

**The Relationship Among Character Strengths, Moral Potency, and Individual
Performance**

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Auburn University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Auburn, Alabama
August 2, 2014

Keywords: Character, decision making, ethics, leadership, moral potency, values

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Abstract

Ethical decision making is a critical component of successful leadership. Many individuals struggle with the ability to move from deciding what is ethical to taking ethical action. The so-called decision-action gap causes difficulties for individuals as they attempt to lead ethically. Moral potency is defined and presented as a possible solution to bridging the decision-action gap. In this study, I surveyed a sample of cadets at the United States Air Force Academy in order to determine which of the Values in Action Character Strengths are positively related to moral potency. Additionally, I investigated the relationship between moral potency and individual performance. Several character strengths were identified as antecedents to moral potency. Suggestions for improving individual levels of moral potency are made based on the results of this study. A non-significant relationship between moral potency and performance is discussed. Ideas for future research regarding the development of moral potency are presented.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost I want to thank God for giving me the support and ability to get through this very challenging program. Next, I want to thank my loving wife, Pam for her support during this program and throughout our 19 years of marriage. I know I have not always made it easy and we have had more than our fair share of challenges, but with God's help, we have survived and achieved our goals. I look forward to many great years with you in Colorado! To my wonderful children, Benjamin, Cody and Jessica, you are the greatest blessings in my life and I love you beyond words. Thank you for your support and for keeping great attitudes as we move from place to place. To my parents, Pete and Gingy Heyler, thank you for raising me the right way and for always supporting me. I am forever in your debt. I also want to thank my in-laws, Frank and Irene Clark, first for letting me marry your beautiful daughter and second, for always being there for us as we have gone through our Air Force career. We have so enjoyed being within driving distance of you for the last 3 years! A special thank you to Mr. Jimmy Pursell and his family for their support of the Center for Ethical Organizational Cultures. Without their financial generosity, I never would have been able to complete this study. I also want to thank my classmate and friend, Donovan Collier, for helping me survive the wild ride that this program has been. Finally, I want to thank the members of my committee, Achilles Armenakis, Alan Walker, Junior Feild, and Stan Harris for their guidance and wisdom in helping me navigate this program. In particular, Alan Walker

and Achilles Armenakis have been largely responsible for any success I have had. Alan has supported me from the very beginning and always provided a listening ear when I needed it. Thank you so much! Finally, Achilles Armenakis has become a mentor and friend to me over the past three years. I feel truly blessed to have worked with him and to have received the kind of support that he has provided. He has bent over backwards to help expedite my program and has encouraged me greatly throughout my endeavors. I look forward to continuing our relationship into the future. Thank you all for everything. I could not have done it without you!

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
List of Tables	vii
List of Figures	viii
Chapter 1 Introduction and Literature Review	1
Chapter 2 Methods.....	45
Chapter 3 Results	58
Chapter 4 Discussion and Recommendations.....	71
References.....	87

List of Tables

Table 1 Research Question and Hypotheses	44
Table 2 VIA Character Strength Reliability Estimates.....	50
Table 3 Correlation Matrix	59
Table 4 Comparisons of Moral Potency Factor Structure for Study	64
Table 5 Regression Analysis of Character Strengths on Moral Potency	65
Table 6 Stepwise Regression Analysis of Character Strengths on Moral Potency.....	67
Table 7 Regression Weights from Stepwise Regression	67
Table 8 Regression Analysis of Moral Potency on MPA.....	69
Table 9 Regression Analysis of Character Strengths on MPA	70

List of Figures

Figure 1 Determinants of Decision to Respond.....	25
Figure 2 Proposed Model.....	33

Chapter 1 – Introduction and Literature Review

“Everything rises and falls on leadership” (Maxwell, 1998, p. 225). When the leadership of an organization is functioning correctly, things tend to go well and success is often the result. On the other hand, when leadership behaves badly, issues frequently arise with performance or ethical violations. Scandals and legal violations at companies such as Enron, WorldCom, and Tyco are all examples of leadership creating a culture where the focus is solely on the bottom line and risk taking is encouraged and rewarded above all else (Gini, 2004). Gini states that, “Leadership sets the pace, communicates ethical standards, and establishes the overall vision, mission, as well as the tone of the day-to-day mundane reality” (Gini, 2004, p. 11). Whether leadership is good or bad, it controls how the organization operates and how decisions are made.

