

**BE A BUDDY:AN EXERCISE IN INNOVATION AND
ENTREPRENEURSHIP
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ABSTRACT

Mental health difficulties across university student populations are seen as a serious problem as for universities as well as for their wider communities. Students can search, identify, and evaluate the problems and business opportunities and can come up with new solutions to those problems. During the process of solution search, students might be able to use the development tools and creativity models.

The problem is more actual while dealing with students having learning disabilities. Thus, two main solutions were identified: the Emotion Tool and Be a Buddy.

Key words: students, higher education difficulties, mental health problems, support, change, improvement, entrepreneurship course.

INTRODUCTION

We are a group of five students studying in the "Towards Innovations and Entrepreneurship" course as part of "the degree program in International Business" at Oulu University of Applied Sciences (OAMK), Finland. In OAMK, there are over 9000 students including over 350 international degree students. It has 30 degree programs, of which two Bachelor's degree programs and four Master's degree programs are taught entirely in English. The degree program in International Business is one of the two English medium degree programs and is intended for both Finnish and international students wishing to seek interesting career paths in innovative international business, sales and marketing, management, or entrepreneurship.

The name of our team is, "Team Silver". Our team includes five students, two of them are exchange students, in their 3rd academic year and the other three are first-year students from OAMK. Shana Van Dyck is from Belgium, studying innovation Management at Erasmus Brussels University of Applied Sciences and Arts. Luca Fasola is studying Engineering and management at SUPSI in Switzerland. The rest of us, Laura Suorsa, Salla Kunnari, and Chamari Dasanayake are studying International Business at OAMK. We have a great multicultural environment inside our team, which helped us to work through this project in a very balanced and peaceful atmosphere. Also, we five have different situations in our private life. For example, Laura Suora has Dyslexia, where she needs some extra support with schoolwork and Chamari Dasanayake has three young kids to look after at the same time while she is doing her studies. With these different backgrounds, we made a powerful team bond between us.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many causes of stress, including personal difficulties (conflict with loved ones, being alone, lack of income, worries about the future), problems at work or study place (conflict with colleagues, a tremendously demanding or insecure job) or major threats in the community (violence, disease, lack of economic opportunity) (WHO, 2021). Despite relatively high levels of psychological distress, many students in higher education experience difficulties, but at the same time do not seek help for difficulties. In particular cases, undergraduate students are most likely to seek help for mental well-being difficulties from peers, but whether this experience is useful is less clear. How such an approach impacts upon the individual from whom assistance is sought is also not well understood (Laidlaw, McLellan, & Ozakinci, 2016).

Still, there is a growing prevalence and severity of mental health difficulties across university student populations recognized as a critical issue for universities and their wider

communities. It is argued that the process of seeking and acting on students' suggestions fosters students' sense of inclusion and empowerment, and this is critical given that the goal of improving student mental wellbeing can only be achieved through an effective partnership between students and institutional actors (Baik, Larcombe, & Brooker, 2019).

AIM

The project we started is a part of the "Towards Innovations and Entrepreneurship" course. The duration of the course was 8 weeks. The main course goals were:

- Students can search, identify, and evaluate the problems and business opportunities in that field and students can come up with new solutions to those problems.
- While searching for the solutions, students were able to use the development tools and creativity models.
- Students take responsibility and work in a multidisciplinary team throughout the whole project.
- At the end of the course students have an idea about, the utilization possibilities with the business model. Which can divide into three main parts,
 - Innovation process and methods to develop innovations
 - Teamwork
 - Business model development

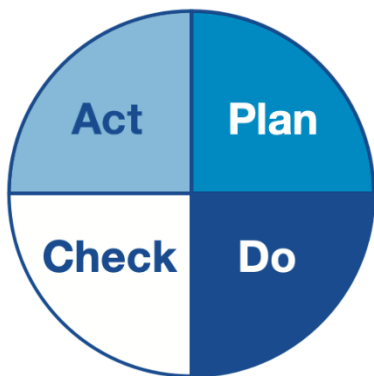
METHOD

We used the basic principles of Lean Project Management as the guideline for this project. The goal of Lean Project Management is to take small steps, do what is necessary at that moment and keep changing and improving. Since this project was only for 8 weeks, Lean Project Management is the perfect method to develop something in a small-time frame.

