Chapter 5
Coming Full Circle: Taking Positive Psychology to GCC Universities

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Abstract The sum of skills that lead to national prosperity has formed the bulk of a new system of inquiry called positive education, the best practises found in teaching along with the principles of positive psychology that focus on the development of student wellbeing versus the remediation of their problems. The positive philosophy differs from mainstream orientations to education by recognizing that even in the absence of problems, attending to student wellbeing and character are essential for good functioning and excellence. Accordingly, in this chapter, we challenge educational institutions to reimagine, redesign and reorganize themselves into "Positive Universities" by harnessing important organizational cultural changes not only for the benefit of students, but for faculty, management, staff, as well as parents and the greater community. We propose to implement character strengths programming to do so. We offer a view of the GCC university landscape and discuss the challenges and opportunities in transforming such learning environments to more positive ones, all the while offering programming ideas and guidance in restructuring these environments accordingly.

5.1 Introduction

As the GCC nations (United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman) strive to become competitive, knowledge-based post-oil societies, they will require the full participation of their young population as moral, productive, innovative, healthy, and happy agents to join them (Schwalje, 2013).

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Yet, a crucial question remains: are youth ready? But, a more important question is whether universities are fully prepared. While young adults in the GCC are graduating in huge numbers, the quality of their education is debatable, as are their workplace readiness skills and personal character (Kronfol, 2013; Lowden, Hall, Elliot, & Lewin, 2011; Ridge, Shami, Kippels, & Farah, 2014). For instance, many regional schools have relied on substandard quality teaching marked by traditional and rigid methods of rote learning instead of focusing on critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills (Pavan, 2014). Further, most universities have programs in place to teach students remedial skills to cope with academic stress, depression and anxiety, but few offer students the skills to learn about themselves or their strengths (Buck, Carr, & Robertson, 2008; Oades, Robinson, Green, & Spence, 2011). In fact, universities generally do not consider their remit to include wellbeing or character development as it is considered a distraction from learning by students, their parents, faculty and administrations alike (White, 2016). Not surprisingly, employers hold universities responsible for failing to equip graduates with the skills that matter (Al Mutairi, Naser, & Saeid, 2014; Kronfol, 2013; Lowden et al., 2011; Sander, 2017) and waste resources compensating for institutional shortfalls, opting to recruit expatriate employees perceived to have a higher level of skill and the personal attributes that contribute to workplace success, like modesty, initiative, and independent thinking instead (Bhayani, 2014; Rutter & Dedoussis, 2016).

Topic Box: Matching Student Skills and Interests to Employment Prospects

A report from Ernst and Young (2015) revealed that only 19% of GCC employers reported feeling that the education system prepared students with the right attitude and behavior for the workplace. Only 16% felt that the education system equipped students with core industry skills and that curricula were in line with the needs of the private sector. Yet, in all GCC nations, when students themselves were asked the same question, 54% in Saudi Arabia and up to 72% in Kuwait felt they possessed such skills. The mismatch between private sector needs and student overconfidence becomes a major barrier in their workforce participation, and more specifically, that of national students. As a result, schemes to increase employment of local nationals across the region are struggling as the number of jobs created in the public sector has been stagnating or is on permanent hold. At the same time, the private sector, where jobs are abundant and expected to rise, continues to fill jobs with expatriates because the required skills among local national applicants are in short supply (Abdalla & Al-Homoud, 2012). It also means there are likely high numbers of graduates who are frustrated and disappointed in their institutions and governments who have failed to fulfill their promise of a good job, one that is well matched to the student's skills and interests, or any job, in exchange for their years of effort toward a post-secondary education. Situations like this are common in the

MENA region. It is cause for concern as many consider this skill-expectation mismatch one of the factors behind rising youth unemployment and events like the Arab Spring (UNDP, 2016).