Even though many decision makers may understand what the “right” course of action is, that knowledge is often unrelated to actually doing what is “right.” Moral potency, which will be described in greater detail later in this chapter, is essentially the ability to develop the responsibility and motivation to take a moral action when faced with adversity and to persevere through difficulties (Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011). Hartman (1998) has previously proposed that there is a positive relationship between strong character and acting according to commitments and values, even when there are pressure and temptations to the contrary. My goal in this study was to conduct an empirical examination of this proposal.

In this study, I investigated three research questions as they relate to future military leaders: (a) what character strengths of leaders function as antecedents to moral potency; (b) is there a relationship between moral potency and individual performance;

and (c) does moral potency mediate the relationship between the character strengths of leaders and their individual performance? My focus was on the construct of moral potency as a key ingredient to ethical leadership. In order for leaders to behave ethically, they must have the strength of their convictions and be able to stand up for what they believe is important even in the face of opposition. While many decision makers are able to determine the ethical course of action, the difficulty comes in moving from that understanding to taking the moral action. This decision-action gap, as it has been termed (*Developing Leaders of Character at the United States Air Force Academy - A Conceptual Framework*, 2011), is a subject of much interest among those who study ethical decision making (Comer & Vega, 2011; Treviño, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006).

Because of this interest, we attempted to determine the antecedents to moral potency by looking at the character strengths developed by Peterson and Seligman (2004). In addition, I examined the relationship between moral potency, as a component of ethical leadership, and individual performance. Finally, I considered moral potency as a mediator of the relationship between the character strengths and individual performance. I wanted to understand if any of the character strengths were related to higher levels of moral potency and also how higher levels of moral potency impact individual performance.

Ethical leadership, in general, and moral potency, in particular, are very important in the military environment. Trust is a key ingredient in the success of many military organizations (Millett, Murray, & Watman, 1986). Members must be able to count on one another and trust that everyone will do the right thing and work in concert to

accomplish the mission. This trust can be broken when individuals are not able to stand up for what they believe to be right.

In this study, I surveyed military officer trainees at the United States Air Force Academy to determine if they have internalized the concepts of ethical leadership and moral potency. The purpose of the educational experience at the Air Force Academy is to develop officers and leaders of character. Since there is a focus on building character, I expected to see higher levels of moral potency than would typically be found in the general population. However, where there was variance in moral potency levels, I wanted to determine if there were certain character strengths that were associated with that variance and also if the variance related to levels of individual performance.

In the next section, I review the literature and give an overview of the concept of ethical leadership. This will be followed by a description of the importance of ethical leadership in a military context. Subsequent to that, I explore the various definitions of the term character as well as how it is differentiated from the concept of values. I then discuss the current emphasis that is being placed on character education by both business schools and business executives alike. Next, I give an overview of Rest and colleagues' (1986) model for moral development and decision making. This will be followed by an in-depth look at the decision-action gap that exists between the deciding and acting steps of the model. At this point, I describe the constructs involved in the model for this study, namely moral potency, the Values in Action character strengths, and the military performance appraisal (MPA) which serves as a means to measure individual performance. Research questions and hypotheses are then proposed.

Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership has been defined as, “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision making” (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005, p. 120). The ethical leader determines what actions are right and wrong and communicates those determinations to subordinates. They are also responsible to enforce these standards and hold individuals responsible when violations occur. Ethical leaders also exemplify the behavior and standards they espouse and lead in a caring and fair manner (Schaubroeck et al., 2012). Finally, ethical leaders always consider the voices of others. In order to be ethical, leaders must put their own needs and desires to the side and be willing to listen to the needs of others (Gini, 2011).

Since leadership has such a significant impact on the function of an organization, it is important to have leaders with strong character who are willing to make tough ethical decisions, even in the face of pressure to behave unethically. Leaders have the ability to exert influence on the ethical culture within the organization and in many cases they actually create the culture. As such, the leader is critical to the development of ethical norms within a given organization (Schminke, Ambrose, & Neubaum, 2005). Leaders with strong character are able to effectively create and communicate a clear vision of what they want to achieve, what is important to them, and what their expectations are of others (Gini, 2004). Prior research has shown that leaders play a critical role in how the ethical culture of an organization develops. This influence is over and above the influence of the individual moral development of the organization’s employees

(Schminke et al., 2005). Zhu, May, and Avolio (2004) proposed a framework for ethical leadership behavior whereby this type of behavior was positively related to levels of employee organizational commitment and trust in leadership. A more recent study has shown a positive relationship between ethical leadership and the ethical culture of the organization (Schaubroeck et al., 2012). These authors found that leaders create shared understandings within their organizations by influencing the ethical cultures of their organizations and that these shared understandings affect both the thought processes and behaviors of those within the organizations (Schaubroeck et al., 2012).

