# Positive Character Strengths in Middle-rung Army Officers and Managers in Civilian Sector

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The present study attempts towards comparing the 24 character strengths in leaders in the Indian Army and the Civilian Sector. The middle rung army officers were expected to score higher than the civilian managers on the character strengths of bravery, creativity, perseverance, social intelligence, self regulation, leadership and citizenship. The character strengths were measured using Values-in-action Inventory of Strengths. The mean scores were calculated for all the 24 character strengths in army officers and civilian managers, respectively. t-ratios were computed to identify the significant differences between the army officers and civilian managers on the character strengths. The results revealed that both army officers and civilian managers scored high in all the character strengths, and there were significant differences among army officers and bank managers on 14 out of the 24 character strengths that can be attributed to their disparate work environments and organizational expectations. The results of the present study can be used retrospectively for selection and training purposes in the army and civilian sector.

Army life has huge differences compared to civilian life. Work activities, daily work schedules, education level and daily expectations for members of the military are very different from those in the civilian world. Military personnel form a distinct group with collective action based on shared interests linked to survival in vocation and combat, with purposes and values that are more defined and narrow than within civil society. Compared to civilian work settings, army has peculiar work environment and unique stressors like frequent relocation and extended deployments (Kilmann, Pondy & Slevin, 1976). One needs to be able to depend on colleagues for mutual survival. Decision-making has more life and death consequences than in most civilian professions. Due to the difference in the kind of work, the personality characteristics required for success in the army may be quite different from the ones required for success in the civilian work sector. For example, Atwater, Penn and Rucker (1991) found that military leaders differ from civilian leaders on a number of personal characteristics like perseverance, inspiration and self confidence. Recently, research in this area has been given a new direction by Positive Psychologists who have taken up an endeavour to study differences in character of army personnel and civilians.

Although character and virtue have been discussed since Aristotle (MacIntyre, 1999), organizational research is just beginning to assess the contribution of virtues and strengths within the realm of leadership. Excellence starts with leaders of good and strong character who engage in the entire process of leadership. Army-men and civilians need to have a strong character to be effective as officers and managers in their work environment respectively. Unfortunately, the assessment of character is presently

quite limited in society in general, and in the military in particular. Peterson and Seligman (2004) decided that components of character include virtues and strengths of character. Virtues are the core traits valued necessary for an individual to possess good character. These six broad categories of virtue emerge consistently from historical surveys: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. Strengths of character (24 in all) are the psychological ingredients - processes or mechanisms - that define the virtues. Viewing leadership through the contextual lens of virtues and strengths appears to be an unexplored topic (Thun, 2008). There is a marked lack of such research in India. The present study seeks to address this lacuna by comparing the 24 character strengths in leaders in the Indian Army and the Civilian Sector.

Matthews, Peterson, and Kelly (2006) had all members of the entering West Point Military Academy's class of 2009 self-rate themselves on the 24 character strengths. Cadets who successfully completed the training were higher than those who left, on nine strengths: bravery, optimism, persistence, enthusiasm, fairness, honesty, leadership, self-control, and teamwork. Only one published study has empirically interrogated a full complement of virtues and strengths of character within the rubric of leadership, and this was conducted only within the demographic band of 18-21 year olds in military leadership training in the USA. Matthews, Eid, Kelly, Bailey, and Peterson (2006) compared 103 army cadets at West Point training academy in the US, 141 Norwegian Naval Academy cadets, and 838 U.S. civilians aged 18–21 studying in colleges on scores on the Values-in-Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS). Military cadets manifested a different profile of the 24 strengths than their civilian counterparts, scoring high on strengths like teamwork, persistence, honesty and bravery. West Point cadets were significantly higher than the US

civilians on character strengths such as bravery, persistence, teamwork, curiosity, social intelligence, self regulation and leadership. Also, West Point cadets were more similar in their rank-ordering of character strengths to Norwegian cadets than they were to their own fellow American citizens.

Pollay (2006) administered the VIA-IS to sixty-two national presidents of AIESEC, the largest student organization in the world. Hope, curiosity, perseverance, leadership, teamwork and fairness were successfully predicted to be represented in the leadership profile. The study suggested that the VIA-IS may be an important tool for organizations which are interested in understanding the strengths profile of their leaders.

Park (2005) conducted a content analysis of the citations accompanying the Medal of Honour given to 123 soldiers, sailors or airmen since World War I. The analysis looked for mention of the 24 strengths of character. These awards were given across branch, age, rank and wars. Most typically, they were given for doing one's job despite danger and threat of death. Bravery (at 100%) was the trait most frequently included in the citations followed by self regulation (80%), persistence (67%), leadership (49%), teamwork (39%) and creativity (18%).

Ruch, Furrer and Huwyler (2004) administered VIA-IS on 275 executives and employees of various Swiss companies in the age range of 20-62 years. Executives in these companies achieved higher scores in three character strengths- leadership, open-mindedness and bravery (which might be obvious strengths for executives). Employees instead seem to be nicer and also more appreciative of the beauty of objectives and nature than executives are, which live rather in an environment of higher competition and more realism. Partly the same strengths distinguish among different levels in managerial position of executives, namely open-mindedness, love of learning,

perspective and modesty.