After receiving the problem, we started our work by researching, interviewing the students, collecting information, changing the direction, and continuously repeating that cycle (Figure 1). Then we decided on the final solution, we focused on developing a prototype and collecting feedback. As we mentioned in the beginning, for most of us this process of doing research, identifying the core problem, and then finally finding a practical solution, is a new process. From the beginning, we were focused on carrying out this in a practical manner as an exercise in innovation and entrepreneurship courses, rather than a scientific study. It is important to keep this in mind.

Figure 1.

Deming circle.



THE PROBLEM

The initial problem our team got was “How to support online students' mental wellbeing?”.

As all of us are students ourselves and have had to deal with online studies since March 2019, this subject was close to our hearts.

We first wanted to understand more about the problem and get different opinions on the topic. We arranged a meeting with the initiator of this project. She explained to us why chose this project and what the aim was. We would focus on higher-education students, but not limited to Armenian students. As mentioned previously, our team consists of people from different countries, so we already started with a broader reach.

Secondly, we each interviewed a total of 5 students during the first week of the project. The aim of the interview was to understand how students have been feeling and reacting during the past semester of online classes. We also asked about which factors influenced their experience. What made them feel better, etc. The interviews were semi-structured and aimed at letting the interviewee tell their story.

During the second week of the project, we decided to interview other stakeholders as well. We interviewed a lecturer a school psychologist and more students.

Aside from the interviews, we also looked at any relevant literature on this topic.

From the interviews we did, and the literature we read, we could gather some interesting information. We came to the conclusion that the biggest influence on students' mental well-being was not the actual online classes but the situation surrounding the pandemic. Most students actually reported they did okay. Some of them even prefer online classes as it, for example, allow them to sleep in more. Students, who reported that they were struggling, were students with a less-optimal home-study environment and with certain conditions. Students who had

children at home, who did not have their own space to study in, etc. But also, students with conditions like ADD and Dyslexia reported more difficulties. During a second meeting with Ms. Harutyunyan, she proposed a narrower definition of the problem: “How can we support online students with disabilities”.

After a discussion in our project group, we decided to further narrow it down to: “How can we support online students with learning disabilities”. From our personal experience, students with learning disabilities are the most common. On top of that, we felt that this group of students’ sorts of “fell through the cracks”. We interviewed several students with various learning disabilities and none of them received extra support from the university. With this new challenge, we went ahead with the ideation.

IDEATION

After narrowing down the problem, we landed on trying to help students with learning disabilities. We came up with three different solutions and made a minimal prototype for them in the form of an advertisement.

The first solution we came up with, is called the Emotion Tool. This is an online tool for students and teachers to show their emotions and feelings live during online classes. The idea is to help teachers to understand how their students are doing during online studies and for students to make it easier to share their current state of mind. The student has different options to choose from which reflect their feelings at the moment. The teacher can see if some of the students are struggling and can use this information to target that specific student that needs help.

The second solution is Be a Buddy. This is an online service, that matches two students with complementary strengths and areas of difficulties. Students must fill out a questionnaire, and the matching will be done based on that. Students will have their study friends with who they can study together and supports each other. The idea is mainly to create a broader social support network for online students.

Stay focused at Home, is also an online tool where you can set your schedule and it will automatically remind you about the tasks and lessons you have on that day. The system will also automatically create folders to organize your schoolwork. There is also an alarm, that will give a notification if students' computers will stay interactive for more than 15 minutes, which can help the student to stay focused during class.

We presented the prototypes for these solutions to 10 students and asked for their feedback about the services. In general, we got good feedback, but most of the interviewees thought the Buddy system to be the most useful tool for their studies. We decided to continue and develop

that idea further.

FINAL SOLUTION

After proposing our three different ideas on how to improve the mental well-being of students we decided to go on with the idea of Be a Buddy (See Annex).

The idea of Be a Buddy is pretty simple compared to the others we had on our minds but at the same time, it was the one that received the best feedback from the interviewees. Basically, this is a service where we can match two students who both have learning disabilities so that they can help each other with their studies. These two students are going to be complementary to each other so that one of them can help the other in subjects he is struggling with and vice versa.

To match the buddies, we are going to use a questionnaire where the students have to fill in not only what they are good with at school and what they struggle with but they can even add their personal interests and hobby so that the person they match with can be a friend as well as a study buddy.

Our mindset with this solution was to develop something simple but effective. Something that could be implemented right away and tweaked along the way. Since this is a very current problem, we wanted something that would be ready to tackle the problem from the get-go.

As we previously explained, the focus of this project was on students with learning disabilities. However, the solution can be implemented for a broader group of users as well.

WHY THIS TYPE OF PROTOTYPE?

