

<b>Subject</b>	<b>PSYCHOLOGY</b>
<b>Paper No and Title</b>	<b>PAPER No.9: Positive Psychology</b>
<b>Module No and Title</b>	<b>MODULE No.5: Character, Strengths and Virtues</b>
<b>Module Tag</b>	<b>PSY_P9_M5</b>

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## 1. Learning Outcomes

After studying this module, you shall be able to

- Know about character strengths and virtues and
- Learn the various classification systems of character strengths and virtues

## 2. Introduction

Over the past years psychologists and psychiatrists have focused more on what is wrong with people. The process of living has largely been ignored. The key aspects of good living like hope, faith, love etc have not been focused upon. Karl Meninger made an effort to bring about a change in the way health care professionals looked at diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of mental illness. He proposed that clinicians should do away with the old labels of sickness and develop a simple diagnostic system which emphasized process rather than states or conditions.

Psychologists have now also started focusing on studying human strengths and virtues. Character strengths are important components of positive living. Linley and Harrington (2006) define strength as a capacity for feeling, thinking and behaving in a way that allows optimal functioning in the pursuit of valued outcomes.

Work on the classification of illnesses has a long history as compared to the classification of strengths. Two classifications have been widely accepted: The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) and the International Classification of Diseases (ICD). However, no classification of strengths has received such wide acceptance. In the recent past three main classification systems have been developed which are discussed below.

## 3. The Clifton Strengths Finder Themes

Clifton wanted to study what is right with people. He believed that talents could be studied in various settings. He stated that talents are natural. According to him, strengths are extensions of talent and it combines talent with related knowledge and skills.

He also believed that success is closely related to personal talents, strengths and analytical intelligence. Clifton and his colleagues identified about three dozen themes of talents.