### Objective:

The present study aims to compare twenty four character strengths (as proposed by Positive Psychologists Peterson and Seligman (2004) possessed by middle rung army officers and managers in the civilian sector.

### Hypothesis:

The middle rung army officers are expected to score higher than the civilian managers on the character strengths of bravery, creativity, perseverance, social intelligence, self regulation, leadership and citizenship.

## Method

### Sample:

It comprised of 24 middle rung army officers (Majors, Lieutenant Colonels and Colonels) and 24 assistant general managers and chief managers from the civilian sector (bank managers in public sector). The army officers included in the sample were taken from the fighting arms (Artillery, Infantry and Armoured) in the south-western command. The civilian managers included in the sample were taken from branches of State bank of India and Bank of India in Chandigarh and Mohali. The reason for including officers and managers of the above mentioned ranks in the sample is the fact that they are the ones who are at a leadership position and monitor a group of people who work under them. The necessary permission from the Integrated Headquarter of Army Directorate General, Military Intelligence Branch, has been obtained.

### Tools:

The Values-in-action Inventory of Strengths was used to compare the 24 positive character strengths in the army officers and civilian managers. The VIA-IS is a 240-item self-report questionnaire that uses 5-point Likert-scales to measure the degree to which respondents endorse strength-relevant statements about themselves (1 = very much unlike me to 5 = very much like me). Each of the 24 strengths of character assessed by the VIA-IS is measured with 10 items. There are a total of 24 strengths of character in the VIA Classification corresponding to the 6 major virtues. Responses are averaged within scales, with higher numbers reflecting more of the strength. All the scales have satisfactory internal consistency measured by Cronbach's alpha coefficient (ás > .70) and substantial test–retest correlations (rs =.70). Coefficients of variation range from .15 to .25, implying acceptable variability (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

## Results and Discussion

The present study reveals that both middle rung army officers and civilian managers have scored in the upper range of all the 24 character strengths (Responses were averaged within scales, with higher numbers reflecting more of the strength, according to Quick & Wright, 2010). The results show that there are significant differences among army officers and bank managers on the following character strengths- creativity, curiosity, open mindedness, love of learning, perspective, bravery, perseverance, kindness, love, social intelligence, citizenship, leadership, forgiveness and self regulation.

A further probe into the mean scores reveals that out of these 14 character strengths on which significant differences have been found, army officers have scored higher than the civilians on 11 character strengths, namely, creativity, curiosity, open mindedness, love of learning, perspective, bravery, perseverance, social intelligence, citizenship, leadership and self regulation, thus supporting the hypothesis.

And, the civilians have scored higher than the army officers on 3 character strengths, namely, kindness, love and forgiveness. The significant differences in the character strengths manifested in army officers and civilians may be attributed to their

**Table 1. Mean, SD, t-ratios and p values of Middle rung Army Officers and Civilian Managers on the 24 Positive Psychology Character Strengths**

| Character Strengths | Army M | SD | Civil M | SD | t-Value | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Creativity | 4.25 | 0.234 | 3.99 | 0.544 | 2.11* | 0.04* |
| Curiosity | 4.32 | 0.248 | 4.02 | 0.236 | 4.11* | 0.000* |
| Open mindedness | 4.23 | 0.339 | 3.92 | 0.407 | 2.81* | 0.007* |
| Love-of-learning | 4.37 | 0.353 | 3.71 | 0.323 | 6.70* | 0.000* |
| Perspective | 4.27 | 0.251 | 4.03 | 0.329 | 2.83* | 0.007* |
| Bravery | 4.18 | 0.279 | 3.98 | 0.358 | 2.11* | 0.040* |
| Perseverance | 4.27 | 0.252 | 4.02 | 0.428 | 3.12* | 0.003* |
| Intelligence | 4.3 | 0.230 | 4.13 | 0.387 | 1.84 | 0.07 |
| Vitality | 4.28 | 0.273 | 4.27 | 0.362 | 0.13 | 0.89 |
| Kindness | 4.03 | 0.361 | 4.32 | 0.431 | 2.49* | 0.01* |
| Love | 4.26 | 0.253 | 4.38 | 0.35 | 2.40* | 0.02* |
| Social Intelligence | 4.1 | 0.318 | 3.91 | 0.294 | 2.22* | 0.03* |
| Citizenship | 4.22 | 0.297 | 3.97 | 0.422 | 2.36* | 0.02* |
| Fairness | 4.27 | 0.268 | 4.37 | 0.346 | 1.11 | 0.27 |
| Leadership | 4.11 | 0.294 | 4.00 | 0.341 | 2.43* | 0.01* |
| Forgiveness | 4.18 | 0.263 | 4.35 | 0.480 | 2.89* | 0.005* |
| Humility | 4.18 | 0.305 | 4.22 | 0.463 | 0.40 | 0.69 |
| Prudence | 4.18 | 0.290 | 4.04 | 0.426 | 1.32 | 0.19 |
| Self regulation | 4.15 | 0.401 | 3.88 | 0.306 | 2.58* | 0.01* |
| Appreciation of beauty | 4.21 | 0.205 | 4.31 | 0.363 | 0.95 | 0.34 |
| Gratitude | 4.28 | 0.214 | 4.37 | 0.355 | 1.60 | 0.11 |
| Hope | 4.26 | 0.293 | 4.11 | 0.322 | 1.72 | 0.09 |
| Humour | 4.23 | 0.305 | 4.06 | 0.463 | 1.55 | 0.12 |
| Spirituality | 4.18 | 0.318 | 4.33 | 0.337 | 1.56 | 0.12 |

