


CHARACTER STRENGTHS & LEADERSHIP

VIA Management

**Exploring the Role of the
24 VIA Character Strengths
in the Workplace**



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FOREWORD VIA MANAGEMENT

In the modern-day working world, where the ever-faster pace of change combines with growing demands to streamline, rationalize and optimize, we are all on the lookout for ways to take our performance to the next level and bring out the best in the people on our team. Unfortunately, most of us lack the tools we need to make this happen and, indeed, are woefully unaware of where or how to start. For some, the pressures of daily life mean they do not have the opportunity to give much thought to the people they work with – or themselves for that matter. For others, their first (and perfectly understandable) reflex is to try to pinpoint key shortcomings and address them through training or professional development.

Through it all, one truth remains clear: most of us have no clue where our real strengths lie, let alone how to leverage them. And yet, these are the areas that represent us at our best and where we have the most to offer. Why is that? Are we too modest? Do we take too much for granted? Do we gloss over too many things? When it comes right down to it, these are questions that only you can answer...

One thing is for sure, however: Peterson and Seligman's set of 24 character strengths, which you will become more familiar with in the pages ahead, and which was developed in 2004 by some of the top scientists in the field, is a simple, structured and straightforward way of putting a name to these elements. It is the result of many years of painstaking research and is still the most commonly used classification method of its kind in the world.

One of the drawbacks that is regularly cited about this classification, and one that I myself have encountered frequently in my research, is the difficulty in applying it to a workplace context. In this regard, the approach outlined in this guide is particularly helpful. It lets you adapt this classification for work purposes and even goes one step further by putting forward examples and recommendations designed to facilitate ongoing development. I can only commend the scope and quality of the work that the authors have done here: they have remained faithful to the spirit of the original classification while offering up a clear, well-defined and infinitely practical formula for the managers, consultants and professionals who will avail themselves of it.

To all the future users of this guide, I wish you a pleasant journey. Whether you are using it for the first time to identify your own strengths or you are working hand in hand with someone on their development path, the experience will undoubtedly be eye-opening and beyond your expectations.

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INTRODUCTION

For the past 30 years or so, the four of us have observed managerial strengths from various angles and perspectives, namely human resources, training and organizational development, clinical psychology, industrial psychology and coaching, combined with our personal experience as employees and managers. The guiding principle for us over the past two years of writing this guide has been fuelled by our passion for developing leaders and managers. We have seen for ourselves that these leaders have done some remarkable work with their teams and made it possible for their organizations to transform and contribute to the society around them. We have nothing but praise and admiration for what they have accomplished.

This guide features 24 character strength summaries, divided into six classes of core virtues, in accordance with the VIA framework. Each one-page description outlines a strength in a concise, compelling way. Individually, these descriptions do not take into account the interplay or combination of the various strengths. As a result, the way these strengths manifest themselves can vary significantly from one individual to the next, depending on their specific VIA profile.

Each description begins with the VIA Institute definition. The next “Optimal Use” section indicates how this character strength is deployed in a leader’s workplace. The “Overuse” section then examines the darker side of this strength or the contextual discrepancy that may undermine performance. The “Underuse and Impacts” section describes circumstances that can prevent a character strength from flourishing and keep leaders from being all they can be. The “Optimization” section suggests various avenues for leveraging each strength. Some are drawn from existing best practices, while others explore new paths. Each description concludes with an image or a phrase that encapsulates the ideas presented (identified at the bottom of each page as a “metaphor”). To make the reader’s job easier, we have used a circular symbol in the centre of the page to indicate the order in which each section should be read.

Managers can refer back to this guide at various points of their career to support their development and gain more insight into their signature strengths (of which there are between five and seven), which generally remain stable over time. This information is also critical in identifying the strategies required to maximize these strengths. The VIA Character Strengths Survey is free to download in several languages at www.viacharacter.org.

Whether you are a leader, manager or coach, the following pages will help you deepen and apply your understanding of these managerial strengths. They can also help make leadership more meaningful in a working world in a constant state of flux.

CHARACTER STRENGTHS & LEADERSHIP

WISDOM



OWL

A symbol of wisdom in many cultures. With their enormous eyes, owls seem eternally inquisitive. They are calm and observant. Perched on a branch or flying overhead, they have a good overview of what is going on around them and can easily zero in on things of interest to them. Owls are often used to represent learning.

ACANTHUS LEAVES

Symbolize the love of art. Acanthus leaves are a common element in classical architecture. They represent creativity (art) and wisdom (ancient cultures, philosophy and history).

1. CREATIVITY
2. CURIOSITY
3. JUDGMENT
4. LOVE OF LEARNING
5. PERSPECTIVE

My signature strength is:

CREATIVITY

My ability to think of new ways to do things is a crucial part of who I am. I am never content with doing something the conventional way if a better way is possible.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I help my team grow and encourage my colleagues to find a wide range of novel, inspiring solutions to address challenges. I dare to do things differently. I excel in complex, changing environments because I am good at forging ties in unconventional ways and looking at things from an alternative viewpoint. I am comfortable in situations of uncertainty and ambiguity.