Unethical organizational cultures can be very costly. When leaders behave unethically, it causes great distress within the organization, causes performance to be sub-optimized, and may even call into question the long term viability of the organization (Brown & Mitchell, 2010). Unethical leadership has been shown to have a negative impact on productivity (Detert, Treviño, Burris, & Andiappan, 2007), employee attitudes (Tepper, Henle, Lambert, Giacalone, & Duffy, 2008), and employee well-being (Tepper, Moss, Lockhart, & Carr, 2007). Employees in unethical organizations find themselves feeling unsafe and also unclear on expectations. These feelings of insecurity can have a direct impact on their performance and can also lead to increased rates of turnover (Brown & Mitchell, 2010).

As we progress farther into the 21st century, organizational structures are evolving to meet changing, competitive environments. Hierarchies are becoming flatter and organizations are becoming more geographically dispersed in order to meet the challenges of current markets. As a result, the level of decision making is being pushed down in the organization and lower level managers are being forced to handle larger and

more complex decisions than ever before (Trevino, 1986). These new types of organizations require leaders at all levels that are able to make ethical decisions. Today's organizations have a critical need for managers with high character at all levels in order to make these important decisions in an ethical fashion (Whetstone, 2001). In days past, decision making was often centralized at the headquarters and could be effectively controlled as long as top level leaders were ethical. This is often not the case in today's environment. Decisions can be made at lower levels of the organization and mid-level managers have a greater scope of responsibility.

In addition to the necessity for excellent decision-making abilities, ethical leaders must also be aware of their impact as role models within the organization. It is important that they be ethical and maintain high levels of moral potency in order to pass these qualities on to their subordinates. Employees are most influenced by the people they work with every day (Weaver, Treviño, & Agle, 2005). Leaders at all levels have the ability to act as role models to those who are immediately subordinate to them. Since leaders are in highly visible positions, they are better positioned to capture employees' attention and influence their behavior through both policy and their own personal actions. When leaders behave in a supportive, fair way toward their subordinates, those subordinates are more likely to follow them and mimic their behavior. On the other hand, when they behave in a way that is perceived as uncaring or aloof, their subordinates are more likely to ignore their guidance (Brown & Mitchell, 2010). Prior research has shown that leaders who reward short term results and do not punish wrongdoing by subordinates will engender unethical behavior within their organizations (Sims & Brinkman, 2002).

Sanderse (2013) discusses two ways that an individual can model moral behavior: conditioning and emulation. In conditioning, employees learn how to respond to different situations by watching their leaders' handling of difficult situations. They also receive rewarding or punishing feedback that causes them to behave in the desired manner. The second way to model moral behavior, emulation, is when the leader illustrates appropriate conduct to their subordinates by giving examples of others who have acted morally and allowing discussion of how certain situations are handled. This allows subordinates to come to their own understanding of what behaviors are moral. The subordinates see that the leader embodies the appropriate behavior, but also realize that this is not the only measure of moral behavior. As such, employees begin to emulate their superiors (Sanderse, 2013). Either way, leaders are guiding their subordinates down the path to ethical behavior and giving them examples of how to behave along the way. However, the idea of emulation tends to be more effective since the subordinates are able to internalize the behavior. When employees see examples of moral behavior and get the chance to discuss moral dilemmas, they are more likely to develop these characteristics in themselves (Hannah & Avolio, 2010).

Social cognitive theory proposes that people learn through the modeling of behavior by others (Bandura, 2005). As such, individuals often learn how to behave and what to believe by watching their significant role models daily (Sweeney & Fry, 2012). Because of this learning process, ethical role models are critical to the development of ethical behavior in others. The effective ethical role model has a consistent ethical vision, communicates high standards, holds people accountable, puts ethics ahead of personal interests and has a long-term, broad perspective (Weaver et al., 2005). The fact

that most ethical role models are willing to sacrifice their own interests in order to stand up for others and to fight for what is right is further evidence that moral potency is a part of the ethical leadership and role-modeling process. Past research shows that ethical role models are typically those who have had role models of their own in the past (Weaver et al., 2005). Because of this “pay it forward” system, it is important for all organizations to encourage managers at all levels to mentor those subordinate to them on how to behave ethically.