Be A Buddy is a service and is thus hard to make a prototype for. The biggest part is the interaction between the students, which is quite hard to prototype. How this service is used also depends on the exact user group and the university's wants. There could be a separate website or just an introduction page on the university website. We ended up with this kind of prototype to visualize the idea of this service rather than make a final outlook of it. The questionnaire for example is an important part of the service that can be prototyped but also when in use can be implemented differently. The brochure and other ads can be visualized as well (See Annex).

Interviews and feedback.

We interviewed many students to get feedback on the prototypes and took all feedback into consideration. We asked them to do the questionnaire and tell us if it contains what they expected. We made possible changes according to the feedback. That is how we ended up with these specific prototypes and the final feedback on them was very good.

CONCLUSION

Students' mental well-being and how students are handling online classes is a topic that hits very close to home for all of us. As we mentioned in the introduction, we are all students with different backgrounds and thus, also different struggles during this strange time.

This project allowed us to work on a problem that feels very important to us. The positive fact of working on a problem that we were familiar with is well, that we are familiar with it. And we know a whole group of people struggling with the same thing. The downside of it was that we were sometimes too close to the problem. It was important to remain objective and look at it from a distance.

These past 8 weeks have given us the opportunity to get familiar with some basic innovation and business development methods and strategies. We learned how important it is to listen when people give you feedback, even if it is different from what you expected in advance.

Most of all, we have learned that even though a project is started with complete strangers in a completely virtual environment, good team dynamics can develop.

REFERENCE LIST

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1. Table of interviewee’s


Interview week	Country	Profile	Age	Academic university/Applied Science	Current year of study	Bachelor/Master	Condition (optional)	code
24-30/08	Belgium	Student	21	Applied Science		3 Bachelor	ADD	1
	Finland	Student	29	University		4 Bachelor	/	2
	Switzerland	Student	26	Applied Science		3 Bachelor	/	3
	Sri Lanka	Student	25	University		2 Master	/	4
	Finland	Student	21	University		1 Bachelor	/	5
31/08-6/09	Belgium	Lecturer	NA	Applied Science	NA	NA	NA	6
	Finland	Student		Applied Science		5 Bachelor	/	7
	Finland	Lecturer		Applied Science		NA	/	8
	India	Student	26	University		2 Master	/	9
	Finland	School psychologist	NA	Applied Science	NA	NA	NA	10
7/9 - 13/9	Belgium	Student	20	Applied Science		3 Bachelor	Dyslexia	11
	Belgium	Student	20	Academic university		2 Bachelor	/	12
	Finland	Student	25	Applied Science		2 Bachelor	ADD, dysorthographia	13
	Italy	Student	21	Applied Science		3 Bachelor	Dyslexia	14
	Switzerland	Student	26	Applied Science		Bachelor	/	15
	Finland	Student	21	Applied Science		1 Bachelor	Dyslexia	16
	Taiwan	Student	27	University		2 Master	Dyslexia	17
	Finland	Student	21	Applied Science		1 Bachelor	Dyslexia	18
	Belgium	Student	21	Applied Science		3 Bachelor	Dyslexia	19
	Belgium	Student	21	Applied Science		3 Bachelor	ADD	1
14-20/9	Belgium	Student	21	Applied Science		3 Bachelor	Dyscalculia	21
	Finland	Student	28	University		5 Master	/	22
	Finland	Student	27	University		5 Master	/	23
	Italy	Student	22	University		3 Bachelor	/	24
	Finland	Student	23	University		3 Bachelor	/	25
	Finland	Student	25	University		2 Bachelor	Dyslexia	26
	Finland	Student	21	Applied Science		1 Bachelor	Dyslexia	19
	Sri Lanka	Student	25	University		2 Master	/	4
	The Netherlands	Student	21	Applied Science		3 Bachelor	Dyslexia	29
	Belgium	Student	21	Applied Science		3 Bachelor	ADHD	30
28/9 - 4/10	Finland	Student	29	University		7 Master	/	31
	Finland	Student	27	Applied Science		1 Bachelor	ADD	32
	Italy	Student	21	University		3 Bachelor	Dyslexia	33
	Italy	Student	22	University		3 Bachelor	ADHD	34
	US	Student	23	Applied Science		3 Bachelor	Dyslexia	35
	Finland	Student	21	Applied Science		1 Bachelor	Dyslexia	19
	Sri Lanka	Student	29	Applied Science		1 Bachelor	/	37

2. Emotion tool advertisement


STRESSED? NO TIME? HARD TO FOCUS?