OVERUSE

I may go off in all directions and lose sight of the end goal. If my fertile imagination goes unchecked in a project, it could feasibly prevent the team from reaching the delivery phase and compromise our timelines.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by:

- Using my imagination to come up with a diverse array of ideas
- Allowing myself to explore bold and innovative solutions
- Giving myself the time and the space to be creative and encourage team innovation
- Thinking of 10 different ways to tackle a challenge

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- In a more conventional environment where there are limited opportunities to explore new approaches and horizons
- Where asking questions is frowned upon
- Where new ideas are subject to hasty and/or harsh opinions, criticism or judgment

Impacts

- I may retreat into myself to come up with scenarios
- I may start sidestepping the rules so I don't feel boxed in

METAPHOR

Wearing different-coloured glasses

My signature strength is:

CURIOSITY

I am curious about everything. I am always asking questions, and I find all subjects and topics fascinating. I like exploration and discovery.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I explore new avenues and ask lots of questions to find out how things work. I strive to understand and relate to my team members and colleagues to get everyone pulling in the same direction. Ambiguity and new situations are an endless source of fascination for me.

OVERUSE

I might seem scattered or have an insatiable need to understand, which may make other people feel uncomfortable and on their guard. If I am too curious, I may not be able to stay focused on the task at hand and be inefficient in managing my time.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by:

- Brushing up on my ability to ask open-ended questions
- Taking the time to dive deeper into new challenges or potential projects
- Making mini-discoveries every day
- Framing meeting agendas as a series of questions rather than a list of topics

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- Where there is a lack of variety (repetitive tasks, highly defined roles, etc.)
- Where it is difficult to explore new paths
- Where questions are not welcome

Impacts

- I may grow bored and indifferent
- I may satisfy my curiosity in other ways, such as surfing the internet

METAPHOR

Variety is the spice of life

My signature strength is:

JUDGMENT

Thinking things through and examining them from all sides are important aspects of who I am. I do not jump to conclusions, and I rely only on solid evidence to make my decisions.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I consider every possibility and examine every consideration. I do not draw conclusions until I have reviewed all angles. This allows me to be as objective as possible. I analyze my projects in painstaking detail. I make sure I have all the facts before making a decision or taking a course of action.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by:

- Preparing my projects and backing them up with facts, based on key questions (Who? When? How? For what purpose?)
- Consulting people with opinions, beliefs and values that differ from my own
- Considering a range of scenarios before making a decision
- Giving myself planned “timeouts” during the day (for breathing, meditation, mindfulness, etc.) so my emotions don’t get the better of me

OVERUSE

I may seem overly rational, cerebral or logical. My interpersonal and conflict management skills may be somewhat stilted. On some level, I may be too critical and biased in my judgment. I may appear to be uninterested in other people’s opinions and fail to engage my colleagues to a suitable degree. Turning thoughts into action may be overwhelming for me, causing me to overanalyze things to the point of total inaction.

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- Where decisions are made based on a gut feeling rather than tangible, verifiable facts
- Where time constraints make in-depth analysis impossible

Impacts

- I may doubt the worth of the decisions made and be left in a state of chronic uncertainty

METAPHOR

The eye sees only what the mind is prepared to comprehend.

– Henri Bergson

My signature strength is:

LOVE OF LEARNING

I love learning new things, whether in a class or on my own. I have always loved school, reading and museums – anywhere and everywhere there is an opportunity to learn.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I am driven to learn new skills, acquire new knowledge and add new abilities to my repertoire. I like reading up on various topics. I am best suited to a role that requires a specific level of expertise or a professional designation. I like teaching and sharing my knowledge with my team and my colleagues.

OVERUSE

I may find the transition from technical expert to people manager difficult. I may have trouble delegating some of the workload in my specific area of expertise to other people.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by:

- Signing up for courses, seminars and conferences so I can pursue my passion for learning new things
- Developing and delivering training content
- Setting aside a block of time every day to read up on topics that spark my interest
- Engaging in regular conversation with colleagues to ask them about their work and learn more about what they do

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- Where I am not learning anything and there are no new challenges for me in my job
- Where I am no longer in contact with new sources of knowledge (websites, colleagues, clients, markets, etc.)

Impacts

- I may feel intellectually starved

METAPHOR

There is no such thing as failure. There is only learning.

My signature strength is:

PERSPECTIVE

Although I may not think of myself as wise, my friends hold this view of me.
They value my perspective on matters and turn to me for advice.
I have a way of looking at the world that makes sense to others and to myself.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I use my ability to see the big picture to bring complex things down to a simple level and frame situations in a way that make sense to me and the other people involved. I am drawn to projects and tasks where my experience and expertise will be fully utilized. A sense of perspective allows me to see things from different angles, which provides context for my work and is a source of support for colleagues in their projects.

OVERUSE

I may offer unsolicited advice. My contributions may not bring any added value to my team in terms of achieving shared goals. I may stand in the way of my employees' development by imposing my point of view rather than letting them express theirs.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by...