The skills required for national prosperity form the bulk of what is called positive education (Green, Oades, & Robinson, 2011; Norrish, Williams, O'Connor, & Robinson, 2013; White, 2016), the best practises found in teaching along with the principles of positive psychology (Gillham & Seligman, 1999; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) that focus on the development of student wellbeing and character versus the remediation of problems. The positive philosophy differs from mainstream orientations in education by recognizing that, even in the absence of problems, attending to character is essential (Huppert & So, 2013; Keyes, 2006; Suldo, Thalji, & Ferron, 2011). This approach further coincides with research in positive psychology showing that knowledge, IQ and classroom skills are not enough to succeed. Character, effort, critical thinking and emotional self-regulation count for far more when it comes to success in life (Butler, Pentoney, & Bong, 2017; Duckworth, Kirby, Tsukayama, Berstein, & Ericsson, 2010; Ericsson, Nandagopal, & Roring, 2009; Kautz, Heckman, Diris, ter Weel, & Borghans, 2014). Accordingly, in this chapter, we challenge educational institutions in the GCC region to reimagine, redesign and reorganize themselves into so called Positive Universities and deploy a character strengths approach to do so.

5.2 What is a Positive University?

Education and knowledge are critically important in Islam and great Arab thinkers held the notion of Positive Universities long before the term became fashionable. According to Islamic history, the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) was illiterate, and yet the first word revealed to him from God was "Iqra" or "Read" as a command (Armstrong, 2007). Some would argue that the Quran itself has many scientific principles embedded in the texts, which resulted in Muslims contributing to modern science and culture as a result (e.g., algebra, astronomy, philosophy, and medical ethics) (Al-Hassani, 2012). Mosques were not only places of worship but places for education and other aspects of community life, such as trade (Al-Hassani, 2012). As a result, Muslim civilizations were pivotal in the development of universities, including such monumental ones as Al-Azhar in Egypt (Al-Hassani, 2012). The philosophy of integrating education into community and spiritual life is a concept often considered by Islamic scholars, including the eminent and well respected Imam Al-Ghazali. Learning spaces were not designed solely for trade in mind nor for students to become mere repeaters of knowledge they did not understand; rather, learning spaces focused on developing "whole" individuals, deep thinkers and effective doers capable of reflecting on their contributions to family, the spiritual domain,

as well as the civic realm. The original mandate of "whole" universities is a tenet of a positive university as well, and in that sense is not new. Accordingly, to foster such insight, as well as higher order thinking and ability, positive universities focus on the delivery of skills for greater wellbeing and the development of character strengths. This brings questions of curriculum content to the forefront as well as how these skills and strengths are taught (Oades et al., 2011).

Positive universities differ from traditional universities in many ways. The major difference is that their interest is the wellbeing of everyone and not only of students. For example, focusing on improving student learning outcomes alone is a moot point when faculty are overworked and under-stimulated, when academic and administrative staff feel they blindly produce reports no one will read, or when management is frustrated and desperate to find short-term public relation wins at the expense of long-term structural and organizational cultural changes. As a whole, positive universities practise what they preach with positive changes permeating across all levels of the organization, even those that do not immediately affect students on a daily basis and which would not ordinarily be targeted in such efforts. Leadership and distributed leadership matter immensely, and top management plays an important role in adopting these practises by considering issues like integrity, respect and fairness as much as their constituents. They are not caught up in self-congratulatory promotional acts, but quietly strengthen old-fashioned values and virtues and provide evidence for that success. While this does not preclude advertising good work, the primary goal of such positive activities does not begin with public relation concerns in mind.

Positive universities are preventive in nature as well as proactive, predicting what students, faculty, management, employers, and community stakeholders will require rather than taking a spontaneous reactive approach to issues as they arise. They look ahead at regularly programmed intervals to anticipate evolving psychosocial needs, industry and market changes, as well as periodically evaluate their programming and curricula to see if these produce the desired social impact. They also take an exit approach, considering what students need to be successful upon departure rather than solely upon arrival (Francis & Auter, 2017). Their goal is not only to graduate students, but to hand them over ready for the workforce. These universities are also aware that alumni, industry partners, mentors, adult learners, other partner universities and community organizations can act as resources and harness them appropriately. These stakeholders are not only useful for signing Memorandums of Understanding, but also to offer and share regular expertise, guidance, professional exchanges, and opportunities with one another. Parents are considered partners in positive universities and can become effective ambassadors. Opening campuses to the community and offering access to facilities and training opportunities such as continuing professional development or executive education programs are also hallmarks as they impact not only students but the wider society.