The closeness of the relationship between the role model and the subordinate is also very important. Even though an organization may work to tout the ethical conduct of its senior leaders, most individuals will look to their proximate supervisors for guidance on how to behave (Treviño et al., 2006). For this reason, it is important for the concepts of ethical leadership to be present at every level and for those values and beliefs to permeate the entire organization.

Ethical Leadership in the Military

As mentioned earlier, ethical leadership is particularly important in the military environment. According to Jennings and Hannah, “the upshot is that militaries need exemplary ethics and leadership now and for the foreseeable future more than ever” (2011, p. 568). Military professionals are charged with serving their countries and protecting what they hold dear. They are given certain privileges and responsibilities as a result of that charge, and they must be able to acquit themselves appropriately. The concept of professional integrity means that one acts in accordance with the beliefs and values of their profession. In the military, professional integrity means that the values of the nation being served are preeminent (Wakin, 1996). Individuals must act on these

principles consistently in order to have professional integrity. There is a priority of values that the military member must understand. In the United States military, the first loyalty is to the Constitution and all that it stands for. This means that when an order is given by a superior that is in conflict with those higher values, it is incumbent upon the individual to refuse to follow the unlawful order (*Oath of Office for Officers*, 1959). This requires a firm grasp of what the Constitution says as well as a high level of professional integrity.

The habits of professional integrity are learned in the training environment. Individuals are given the opportunity to practice making difficult decisions when the stakes are not as high. It has been theorized that moral potency can be developed by repeatedly making difficult decisions in the face of pressure (Hannah & Avolio, 2010). These habits must be developed early because it becomes more difficult to develop new habits as one becomes more comfortable in his/her position. An important question is, “If our preprofessional preparation does not inculcate the habits of professional integrity, can we have confidence that those habits will be practiced by these same individuals when they become licensed professionals” (Wakin, 1996, p. 27)? In addition to practicing the habits of professional integrity, it is also critical that individuals practice integrity in their personal lives. Integrity means wholeness and for individuals to be whole, their character must be consistent regardless of the circumstances (Petrick & Quinn, 1997).

Another dimension of ethical leadership that comes into play in the military context is the leader’s ability to ensure compliance from subordinates. Jennings and Hannah (2011) discuss two types of morality that are seen in the military and elsewhere:

morality of obligation and morality of aspiration. These concepts are similar to the ideas of conditioning and emulation that were discussed earlier. Morality of obligation is focused on rule-following while morality of aspiration is based on virtue and honor where military professionals aspire to be good people who make ethical decisions because of some internal motivation.

Jennings and Hannah (2011) describe a military ethic as serving two purposes: from a negative perspective, there is a set of restrictions that keeps members' conduct in line; from the positive side, it allows the people who are served by the military to be confident that the members will hold themselves to high ethical standards. Since the military is an inherently violent instrument whose goal is to constrain others by force, it is important that there are guidelines in place to ensure this power is not abused. Not only must military members be held in check by rules and regulations, but they must know, inherently, what is right and wrong and when they need to stand up to authority and fight for higher principles, such as honor and integrity. I propose that moral potency plays a key role in this area as it is what allows individuals to know when to take such an action and allows them to carry it out.

Role modeling is a key element of leadership in the military, as it is in the civilian sector. Commissioned officers are quickly placed into positions where they are leading people and they must be equipped early in their careers to establish themselves as effective ethical role models. When individuals are placed in positions of power, they have a much greater likelihood of becoming a model to others regarding behaviors that are appropriate within the organization (Jordan, Brown, Treviño, & Finkelstein, 2013).

When leaders are considered to be ethical they exhibit characteristics such as care, honesty, trustworthiness, and fairness and they work hard to reward ethical behavior while disciplining those who act unethically (Jordan et al., 2013). These are the types of characteristics that are needed in military leaders not only so they can lead effectively, but also so they can model this type of conduct to their subordinates. Recent research has also found that subordinates perceive their leaders to be more ethical when the leaders have higher levels of cognitive moral development than subordinates (Jordan et al., 2013). Basically, subordinates will perceive their leaders more positively when those leaders are further along in their moral development than are the subordinates because of the positive difference in the superiors' abilities. Moral development will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Because of the importance of the military mission and the stakes involved, it is critically important that those placed in positions of leadership hold themselves and their subordinates to the highest ethical standards. Military responsibilities include representing the United States at home and internationally, being good stewards of taxpayer resources, and upholding the values and beliefs stated in the Constitution (Barlow, Jordan, & Hendrix, 2003). Military leaders must be willing to do the right thing for their nation at all costs. A lack of ethical leadership in a military organization can be disastrous as evidenced by the massacre at MyLai (Belknap, 2002) and the more recent atrocities that took place in the Abu Ghraib prison camp (Danner, 2004).

