

# ELEVATION CARDS

## MAKE CHARACTER STRENGTHS SHAREABLE AND SOCIAL

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### THE IDEA

The Values-in-Action (VIA) classification of **character strengths** identifies positive character traits embodied in people's actions, morally valued across history and cultures, and measurably present in people world-wide.

Existing research and applications have mainly addressed the benefits of strengths use and a strengths focus for **individual well-being**. This project emphasises the **social and pro-social side of strengths**, which has received less attention in the literature.

#### Aim

The idea is to encourage **positive social feedback** about strengths use.

This is intended to spread **awareness and appreciation for strengths** and good character, with the associated benefits for well-being. Sharing Elevations Cards also **promotes pro-sociality** and has the potential to generate **experiences of shared positivity and social connection**.

#### Existing Interventions

Existing **strength cards** applications (e.g. Mindspring. [uk.com](http://uk.com), 2015; [theresiliencecentre.com.au](http://theresiliencecentre.com.au), 2015) typically illustrate the VIA classification and facilitate engaging with one's own strengths. Elevation Cards focus on the aspect of pro-sociality and sharing, and encourage people to see others' strengths as well as their own.

The project was also inspired by KindSpring's **Smile Cards** ([KindSpring.org](http://KindSpring.org), 2015), which aim to spread awareness and share the benefits of "random acts of kindness."

Existing interventions and practical approaches (e.g. Biswas-Diener, 2010; Linley, 2008) extol the benefits of **strengths-spotting**, increasing one's **strength vocabulary** and cultivating a **focus on strengths** in oneself and others. The **elevating effect** of seeing strengths in others is also referenced by practitioners of positive psychology and positive psychology coaching (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007; Niemiec & Wedding, 2013).

#### Elevation

The project is called **Elevation Cards** after the positive pro-social emotion elicited by seeing excellence and moral goodness realised in the actions of others (Haidt, 2000).

A similar **uplifting** effect is proposed in the VIA definition of character strengths to result from seeing strengths actualised in other people (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

### IN PRACTICE

Each card features **one strength** from Peterson and Seligman's (2004) classification, some playfully paraphrased, with an accessible definition of the character strength and space for a personal example of its use.

**Multiple versions** exist for several strengths to cover various senses in which they might be expressed or actualised.

Unlike the messages on the front, the descriptions are written in the **third person** in order to encourage reflection on what applies to one personally, openness to seeing strengths in others also, and feeling part of a group of people with similar strengths.

#### Use

The instruction is simply to give a card to someone, be it a friend or a stranger, in whom the giver has seen the respective strength. Recipients are encouraged to **pass on cards** of their own (and blank cards may be gifted along with one made out to the recipient).

Sets of cards can also be used by **coaches, trainers or teachers** to facilitate strength-focussed feedback or to introduce students and clients to the concept of character strengths and the exercise of strength-spotting in an accessible and social way.

#### Distribution

Elevation Cards are available directly from the author, from Inntal Institut and via **www.elevationcards.de**

Cards are made out to receivers personally, who keep them (so that each card might bring a smile to it's recipient's face more than once). In order to pass on cards of their own, short of making copies of theirs, people therefore need to acquire new cards.

Two twenty-four-card sets with two design variants for each of the **twenty-four strengths** are available.

The website includes the suggestion to gift recipients sets for their own use along with a personalised card for them, or indeed several.

Of course, the aims of the project don't require that just the original cards be used: Someone might receive one and be inspired to just tell someone else about a strength they've seen in them, write them a note or message, or even design their own cards. These outcomes would all resonate well with the aims of this project.

## POSSIBLE BENEFITS

The application is expected to have social and well-being benefits for both givers and receivers based on a number of theoretical considerations.

### Seeing the good in other people

Expectations and perceptions of pro-sociality in others have been shown to influence people's own **social and pro-social behaviour** (Lieberman, Samuels & Ross, 2004). Positive affect and pro-sociality have also been suggested to be positively and reciprocally related.

Seeing the good in others can induce positive pro-social emotions such as **elevation and gratitude** (Algoe & Haidt, 2009), which promote affiliative and pro-social behaviour. The messages on Elevation Cards express just such emotions.

### Encouraging pro-social strengths use

Elevation cards promote **positive social feedback** particularly on instances of strengths use that impress, inspire or directly benefit others. This emphasises the moral and pro-social side of good character.

Just as strengths differ in their association with well-being and other positive personal outcomes (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004), some strengths may be less inherently moral or pro-social than others, such as those associated with intellect or inquisitiveness (McGrath, 2015). Elevation Cards pick out and highlight examples of strengths use that contributes to social good and actions that **benefit, impress or inspire other people**.

### Social connection

The act of gifting a personalised Elevation Card may be a **positive social experience** for both giver and receiver.

The receiver of a card made out to them personally may feel grateful, flattered, valued or appreciated – all positive social emotions that enhance people's mood and **sense of connection** (Fredrickson, 2013). Since the card itself expresses appreciation on the part of the giver, these positive social emotions will typically be **shared**.

### Spreading the word

With the distribution and passing-on of cards, these positive effects will reach more people, as will **awareness of the concept of character strengths** and potentially interest in the relevant research and findings from positive psychology.

### References

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### Sharing strengths

Strengths-spotting cards make character strengths **shareable and social** as opposed to personal or private.

The fun and social act of sharing Elevation Cards may counteract people's typical hesitation to openly talk about their own strengths and the associated ambivalence, capitalising instead on the mutually beneficial effect of **sharing strengths with others** (Biswas-Diener, 2015).

### Strengths diversity

Givers and receivers of Elevation Cards are encouraged to engage with the multi-faceted concept of character strengths in a personal and playful way, enhancing their strengths vocabulary and their ability to see **diverse strengths** in themselves and other people. The variety of cards highlights the **pluralism** that characterises any multi-dimensional account of strengths and virtues, and particularly the VIA classification.

The cards leave space for **personal examples** of when a strength was seen in action, which promotes reflection, creativity and independent thinking.

### Play

The design and customisability of the cards aims to introduce elements of **creativity and playfulness** into the exercise of strengths-spotting – albeit not in the sense of overt gamification where the impression of artificial rewards might undermine the meaningfulness of the gesture (cf. Mekler, Brühlmann, Opwis, & Tuch, 2014).

Since the cards are pre-printed and reflect an established framework, there is a degree of **formalisation** that might provide helpful structure for paying someone a kind of compliment one might otherwise feel awkward to attempt. This is balanced by the cards' **friendly and personal** tone and playful visual style.

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