

Session 3: My Social Brain (VIA Character Strengths)

Before the workshop, you participated in the VIA Strengths Survey, the world's most scientifically validated tool for measuring character strengths. It is the product of a multi-year research project, whose goal was to identify what's best about human beings and how we use those best characteristics to build our best lives for ourselves and others. The Classification reflects the world's major religious writings, as well as studies of major philosophies. The search was conducted by 55 top social scientists over a period of three years beginning in 2001.

The resulting classification of 6 virtues and the 24 character strengths within them form a language of common ground. People - in remote villages in Greenland, or the Ukraine, or in urban Australia - agree on the goodness of these strengths and virtues.

Before answering the reflection questions below, **flip over to the next two pages** for a more detailed exploration of the different character strengths.



For each of your top strengths, can you think of any stories where you use them in your life? How do you feel when you use these strengths? Are there any differences in how you use these strengths in different situations (e.g. at home, at work)? Jot down any thoughts in response here:



Have a look at some of the strengths that come towards the bottom of your list. Are there any you would like to develop further? Record any thoughts on how you might do this here:



The VIA Classification of Character Strengths are:

1. **Wisdom & Knowledge** – Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge



Creativity [originality, ingenuity]: Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things; includes artistic achievement but is not limited to it



Curiosity [interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience]: Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake; finding subjects and topics fascinating; exploring and discovering



Judgment [critical thinking]: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; not jumping to conclusions; being able to change one's mind in light of evidence; weighing all evidence fairly



Love of Learning: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one's own or formally; obviously related to the strength of curiosity but goes beyond it to describe the tendency to add systematically to what one knows



Perspective [wisdom]: Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and to other people

2. **Courage** – Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal



Bravery [valour]: Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; speaking up for what is right even if there is opposition; acting on convictions even if unpopular; includes physical bravery but is not limited to it



Perseverance [persistence, industriousness]: Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles; “getting it out the door”; taking pleasure in completing tasks



Honesty [authenticity, integrity]: Speaking the truth but more broadly presenting oneself in a genuine way and acting in a sincere way; being without pretence; taking responsibility for one's feelings and actions



Zest [vitality, enthusiasm, vigour, energy]: Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or half-heartedly; living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated

3. **Humanity** – interpersonal strengths that involve tending to and befriending others



Love: Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated; being close to people



Kindness [generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, "niceness"]: Doing favours and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them



Social Intelligence [emotional intelligence, personal intelligence]: Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself; knowing what to do to fit into different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick



4. **Justice** – Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life



Teamwork [citizenship, social responsibility, loyalty]: Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one's share



Fairness: Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance



Leadership: Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done, and at the same time maintaining good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen

5. **Temperance** – Strengths that protect against excess



Forgiveness: Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting the shortcomings of others; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful



Humility: Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more special than one is



Prudence: Being careful about one's choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted



Self-Regulation [self-control]: Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one's appetites and emotions

6. **Transcendence** – Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning



Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence [awe, wonder, elevation]: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in various domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience



Gratitude: Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks



Hope [optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation]: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about



Humour [playfulness]: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes



Spirituality [faith, purpose]: Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort

You may have noticed that five of the character strengths have **borders** around them. Research has shown that these strengths have the highest correlation with **life satisfaction**. If you would like to improve the quality of your life and raise your level of happiness you might consider developing one or more of these strengths.

