

24 individual strengths & head/heart/gut

The *VIA inventory of strengths (VIA-IS)* survey has been completed by more than 3 million people from every country in the world. Examination of over 1 million of the responses shows that 16 of the VIA's 24 character strengths can helpfully be classified into 3 groups – *head/relationship with the world*, *heart/relationship with others* and *gut/relationship with oneself*:

inquisitiveness (head/learning) – *relationship to the world*:

appreciation of beauty & excellence (awe, wonder, elevation); **creativity** (originality, adaptive, ingenuity); **curiosity** (interest, novelty-seeking, exploration, openness to experience); **love of learning** (mastering new skills & topics, systematically adding to knowledge); and **perspective** (wisdom, providing wise counsel, taking a big picture view)

caring (heart/humanity) – *relationship to others*:

capacity to love & be loved (both loving & being loved, valuing close relationships with others), **fairness** (just, not letting feelings bias decisions about others), **forgiveness** (mercy, accepting others' shortcomings, giving people a second chance), **gratitude** (thankful for the good, expressing thanks, feeling blessed), **kindness** (generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruism 'niceness'), and **teamwork** (citizenship, social responsibility, loyalty)

self-control (gut/doing) – *relationship to oneself*:

honesty (authenticity, integrity), **judgment** (critical thinking, thinking things through, open-minded), **perseverance** (persistence, industry, finishing what one starts), **prudence** (careful, cautious, not taking undue risks), and **self-regulation** (self-control, disciplined, managing impulses & emotions)

the more general 8 strengths, happiness & adaptive functioning

As illustrated above, 16 of the 24 VIA character strengths fit fairly directly onto this three factor model. The other 8 strengths are more general and link strongly with more than one of these three factors. These 8 more general strengths include **humility** (modesty, letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves), **leadership** (organizing group activities, encouraging a group to get things done) and **spirituality** (religiousness, faith, purpose, meaning). Overall happiness & flourishing are more strongly linked to "*strengths of the heart*" than to "*strengths of the head & gut*". However for adaptive, successful functioning in particular environments – for example, work, study or relationships – other "*situational*" strengths may come to the fore. For successful close relationships *love*, **social intelligence** (emotional intelligence, aware of the motives/feelings of self/others, knowing what makes people tick) and **humour** (playfulness, bringing smiles to others, lighthearted) seem of particular importance. In contrast, for autonomy **bravery** (valor, not shrinking from fear, speaking up for what's right), *honesty* & *perspective* appear more central. Similarly different strengths may prove of particular help at different life stages. It seems too that some strengths are more helpful if well balanced with others – for example *kindness* & *honesty*, *love* & *social intelligence*, and *hope* & *gratitude*. Overall though, a recent major review of relevant research studies highlights that of all 24 character strengths, **zest** (enthusiasm, vigor, vitality, energy, feeling alive & activated), **hope** (optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation) and *curiosity* seem most strongly associated with high levels of overall wellbeing.