According to Jennings and Hannah (2011), the military is expert at inculcating its new members with the rules and regulations that need to be followed during basic training. New recruits quickly learn to follow the rules and to behave appropriately or to

face disciplinary action. The effort to develop a sense of identity as a military member is a more difficult and time-consuming task. The process involves social learning, social identity, and role modeling. However, it is critical when the individual is placed in a situation where right conduct is not mandatory and other options are available. These are the times when moral potency is critical. As such, it is important that we identify ways to ensure military leaders develop this identity and internal motivation as early as possible in their careers. Hannah and Avolio define the concept of ethos as, “extreme levels of strength of character required to generate and sustain extra-ethical virtuous behavior under conditions of high moral intensity where personal risk or sacrifice is required in the service of others” (2011, p. 992). The military needs leaders with this ethos in order to accomplish the mission. The strengths of character described in this definition are analogous to the proposed antecedents to moral potency that will be explored in this study.

Character Defined

The term character is often used, but there are many different definitions for it. Lickona’s (1991) definition is doing what is believed to be right even when pressured, externally or internally, to do the opposite. Hartman, says, “People of strong character act according to their commitments and values despite possible short-term pressures and temptations to the contrary” (1998, p. 549). Aristotle mentioned character as being central to a life of moral conduct, and others have described character as being critical to leadership (Sarros, Cooper, & Hartican, 2006). General Omar Bradley noted that character is ingrained in the military leader and consists of honesty, loyalty, courage, self-confidence, humility and self-sacrifice (Barlow et al., 2003). Sweeney and Fry define

leader character as, “consistent moral and ethical actions for the purposes of maintaining congruence with one’s own and the organization’s values and beliefs, and to serve the greater good of the community” (2012, p. 91). Berkowitz (2002) defines character simply as the characteristics that cause an individual to do the right thing.

Wright and Lauer (2013) describe three dimensions of character that have been widely accepted throughout history. First is moral discipline, which is evident when individuals are able to suppress their individual desires in order to focus on the societal good. Second, moral attachment is displayed when individuals show a clear commitment to a higher cause. Finally, moral autonomy is the capacity to make ethical decisions of one’s own free will. The person of character is primarily concerned with pursuing the good whether it pertains to the individual or society.

There are several reasons why character is important for leaders of organizations. Leaders with character have been shown to create organizations that are competitive and have supportive environments for their employees (Sarros et al., 2006). In addition, character is the foundational principle in the development of military leaders in Britain, as well as the United States. The integrity of leaders has been shown to limit the number of ethical violations by an organization, its employees and its customers (Sarros et al., 2006). Leaders of character have also been shown to have the ability to positively influence organizational cultures. They are an important building block for organizations with sound management practices (Goffee & Jones, 1998).

On the other hand, there are many examples of a lack of leadership character in today’s society. When organizational leaders place a focus on the accumulation of wealth or material goods and allow their leaders to lie, cheat, or steal, as long as it is not

too much, it can wreak havoc on the organization and the larger society (Wright & Lauer, 2013). The end result is a quick trip down the slippery slope to an unethical culture.

Character profiles examine different careers and identify which character strengths are most necessary for success in those careers. A character profile lists the top five character strengths that business school students feel are most beneficial to leaders in certain career fields. Recent research on these character profiles by Wright and Quick (2011) has found that the actual profiles of college and MBA students are much different than the ideal character profiles that these same students develop for various careers. The mismatch between the ideal and the actual profiles of the students provides evidence that there is a gap between the optimal profiles of individuals with good character and the profiles that are actually perceived.