5.3 What are Character Strengths?

Character strengths are not the skills one learns in school like architectural drawing or math, but the stable and innate traits used in actions, thoughts, and feelings that lead to individuals being able to draw or do math, such as persistence, courage, honesty, and self-regulation, which lead to excellence over time (see Table 5.1) (Wood, Linley, Maltby, Kashdan, & Hurling, 2011). They can be thought of as positive personality traits (Harzer & Ruch, 2015) or psychological identities by which individuals are best known (Littman-Ovadia, Lazar-Butbul, & Benjamin, 2014; McGrath, 2015a). For example, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, is best known for his drive, leadership and vision, while someone like Bill Gates is known for his creativity and innovation, as well as philanthropy. Peterson and Seligman (2004) consider strengths to be morally valued and universally good by most cultures. Strengths are not meant to facilitate negative functioning or be used towards instrumental or maleficent ends. For example, one does not use the strength of forgiveness to tolerate abuse, humour to insult, or hope to disregard reality. Strengths are also demonstrated across social practices and rituals, as well as by individuals who act as moral exemplars, living a strong life narrative of kindness, love, or integrity as examples. Moral exemplars are socially useful in modeling what strengths are, when to use them, and what their challenges and rewards are. In fact, an entire literature is devoted to identifying such exemplars in cinema for example (Niemiec & Wedding, 2014), where Star Wars characters Finn, Rey and Han Solo offer a means for young adults to learn about moral traits in action (see Sansom, Bretherton, & Niemiec, 2016 for examples).

While natural, strengths are nurtured within families, religions, communities, institutions, and through formal activities like sports, volunteering, competition, travel, work, military service, and recreational clubs like science, photography, or public speaking. Many of these activities are found in universities and the broader community and are all the more important considering the absence of internships, summer and part-time job opportunities, and volunteer positions that place young people in the GCC at a disadvantage compared to their international peers (Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2012; Singh, Jones, & Hall, 2012).

5.3.1 Of What Use are Character Strengths?

Using one's character strengths appropriately, with the right dose, timing, and in the right context, can trigger opportunities and positive outcomes. For example, identifying and using one's strengths in a new way (i.e., in a different setting, with different people or in a different manner) consistently showed increases in happiness and decreases in depression six months later (Gander, Proyer, Ruch, & Wyss, 2013; Mongrain & Anselmo-Matthews, 2012; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005), less stress (Park & Peterson, 2006; Peterson & Peterson, 2008), as well as greater

Table 5.1 Character strengths and virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)

Virtue category	Strength
Wisdom & Knowledge: Cognitive strengths that involve learning and using knowledge	1. **Creativity** [originality, ingenuity]: Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things
	2. **Curiosity** [interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience]: Taking interest in ongoing experience for its own sake; exploring, discovering
	3. **Open-mindedness** [judgment, critical thinking]: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; weighing evidence fairly
	4. **Love of learning**: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one's own or formally
	5. **Perspective** [wisdom]: Providing wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and others
Courage: Emotional strengths that involve the will to accomplish goals in the face of difficulties	6. **Bravery** [valor]: Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; acting on convictions even if unpopular
	7. **Persistence** [perseverance, industriousness]: Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles
	8. **Integrity** [authenticity, honesty]: Presenting oneself in a genuine way; taking responsibility for one's feeling and actions
	9. **Vitality** [zest, enthusiasm, vigor, energy]: Approaching life with excitement and energy; feeling alive and activated
Humanity: Relational strengths that involve tending/befriending others	10. **Love**: Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated
	11. **Kindness** [generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, "niceness"]: Doing favors and good deeds for others
	12. **Social intelligence** [emotional intelligence, personal intelligence]: Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself
Justice: Civic strengths that underlie a healthy community life	13. **Citizenship** [social responsibility, loyalty, teamwork]: Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group
	14. **Fairness**: Treating all people the same; being fair and just; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others
	15. **Leadership**: Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and maintain good relations within the group

(continued)

Table 5.1 (continued)

