that does not. This is new territory for HEI's and one that will increasingly need to be considered. To date, there is sparse evidence that universities are doing so.

Another important facet to this is the changing profile of students. Before widening participation, it was mainly those from higher socio-economic circumstances who went into HE. Their smaller numbers and privileged backgrounds acted as buffers through the stresses of university life (The UK Royal College of Psychiatrists,as cited in Macaskill, 2013). Student numbers subsequently rocketed as the widening participation agenda was embedded. This was followed by the recent changes in funding to HE which brought about a slight decrease in numbers. However, analyses of the student population in the UK shows that over the ten year period since funding was changed, this has resulted in a greater proportion of younger students and those in full time education, and a decline in mature and part-time students (Universities UK, 2015).

In 2011, The UK Royal College of Psychiatrists, (cited in Macaskill, 2013) predicted that as the student population increased to more accurately reflect the general population, that the result would be an increase in their mental ill health, with students below the age of 24 being known to be at greatest risk of developing serious mental health issues (Kessler et al 2007). Stresses related to the move towards adulthood can be exacerbated by leaving home, settling into university life and the related financial pressures (Montgomery & Cote, 2003).

Macaskill's (2013) research showed that the level of mental ill health (in particular, depression) suffered by students was proportional to the general population, and tended to escalate sharply in the second year of undergraduate study. She pointed out that while student numbers increased in universities; that the adjoining support services did not expand proportionately, leading to a shortfall in provision, for all but the most needy.

This highlights the importance of HEI's creating opportunities for students to strengthen their 'soft skills', thereby contributing to students' overall sense of wellbeing, and resilience.

Having a positive self-esteem has been shown to lead to student happiness (Flynn and Macleod, 2015). Experiencing greater levels of happiness leads to greater levels of resilience. Cohn et al state that, 'happy people become more satisfied not simply because they feel better but because they develop resources for living well' (Cohn et al 2009). Resilient people experience more happiness, and they also experience better mental health (Sood, 2015). Finally, happy, resilient students are more likely to be sociable, and better connected to others in their community (Fisher, 2012).

HEI's are well placed to take on this challenge, as they are by their nature, discrete communities. Any community requires strategic leadership, the cultivation of a particular culture. A positive mind set by academic and other staff can foster an increased sense of resilience in students (Brooks and Goldstein, 2008).

1.1 Defining Happiness, Well-Being and Resilience

In a cultural and historical exploration of the origins of happiness, Oishi et al (2013) conclude that for centuries, happiness was seen as something fragile, and more to do with luck, and the whims of fate, something that was external and out of one's control. Religious and cultural mores set happiness within a hedonistic frame that stigmatised its pursuit. For example, Oishi et al (2013) quote St Augustine as stating that 'true happiness is "unattainable in our present life".

Over time, the emphasis has shifted to happiness being seen as something that is agentic, internal to oneself, a state of being. Nevertheless, there remain significant cultural differences in the understanding and presentation of 'happiness'. In individualistic cultures, for example, in North Americans, there is a tendency to define happiness in relation to one's self-esteem and sense of achievement whilst collectivist cultures, (such as Eastern Asian) tend to focus on society's inter-dependent nature, defining happiness in relation to inter-personal connectedness (Uchida et al, 2004).

Despite these differences, Delle Fave et al's (2016) study across 12 different countries showed that happiness is 'a relatively stable and harmonious interplay between physical, emotional, experiential, and reflective aspects of the person' that irrespective of individualistic or collectivistic cultures, focuses on a sense of harmony at intra and inter-personal levels.

Happiness is often referred to alongside the term 'subjective well-being' and seen as an important component of it. Vitterso (2004) defines it as 'people's evaluative responses to their lives', referring to Diener's (1984) model of subjective well-being where an individual's

affective response to specific life events is measured alongside their sense of satisfaction about their lives generally. Such approaches focus on either a genetic pre-disposition to perceive life in a particular way, (Diener, 2000) or argue that individuals derive subjective well-being from fulfilling basic human needs, and become habituated to a specific 'set-point' that they repeatedly return to (Steel et al, 2008).

Csikszentmihalyi's (2014) work on happiness is noteworthy here. Like others, he also questions whether it is a personal trait or a permanent disposition, but then relates happiness to the concept of 'flow': that specific state of mind in which an individual is focusing so completely on a task that they lose sight of all else, including a sense of time. Flow is most likely to happen when the complexity of the task to be carried out is within the limits of the person carrying it out, perhaps by some stretching of their existing skills, but not beyond their comfort zones. The ability to achieve flow is one of the key ingredients of successful academic life (Martin, 2011).