- Expanding my network of colleagues and confidants to tap into a variety of viewpoints
- Examining the context, the nature of the task and the desired results
- Thinking back to what motivated some of my recent decisions and actions that had particularly successful outcomes
- Learning from other people's experience by reading biographies, watching documentaries and drawing on their insights

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- Where things are being micromanaged, where people have strong, inflexible views and where information does not flow freely
- Where thinking, analysis, reflection and reasoning are discouraged (intellectual prison)

Impacts

- Frustration with the inability to contribute my input and the limited level of analysis
- Loss of purpose stemming from the repression of thoughts and actions

METAPHOR

Taking a hot-air balloon ride to see the whole forest instead of the individual trees

CHARACTER STRENGTHS & LEADERSHIP

COURAGE



WOLF

An adventurous, strong-willed animal guided by instinct. Wolves are clever and powerful. Like dogs, they are good-natured and playful.

BORAGE

A symbol of courage. It is said that Roman soldiers would drink a tea made of the leaves of this flower before going into battle. It is a source of omega-6 and reportedly an effective morale booster.

6. BRAVERY

7. PERSEVERANCE

8. HONESTY

9. ZEST

My signature strength is:

BRAVERY

I am a courageous person who does not shrink from threat, challenge, difficulty or pain.
I speak up for what is right even if there is opposition. I act on my convictions.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I can allay my worries and fears by staying true to my values, beliefs and convictions, even in the face of adversity. I am capable of stepping out of my comfort zone and trying something new. People describe me as someone who does not back down from a challenge or turn away from an obstacle. I tenaciously defend the interests of my team and my organization. I voice my opinion even if I know others do not share my point of view.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by...

- Visualizing the benefits and positive outcomes that may result from an act of courage (e.g., providing constructive feedback to an employee earlier in the process)
- Expressing an idea or a suggestion in a meeting to a person who is above me in the organization
- Asserting myself within a group
- Pushing myself to do something that is out of my comfort zone (e.g., partnering with someone who is not a natural fit with my profile)

OVERUSE

I may make decisions and take action too rashly without giving due consideration to the risks and impacts. I may fail to filter my feedback, which may sometimes hurt people's feelings. In some contexts, I may be less than tactful in my dealings with others. There is risk of my venturing too far beyond my personal and professional limits. I may be hard to manage.

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- Where the issues at stake do not resonate with me
- Where there is no adversity or where challenges are not sufficiently stimulating

Impacts

- I may seek out causes to embrace
- I may turn a situation into my own personal crusade

METAPHOR

True grit

My signature strength is:

PERSEVERANCE

No matter what the project, I “get it out the door” in timely fashion. I do not get distracted when I work, and I take satisfaction in completing tasks.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I bring medium- and long-term projects to fruition, regardless of the problems or challenges I encounter along the way. I also make decisions in line with established goals, and I work hard to overcome roadblocks as they arise. I am a go-getter and I actively encourage my team to “keep at it.” I feel a sense of pride and accomplishment when I finish a project, and it makes me feel good to honour my commitments.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by...

- Organizing my projects according to sub-goals, action plans and timelines
- Trying new tools to boost my efficiency
- Selecting one task every day and completing it
- Setting aside time during the day where I am not interrupted and I can get through as much of my workload as possible

OVERUSE

I may be so intent on keeping my nose to the grindstone to complete a project that I pay no heed to the political context or the impact on the people involved. I may come across as stubborn and even obsessive. If I am not careful, my work may tend to creep over into the other parts of my life. I may ask too much of my team and put my own position at risk.

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- Where my ability to act is restricted and I cannot finish what I have started
- Where I cannot see the overall purpose and outcomes of the energy I have invested in a project

Impacts

- I may get the impression that I am working without an end goal
- I may feel deflated and listless as a result

METAPHOR

As industrious as an ant

My signature strength is:

HONESTY

I am an honest person, not only by speaking the truth but by living my life in a genuine and authentic way. I am down to earth and without pretense; I am a “real” person.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I think, speak and act with authenticity. My behaviours are always in sync with my core values. People tend to follow in my footsteps and are inspired by who I am and what I do. I say out loud what everyone else is thinking. I keep my promises and honour my commitments to my colleagues.

OVERUSE

I may not be the most politically strategic person. I may reveal too much information without taking timing, context and people into consideration. My tendency to call things the way I see them may be too blunt, and people’s feelings may be hurt as a result. I may let my feelings of outrage and indignation get the better of me, without factoring in the collateral impacts, which often makes me the scapegoat.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by...

- Providing clear, sincere feedback to my employees and colleagues
- Having the courage to speak up and voice my disagreement during meetings
- Owning up to and fixing any mistakes I make
- Keeping my promises and honouring my commitments, even in extreme circumstances

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- Where people are not upfront in their intentions, go behind other people’s backs and act manipulatively
- Where there is no leeway to express discomfort and vulnerability
- Where people hide their real intents and filter or conceal certain reactions to give the appearance of being strong

Impacts

- I may not feel like myself
- My actions may be motivated by an overriding need for transparency and integrity

METAPHOR

I do what I say and say what I do

My signature strength is:

ZEST

Regardless of what I do, I approach it with excitement and energy. I never do anything halfway or halfheartedly. For me, life is an adventure.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I am full of enthusiasm and positive energy. The people I work with say my cheerfulness is contagious. I love my work and I feel it means something. I throw myself into everything I do with passion and purpose. My dynamic attitude inspires and motivates others. I have a great deal of physical and/or intellectual stamina.