Virtue category	Strength
Temperance: Self-regulation strengths that protect against excess	16. **Forgiveness and mercy**: Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting others faults; giving second chances; not being vengeful
	17. **Humility/Modesty**: Letting successes speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more special than one is or others
	18. **Prudence**: Being careful about one's choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted
	19. **Self-regulation** [self-control]: Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one's appetites and emotions
Transcendence: These strengths allow for connections to the universe and offer meaning	20. **Appreciation of beauty/excellence** [awe, wonder, elevation]: Appreciating beauty, excellence, performance in many domains of life
	21. **Gratitude**: Being aware of and thankful of the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks
	22. **Hope** [optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation]: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it
	23. **Humor** [playfulness]: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to people
	24. **Spirituality** [religiousness, faith, purpose]: Having coherent beliefs about a higher purpose, the meaning of life

positive affect, self-esteem and a sense of vitality (Wood et al., 2011). The benefits of greater use of character strengths were also evident in the context of leading an active way of life, the pursuit of pleasurable activity, healthy eating, and greater physical fitness (Proyer, Gander, Wellenzohn, & Ruch, 2013).

Of interest to young adults is the usefulness of character strengths in the employment counselling context, where one study showed that young adults who received strengths-based career counselling were significantly more likely to be employed three months post-intervention than those who received traditional services (Littman-Ovadia et al., 2014). Other studies have indicated that the development of character strengths increased the chances of employment and boosted earning power (Lindqvist & Vestman, 2011; Mohanty, 2010). When individuals use their strengths in the workplace, job satisfaction also tended to increase as did the ability to deal with workplace stress (Harzer & Ruch, 2015; Littman-Ovadia & Steger, 2010). However, the most prominent finding was that individuals who identified their strengths in a workplace context increased their likelihood of flourishing compared to employees who had not, while employees who knew and used their strengths showed an 18-times greater likelihood (Hone, Jarden, Duncan, &

Schofield, 2015). Related studies have also shown that when strengths are identified and used, greater ethical and honest decisions are made (James & Chymis, 2004) and moral behaviors observed (Ruch, Bruntsch, & Wagner, 2017). Boosting individual strengths is also of value. Grit (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007), the resolve and passion for long-term goals along with sustained effort and interest, has been known to lead to a number of positive outcomes. For example, high-grit individuals attained higher education levels and made fewer career changes over time (Duckworth et al., 2007), and were also more likely to engage with learning experiences of a more challenging nature (Duckworth et al., 2010). The strength of optimism also had positive outcomes, predicting job success and confidence in one's career-related decisions (Creed, Patton, & Bartrum, 2002; Neault, 2002).

Positive effects are not limited to young adults. Studies on primary school students also showed that the use of strengths in new ways led to increases in hope and engagement (Madden, Green, & Grant, 2011), greater student wellbeing (Oppenheimer, Fialkov, Ecker, & Portnoy, 2014), as well as better school achievement and social functioning (Shoshani & Slone, 2013). School-wide character strengths development programs are also well established in other parts of the globe. For example, Proctor et al. (2011) implemented a Strengths Gym program in a UK middle school. Students received instruction in the 24 strengths through class work, self-reflection, group discussion, and homework activities, and relative to a control group, showed increases in life satisfaction and positive affect. Gillham et al.'s (2011) high school program also predicted fewer symptoms of depression, while the popular and often cited Geelong school program in Victoria, Australia (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009) also generated greater student engagement and stronger academic results.

5.4 Which Strengths Make the Biggest Difference?

While strengths are unique to individuals (Mayerson, 2015; Williams, 2016), some combinations lead to greater positive affect and life satisfaction. Curiosity, hope, love, gratitude, and zest show the most consistent and strongest relationships, while modesty, prudence, fairness, spirituality, and forgiveness showed the weakest relationships (see Martínez-Martí & Ruch, 2014; Niemiec, 2013; Proyer et al., 2013). This does not mean that the latter are insignificant, because each of the 24 strengths contributes to overall wellbeing. The ranking relates to the relative impact on wellbeing overall of each individual strength. Strengths have also been categorized by the "heart" (i.e., love, gratitude) and "head" (i.e., open-mindedness, judgement). Research has shown that strengths of the heart were more strongly correlated with wellbeing (Park & Peterson, 2008; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). Finally, higher scores across all of the strengths correlated positively with life satisfaction, suggesting that good character is related to living a good and happy life (Ruch, Huber, Beermann, & Proyer, 2007). Overall, the findings indicate that the development and a balance of all 24 strengths are necessary for wellbeing and life satisfaction.