Another key area is resilience. This is commonly defined as one's ability to bounce back from adversity. This is an area that has seen increasing prominence in recent years, especially within the context of training health and social care professionals (Grant & Kinman, 2014). Leppin et al's (2014) systematic review found 'low confidence that resiliency training programs have a small to moderate effect at improving resilience and other mental health outcomes'. On the other hand, Sood et al (2014) found that a single ninety minute session on stress management and resiliency training with follow-up phone calls was sufficient to produce a clinically significant reduction in the stress levels of radiology physicians.

It could be argued that HEIs are ideally located to develop opportunities for an 'emotional curriculum' (Grant & Kinman, 2014) for students and staff; one that enhances levels of resilience by enabling 'caring relationships' (Wilson and Ferch, 2005).

1.2 The HEI Context

To date opportunities for developing 'soft skills' in formal or informal settings within HEI's have remained sparse. There has been little research exploring the impact of extra-curricular activities on student and staff well-being, at an individual or collective level. It is important to develop a greater understanding of these areas so that the student experience can be enhanced in a way that enriches students' (and staffs') lives, not only whilst they are studying, but throughout their lives.

In the USA, Kale (1988) put together a model of happiness that focused on students evaluating different domains in their lives (their needs, desires, resources and health; where they are in relation to their expectations and the reality of their situation in relation to intimate relationships, friends, career and hobbies. Their aim was to work towards managing a portfolio

of 'life management', thereby developing greater balance in their lives (the key to happiness, for Kale). This approach relies on students having a degree of insight into the gap between their expectations and reality, and having the wherewithal to know what action to take. This is not always the case, especially with more vulnerable students.

More recently, a study based in Cyprus found that an eight-week online course increased the subjective and measured well-being of first year undergraduates, when compared with a control group (Koydemir and Sun-Selışık, 2015). Students worked through five modules that centred on: cultivating their character strengths; regulating their emotions; communicating constructively and building social connectedness; effective decision-making and problem solving and achieving flow and practicing gratitude. Such a model seems promising but relies on a commitment from students to actively study the online course. It also misses an opportunity for students to discuss the contents of the material collectively and alongside academics thereby increasing the chances of them feeling more connected with other peers and staff within an academic community.

Sood's work (2015) is noteworthy here, although it is done within the framework of the Mayo Clinic, rather than an HEI. He presents a ten-week programme, as a workbook to be carried out in four stages. The first two weeks use techniques of mindfulness that initially encourage participants to declutter their minds. The next six weeks cultivate emotional resilience by providing exercises that are centred on different aspects of resilience (gratitude, compassion, acceptance, meaning, forgiveness, relationships). The final two weeks encourage participants to develop healthier habits, including practising mindfulness. The programme is presented as a comprehensive workbook, which is thought provoking and needs to be progressed at the right pace for the individual. Sood's (2015) research shows that happiness is something that is not related to one's life events or circumstances, but is something that individuals can cultivate. He reports that doing so, can strengthen one's resilience and lead to a greater sense of connection with others.

1.3 This Study

The aim of this pilot study was to explore the links between happiness and resilience, and community within an HEI. A ten-week course was devised, called The Happiness Project, which broadly mapped the ground covered by Sood (2015).

1.4 Aim

This paper reviews the implementation of the project and evaluates it

1.5 Developing the Project

To maximise and retain participant engagement over a period of ten weeks, exercises were devised which could be read quickly, were aesthetically pleasing and inspirational in

content. Each exercise was less than one page of A4 and mobile phone friendly. It contained a thought provoking image, followed by a brief inspiring quote and a succinct 'message of the day' which gave a narrative around the theme being explored. Finally, there was a brief optional task and a link to an online VLE discussion page (via Canvas) where participants could leave comments about their experiences, and read those left by other participants.

Over the course of ten weeks, participants covered a range of topics. The first three weeks focussed on exercises to enable participants to mentally de-clutter and begin to increase their sense of mindfulness. The remaining weeks focussed on different aspects of resilience. Week four's theme was about connecting with gratitude. Week five focussed on developing compassion for oneself and others. This was followed by a week of practising acceptance, and then one on considering the meaning of events one's life. Week eight encouraged participants to consider forgiving others and themselves. Week nine invited participants to reflect on the quality of their personal relationships. Finally, week ten rounded off the project with a consideration of healthy habits and how participants could work at sustaining any progress they may have made.

Each week was designed to begin at a general level, and then as it progressed, asked participants to relate the ideas presented to their lives, their relationships and finally to themselves. The material was designed to be thought provoking, but invitational, rather than instructional, to enable participants to think as much or as little as they felt comfortable with.