OVERUSE

My exuberance can sometimes be overwhelming. I can be off and running with a project before my team even laces up. I may work my people too hard and overload my own agenda with projects that are too ambitious in scope.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by...

- Taking swift action to turn obstacles into opportunities
- Taking the time to greet people energetically every day
- Engaging in regular physical activity, maintaining a balanced diet and getting enough sleep
- Creating spaces where I can reconnect with the things I am passionate about

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- Where people try to rein me in, where challenges are lacklustre and where people tend to be passive and do the absolute minimum to get by
- Where I am held back or prevented from working at the fast pace I am used to

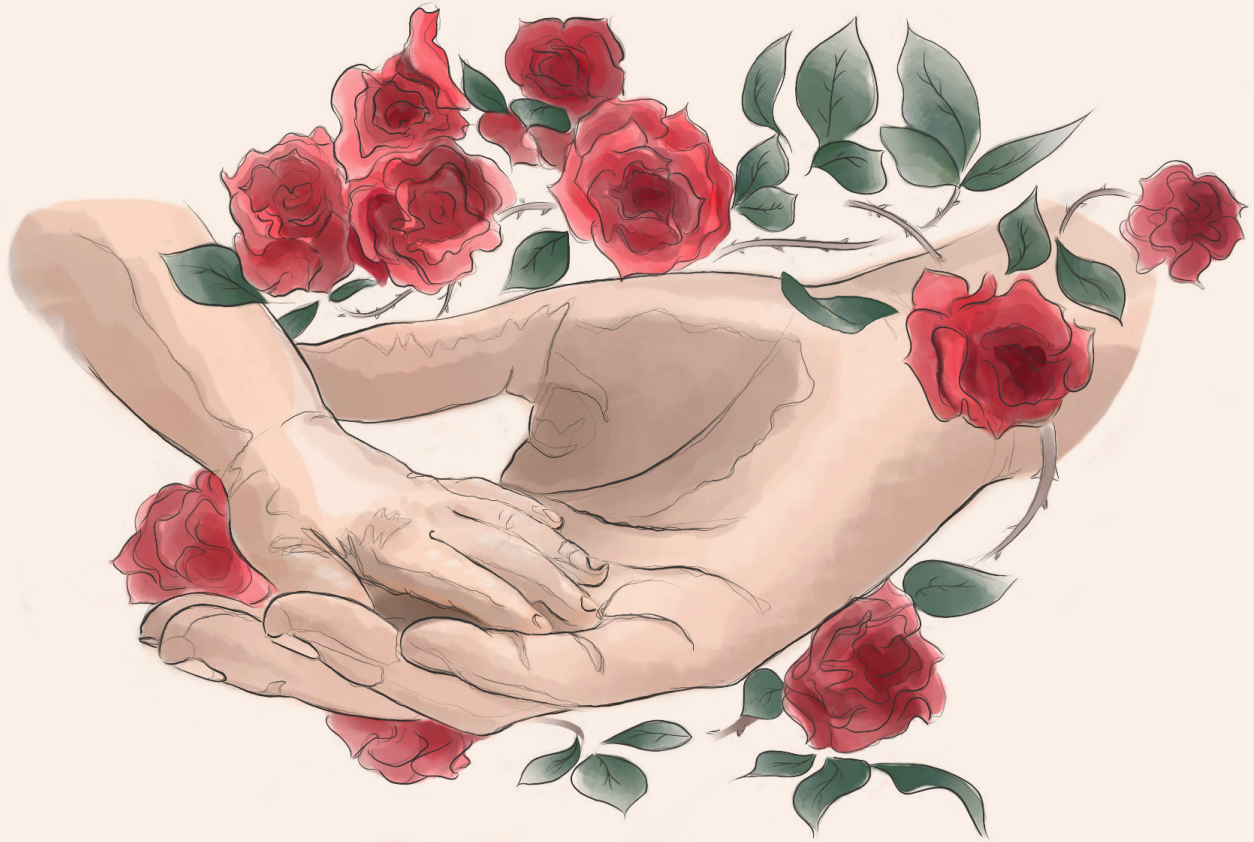
Impacts

- I may feel like a racehorse who is being kept from coming out of the gate

METAPHOR
Energizer bunny

CHARACTER STRENGTHS & LEADERSHIP

HUMANITY



HAND

The human hand is a universal tool and symbol for communication. Humanity refers to all human life on the planet as well as the specific characteristics that define what it is to be a human being.

Humanity also refers to certain personality traits, for example those that amplify the qualities or values considered to be essential to the human experience, such as kindness and generosity.

ROSE

A red rose represents love.

10. LOVE

11. KINDNESS

12. SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE



HUMANITY

My signature strength is:

LOVE

I value close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated. The people to whom I feel most close are the same people who feel most close to me.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I develop and maintain strong, close relationships with my staff members, my colleagues, my boss and others. I genuinely appreciate the people around me and vice versa.

OVERUSE

I may find it problematic to manage interpersonal conflicts and deal with difficult staff situations. I may become my employees' confidant and lose the objectivity I need to manage performance effectively. I may be inclined to prioritize other people's needs above my own. I may find it hard to put myself first and say no.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by...