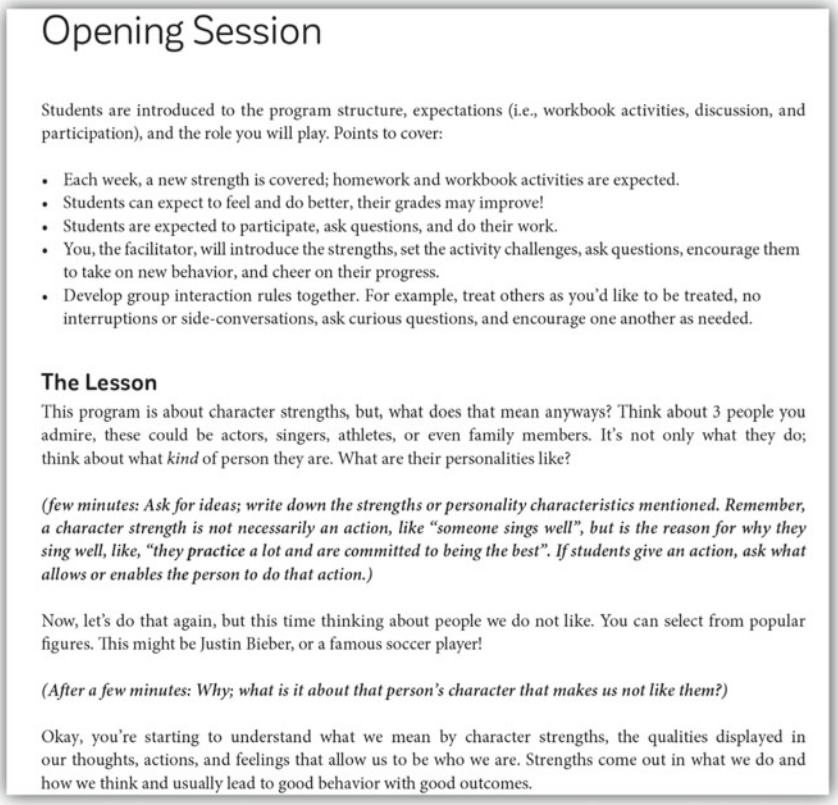
Topic Box: Are Character Strengths Universal?

The Values in Action (VIA) classification system (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) was developed by identifying the strengths promoted within various cultures around the world, including the Islamic culture and religion as well as Buddhist, Confucian, Hindu, Athenian, and Judeo-Christian traditions. It also included literary and philosophical sources across historical periods, including the Boy Scouts and Charlemagne's code of conduct for knights (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005)! The work of identifying, assembling, and validating the strengths culminated in six categories of virtues (wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence) under which a total of 24 character strengths are found. Individuals can take the VIA Inventory of Strengths test (VIA-IS; Park & Peterson 2006), available in over 20 languages, on the www.viacharacter.org website. The VIA-IS is considered to have good internal consistency and test-retest reliability (see Niemiec, 2013), including for the Arabic version; see www.viacharacter.org/www/VIA-IS-Arabic-Translation-Psychometrics.

Individuals in 54 nations completed the online VIA-IS (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006) and results showed a high convergence with the 50 US states' endorsement of strengths with Pearson's correlations between 0.73 and 0.99. McGrath (2015b) extended this study to include 75 nations with a total of 1 million VIA participants from 2002 to 2012. Corrected for small national sample sizes, of which the UAE was one, each nation had at least 150 respondents. McGrath showed that the endorsement mean correlation was 0.85 (with a range of 0.49–0.99) and that 55 of the 74 nations exceeded correlations of 0.80. These correlations related to five strengths in particular, indicating that the most endorsed strengths shared between nations showed very high concurrence and included fairness, judgement, honesty, curiosity and kindness. Conversely, spirituality, modesty and prudence were the least endorsed by all nations, except by Indonesia, Pakistan and Kenya who alone endorsed these as part of their top five. These results show that there is a good deal of consistency between what individuals around the world consider to be good character. It also suggests that the construct of character strengths may be one of the most universal to date, serving to allay fears about Western cultural dominance (Baer, 2015).