Character versus Values

Hannah and Avolio (2011) describe a clear distinction between individual values and the moral component of individual character. Several authors have mentioned concerns with values research over the past number of years as individual values have become much more focused on self-interest than the interests of society (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Quick & Wright, 2011; Wright & Lauer, 2013). The problem is that individuals are reluctant to make judgments about others' behaviors or to impose any kind of standards on others. Gini describes this lack of conviction as, "the absence of positive moral leadership and the neglected development of a moral culture" (2004, p. 11). The result is a worldview where anything goes and decision makers decide what to do based on what is best for them and their organizations rather than on what is best for the society at large. When groups are focused on these self-interested values, it is little

wonder that ethical scandals and criminal activity abound in the business world.

Individuals are merely looking out for their own values and their own best interests.

Character, on the other hand, is focused on balancing the personal good with societal good. The foundations on which a person of character makes decisions are firm and not subject to change based on what is best for that person at a given moment (Wright & Lauer, 2013). As St. Paul says in his letter to the church at Philippi, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others” (Bible, 1984, p. 1072). This is the mindset of a leader of character.

The Call for Character Education

Many researchers are interested in character development and whether or not it can be taught. While there is some evidence that much of a person’s character is developed during childhood, we also know that some of an individual’s character comes with the maturity developed in adolescence and beyond (Berkowitz, 2002). Some researchers feel that teaching students at the college and post-graduate level about an analytical framework for dealing with ethical dilemmas can be very effective in helping them face issues in the future and establishing ethical frameworks for their organizations (Hartman, 1998). Helping students see the long-run implications of unethical decisions instead of having them focus solely on the quick fix or the immediately profitable solution is one way to expand their horizons and get them thinking about ethical decisions. Awareness is also important. When decision makers are made aware of the ethical implications of their decisions, they are more likely to give them careful consideration. The moral intensity, or the characteristics of the situation, can encourage

them to take a more considered view of how to handle a given decision (Jones, 1991). Regardless of how character is developed, it is critical that the values and belief systems of those being trained are integrated with their self-identities (Sweeney & Fry, 2012).

Overall, research has shown that character can be developed in individuals at times beyond adolescence. The evidence suggests that the most effective forms of training are facilitated ethical discussions between peers and their superiors about real or hypothetical ethical dilemmas. By allowing individuals to grapple with situations that require moral reasoning at levels above their own, they are stretched and can develop into better ethical decision makers. However, the training has been shown to be most effective when it lasts between 4-12 weeks, and programs less than 4 weeks long have very little impact (Jordan et al., 2013). Therefore, we find that character can be developed, but it takes a concerted effort and there is no quick-fix solution. The length of time required for training to be effective may make some people question the investment of time and resources, but, as we will see, many are beginning to realize the need for this type of education in business, specifically, and in society, in general.

In light of the ethical challenges faced by organizations in today's economy, it should come as little surprise that companies are beginning to clamor for character education in business schools across the country and around the world. Many of the perpetrators of the scandals that have splattered the headlines of the business newspapers and magazines in the past few decades have been graduates of "top-notch" business schools and MBA programs. Many of those same types of graduates ended up on Wall Street and were involved in the financial crisis that hit the nation in 2007. Crossan and colleagues (2013) conducted extensive round-table discussions with over 300 business

executives from around the globe. They wanted to know what these executives thought about the importance of character education. The upshot of these discussions was that the executives think that character is important and that it needs to be taught in business schools. The authors found that, “leadership of self, and in particular, character development are essential to effective leadership and hence we cannot turn our backs on this critical element of leadership development” (Crossan et al., 2013, p. 295). Several of the executives interviewed felt that there needed to be more emphasis placed on character and morals in order for future leaders to have convictions and foundational principles on which they can base their decisions. There seemed to be a general consensus that character and a willingness to stand up for one’s beliefs is lacking in the business world today (Crossan et al., 2013).

Many academicians are also of the opinion that character is an important part of an MBA curriculum. Ethics courses that teach students how to deal with problems by using analytical frameworks are increasingly common. In addition, ethics considerations are now being included in many front line management courses and the educators involved feel that this is a significant piece of what educators in this area are called to do (Hartman, 1998). Students can be encouraged, while still in school, to think critically about ethical issues. The more practice they have facing challenging problems, the better equipped they may be to handle them when they arise on the job.