- Setting aside regular blocks of time to check in with my employees
- Taking the time to understand people's individual strengths
- Focusing on my employees' growth and well-being
- Getting some "me time" in every day (breaks, small walks, etc.)

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- Where the environment feels cold and impersonal
- Where too much attention is paid to processes and not enough to people
- Where it is impossible to form close bonds

Impacts

- I may experience feelings of loneliness and isolation
- I may feel inhuman or automaton-like

METAPHOR

**It is only with the heart that one can see rightly;
what is essential is invisible to the eye. – Antoine de Saint-Exupéry**

My signature strength is:

KINDNESS

I am kind and generous to others, and I am never too busy to do a favour.
I enjoy doing good deeds for others, even if I do not know them well.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I am an altruist. I give without expecting anything in return. I am happy making other people happy. I am sensitive, considerate and empathetic. I try to keep all my interpersonal relationships balanced at all times. My leadership approach is firmly rooted in the employee and customer experience.

OVERUSE

I may come across as intrusive or overbearing. I may find it difficult to be firm in addressing performance and behavioural issues, as the lines between empathy and sympathy tend to blur. Indicating my limits and asserting my leadership may be challenging for me. I may neglect my own needs, which in turn may have an impact on my performance and sense of balance.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by...

- Doing something nice for a colleague with no ulterior motive
- Working to uphold the quality of my relationships through verbal and written communication
- Striving to maintain a balance between giving/receiving and offering/asking
- Helping someone in need without being asked to

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- Where wellness-oriented initiatives are undervalued or limited
- Where petty or mean behaviour is tolerated or even encouraged
- Where extreme capitalism is a barrier to treating other people with respect and consideration

Impact

- I may feel bad that I am not contributing to other people's well-being

METAPHOR

Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared. – Buddha



HUMANITY

My signature strength is:

SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

I am aware of the motives and feelings of other people. I know what to do to fit in to different social situations, and I know what to do to put others at ease.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I am good at reading other people's cues and interpreting information about their motivations and emotions. I am insightful. I adapt to different social contexts and different types of people with ease. I instinctively know what motivates teams and rallies them together. I am capable of establishing context-specific strategies. I am comfortable in a negotiation scenario and I actively seek out win-win solutions.

OVERUSE

I may overanalyze non-verbal cues and situations. I may misread people or be oversensitive to what they are feeling. I sometimes spend so much time thinking of potential impacts that I am slow to make decisions and too cautious in my actions. I may strike others as being manipulative because of my ability to adapt to other people's needs and situations.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by...

- Facilitating the integration of people into unfamiliar contexts (new team members, etc.)
- Paying attention to the non-verbal cues of the members of my team and reacting accordingly
- Constantly adapting my actions based on my reading of the situation
- Advocating compromise in challenging situations

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- Where people are hard to connect with and feedback is difficult to obtain
- Where lies, secrets and manipulative behaviours are tolerated
- Where my concerns cannot be discussed or shared

Impacts

- Interpersonal tension, misunderstandings and uncertainty
- Feeling of not being in control of a situation

METAPHOR

An interpersonal bat that uses sound waves as a radar system of sorts

CHARACTER STRENGTHS & LEADERSHIP

JUSTICE



BEE

Symbolizes teamwork and leadership. Bees have six legs, and their abdomen is divided into six parts. The number six is also significant in that their honeycombs are a series of hexagons. Proportionally speaking, bees are definitely fair and balanced creatures.

OLIVE WREATH

Justice is often symbolized by a scale encircled by a wreath of laurel leaves. However, since laurel leaves represent victory and olive leaves represent peace, the latter seems more suitable here as a depiction of fairness.

13. TEAMWORK

14. FAIRNESS

15. LEADERSHIP



JUSTICE

My signature strength is:

TEAMWORK

I excel as a member of a group. I am a loyal and dedicated teammate, I always do my share, and I work hard for the success of my group.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I can collaborate on and contribute to my team's success and help it achieve its mission. I see myself first and foremost as a team player. I have a keen sense of duty and loyalty. I enjoy connecting with other people. I encourage and support collaboration and teamwork, based on my values and the values of the organization.

OVERUSE

In my overzealous attempts to achieve consensus, I may find myself at a stalemate. I may also rely too much on other people's opinions – to the point of bending to the will of a group to avoid being excluded. I tend to underestimate the value of my contributions. It may occur to me from time to time that the team is much more important than I am.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by...

- Contributing to a team or an organization as an employee or volunteer
- Doing favours for other people
- Questioning others about their needs
- Recognizing the team's achievements

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- Where people work in silos, without any connections between them
- Where my duties isolate me from the rest of the organization, due to the nature of the job or the geographic location, and there are no technological tools in place to compensate

Impacts

- I may be persuaded to go against my values for the good of the team
- I may feel constrained and unable to reach my full potential or build momentum

METAPHOR

If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

My signature strength is:

FAIRNESS

Treating all people fairly is one of my abiding principles. I do not let my personal feelings bias my decisions about other people. I give everyone a chance.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I treat every person with dignity and respect. I apply the same rules to everyone, and I give the same chances and opportunities to my team and my colleagues. I judge people on their professional performance, not their personal characteristics.