5.5 Three Approaches to University Level Character Development

Character strengths development programming can take a whole-university approach. Oades et al. (2011) recommend that such efforts target faculty, administration, parents, the university campus residential setting, and work environment,



Opening Session

Students are introduced to the program structure, expectations (i.e., workbook activities, discussion, and participation), and the role you will play. Points to cover:

- Each week, a new strength is covered; homework and workbook activities are expected.
- Students can expect to feel and do better, their grades may improve!
- Students are expected to participate, ask questions, and do their work.
- You, the facilitator, will introduce the strengths, set the activity challenges, ask questions, encourage them to take on new behavior, and cheer on their progress.
- Develop group interaction rules together. For example, treat others as you'd like to be treated, no interruptions or side-conversations, ask curious questions, and encourage one another as needed.

The Lesson

This program is about character strengths, but, what does that mean anyways? Think about 3 people you admire, these could be actors, singers, athletes, or even family members. It's not only what they do; think about what *kind* of person they are. What are their personalities like?

(few minutes: Ask for ideas; write down the strengths or personality characteristics mentioned. Remember, a character strength is not necessarily an action, like "someone sings well", but is the reason for why they sing well, like, "they practice a lot and are committed to being the best". If students give an action, ask what allows or enables the person to do that action.)

Now, let's do that again, but this time thinking about people we do not like. You can select from popular figures. This might be Justin Bieber, or a famous soccer player!

(After a few minutes: Why; what is it about that person's character that makes us not like them?)

Okay, you're starting to understand what we mean by character strengths, the qualities displayed in our thoughts, actions, and feelings that allow us to be who we are. Strengths come out in what we do and how we think and usually lead to good behavior with good outcomes.

Fig. 5.1 Excerpt from opening session (Lambert, 2017)

in addition to students, who represent the main group. Strengths instruction can take a stand-alone format (see Figs. 5.1 and 5.2 for lesson plan examples from Lambert, 2017), the content of which is developed to suit young adults and their concerns, such as stress, job opportunities, relationships, business ventures, decision-making, as well as the concerns of their professors (i.e., workplace stressors and ethical dilemmas, relationship and parenting concerns, or career innovation as examples). Efforts to nurture and develop a university's human resources both professionally and personally are also included in this approach with the recognition that for students to be at their best, faculty, its management and the learning environment must strive for the same.

A second approach uses the same material and content across various activities where the focus is on nurturing strengths in students alone. This approach may entail a more exclusive value proposition targeted at the development of special centres or institutes for character excellence within a university. It may be the case that only selected students or those from certain programs go through such intensive

Integrity: Showing Congruency between What One Does, Feels and Says

Instructor explanation: *Peterson and Seligman (2004) defined integrity as practicing what you preach although it can also be understood as honesty, sincerity, trustworthiness, or honoring commitments, promises, agreements as well as values. We can always count on people with integrity to do what is fair, just and acceptable, and to tell the truth. From parenting to the workplace and in positions of leadership, friendship and intimate relationships, integrity builds trust. Integrity or a lack thereof, is responsible for problems like corruption and social inequality; indeed, most of today's issues are not due to a lack of resources, but ethics and the willingness to act and abide by a code of values, be it professional or personal. It may be that a focus on self-importance, getting social media "likes", and quick monetary returns has negatively impacted the importance of integrity, a topic that only seems to be discussed in the aftermath of business scandals, school cheating, or cases of government corruption.*

Integrity is not only beneficial in limiting potential unethical acts, but for workplace satisfaction and performance as well. For example, the degree to which employees trust their supervisor was positively correlated with one's performance on the job, the level of personal effort given beyond that normally expected, as well as employee's long-term job satisfaction (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Further, in high-level executives, integrity played the biggest role in explaining performance differences (Sosik, Gentry, & Chun, 2012). Trusting others to do the right thing has a ripple effect on not only what we do, but how, such that when individuals cannot trust others to do the right thing, they are more likely to engage in unethical behavior themselves. For instance, when students see others cheat, they are more likely to cheat too (Rettinger & Kramer, 2009). Yet, those with strong integrity can overcome negative influences to a greater degree and decide for themselves.
Homework and In-Class Reflection