The material for the first three weeks was used from a freely available three week online course called Project Happiness (https://projecthappiness.com/) which purports to be based on the work of Sood (2015). The remaining weeks focussed on different aspects of resilience and were adapted from the structure presented in Sood's workbook (Sood, 2015).

1.6 Ethical Considerations

Any risk to vulnerable people was carefully explored as part of the process of seeking ethical consent for the research which was granted by the university's Faculty Research Ethics Committee.

On signing up for the project, participants were reminded that they could opt out of the project at any time. They were asked to let the research team know if they were concerned about their emotional well-being. The limits of confidentiality were also clarified. Participants were able to see the names and identities of anyone who left a comment on the discussion page, but were ensured that they would not be identified or named in any way, in any published output (anonymity and confidentiality). They were assured that their privacy and confidentiality would be respected, except if the research team became concerned about their

emotional well-being. If such a situation arose, they would be approached to consider the most appropriate way forward to safeguard their well-being.

2. Methods

This mixed methods study used a simple questionnaire with descriptive statistics which involved a pre and post project questionnaire.

The project was open to all staff and students within a post-1992 university. Participants were eligible to take part if they were a student or member of staff and were able to access their university emails on a weekday basis (Monday – Friday) for ten weeks.

The project was publicised throughout the university online channels (such as staff and student intranets, plasma screens and targeted emails) as well as engaging students on campus during Freshers' Week with relevant activities and giving out promotional sweets and flyers. Timescales of the project were clearly set out in flyers and in the online 'signing up' process. Participants completed a brief pre-project questionnaire and also their consent to participate in the research.

During the course of the project, they received a daily (Monday – Friday) email, and had the option of accessing the VLE Canvas discussion page. The emails were sent at 6.30am to ensure that staff and student commuters could access the daily email on their journey and be able to reflect on the daily message. At the end of the ten weeks, they were sent an email thanking them for their involvement in the project and asking them to complete a short post-project questionnaire about their experiences.

All the data gathered was treated anonymously and confidentially. Data gathered from the questionnaires, was coded and analysed for themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Comments from the discussion pages were also analysed for themes.

3. Results

3.1 Demographics

512 participants initially signed up for the project. From this sample, 111 participants completed both the pre-project and post-project questionnaires. Of these, 58 were students and 53 were staff.

Academic and professional staff constituted 47 % of the sample. The remainder were students who spanned the full range of faculties within the university, from all years of academic and post-graduate study. 77% of participants were female, and 21% male.

Students in the first year of their undergraduate studies made up 23 % of the student numbers. 31% were in the second year of their undergraduate studies and 34% in their final year. 11% of students were on post-graduate courses, all in their first year of study.

3.2 Age: As might be expected, there was a difference in age range of staff and students. Students aged 18-24 made up the largest section of participants (82%); with those aged between 25 and 39 forming 11% of the group and those over forty years forming 5% of the group. Staff members were aged above 25 years. 23% were aged between 25–39 whilst 76 % were aged over 40 years.

3.3 Ethnicity

Students: 23 % of students stated they were White British, 16% that they were 'white other', 16% that they were Asian British, 16% Asian Other; 8% stated they were black British; 6% that they were 'black other'; 2 % stated they were white and black British. Students who preferred to state their ethnicity stated they were: Indian, 'mixed race', Pakistani, Arab, and white African.

Staff: 67% were white British, 13% Asian British, 7% stated they were 'white and other British', 1% that they were black British, 2 % Asian and white British, 1 % that they were black African-Caribbean and white British and 1 subject stated they were Armenian

3.5 Feedback on the Structure and Contents of the Project

Most participants (82%) found the structure of the course helpful and 70% of participants read the daily messages 4 – 5 times a week. Most participants (84%) said they found the daily messages helpful or very helpful, although, interestingly, only 14% of them actually carried out the suggested daily exercise four or five times a week. Most participants (38%) didn't do the suggested daily exercises at all, or did them once a week.

Participants completed pre and post-project questionnaires which provided information about their subjective experience of happiness and resilience. Due to the sample size, these numbers are not statistically significant. Nevertheless, there is value in analysing them for any trends or patterns.

3.6 Happiness

When asked about the overall impact of the project on subjects' level of happiness, 47% of participants felt that their levels of happiness had increased as a result of participating in the project. Exactly the same percentage stated that the project had made no difference to their levels of happiness.

The pre and post project questionnaire asked subjects to consider their mood fluctuations on an average day and to rate how much of an average day they spent in a state of

happiness. The results from these questions are set out below in tables 1 and 2. They show that whilst for the large majority, there appear to be no shifts along these parameters. It could be postulated that a few participants moved up an increment in each table.

