MBSP Handout 2.2

Session 2:

VIA Fact-Sheet

VIA Institute (www.viacharacter.org)

- The VIA Institute on Character (once called the Values in Action Institute) was created in 2000 by Dr. Neal Mayerson, under direction and collaboration with Dr. Martin Seligman, founder of positive psychology.
- The VIA Institute was initially and has continued to be supported generously by the Manuel D. and Rhoda Mayerson Foundation, a private family philanthropy.
- The VIA Institute on Character is a global, *nonprofit* organization located in Cincinnati, Ohio.

VIA Classification

- The VIA Classification is the result of a three-year project reviewing the best thinking on virtue and positive human qualities in philosophy, virtue ethics, moral education, psychology, and theology over the past 2,500 years (e.g., from the works of Aristotle and Benjamin Franklin to King Charlemagne and the tenets of the major world religions).
  - Involved extensive historical review and analysis using specific strength criteria.
  - The work was conducted under the auspices of the VIA Institute, Seligman, 55 scientists/scholars, and directed by professor/researcher Dr. Chris Peterson.
- Six core themes emerged – wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence – found across religions, cultures, nations, and belief systems.
- Applying various criteria, these "virtues" were subdivided into 24 universal character strengths that represent the pathways to the virtues.
- This work is discussed at length in the scholarly text *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (2004), authored by Peterson and Seligman and published by Oxford University Press and the American Psychological Association.

VIA Surveys (www.viame.org)

- The VIA Survey (VIA-IS) measures the 24 character strengths.
- The VIA Survey has been taken by 2 million people in every single country around the globe. It gives the user immediate feedback on their top strengths of character. It is the only strengths survey in the world that is free, online, and psychometrically valid.
  - It has been found to have good, acceptable levels of reliability and validity.
  - Results moderately correlate with reports by the respondent's friends and family.
- The VIA Youth Survey is a validated measure of the 24 character strengths in youth between the ages of 10–17. Youth receive free results, and have the option to purchase a detailed youth report.

- As of 2013, both surveys are validated and available as briefer surveys, only at www.viame.org. Users now can complete the surveys in half the time. Other versions are available for researchers to study or use with students, employees, subjects, or other groups.

VIA Reports (www.viapros.org)

- *Free report:* After anyone takes the free VIA Survey, they are offered immediate results including their profile of character strengths, ranked from 1 to 24. Cost: Free.
- *VIA Me Pathways Report:* A consumer-friendly report with graphs, tips, quotes, and strategies for working with one's highest character strengths. Cost: $20.
- *VIA Pro Report:* An extensive report used to help practitioners better understand their client's signature strengths, overuse/underuse, the latest research, and best practices. Cost: $40.
- *VIA Pro TEAM Report:* An extensive report used by consultants and leaders in the business world to capitalize and leverage team strengths. Cost: $15 per team member.

Character

- *Definition:* Character strengths are stable, universal personality traits that manifest through thinking (cognition), feeling (affect), willingness (volition), and action (behavior).
  - When expressed in balance, character strengths are morally valued and beneficial to oneself and others. These positive psychological characteristics are considered to be the basic building blocks of human goodness, authenticity, and flourishing.

Signature Strengths

- Character strengths can be developed. It is likely that most people can enhance their capacity for expressing each of the 24 character strengths.
- Studies have shown that using one's signature strengths in a new and unique way is an effective intervention: it increased happiness and decreased depression for 6 months. The use of signature strengths has been found to be beneficial in different settings including work and education.
- Deploying one's signature strengths at work is linked with greater work satisfaction, greater well-being, and higher meaning in life. Expressing 4 or more signature strengths at work is linked with more positive work experiences and meaningful work.
- Two of the most important predictors of employee retention and satisfaction are: Reporting you use your top strengths at work and reporting that your immediate supervisor recognizes your top strengths.
- Research has found there is a strong connection between well-being and the use of signature strengths because signature strengths help us make progress on our goals, allow us to express our true passion and meet our basic needs for autonomy, relationship, and competence.
- Practitioners who focus on a client's strengths immediately prior to a session increase strength activation, improve outcomes, foster a sense of mastery for the client, and strengthen the practitioner-client relationship.
- Character strengths buffer people from vulnerabilities (e.g., perfectionism and need for approval) which can play an important role in managing depression and anxiety.