OVERUSE

I may react strongly to situations where beliefs and values that I consider to be essential are not being upheld. I may adhere strictly to procedures without considering the nuances they involve in terms of workplace relationships. Standing up for a cause at any price could jeopardize my political capital and credibility.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by...

- By ensuring that criteria and procedures are documented, disseminated, implemented and enforced
- By asking all colleagues for their input
- By assigning a task to someone I do not usually delegate work to
- By identifying three strengths for each of my employees, including those with whom I have a challenging relationship

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- Where standards and regulations lack clarity, are not sufficiently geared toward the common good or seem unfair
- Where the criteria and conditions underlying decisions and actions are unclear and open the door to favouritism

Impacts

- Major discomfort and dissatisfaction
- Irrepressible impulse to address what seems incongruous and to take action in the name of the common good

METAPHOR

Absolute truth is a myth. Every truth is shaped by context.



JUSTICE

My signature strength is:

LEADERSHIP

I excel at the tasks of leadership: encouraging a group to get things done and preserving harmony within the group by making everyone feel included. I do a good job organizing activities and seeing that they happen.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I provide support to people in a fair, equitable way. I convey a vision and a sense of direction that facilitate the engagement and inclusion of all my team members. I bring things to the fore organically but not necessarily proactively. I have a positive influence on my teams. I have a strong sense of responsibility.

OVERUSE

I may let my leadership interfere with my team members' ability to be self-sufficient and my ability to collaborate with my peers. When confronted by objectives and patterns that are different from my own, I may come across as overbearing, inconsistent and controlling.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by...

- Conveying and/or developing a compelling collective vision
- Improving my delegation skills
- Clarifying everyone's roles and responsibilities in line with their strengths
- Initiating more courageous and considerate conversations

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- Where there is nobody to influence
- Where my colleagues do not believe in the cause and have no interest in embracing it
- Where I have to work alone

Impacts

- I may feel powerless and disheartened



METAPHOR

Orchestra conductor

CHARACTER STRENGTHS & LEADERSHIP

TEMPERANCE



RAM

Rams are a symbol of balance. In their habitat, marked by sharp cliffs, they manage to find this balance – cautiously, prudently and with great care. In some African traditions, a ram's horn is used as a symbol of humility in funeral rites.

VIOLET

The violet symbolizes humility and discretion, likely because of how its petals seem almost reluctant to bloom.

16. FORGIVENESS

17. HUMILITY

18. PRUDENCE

19. SELF-REGULATION

My signature strength is:

FORGIVENESS

I forgive those who have done me wrong. I always give people a second chance.
My guiding principle is mercy and not revenge.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I am able to give another chance to my employees and colleagues. I quickly go into solutions mode instead of playing the blame game. I am patient and understanding when mistakes arise. I do not hold a grudge. That would be a poor use of my time.

OVERUSE

I may become too permissive and give the impression that I am lax with my employees and lack managerial fortitude. I may create situations of inequity within my team if I do not address problem situations in a timely manner. I may be too tolerant of certain incongruities.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by...

- Guiding others to be quicker to consider alternative perspectives
- Giving myself a second chance when I make a mistake
- Developing a solutions-oriented mindset within my team rather than pointing fingers
- Being more self-compassionate

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- Where the situation or roles lead people to classify, categorize, order and judge others, regardless of the criteria
- Where it is impossible to make honest mistakes or where the consequences for offences are too severe or too broad

Impact

- I may feel particularly isolated
- I may experience a loss of meaning

METAPHOR

Knowing how to move on

My signature strength is:

HUMILITY

I do not seek the spotlight, preferring to let my accomplishments speak for themselves.
I do not regard myself as special, and others recognize and value my modesty.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I let my accomplishments and achievements speak for themselves. I prefer to shine the spotlight on my team rather than myself. I do not seek out praise or compliments. I am genuinely interested in what my colleagues have to say. I take their proposals into consideration and I enjoy providing them with support. I feel that the strength of a group is more than the sum of its individual contributions. I value my team's successes and am ready to shoulder the blame when results are not up to par.

OVERUSE

I may forget myself while I am making sure others' needs are being met. I may even underestimate my own value. I may be hesitant to take the floor or assume a leadership mantle when comes time to do so. I may seem to lack self-assurance, which may undermine my colleagues' confidence in me.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by...

- Aiming to achieve a balance between my natural modesty and the need to be visible in my efforts to increase their impact
- Listening carefully to others
- Recognizing the contributions of my co-workers to fuel motivation
- Acknowledging the positive effects of humility

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- Where I have to sell myself, call attention to my achievements and show people what I am capable of doing
- Where the environment or people make it difficult to maintain a low-key, under-the-radar posture

Impacts

- I may become uncomfortable or embarrassed and feel like I am an impostor
- I may not get my point of view across

METAPHOR

Nelson Mandela

My signature strength is:

PRUDENCE

I am a careful person, and my choices are consistently prudent ones.
I do not say or do things that I might later regret.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I reflect carefully on the situation and get a good read of the environment to manage the risks and impacts of my decisions and my efforts. I analyze the interests at stake and consider the benefits and drawbacks. My colleagues trust me: they know I treat any information they share with me respectfully and discreetly.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by...