Table 1: *Subjects' Rating of their Mood on an Average Day Pre- and Post-Project (in Percentages)*

On an Average Day:	**Pre-Project**	**Post-Project**
My mood is usually quite stable	26	32
My mood is generally Ok, but sometimes people or things can upset me	39	35
My mood varies, depending on the kind of day I'm having	19	22
My mood changes a lot, like a roller coaster!	12	8
A lot of the time, my emotions are overwhelming and I feel out of control	3	3

Table 2: *Subjects' Rating of their Levels of Happiness on an Average Day Pre and Post Project*

On an average day I'm happy:	**Pre-project**	**Post-project**
Over 81 % of the time	21	24
61-80 % of the time	44	44
41-60% of the time	17	21
21 – 40% of the time	14	7
0-20 % of the time	4	4

3.7 Resilience

The results around resilience followed a similar trend with exactly half of subjects stating that their level of resilience was about the same as before, but 48 percent stating that it had increased as a result of participating the project. The pre and post questionnaire also asked subjects how quickly they felt they were able to bounce back after a stressful time. The results of this are shown in table 3. Again, although not statistically significant, it shows a slight trend towards subjects moving up an increment in the table in the post-project questionnaire.

Table 3: *Subjects' Assessment of How Quickly they are Able to Bounce Back after a Stressful Time (Shown in Percentages)*

Which of the following best describes how you bounce back or recover after a stressful of difficult time?	**Pre-project**	**Post-project**
I 'bounce back' very quickly after a difficult or stressful time	10	16
I 'bounce back' fairly quickly after a difficult or stressful time	45	43
It can take me a while to recover from difficult or stressful times	31	33
It can be difficult for me to get over difficult or stressful times	10	5
Every difficult or stressful event sets me back, taking a lot out of me	4	2

3.8 Use of Canvas Discussion Page

The Canvas Discussion page was not used by participants and so will not be discussed here.

3.9 Thematic analysis of the comments in the post-project questionnaire revealed a number of themes. These were divided into the broad categories of what subjects found helpful and what were the downsides of the project.

Results from the thematic analysis suggests that many participants looked forward to receiving the daily emails and developed an anticipation in reading them. They found that over time, the emails increased their awareness of mindfulness and resilience and so they began to make healthier choices in their thinking and behaviour.

There were some barriers to the project. These included technical difficulties around receiving the emails. For a couple of participants, who were already feeling overwhelmed, the daily email added to this, exacerbating these feelings. These themes will be reported further here:

3.10 What Worked Well

Many participants reported appreciation and gratitude for being involved in the project and found the material covered to be inspirational and uplifting, irrespective of whether this led to a shift in their levels of happiness or resilience:

> '*Quite inspirational reads, even though I did not carry out all of the suggestions, it still made a difference reading and reflecting on them…*'

'*The quotes that were shared with us were amazing and really helped me rethink my outlook on life.*'

'The project has been empowering and truly inspirational. It made me a bit open minded and thoughtful of things I wouldn't think about on a daily basis. I found the timing quite good as it co-incided with my morning alarm so it was good to read and think about things before I got out of bed…'

There was a sense that the drip drip effect of receiving positive daily messages helped to set an affirming intentional mind-set for the day which, for some, seemed helpful:

'*…While I'm not totally sure it immediately impacted on me, the messages were all good and I'm starting to develop a better mind-set. Honestly, the motivation I got from the daily emails was very helpful and I would love to do this again!*'

'*…it gave me food for thought and made me think in a more positive way…*'

'…gave me a positive outlook to life and helped how my day turned out since I would apply the principles learnt…'

'*The message…would always pop up in my head when I was going through something or not feeling too good about something. That helped me to work to make things better instead of sulking about them.'*

As the project continued, the specific themes that were explored each week enabled some participants to dig deeper into different aspects of themselves. There were indications that some participants were able to take what felt useful to them, and to begin to internalise it:

'*This project allowed me to maintain relatively stable throughout a time of year that I am usually a complete wreck…have been able to acknowledge some feelings that I usually have a difficult time expressing…'*

'…eventually I discovered that the peace of mind and sense of clarity that I got from reading the daily insights from the Happiness Project was utterly enchanting and mind-stimulating…Being a victim of self-sabotage…this program helped me in finally coming to the conclusion that not everything that has happened is because of me or my fault…a little effort here and there contributes a lot…I have gained so much, resilience being just one accomplishment.'

'…made me stop and place more importance on myself…the most important thing I have gained is a better appreciation for both others and myself.'

