

When the 24 VIA character strengths meet the 23 Inner Development Goals (IDG)

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The outer world

The world we experience can be everything from an awful place to an awe inspiring one. Of course, it depends on where you are and what is happening around you. Sometimes you have control over it (you can visit a breath-taking nature spot) and sometimes you have less or no control over it (you are experiencing a heatwave, or your country is at war). With all the crises in the world, stress at work, inflation, and uncertainties, we can easily feel overwhelmed and more or less out of control. That is probably also why the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as adopted by the United Nations in 2015 to ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity, will not be achieved by 2030 as planned.

The inner world

When I say that my mission is to colour the world more beautiful together, by 'the world' I mean both our outer world and our inner world. I believe that we need to start with our inner world.

When we pause and reflect and are really present in this moment, we can become aware of what is going on – inside us and outside us. How everything we do and don't do, everything we want and think we need, is interconnected. We are often so stuck in our head brains – and especially the overloaded left thinking hemisphere - that we need to strengthen the connections between our left-brain hemisphere and our right brain hemisphere with all its creativity. We also need to re-engage our bodies. We need



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to connect more with our hearts and gut feelings. Our heart and gut react much faster than our head brain and often have ‘higher truths’. If you take the time to regularly be still and reflect on what really DRIVES YOU (and not on what others want for you), you will gain more self-insight. You will become aware of your top character strengths that can empower you and let you find new ways to use them in sustainable ways. We not only need to think in new ways, but we also need to think, feel, be and act in new ways to solve today’s issues.

Achieve personal and professional growth – 2 frameworks

One of the most popular frameworks for understanding and developing human potential is the classification of VIA **Character Strengths**. This classification identifies 24 universal strengths that are grouped into **six virtues: Wisdom, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance and Transcendence**. These strengths are considered to be the positive character traits of human personality that contribute to well-being and flourishing. They impact how we think, feel and behave. In the early 2000s a scientific study of character was initiated by Neal Mayerson and Martin Seligman, the founder of positive psychology which is the science of how we best thrive in life with its ups and downs. Chris Peterson led this substantial cross-cultural and historical research involving 55 scientists over several years. It resulted in the VIA Classification of Character Strengths and Virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Since then, hundreds of peer-reviewed articles have been published across many cultures.

Wisdom	Courage	Humanity	Justice	Temperance	Transcendence
Creativity Curiosity Judgment Love of learning Perspective	Bravery Perseverance Honesty Zest	Love Kindness Social intelligence	Teamwork Fairness Leadership	Forgiveness Humility Prudence Self-regulation	Appreciation of beauty & excellence Gratitude Hope Humor Spirituality

Figure 1 VIA - 24 character strengths

Another framework that aims to help people achieve personal and professional growth is the Inner Development Goals (IDG). This framework consists of 23 **skills** divided into **five domains: Being, Thinking, Relating, Collaborating and Acting**. It was developed by Ekskåret Foundation, The New Division and 29k Foundation together with a group of researchers who created the IDG platform. It was published in April 2022. These skills are based on the latest research in neuroscience, psychology and leadership, and are designed to help people enhance their emotional intelligence, resilience and performance. They relate to what is needed in order to successfully work with complex societal issues, in particular those identified in UN's Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

Being	Thinking	Relating	Collaborating	Acting
Inner compass Integrity and Authenticity Openness and Learning mindset Self-awareness Presence	Critical Thinking Complexity awareness Perspective skills Sense-making Long-term Orientation and Visioning	Appreciation Connectedness Humility Empathy and Compassion	Communication skills Co-Creation skills Inclusive Mindset and Intercultural competence Trust Mobilization skills	Courage Creativity Optimism Perseverance

Figure 2 IDG - 23 skills

Comparison of 24 VIA character strengths and 23 Inner Development Goals (IDG)

As a certified VIA character strengths and mindfulness (MBSP) leader, I was surprised when I saw the IDG framework for the first time. Immediately I spotted several of the 24 character strengths and I wondered whether IDG was based on VIA. This was not the case although IDG consulted many scientists including from the field of positive psychology.