WANT TO BE HAPPY?


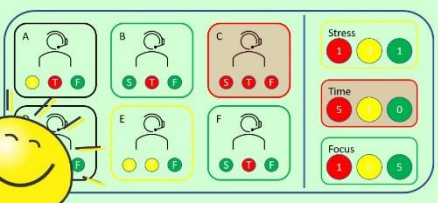
SHOW YOUR EMOTIONS REAL-TIME



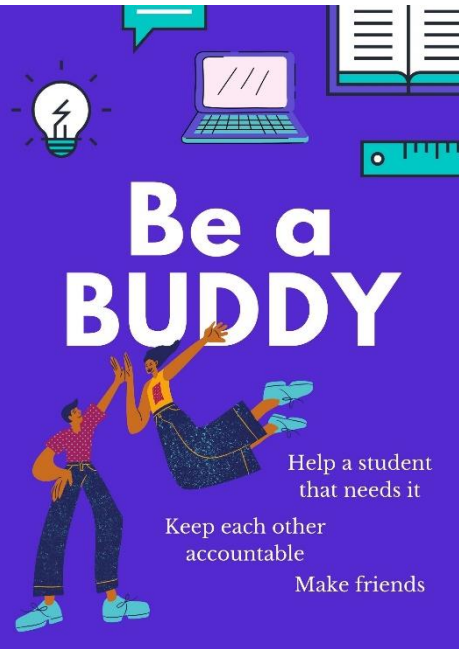
Emotion Meter



LET YOUR TEACHERS HELP YOU AND YOUR CLASS!



3. Be a Buddy advertisement



Be a BUDDY

Help a student that needs it

Keep each other accountable

Make friends

4. Stay focused on home advertisement



STAY FOCUSED AT HOME!

A smart tool that can help you planning during online lessons

AUTOMATIC CREATION OF FOLDERS

You don't have to think about creating tons of folders for your assessment anymore, everything will be done automatically

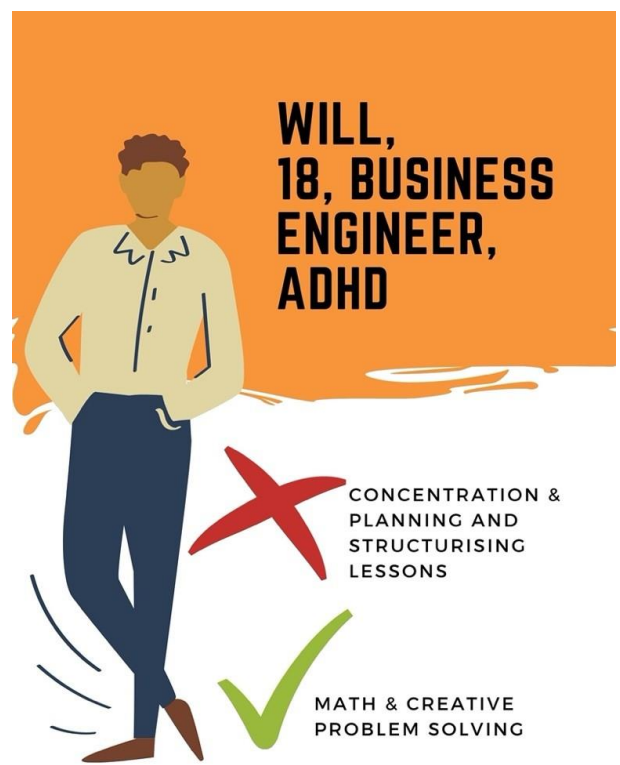
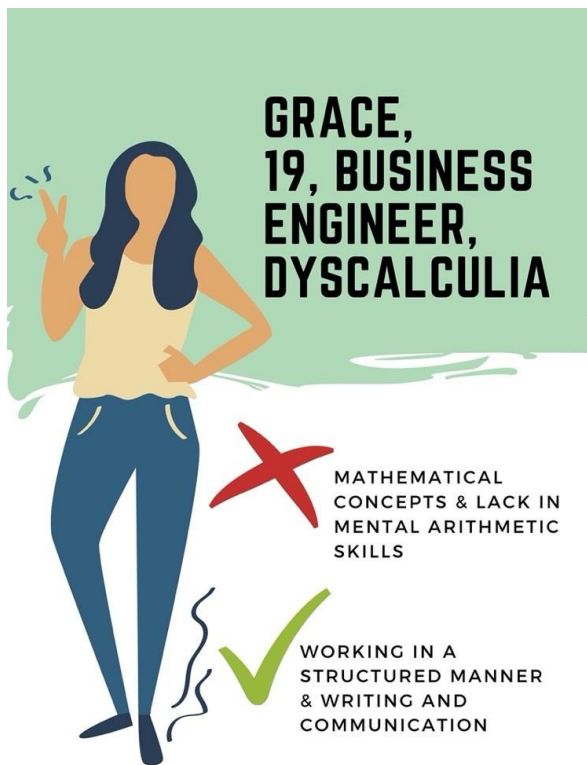
DAILY NOTIFICATION ABOUT YOUR DUE ASSESSMENTS