1. When you make a promise or agree to do something, write it down so that you don't forget. Integrity means doing what you say you'll do, so the list will remind you of what you've said (or at least what not to say if you have no intention of doing it). Be accountable. If you realize you've said yes to something and cannot follow through, let the person know immediately so they can find someone else and move on with their plans. In fact, write a list of all the things you've committed to in the next week and plan your decisions accordingly.
2. At the end of each day, notice the times when you were trying to impress others, like showing off clothes, cars, watches, bags, or when you used the names of others to make yourself appear more important. Reflect on why you felt this was important and consider how it made you look and whether it was helpful in reaching your goals. Try to make this list shorter each day.
3. Have you ever defended your values when it was unpopular? Did you pay a price for it? What was the consequence? How did you feel afterwards? What did you learn from the experience? Would you do it again? Describe what happened in your workbook.

Fig. 5.2 Excerpt from a sample lesson for "Integrity" (taken from Lambert, 2017)

programming accompanied by focused experiential activities included as a form of university internship and/or community service. The benefit of this approach is that it does not come across as a punitive form of additional work but a privileged position into which one is nominated. Graduates from these centres may be expected to take on the status of moral exemplars and act as role models thereafter, adding this training to their CVs with benefits to future employers who gain from this type of quality assurance.

Still, a third more integrated approach involves embedding instruction into existing curriculum whereby strengths can show their expression in almost any course where human behavior is concerned such as English literature, political science, Islamic philosophy, sociology, or business ethics. Selected strengths can be infused into class discussions (i.e., what strength or lack thereof is being demonstrated in a novel's fictional character, business decision, or foreign policy objective?). In this way, all humanities include an examination of human character, a critical aspect of moral analysis that is frequently absent in the classroom and yet, very relevant to real life workplace, parenting or relational concerns. Assessment tasks, personal reflections, interviews, learning and teaching activities can be structured around these strengths so that students become familiar with the notion of character, gain insight and learn to be critical of their own moral choices and hold themselves to a higher standard as a result. This requires significantly more effort on the part of instructors but helps to activate the strengths in as many contexts as possible.

Alongside the VIA, the *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (CSV) diagnostic manual (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) describes the strengths much like the American Psychiatric Association's (2013) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) describes dysfunction. The CSV is used to diagnose individual strengths and is replete with research as well as lists of recommended movies, songs, and novels that are deemed to characterize them. It is used by positive psychologists and strengths coaches to complement the DSM or as a stand-alone diagnostic tool in clinical settings as well as educational and workplace contexts. Yet, despite the growth of the strengths industry in schools and businesses in particular (Niemiec, 2013), the goal of such work is not to increase all strengths indiscriminately or use them across all contexts. Achieving a balance is key (Allan, 2015) as some strengths can complement or undermine one another when used too much, too little, or in certain combinations. For instance, low judgment may undermine the effects of high kindness and leave individuals with unintended outcomes. In fact, a recent study measured the effects of the over and underuse of strengths, showing that both increased depression and social anxiety (Freidlin, Littman-Ovadia, & Niemiec, 2017), although the underuse of strengths contributed to more negative outcomes.

Finally, beyond character and wellbeing, there is real life. Extracurricular activities are where most young people learn the skills for becoming independent adults. Yet, across the GCC nations, high salaries translate into a corresponding plethora of cheap household help (i.e., maids, drivers, cooks, and nannies), who paradoxically undermine such learning. A recent example in one of the author's teaching illustrates this. While undertaking a classroom volunteer project which involved handling and packaging dry foods (i.e., rice) to donate to a labor camp, over half the class did not know how to fold the bottom of a cardboard box for greater support, one had never used scissors before, and another reported not knowing rice was a dry grain. It is little wonder so many students cannot manage many real life challenges themselves; they are never given real life opportunities to learn.

Accordingly, positive universities may want to include a mandatory first year life skills program to not only ensure students know about and can use digital capabilities,

but everyday life skills. This could include financial literacy, i.e. how to live within a budget, save money, avoid debt, and distinguish between needs and wants. Resiliency skills would also go a long way as many students find it difficult to tolerate any critical feedback and accept responsibility for failings. Such behaviors are not exactly the qualities of brilliant leaders, industry disruptors, or for that matter, partners and parents! While meaning well, many adults unknowingly contribute to the lack of skill and character development by trying to shield and protect young adults from failure. Yet, the chance to fail in order to learn is exactly what is needed.