- Stepping back to envision all the possible short-, medium- and long-term impacts of a decision
- Developing the habit of defining goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely (SMART)
- Daring to take calculated risks
- Springing into action after I have completed my analysis

OVERUSE

My slow and deliberate approach to decision-making may mean I miss out on certain business opportunities. I may avoid taking risks and deter my colleagues from being more proactive. I may, out of a fear of making a mistake, fixate on potential obstacles and scenarios. I may come across as inflexible and rigid. In my management duties, my knowledge of my colleagues' personal situations may leave me feeling like my hands are tied.

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- Where I am asked to make a decision quickly without thoroughly analyzing the consequences, or where I have to rely on my intuition and patchy information
- Where I am asked to overlook environmental, financial and societal impacts in my decisions

Impacts

- I may struggle with the idea of trusting my instinct
- I may become anxious
- I may be afraid of making mistakes and being held accountable for them

METAPHOR

A quiet force

My signature strength is:
SELF-REGULATION

I self-consciously regulate what I feel and what I do. I am a disciplined person.
 I am in control of my appetites and my emotions, not vice versa.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I am calm, confident and unshakeable, even in trying or crisis situations. I control my thoughts and emotions to be able to choose a suitable course of action. I am able to change my habits when they are not optimal. My self-discipline is such that I have influence over whether or not we achieve the goals we have set within the established timeframes. My attitude and patience help ensure a secure environment for the team members and colleagues I work with.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by...

- Using management tools designed to support my team and my organization
- Assuming leadership in an urgent or crisis situation
- Helping my team stay focused on their objectives
- Setting aside “me time” in my schedule to have fun, enjoy myself and get some rest

OVERUSE

I may seem cold, rigid, insensitive, routine-oriented, controlling and incapable of adapting. I may lack spontaneity and be reluctant to grant teams any extra autonomy or accountability.

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- Where the context is ill-defined, ill-structured, ill-disciplined and ill-oriented
- Where there is a great deal of flux and ambiguity
- Where action plans are not heeded

Impacts

- I may feel frustrated, unsettled or worried
- I may let my need for structure and control take over

METAPHOR

Be the captain of your own ship

CHARACTER STRENGTHS & LEADERSHIP

TRANSCENDENCE



UNICORN

This mythical creature has long been a symbol of purity and grace. A belief in unicorns continues to endure. In popular culture, unicorns are said to have fantastic powers: uncanny wisdom, the ability to talk, divination and the sensing of imminent danger.

MAGNOLIA

A yellow or white flower, which represents either the sun or the moon. Magnolia bushes have been around for millennia. In fact, they were one of the planet's first flowering plants. A timeless symbol of beauty and purity, they are also a spring flower, embodying the hope that emerges after a long, cold winter. Giving someone flowers as a gift is a symbol of gratitude.

20. APPRECIATION OF BEAUTY AND EXCELLENCE

21. GRATITUDE

22. HOPE

23. HUMOUR

24. SPIRITUALITY

My signature strength is:

APPRECIATION OF BEAUTY AND EXCELLENCE

I notice and appreciate beauty, excellence and skilled performance in all domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I am attentive to the skills, abilities and excellence demonstrated by the people I work with. I have a knack for recognizing and grooming talent within my team. I help my team members improve their performance and aim for excellence. I make sure my surroundings are esthetically pleasing and use this to optimize the environment, collaborative experience and well-being in the workplace.

OVERUSE

I may have trouble delegating, fearing that the results might fall short of my expectations. I may push my teams too hard and risk exposing them (and myself) to burnout. I may be a perfectionist to a fault, and my time and priority management skills may be lacking. I may be hypersensitive to comments and criticism.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by...

- Taking the time to appreciate the beautiful things in life, nature, architecture, art, etc.
- Keeping track of my achievements and my team's achievements in my journal
- Taking the time to appreciate the actions that encourage people to do better and be better, as individuals and as a team
- Create an "inspiration file" (pictures, articles, journal entries, benchmarks, etc.) highlighting success factors, achievements and examples of excellence

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- Where excellence is undervalued
- Where the lowest common denominator seems to be the norm
- Where awareness of beauty and excellence are underappreciated or even derided

Impacts

- I may lose motivation because I am unable to enjoy my experiences and results to the fullest
- I may be less inclined to step up and contribute

METAPHOR

Beauty and the Beast

My signature strength is:

GRATITUDE

I am aware of the good things that happen to me, and I never take them for granted. My friends and family members know that I am a grateful person because I always take the time to express my thanks.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I am grateful for the challenges I can overcome and for the opportunity I have to develop my team. I am quick to give positive feedback and I recognize the contributions of my employees in many different ways (e.g., coffee and muffins, outings, greeting cards). I pay attention to success factors and I make sure I take every opportunity to express my appreciation. I am also receptive to acknowledgement from others.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by...

- Making a habit of jotting down three good things that happen to me during the day
- Starting meetings by acknowledging people's recent successes
- Spontaneously thanking co workers
- Providing regular feedback to team members emphasizing the positive aspects of their work

OVERUSE

I may be seen as someone who is lenient. Some may think I don't address problems directly and avoid dealing with certain situations. Being effusive in giving thanks and praise, or doing it indiscriminately, can actually send the opposite message. I may appear to use flattery and compliments as a way of influencing others and winning their favour for my personal gain, to the detriment of my team or my organization.