Then I wondered if and how these two frameworks could be integrated. How much could the 24 character strengths be mapped on the 23 skills from IDG? In this article, we will explore this question and provide some examples of how to apply the strengths and skills in different contexts.

Similarities and differences

My exploration started with understanding the similarities and differences between character strengths (VIA) and skills (IDG).

As we have seen, both are based on scientific research. While VIA is cross-cultural, IDG is only viewed through Western eyes at the time of writing.

The 24 VIA character strengths are *innate traits* that can be expressed in different ways depending on the situation. Every individual possesses all 24 character strengths in different degrees, giving each person a unique character strengths profile. The 23 IDG skills, abilities and qualities are mostly *learned abilities* that can be improved with practice and feedback. Both character strengths and skills are flexible and can be developed.

Especially Signature strengths (a person's top 3-5 character strengths) are quite stable over time and situations. Skills are more adaptable to changing demands. Character strengths are more *descriptive and evaluative*, while skills are more *prescriptive and actionable*. In other words, strengths describe and assess what someone is naturally good at, enjoys doing and is energised by. Skills provide guidance and direction for what someone should learn or improve. For example, you can't develop the IDG skill of Innovation without using the character strength of Creativity which allows you to develop an idea or a product that is both original and at the same time useful or adaptable. You may even want to use Creativity in combination with Curiosity and Perseverance. Character strengths are plural in that they are expressed in combinations rather than in isolation.

Another difference is that the character strengths are more value-based than the skills. Skills are more goal-oriented and reflect personal preferences and aspirations that can vary from person to person. Moreover, character strengths are universal, while skills are contextual. That is, character strengths apply to all people across cultures and nations, and the purpose is to be your best self in all areas of life, at work, at school, in personal development etc. IDG skills help people achieve their inner goals with the purpose of contributing to a more sustainable global society. Generally speaking, IDG skills are pathways to achieving the SDGs, and character strengths are pathways to the virtues, to being good and/or doing good. Character strengths have a broader scope. Since they reflect moral virtues that are widely valued and respected by society, they also include the pathways of the IDG.

The 24 character strengths can be measured, which is currently not the case for the 23 IDG skills. After the VIA Classification was completed, a free personal strengths test was developed to measure

these 24 character strengths in individuals. This [VIA Survey](#) is based on self-assessment and has been translated into many languages. The VIA survey is psychometrically valid and under peer review by hundreds of scientists around the world as the only one of its kind. It is used by many researchers and there is a rapidly growing number of scientific studies based on the large database of survey results, which in turn is a huge source for the advancement of character studies.

Connections and overlaps

Now let's identify the connections and overlaps between character strengths and skills.

At first glance, there are a few one-to-one connections in the domain of Acting: Courage, Creativity and Perseverance are also character strengths with the same name.

That made me curious to what extent I could connect all of the 24 character strengths to the 23 IDG skills. Since each character strength can be expressed in many different ways depending on one's personality and often has a much broader interpretation than the word description would suggest, it did not take me long to link each character strength to one of the skills. Some are very similar, while others represent some aspects of a strength or vice versa.

The table below (see *Figure 3 Mapping VIA character strengths to IDG skills*) shows my interpretation of the overlap. When looking at the table, please keep in mind that character strengths can be used in a wide number of ways. **They are very flexible, and fluid and you can develop a skill by using different character strengths. What I did was to link each character strength to the skill that I felt was most closely related.**