N=48  *p< 0.05

disparate work environments and organizational expectations. Research in the West has shown that army personnel manifest a different profile of traits than their civilian counterparts (Atwater, Penn and Rucker, 1993; Matthews, Eid, Kelly, Bailey, and Peterson (2006). Compared to managers in the civilian sectors, army officers are expected to possess an outstanding level of wisdom and courage to be able to lead people under difficult circumstances. They work in extreme, dualist situations that demand high bravery, perspective, self-regulation, leadership skills and critical thinking. Studies with military personnel suggest that social traits contribute to brave behavior (Gal, 1995). Thus, army officers need to be high on strengths like social intelligence and citizenship as well. Civilian managers should also be high on character strengths like hope, curiosity, perseverance, leadership, teamwork and fairness which are successfully predicted to be represented in a leadership profile. On the other 10 character strengths, namely, intelligence, fairness, prudence, appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, spirituality, humility, humour and vitality, no significant differences have been found.

In the present study the civilian sample included only bank managers working in the public sector. This study can be replicated for professionals in other civilian sectors as

well. Further, the different 'arms' of the army (artillery, armoured corps, infantry etc) can be separately compared with the civilian population. There is utilitarian value in strength of character, for the army officers, the leaders, managers and the organizations they serve. Character strengths are a resource largely untapped by typical organizations. The results of the present study can be used retrospectively for selection and training purposes in the army and public sector. People with good character are highly engaged in what they do and find significance beyond themselves in their activities, and they are highly satisfied with their lives, and people who are highly satisfied are happier, healthier, more resilient, and more productive (Peterson & Park, 2006). Under the umbrella of the positive psychology movement, exploration of character strengths within organizations is a nascent but burgeoning line of inquiry. The present study is a step towards exploring this concept in the Indian scenario.

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# Psychometrics Encompassing VIA-IS: A Comparative Cross Cultural Analytical and Referential Reading

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This study pertains to comprehend the differential nature and structural dynamics behind psychometric properties of the famous Values in Action-Inventory of Strengths (*VIA-IS*). The factorial and structural components of *VIA-IS* are studied in a wide range of settings and in limited attempts of its replication, the statistical values between the different versions of the inventory varies in different cultures across the globe, albeit not in a very significant manner. Taking instances from different cultures wherein the *VIA-IS* has been used and adapted for usage, this study will bring to light the major points of convergence and divergence in publicizing the psychometrics of a theory based self report measure. In a way, this study will provide a quick reference to the researchers who are interested in studying character strengths and virtues in an empirical manner and use *VIA-IS*. Also, this study will act as a connecting link between the various versions of the scale with special reference to its Indian adaptation.

***Keywords:*** *VIA-IS, Psychometrics, Factor Structure, Cultures, Test adaptation*

Peterson and Seligman (2004) have developed a hierarchy of positive psychological character strengths after analyzing different religious, cultural and legal texts from around the world in an attempt to achieve a universal classification for character strengths. The hierarchy consists of 24 speciûc character strengths that are seen as the psychological ingredients that make up six "virtues". The classification includes 24 ubiquitously-recognized character strengths organized under the six broader virtues includes: (1) wisdom and knowledge (creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning and perspective); (2) courage (bravery, honesty, perseverance and zest); (3) humanity (kindness, love and social intelligence); (4) justice (fairness, leadership and teamwork); (5) temperance (forgiveness, modesty, prudence and self-regulation); and (6) transcendence (appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, humor and religiousness). This classification provides a starting point for a comparative psychology of character since these virtues are situated at a higher level of abstraction than character strengths, and are likened to constructs proposed by philosophers and religious figures over many centuries (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). Taken together, strengths of character appear to aid understanding of what contributes to fulflling outcomes at personal, relational, and organizational levels which happens to be the primary goal of the positive psychology movement. With this, Positive psychology has reclaimed character and virtue as legitimate topics of investigation for social science (McCullough & Snyder, 2000).

Further, in order to measure and assess these 24 character strengths, Peterson and Seligman (2004) have also developed the *Virtues in Action* Scale (VIA). The VIA is a self-assessment measure of character strength requiring respondents to rate how likely they are to participate in certain behaviors that are