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- Where I am prevented from expressing gratitude by time or logistical constraints
- Where people are adverse to the expression of positive feedback and recognition

Impacts

- I may feel like I am being judged or misunderstood
- I may censor myself and feel upset

METAPHOR

Common courtesy

My signature strength is:

HOPE

I expect the best in the future, and I work to achieve it.
I believe that the future is something that I can control.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I make it point to work toward positive and achievable results. I have a positive outlook of the future and I firmly believe I can achieve my vision. I trust in my team's capacity to attain the objectives we have set for ourselves, even if there are obstacles in the way. My optimism is contagious, motivating and inspiring.

OVERUSE

I may overlook certain obstacles and not be as attuned as I should to the concerns of my team and my colleagues. My expectations may seem unrealistic. My optimism may cloud my vision of certain strategic aspects.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by...

- Working every day on a project that excites me, be it personal, interpersonal or professional
- Sharing my optimism for certain ideas or undertakings around me
- Regularly identifying stimulating objectives for myself and my team
- Looking to the future with optimism and identifying various means for moving forward

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- Where I am surrounded by pessimistic, cynical people who dampen my enthusiasm
- Where the time horizon is limited to the short term (day to day) or where there is a lack of clarity
- Where there is a lack of positive vision

Impacts

- I may be disappointed to miss out on what might have been possible

METAPHOR

Seeing the glass half-full

My signature strength is:

HUMOUR

I like to laugh and tease. Bringing smiles to other people is important to me.
I try to see the light side of all situations.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, I can defuse tension and reduce conflict in difficult circumstances. I often tell funny stories related to potentially challenging situations. I have a knack for using self-deprecating humour. I create a pleasant, enjoyable and efficient work environment conducive to creativity and solutions for my team and my colleagues.

OVERUSE

I may not be taken seriously by some people and it may be more difficult for me to be respected as an authority figure. I may make the mistake of telling jokes that are inappropriate or out of context and end up inadvertently offending someone. I may bother some people who think levity is a waste of time or shows a lack of commitment.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by...

- Letting myself laugh with the people I work with and have fun at work
- Using my sense of humour judiciously to defuse stressful situations
- Using humour to develop my network of contacts
- Allowing team members with a natural sense of humour to contribute to creating a relaxed atmosphere when appropriate

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- If I am in a serious environment where people hold back their emotions and even disapprove of other people showing theirs
- Where my co-workers are unwilling or unable to laugh at themselves or publicly frown upon displays of positive energy

Impacts

- I may not be as energetic as usual and become bored with my job
- I may use sarcasm and cynicism to express myself

METAPHOR

Humour is the healthiest form of rationality.

– Jacques Brel

My signature strength is:

SPIRITUALITY

I have strong and coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe. I know where I fit in the larger scheme.

My beliefs shape my actions and are a source of comfort to me*.

In my capacity as a leader...

OPTIMAL USE

At my best, my professional endeavours contribute to the mission and values of my organization and are consistent with my own values. As a leader, I can articulate a mission that inspires my colleagues and gives purpose to their work. I can reframe objectives and my team's workload to focus on what is essential and meaningful. True success for me is at a higher level and has a society-wide impact.

OVERUSE

I may come across as stubborn and unwilling to make concessions when comes time to make decisions that are not aligned with my values or the values of the organization. I may judge others who do not share my values. My deep-seated commitment to my mission may cause me to lose sight of the big picture, make bad decisions and/or cause team members to disengage.

OPTIMIZATION

I can accentuate this strength by...

- Examining the reason and meaning of my actions and the actions of my team
- Making sure my core values are closely aligned with the way I apply them to my work
- Distinguishing between success in life and a successful life
- Volunteering for a cause I believe in

UNDERUSE CONTEXTS

- Where people are unreceptive to religious and spiritual beliefs
- Where the environment is not conducive to reflection

Impacts

- I may feel like my source of inspiration is being infringed upon
- I may keep silent or try to remain inconspicuous
- I may feel disheartened

* In recent years, psychology research has tended to draw a distinction between religiousness and spirituality. Religiousness is an individual's belief in the divine, accompanied by some manner of religious practice. Spirituality is linked to the intentional development of human strengths and virtues. In our view, the VIA analysis seems to focus more on religiousness.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1

Identify a professional achievement that had a positive impact on you.

2

How did your signature strengths contribute to the results?

3

Do you sometimes rely too much on any one of your signature strengths to your potential detriment?

4

How could you improve how you utilize your strengths the next time you are up against a challenge?

CONCLUSION

These 24 character strength summaries have been developed for use by leaders and managers in a workplace context based on the body of knowledge associated with the VIA inventory.

Our goal is to contribute to a better understanding of the character strengths associated with leadership through an examination of optimal use, overuse and underuse in a personal, organizational and societal context.

We are also committed to helping managers hone specific strengths by opening up various possibilities for them to explore.

We hope to give back to the community at large by making our findings and insights available as a free download.

We would be grateful for any feedback or comments you might have so we can keep making adjustments and improvements to this guide.



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