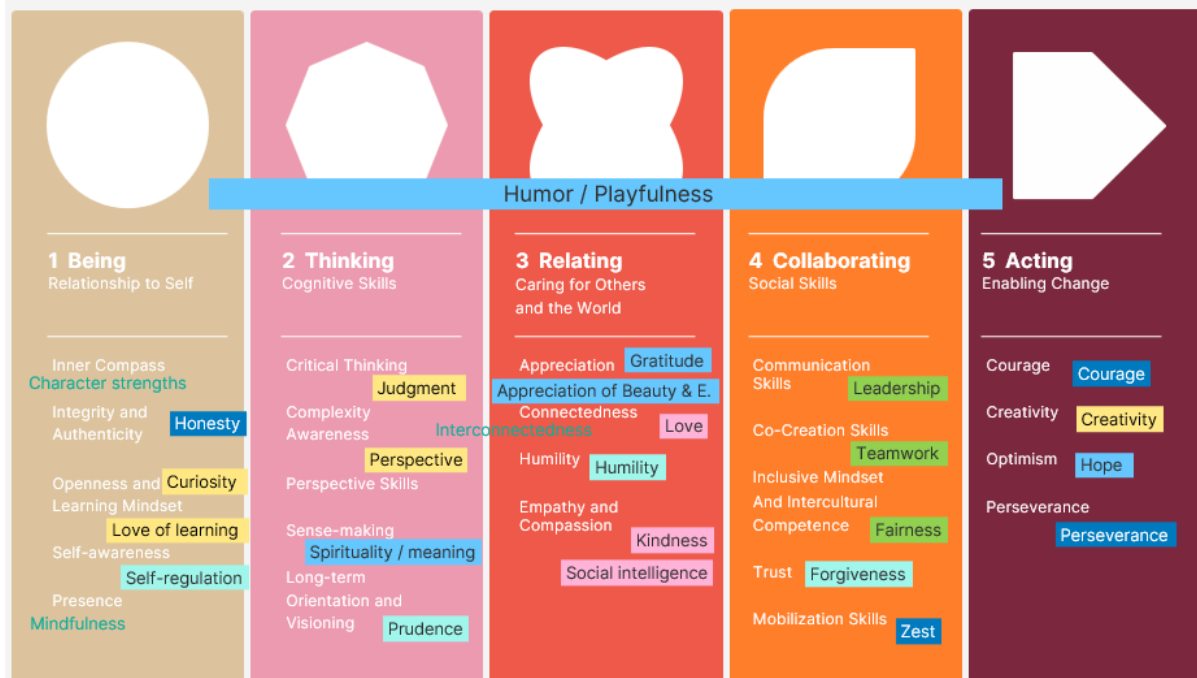


Figure 3 Mapping VIA character strengths to IDG skills

A note to the use of colours:

The strengths are colour-coded by me to reflect the virtues. What emerged was that the strengths in the virtue Temperance (aqua blue) were well distributed across all IDG dimensions, except for the dimension Acting. This

makes sense. We always need to stay balanced and mindful. When we want to act properly though, we may not want to temper ourselves that much.

Another observation that makes sense is that some virtues are only linked to one dimension. The virtue of Humanity (pink) is clustered in the dimension of Relating and the virtue of Justice (green) in the dimension of Collaborating.

The words in green are connected to three of the skills that do not have a direct match with a character strength. They are related to the combination of Mindfulness and Character strengths, as taught in the MBSP programme. All the character strengths give you an Inner compass. Mindfulness gives you Presence. And the concept of Interconnectedness together with Love is a far better fit to Connectedness than Love alone.

Some examples of direct matches, close connections and supporting connections.

As we have seen, we have three direct matching character strengths in the domain of Acting: Courage, Creativity and Perseverance. Optimism is also part of a character strength, Hope, which involves optimistic thinking and agency. In the Being domain, we have a direct match between the skill of Integrity and authenticity and the character strength of Honesty, which encompasses both. In the Relating domain, the Humility skill matches the character strength of Humility.

Other skills are very similar to a character strength. The skill Openness and learning mindset is strongly linked to the character strength of Curiosity, which is often described as novelty-seeking and being open to experience. Curiosity is associated with a natural desire to acquire knowledge and thus fosters a learning mindset. The skill of Critical thinking is closely related to the character strength of Judgment. Judgment is partly about critical thinking, but also about being open-minded and able to change one's mind in the light of new knowledge and being open to other arguments and perspectives.