All character strengths programming has the goal of helping students *identify* their strengths to achieve a better fit between themselves and the worlds of work, recreation, and relationships, and to *develop* their strengths through activities, self-reflection, and discussion. The "development" approach is broader than the standard "identify and use" approach more commonly used in strengths work. Development avoids limiting individuals to their existing strengths and instead prepares them for real life which requires all of the strengths to be used (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & Minhas, 2011). Yet, strengths programming should neither take a compliance nor rewards-based approach (Nesfield, 2016) as the goal is not to tell students what to do, but to facilitate their deliberate contemplation about choices and consequences. Thus, much like children behaving only when their parents are in the room, doing the right thing out of fear or desire for social approval, is not the aim. Instead, it is about understanding the value of doing the right thing when no one is watching. Consequently, such programming focuses on developing insight as to which strengths should be used, under what circumstance and why, so that the range of behavioral and cognitive options becomes broader, the variety of appropriate settings expands, and performance and wellbeing increase as a result.

5.6 Avenues for Future Study

Character strengths are one area in positive psychology where there is much available data. However, regional studies are few and limited to two in the UAE (Lambert, Budhraja, Mullan, & Gupta, 2018; Petkari & Ortiz-Tallo, 2018). Nonetheless, researchers, educators and practitioners can visit the www.viacharacter.org website for a comprehensive listing of studies with which to determine future steps of their own. It is worth reminding that character strength development is not only essential for young people in education, but for all adults in the workplace and everyday life as well.

Examples of future research might involve answering the following questions: Does the use of character strengths (and which ones) change over the duration of time students spend at university and to what aspects of the university environment can these changes be attributed? For instance, does the strength of integrity grow during years spent at university or weaken? If so, what does this say about the university setting? Are these changes due to classroom instruction, the social atmosphere, extracurricular activities like sports, or maturation and development? What

are the implications of such findings for university settings and their development as positive institutions? Researchers can rely on longitudinal studies for such answers and experiment with controlled interventions designed to develop such strengths to help effectively prepare students for the workplace.

5.7 Conclusion

As universities look for ways to stand out and recruit top talent, the offer of a character strengths program or positive university can be an attractive proposition for faculty, students and parents alike. Not only focused on academics or extracurricular activities, universities can also offer a moral or psychological element geared not exclusively towards problems but to human excellence and wellbeing. The student experience would be greatly enhanced beyond learning skills, thus providing graduates with a competitive edge in the marketplace and the transferable skills most in demand by employers at present (Sander, 2017). Graduate employability outcomes are becoming increasingly important globally with students attracted to universities that provide a better prospect of employment. Universities can also distinguish themselves from competitors by attracting top faculty not only with the lure of practicing academic excellence but personal excellence as well. Becoming an employer of choice for this reason can be attractive, especially in the current GCC landscape where the number of foreign students continues to grow. This offers a unique form of professional growth within a very broad multicultural context. Having a character strengths programming component would not only attract top student and faculty talent, but ideally, retain such talent with higher standards and practises of moral behavior engrained throughout the organizational culture, including classrooms. Universities can strive to become moral exemplars themselves and boost their reputation, rankings, as well as retention figures in the industry, too.

Character strength education is making a comeback, and young adults should not be overlooked for fear that it may add to a taxing workload or divert resources from learning. Identifying, using and further developing one's character strengths has positive outcomes for learning, ethical behavior, positive affect, social functioning, physical health, job satisfaction, the likelihood of employment, and earning power (Gander et al., 2013; Lindqvist & Vestman, 2011; Littman-Ovadia et al., 2014; Mongrain & Anselmo-Matthews, 2012; Oppenheimer et al., 2014; Proyer et al., 2013; Shoshani & Slone, 2013). Consequently, universities can and should play a role in character formation, not only to meet their own commercial interests, but because they are the ideal institutions in which to grow human capital and best prepare students for a great entry into the world. Universities are the last chance for students to receive the time, space, support and opportunities to contemplate and practise becoming better, more responsible and caring citizens before entering real life contexts. It is only in universities that the contributors to a better society and region can be fully developed.

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