Gentile and Samuelson (2005) have developed a concept called Social Impact Management. This is a field of inquiry that falls at the intersection between business needs and larger societal concerns. Its goal is to help managers deal with the complexities of the interactions of these two spheres and to develop solutions that are

beneficial to both. This is important because the evidence shows that the majority of business students experience a shift during their education from focusing on customer needs and product quality to a focus on shareholder value (Gentile & Samuelson, 2005). This is a concern because of the possible ethical issues that can arise from this type of focus. Once managers are fixated on shareholder value, they may begin to emphasize the business needs discussed above at the expense of societal concerns. Instead of focusing on developing win-win solutions, new managers take on a win or lose perspective and feel that they need to choose between business objectives and moral ones. The concept of social impact management helps managers develop solutions that can be beneficial to both. Next, I will look at how the moral development process works for individuals.

Rest's Model for Moral Development

Rest and colleagues' (1986) model for moral development is one of the best known efforts to describe the process that individuals go through when facing moral dilemmas. The model has four steps, the last two of which are of primary interest in this study. Rest and colleagues proposed that there are four psychological processes that an individual must go through in order to act morally. The first step is to determine what actions are possible, who is affected, and how the affected parties may be impacted by certain actions. The second step is to make a judgment about which course of action is morally right. The third step in the model is to put a priority on the moral aspects of the situation above the personal aspects of the decision. In this step, individuals make the choice that they intend to do what is morally right. The final step in the model is the taking of moral action. Individuals must have the perseverance, skill, and strength of character to follow through on their decision to act morally. They may face challenges

such as a lack of will or even obstacles at this point and they must be able to overcome them (Rest et al., 1986).

The first step of the model, interpreting the situation, requires decision makers to envision the possible options available to them and the consequences of each of those options. In this step, the decision maker realizes that there is a moral component to the decision and that its results could have an impact on the interests or well-being of others. The final part of this stage is for individuals to work to understand their own feelings about the situation and the possible outcomes (Rest et al., 1986).

In step two of the model, the decision maker must determine which of the options developed in the first step is the morally correct thing to do. This determination is based on many different aspects of the individual including his/her belief system, ideologies, sense of fairness and cultural background (Rest et al., 1986).

The third step involves weighing the benefits of the morally right decisions against the other options that may be better for their careers, their families, or long-range goals. There are many different reasons why individuals will decide on the moral choice versus the others, to include societal norms, conscience, and fear of repercussions (Rest et al., 1986). It may also be a combination of these factors that spurs the decision makers on to deciding to make moral choices.

The final step is when the individual actually decides to make the moral decision and puts it into action. The authors mention the fact that perseverance, resoluteness, competence and character all lead to successful execution of component four. They also discuss the importance of feeling like you can accomplish (efficacy) successful outcomes (Rest et al., 1986). The impact of moral potency is found in the space between

components three and four. It allows individuals to stand their ground and face the obstacles that are in front of them. They have the resolve to make the morally correct decision because of their moral potency. Next, I will look at the gap that exists between steps three and four and the challenges of moving from knowing the right thing to do to actually doing it.

Decision-Action Gap

Treviño et al. (2006) in their review of behavioral ethics in organizations have recommended that greater attention be paid to the link between ethical intentions and ethical action. Individuals may have numerous intellectual strengths, but in order to make moral decisions, they must also be motivated to follow through. As Schwartz and Sharpe (2006) discuss, if one wants to be wise, it is not enough to know what the right thing to do is; one must also be willing to do the right thing. Comer and Vega note that, “because *knowing* the right thing to do is not the same thing as *doing* the right thing, it is also important to focus on the factors contributing to the discrepancy between moral reasoning and moral behavior in the workplace” (2011, p. xv). Zhu and colleagues (2004) proposed a framework of ethical leadership behavior that they refer to as “authenticity”. This refers to consistency between a leader’s moral intentions and his/her actions. In order for leaders to be considered authentic, they must be able to bridge the gap between decision and action. The construct of moral potency is one that can help us better understand the link between ethical intentions and ethical action and how it can be strengthened.

Before attempting to establish a relationship between moral potency and the bridging of the decision-action gap, we must first understand the possible causes of the

gap. As mentioned earlier, the process of going from the deciding step of Rest's model to the action step can be challenging. There are several reasons for the existence of the decision-action gap. First, there are the social trends that make this step more difficult. One of those trends is the increasing level of pressure for organizations to turn a profit. Increasing pressure of this type adds to the challenge of making ethical decisions. There are many individuals who have a desire to behave ethically, but they are diverted by pressure from their organization (Callahan & Comer, 2011). With the focus so squarely on the bottom line, it can be difficult to conjure up the resolve to make a decision that may have a negative impact on the organization's financial fortunes. Additionally, many individuals in decision-making positions are being richly rewarded for making their organizations profitable at the expense of ensuring ethical practices (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). This is another example of the folly of rewarding A and hoping for B (Kerr, 1975). We reward performance and expect moral behavior.