Where there is no one-to-one correspondence, some strengths can be seen to support or enhance some skills, and vice versa. The skill of Empathy and compassion can help express the strength of Kindness, as it involves understanding and caring for the feelings of others. The character strength of Love, within the virtue category Humanity, can contribute to the skill of Connectedness, which is about being part of a larger whole, including humanity.

As mentioned earlier, character strengths are very versatile and flexible and can be placed on any of the skills. For example, the reason why I placed Leadership on Communications skills is because I felt it was the best fit. Of course, you could argue that for Leadership you also need the skills of Presence, Critical thinking, Empathy and compassion, Trust and Creativity, etc. I often coach leaders that don't have the character strength of Leadership as their top strength, and they feel very uncomfortable. This feeling quickly passes when they see that they have, for example, the signature strengths of Social intelligence, Judgment and Hope, which makes them great leaders.

Funny enough, I didn't see the character strength of Humor reflected in the IDG framework. I added it as an overarching strength on top of the framework. Humor or playfulness is a very important contributor to team building and moving towards goals. It contributes to destressing and keeping the mood up.

Applying strengths together with skills to create strong teams in different contexts

Every person has a unique VIA profile of character strengths. When you know the character strengths of your team, you as a leader can put together the right combination of people (read: strengths) for specific projects. If you become aware of your profile and learn how to best utilise your strengths, you can develop your IDG skills faster.



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We need different skills to achieve the SDGs in different contexts. What would it be like to get clarity on which character strengths (what you are innately good at, enjoy doing and are energised by) best support you in developing the IDG skills? What is the best combination of strengths in a specific context? How can we put together a team with the right combination of strengths and skills? These questions might give an indication of how character strengths and skills can work together.

How to use the strengths and skills in different contexts? Depending on the goal, situation and target group, some strengths and skills may be more relevant or effective than others. For example, if your goal is to lead a team project, strengths such as Leadership, Teamwork, and Fairness can be very useful. These strengths can help you guide and motivate your team effectively, work well with others and ensure that everyone is treated fairly. Additionally, it can be beneficial to have skills such as Long term orientation and visioning, Co-creations skills and Mobilisation. These skills can help you persuade others, work together towards a common goal and overcome any obstacles that may arise.

If the goal is to solve a complex problem, the strengths of Creativity, Judgment and Perspective can be useful, along with the skills of Complexity awareness, Perspective skills and Connectedness. If the goal is to cope with stress or adversity, the strengths of Bravery, Hope, Humor and Gratitude may be beneficial, along with the skills of Self-awareness, Optimism and Appreciation.

Summary and conclusion

Based on this exploration of differences and similarities, I would argue that the VIA character strengths and the IDG skills cannot replace each other as a framework for personal and professional growth. Rather, they complement each other and offer different perspectives and tools to enhance one's potential and well-being. The character strengths can help you clarify your values and passions. The IDG skills can help you develop competencies and strategies. Since your signature strengths (your top character strengths) in particular reflect the "real" you—who you are at your core and what you value most, these strengths can support you in boosting your IDG skills and using them in more positive and meaningful ways.

That's why I suggest people use both the character strengths and the skills from the IDG to assess their current state and set their future goals. By doing so, they can benefit from the best of both

worlds – they can leverage their strengths and improve their skills in a balanced and holistic way to maximise their inner potential.

By mapping the strengths on the skills, we can gain a deeper understanding of ourselves and others and unlock our potential in different contexts. By utilising our strengths and skills in different contexts, we can increase our well-being and performance, empower people to overcome challenges and contribute to a better world.

Want to learn more?

If you are interested in your own free VIA strengths profile and/or a personalised 30-minutes review, please contact me. Norwegians can [click here](#).

To learn more about the 24 VIA character strengths and the IDG skills, please visit the websites mentioned under Sources.

Feel free to share this article provided you include the following:

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For more information about the MBSP program, you can [click here](#). For other creative solutions to colour your inner and outer world more beautiful, [start exploring here](#).

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