

Values in Action – Catalogue of Character Strengths

By Peterson & Seligman, 2004

A Summary by Sahaya G. Selvam

CS1. Creativity

Creativity can be observed in behaviours that exhibit, and ideas that express, great degree of originality and adaptive character (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p.110). It may be seen as a mental process, expressed by certain individuals, and can be analysed in terms of tangible products (Simonton, 2005, p.191).

CS2. Curiosity

Curiosity represents “one’s intrinsic desire for experience and knowledge” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p.125). Curiosity is particularly noticed when someone seeks knowledge that goes beyond the principle of “utility of the information to the agent.” It is as if information is sought for its own sake (Loewenstein, 1994, p.75).

CS3. Open-mindedness

This character strength consists in the ability to seek actively evidence against one’s own beliefs, plans, or goals. Open-mindedness can also be referred to as a sense of judgement and critical thinking. In simple words, open-mindedness consists in a constant effort towards the elimination of one’s own biases and stereotypes.

CS4. Love of Learning

Love of learning describes an individual’s interest to acquire information and skill, and the way one engages new information and skills. Thus, it includes aspects of motivation, content, and methodology in engaging knowledge. People acknowledge the presence of a positive affect when engaging new knowledge (see Covington, 1999).

CS5. Perspective (Wisdom)

Perspective or wisdom is conceptualised “in terms of wise processes, wise products, or wise people” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p.182). It is closely related to self knowledge, meaning of life, and being able to use right judgement in relationships. Thus, this special type of knowledge is used for the well-being of oneself and others. In this way, wisdom has an intra- and inter-personal dimension (Kunzmann & Stange, 2007, p.306).

CS6. Bravery

Bravery or valour is seen in a voluntary action, which involves some danger, and which an individual undertakes after due understanding of risks involved. Certain conditions are considered necessary to courage: freedom, fear, risk, uncertainty, an endangered good and a morally worthy end (Shelp, 1984, p.351).

CS7. Persistence

It is defined as “voluntary continuation of a goal-directed action in spite of obstacles, difficulties, or discouragement” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p.229). Continuing to perform something that is fun and rewarding in itself does not entail persistence, though there may be some pleasure at the completion of the demanding task that is marked by persistence.

CS8. Integrity

Integrity, which is also related to authenticity and honesty, consists in being true to oneself, and owning up accurately one’s inner states, intentions and commitments (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, pp.251-2). While authenticity is perceived in the avoidance of pretence, honesty is refusing to fake reality (Locke, 2005, p.308; see also Harter, 2005).

CS9. Vitality

Vitality consists in “approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or half-heartedly; living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated” (Peterson, 2006, p. 32). Vitality presupposes a physiological wellbeing – free from fatigue and illness, and a psychological wellbeing – integration of the self at the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels (See Ryan & Frederick, 1997).

CS10. Love

“Love represents a cognitive, behavioural, and emotional stance toward others that takes three prototypical forms. One is love for the individuals who are our primary sources of affection, protection, and care. . . . Another form is love for the individuals who depend on us to make them feel safe and cared for. . . . The third form is love that involves passionate desire for sexual, physical, and emotional closeness with an individual whom we consider special and who makes us feel special” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p.304). This is also referred to as intimacy (Peterson, 2006, p.32), or as attachment (Hazan & Shaver, 2004) and is different from compassion or kindness, that is considered here below.

CS11. Kindness

Kindness, generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, and “niceness” are closely related terms that indicate “a common orientation of the self toward the other” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p.326). Kindness consists in doing favours or good deeds to others, while compassion is more related to the emotion evoked at the sufferings of others.

CS12. Social Intelligence

Social intelligence is a concept that is related to emotional intelligence and personal intelligence. Personal intelligence refers to the ability to “assess one’s own performance at a variety of tasks,” including the motives and emotions that accompany them; emotional intelligence refers to the capacity to identify emotional states of others, to understand how these states can influence relationships, and how best to manage emotions (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, pp.338-339).

CS13. Citizenship

This character strength, which includes social responsibility, loyalty, and teamwork, represents a general commitment to the common good. Without the neglect of the self, it consists in going beyond self-interest, in the fulfilment of duty. It is also expressed in being loyal to friends, being a good team-player, having a strong civic sense, and contributing to social causes.