You often forget about your projects due dates? No more struggling, everyday you'll receive a notification reminding what you still have to do

DON'T GET DISTRACTED DURING THE LESSON

If your computer stays inactive for more than 15 minutes during a class an alarm will ring to remind you to pay attention

5. Persona



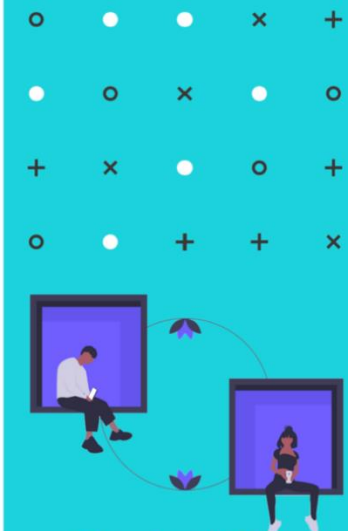
6.Be a Buddy Brochure

Who are we?

Buddy is a service where higher education students can sign up to become a buddy and get a buddy to themselves if needed. The idea of the service is to connect students who need help during their online studies. Service will match two students who complementary each other's difficulties and strengths and can this way share their knowledge and have support.

How to sign in?

- Open Buddy –website
- Fill in the questionnaire by following the instructions.
- Based on the questions, we compose your profile. We include your personality, likes and dislikes, strengths and areas where you need support from your future Buddy.
- The system matches you with another user who is complementary to your profile
- Finally, you will get the contact information of your Buddy



Contact Us

123 Anywhere St.,
Any City, ST 12345

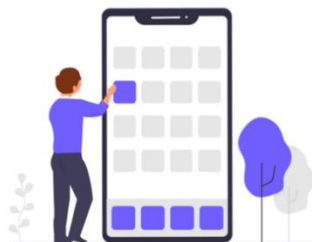
+123-456-7890
hello@reallygreatsite.com
www.reallygreatsite.com

Be a Buddy!

Looking for a buddy to study with?



Delivering help to students with learning disabilities!



Terms and conditions

By joining to the Buddy- service you will allow the service to use your info to find your match. All your data will be used only to create your profile. Your personal information will not be shared with any third party. The service will only share the following things to your Buddy:

- Name/nickname
 - Your studies and school
 - Strengths and areas you need support for
- By accepting these terms, you will assure that all the data you give is correct and you will take the responsibility to be supportive and loyal to your Buddy- match. Do not share or copy your buddy's school projects, ideas or innovations. If there is any confidential topics between buddies, we expect you to maintain that confidentiality.



We will help you to match with someone complementary to you!



Let us help you with

- Dyslexia
- ADHD
- Dyscalculia
- Concentration and planning
- Structuring lessons
- Writing and communication

...and much more!

What if I want to change my study-buddy?

After two weeks you will have a feedback session where you will have opportunity to share your experience. After the session you can decide if you want to continue or change your buddy.

7. Promotional email

WELCOME TO GET SUPPORT WITH YOUR ONLINE STUDIES

New service for OULU community of Applied Sciences



NEW YEAR, NEW GOALS


Our university is pleased to introduce the new online service: Buddy, which has been created to help you during the online studies. The shift to online studies has brought us new challenges and our university wants to support you. Buddy has been specially designed for students with learning disabilities. The service will connect you with another student who complements you in your challenges and strengths. You can start your study-buddy relationship with your partner, and get the social support you are lacking. If you feel that you have been struggling during the online studies, don't hesitate to join us, and make your studies more fun!

GO TO READ MORE INFORMATION WWW.STUDYBUDDY.COM


OAMK
OULU UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

8. Facebook advertisement

**ARE YOU FEELING
Alone.....
Stress.....
Can't focus.....**




**BUDDY
IS WHAT YOU NEED.....**



GIVE IT A TRY.....
<https://forms.gle/XC3UyRYTRNviUsAA8>

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