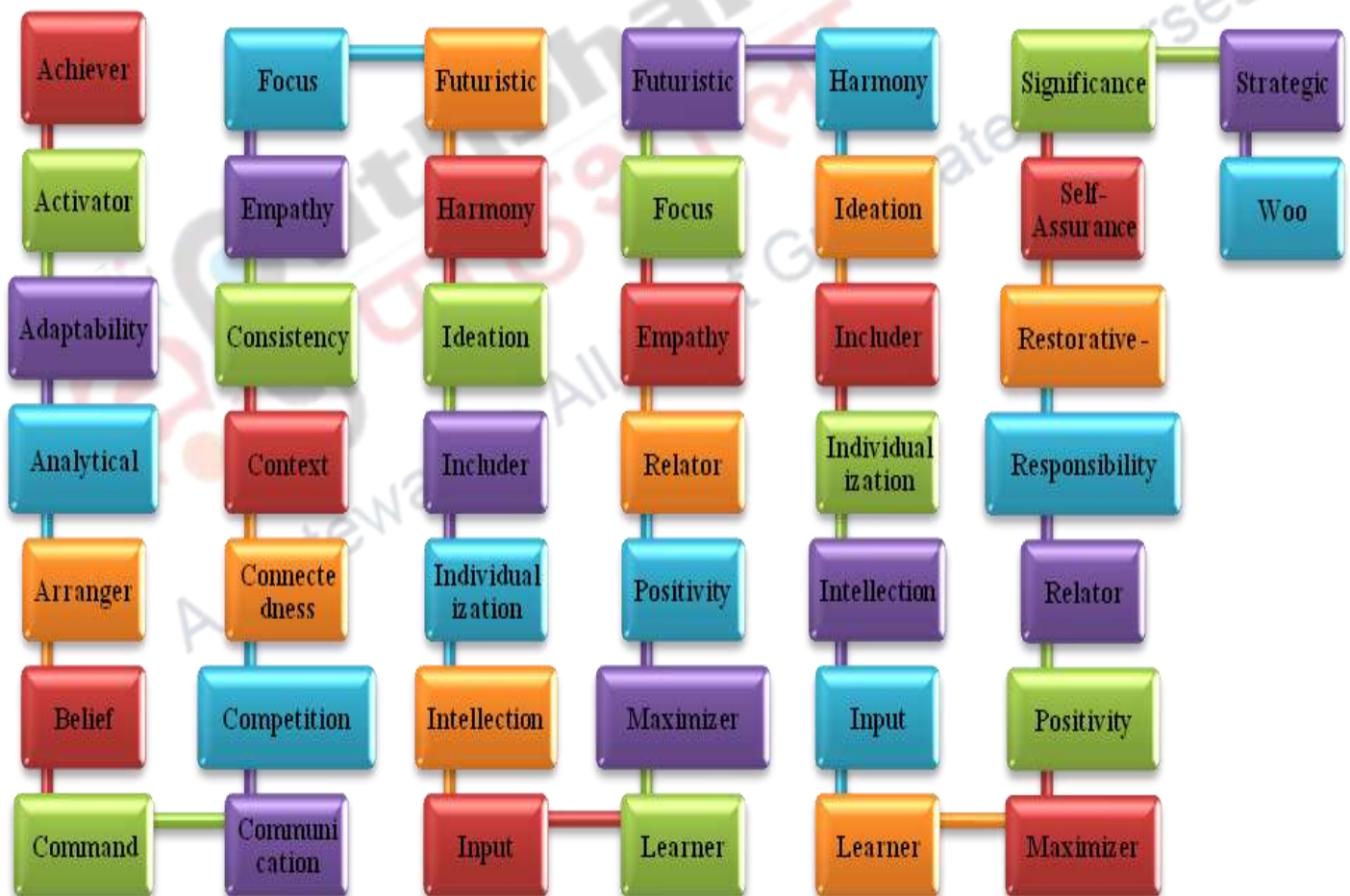
Don Clifton and Martin Seligman



### The Clifton Strengths Finder Themes

- **Achiever** – People strong in this theme have a constant drive for accomplishing tasks. They like being busy and productive
- **Activator** - People strong in this theme act to start things in motion and turn thoughts into actions
- **Adaptability** - People strong in this theme easily accommodate to changes in plan. They prefer to go with the flow
- **Analytical** - People strong in this theme require data to make sense of their circumstances.
- **Arranger** - People strong in this theme enjoy juggling many tasks and variables to reach an outcome
- **Belief** - People strong in this theme attempt to find meaning behind everything that they undertake
- **Command** - People strong in this theme take up positions of leadership
- **Communication** - People strong in this theme use words to inspire action and are good conversationalists
- **Competition** - People strong in this theme thrive on competition to be successful
- **Connectedness** - People strong in this theme seek to unite others
- **Consistency** - People strong in this theme believe in treating everyone the same
- **Context** - People strong in this theme use the past to make better decisions in the present
- **Deliberative** - People strong in this theme proceed with caution, and always seek to have a plan
- **Developer** - People strong in this theme recognize and enhance the hidden potential in others
- **Discipline** - People strong in this theme seek to make sense of the world by imposing order
- **Empathy** - People strong in this theme understand the emotions of others
- **Focus** - People strong in this theme require a clear sense of direction
- **Futuristic** - People strong in this theme have a keen sense of the future
- **Harmony** - People strong in this theme seek to avoid conflict through consensus
- **Ideation** - People strong in this theme are able at finding underlying concepts that unite ideas
- **Includer** - People strong in this theme instinctively work to include everyone
- **Individualization** - People strong in this theme tap the uniqueness of individuals
- **Input** - People strong in this theme constantly collect information for future use

- **Intellection** - People strong in this theme enjoy thinking and thought-provoking conversation
- **Learner** - People strong in this theme learn new things to feel successful
- **Maximizer** - People strong in this theme try to take things from great to excellent
- **Positivity** - People strong in this theme try to look at the bright-side to any situation
- **Relator** - People strong in this theme prefer fewer, but deeper relationships
- **Responsibility** - People strong in this theme follow their commitments
- **Restorative** - People strong in this theme love to solve difficult problems
- **Self-Assurance** - People strong in this theme stay true to their beliefs, and have confidence in their ability
- **Significance** - People strong in this theme want to be seen as significant by others
- **Strategic** - People strong in this theme are able to see a clear direction even in a complex situation
- **Woo** – WOO stands for winning over other



The Clifton StrengthsFinder Themes



In 1999, an online version of the Clifton Strengths Finder came up which had 35 themes. It had 180 item pairs and 34-theme version.