CS14. Fairness (Justice)

In simple words, it is “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” (Peterson, 2006, p. 33). On a deeper note, fairness presupposes moral judgement – being able to determine what is morally right or wrong, and what is morally permitted or proscribed.

CS15. Leadership

Leadership is a personal quality that fosters the cognitive and temperamental ability to influence and help others. While working in groups, leadership is particularly noticed in the ability to motivate others to move towards the objectives of the group while fostering good relationships among members.

CS16. Forgiveness and Mercy

Forgiveness is a set of prosocial changes that needs to be understood in terms of what happens, inside the person who has been hurt - intrapsychic consequence; and between the one hurt and the relationship partner -interpersonal consequence (Baumeister, Exline, & Sommer, 1998, p.85) Forgiveness can be considered a particular expression of mercy; and the latter includes “kindness, compassion, or leniency towards a transgressor” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p.446).

CS17. Humility

Although humility may falsely be equated with a sense of unworthiness and low self-regard, true humility is a rich, multifaceted construct that entails an accurate assessment of one's characteristics, an ability to acknowledge limitations, and a "forgetting of the self" (Tangney, 2000). Modesty, which is related to humility, "refers primarily to the moderate estimation of one's merits or achievements and also extends into other issues relating to propriety in dress and social behaviour" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p.463).

CS18. Prudence

Prudence consists in being aware of the consequences of one's choices, and developing strategies in self-management so as to move towards the achievement of one's goals. Prudent individuals also have a moderate and flexible attitude to life, and constantly strive to balance between their ends and means (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p.478). Prudence is not to be identified with excessive caution, nor is it selfish, endless calculations.

CV19. Self-regulation

As one of the character strengths of temperance, self-regulation can also be referred to as self-control or self-discipline. The expressions of self-regulation and its constructs refer to how a person exerts control over his or her impulses and behaviour so as to pursue their goals while maintaining their moral standards. It can also mean a rhythm of life that facilitates self-efficacy (Bandura, 1999). "Delay of gratification constitutes an important paradigm of self-regulation," implying that a person with self-regulation is able to resist the temptation to choose an immediate, small reward in order to obtain a larger benefit, even if the latter was delayed (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p.500).

CV20. Appreciation of beauty and excellence

This character strength in transcendence consists in "noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience" (Peterson, 2006, p.33). Awe, wonder, and elevation are emotional states that accompany appreciation.

CS21. Gratitude

Gratitude includes an appropriate response to receiving gifts; gift is understood as a reward that was beyond what one worked for. This includes then being aware of, and thankful for, the good things that happen in life. The three components of gratitude proposed by Fitzgerald (1998) have been generally accepted by psychologists: (a) a warm sense of appreciation for somebody or something; (b) a sense of goodwill toward that person or thing, and (c) a disposition to act on what flows from appreciation and goodwill (see also Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p.555; Emmons & McCullough, 2004, p.5.)

CS22. Hope

"Hope, optimism, future-mindedness, future-orientation represent a cognitive, emotional, and motivational stance towards the future" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p.570). In more precise terms, this stance consists in "expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about" (Peterson, 2006, p.33).

CS23. Humour

Humour can have at least two possible strands of meaning. First, it refers to the ability to recognise, enjoy and even create 'comic'. Comic includes a whole range of harmless incongruent situations – jokes, comedy, teasing, sarcasm, satire, irony, fun, wit and so on. It could emerge out of a use of language, or the body, or arrangement of objects. In this sense, humour is an ability to have wholesome fun, it is related to playfulness, and is one type of aesthetics. The second meaning refers more to an attitude towards situations in life: being able to see the lighter side of things, being composed and cheerful even in the face of adversity, and

maintaining a good mood. While in the first sense humour may be related to physical laughter, in the second sense it is more an internal attitude (see Martin, 2004).

CS24. Spirituality (religiousness, faith)

“Spirituality and religiousness refer to beliefs and practices that are grounded in the conviction that there is a transcendental (non-physical) dimension of life” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p.600). These beliefs and practices may be expressed in having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits in the larger scheme; having beliefs about meaning of life that shape and provide comfort (Peterson, 2006, p.33).

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