'I realised it's easy to think negatively and complain about bad days but its more rewarding to check yourself and rectify your ways to improve yourself…'

3.11 What did not Work Well

There were some technical issues that were not anticipated and which meant that some students on placement were unable to access the daily emails because of firewalls and other online security measures in their placement settings. A few students contacted us about this, but many did not. This may have been frustrating for some students.

For some subjects, the daily emails were not helpful. The format or contents did not appeal to them, or they found that ten weeks was too long a period of time for which to receive a daily email:

'*Some emails made me think about the things in life that are very difficult to change but the emails implied it would be possible, but actually there are massive implications to life choices and those cannot be easily managed…*'

'*It went on a bit too long…*'

One student was disappointed as they had been expecting a different form of project than the one they received:

'*This was generally a good idea. However, I was expecting a project based on facts and supported by research…moreover, there was no specific incentive supporting the completion of tasks. As a consequence, I completed very few of them…*'

Whilst the project supported some participants through some difficult times, for a few who were feeling overwhelmed already, it became another thing they had to manage, rather than something that was supporting them:

'Too many emails and I got a bit stressed about it. I felt I needed to read them all…'

'It was a busy term and I didn't always have time to think about them [daily emails*] properly…hard to remember…'*

'*I enjoyed the daily tasks, however, some were too challenging for what I already had on that day.'*

'I think this is a great project. It was difficult (as a staff member) to give it enough attention/ time…'

For some the material was new and it felt as though a lot of ground was being covered, so it is possible that a new message everyday may not have given them enough time to think about the previous material and consolidate it.

'I would send less emails to give us time to reflect on the daily message.'

'Sometimes actions were good but the fact that they didn't come around again made it difficult to embed them…'

4. Discussion

In discussing the results, it is worth beginning with the limitations of the study. This was a pilot project that used a mixed methods approach with subjective self-assessment in the form of pre and post-project questionnaires, not standardised psychometrically tested measures. This limits the usefulness of the findings.

Interestingly, 84 percent of participants stated that they found the daily emails helpful/ very helpful and just under half felt that project had contributed to them feeling happier and more resilient. There were some specific examples of shifts in thinking and participants making healthier choices, that helped some subjects to move towards a more stable mood. This made it more likely for them to sustain a constant level of happiness throughout the day. These views cannot be generalised across the sample.

Just under half of respondents stated that their levels of resilience had increased as a result of the post-project questionnaire. But these results are not mirrored in Table 1.3 which shows a smaller increase. The thematic analysis revealed only one direct comment referring to resilience. So it is difficult to draw any concrete conclusions from this.

It would be important for any future studies to use standardised measures around happiness and resilience to get more accurate data. It would also be helpful to give clear information about what the project is and is not, as one or two comments suggest that participants' expectations did not align with the project.

In signing up for the project, subjects were informed that they could unsubscribe at any time. The thematic analysis suggests that there were a number of participants who chose not to withdraw but who found the emails to be of limited value, either because of their frequency or their content. It is interesting to note that these participants chose not to unsubscribe. Some chose to save the emails so they could view them at a later point. This suggests that they saw some value in the contents of the emails.

Focussing on participants' who responded positively; although a statistical analysis was not carried out on the results, it does seem important that nearly half of the sample found

the daily emails helpful and many found them inspirational. It is possible that the email itself (rather than its contents) may have contributed to participants' well-being. However, none of the participants indicated this. Most referred to the contents of the emails as being helpful in that this enabling them to set a positive intentional outlook on their day which then set the tone for the day.

It is possible that, over time, the contents of the daily emails acted as a reminder to participants to enable them to make healthier choices, that were more likely to lead to greater moments of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014) enabling them to move beyond their habituated 'set points' to levels better suited to their increased awareness of happiness and resilience (Steele et al, 2008).

A few participants reported changes in their attitudes. It is not clear to what extent this happened, nor is there any data to suggest that any changes that occurred in the duration of the project were sustained beyond its life. A follow-up study would be needed to clarify this. However, staff and students both referred to the significance of such a project being run by the university and indicated that this made them feel valued. There were requests for further similar projects.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this pilot study indicate that there is scope and an appetite for students and staff within HEIs to participate in programmes such as The Happiness Project; that offer opportunities for personal development. Such projects have a value in themselves, and are experienced positively by students and staff, irrespective of whether they participate in them.

The results of this research indicates that 84 percent of respondents found the daily emails helpful and just under half of all respondents reported that they felt their subjective levels of happiness and resilience had increased as a result of taking part. However, further research using standardised measures is recommended, as well as follow-up studies to see if any changes made could be sustained over time.

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