Gallup developed a new classification system for talent and a measure for children and youth (10-14 years). This is known as the Clifton Youth Strengths Explorer which was released in 2006.

#### 4. The VIA Classification of Virtues and Strengths

Peterson and Seligman state that there is a language in psychology to talk about the negative aspects and what is wrong with people but an equal terminology to describe human strengths is lacking. The VIA classification provides such a language and provides a strength based approach to diagnosis and treatment.

The VIA classification began with the question of defining the concepts of strength and highest potential. It also aimed to assess the efficacy of a positive youth development program.

Peterson, Seligman and other colleagues concluded that character included virtues, character strengths and situational themes.

#### Distinguishing Virtues, Character Strengths, and Situational Themes

**Virtues** are the core characteristics which are valued such as wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. These six categories of virtue are considered to be universal. If a person possesses these virtues at above-threshold values he is considered to be of good character.

**Character strengths** are the psychological processes that display the virtues.

Situational themes are habits by virtue of which people manifest certain character strengths in given situations.

**Themes** differ from character strengths in since they are located in specific situations. Themes in themselves are neither good nor bad; they can be used to achieve strengths but can also be used for wrong purposes.

#### The VIA Classification of Virtues and Strengths

##### 1. **Wisdom and Knowledge** – Cognitive strengths related to the acquisition and use of knowledge

- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Judgment
- Love of Learning
- Perspective

2. **Courage** – Emotional strengths involving the will to achieve goals in the face of difficulties

- Bravery
- Perseverance
- Honesty
- Zest

3. **Humanity** - Interpersonal strengths

- Love
- Kindness
- Social Intelligence

4. **Justice**

- Teamwork
- Fairness
- Leadership



**Virtues as listed in the VIA Classification**

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

- Forgiveness
- Humility
- Prudence
- Self-Regulation

**6. Transcendence** - Strengths that make connections to the larger universe and provide meaning

- Gratitude
- Hope
- Humor
- Spirituality
- Appreciation of beauty and excellence

**Source:** <http://www.viacharacter.org/www/Character-Strengths/VIA-Classification>

## 5. The Search Institute's Developmental Assets

The Search Institute's Developmental Assets (Benson et al., 1998) help in assessing the factors that help a child in dealing with life's problems. These assets are considered positive experiences and qualities.

The assets are divided into two groups of 20 assets each known as internal assets and external assets. The external assets are the positive experiences that develop through interactions with others while the internal assets are personal qualities that aid in positive development.

The Search Institute's Profile of Student Life: Attitudes and behaviors was developed in 1989 and revised in 1996 by Benson et al (1998).

Looking at the three classifications of strengths and virtues presented above, it can be seen that positive psychologists now focus more on achieving a balance in terms of giving attention to both weaknesses and strengths which will help in providing a more accurate view of humans.

To conclude, it is very important to identify the character strengths in individuals. Interventions can then be planned so as to enhance the strengths. These character strengths are very important and have implications in life satisfaction, positive affect, achievement, workplace, mental health, mindfulness, wellness etc.

The development of these character strengths will help in providing a buffer against mental health issues and will facilitate the development of positive individuals which will in turn lead to development of positive communities.

## 6. Summary

- Over the past years psychologists and psychiatrists have focused more on what is wrong with people. However, now psychologists have also started focusing on studying human strengths and virtues.
- In the recent past three main classification systems of virtues and strengths have been developed.
- Clifton and his colleagues identified many themes of talent involving enduring, positive personal qualities.
- Peterson, Seligman and other colleagues decided that components of character included virtues, character strengths and situational themes.

- The Search Institute's Developmental Assets are considered positive experiences and qualities. The assets are divided into two groups of 20 assets each known as internal assets and external assets.

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