Another social trend that faces decision makers and makes ethical actions more difficult is the rise in bureaucratization. As businesses become larger and more bureaucratic, the ability of individual decision makers to practice autonomy or to learn the necessary skills to make an ethical decision is radically reduced. Established procedures and a lack of flexibility prevent decision makers from dealing with challenging issues and learning the intricacies of facing an uncertain situation and handling it in an ethical manner (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). As a result, the decision-action gap grows wider and more difficult to cross.

Graham (1986) discusses conflicting loyalties as another reason for the disconnect between moral decisions and moral action. The conflict arises because of the competition

between the Judeo-Christian ethic of personal responsibility and the organizational ethic of team loyalty. Personal responsibility sometimes requires the individual to stand alone and face ridicule because of an unpopular position. Team loyalty, on the other hand, requires the individual to go along to get along. The individual must put aside personal beliefs in favor of what is good for the organization. Graham (1986) posits that the team loyalty ethic has assumed a dominant role in organizational cultures today. This has resulted in a lack of appreciation for individual consideration of ethical issues that may lead someone to oppose the status quo. The emphasis on the good of the organization effectively kills an individual's ability to stand up for what is right. Organizational norms also impact the way individuals make decisions. It has been shown that people have a tendency to act on norms that are more salient. As such, it is reasonable to expect that individuals will be less likely to act morally when the salient organizational norms encourage the opposite (Jones & Ryan, 1997).

Another social issue that may make crossing the decision-action gap more challenging is the separation of spirituality from civic life. Most spiritual traditions include a worldview and guidelines for what is right and wrong. When individuals choose to follow certain spiritual traditions, they typically accept those guidelines and incorporate them into their decision-making process. However, when that spiritual foundation is not accepted by the larger society, morality tends to become more of a combination of reason, emotion, social structure and experience as opposed to a set of rules that are established by a higher power (Thompson, 2004). Moral standards become relative and leaders may find it difficult to stand up for their beliefs because of the hostility they may face. Peterson and Seligman (2004) describe spirituality as a belief in

a higher power. When this belief is missing, there is a greater risk of individuals making decisions based on their own desires rather than what is best for the larger group or in accordance with a spiritual belief system.

In addition to the social trends and pressures that exist, there are also some innate, human characteristics that add to the challenge of bridging the decision-action gap. It has been shown, through experimental psychology, that human beings are typically weak morally. Especially when they are faced with unanimity from a group, authority figures who are resolute, or situations that are stressful, it is much easier for a person to go along with others than it is for them to stand up for their beliefs (Alzola, 2008). Williams and Gantt (2012) discuss brief moments of “moral lucidity” that occur when someone encounters a moral dilemma and knows what the right thing to do is. Often these moments are quickly bypassed and individuals rationalize their way out of making a moral decision. Higher levels of moral potency will allow decision makers to recognize the moments of moral lucidity and to capitalize on them despite their natural inclinations.

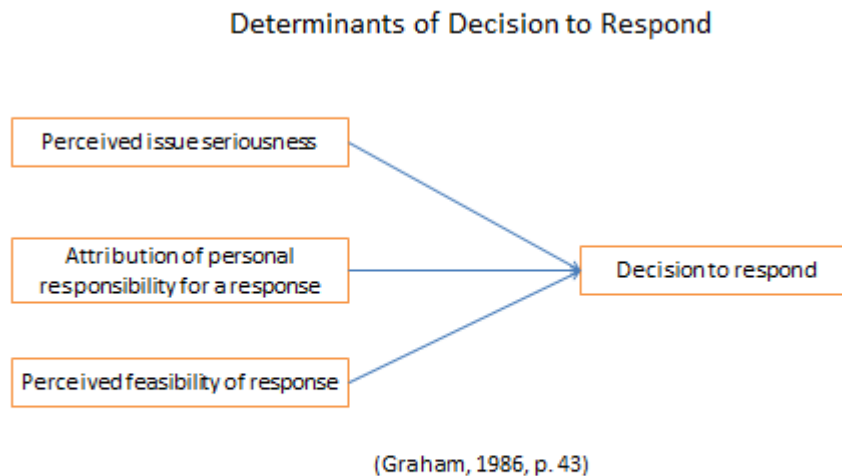
A final challenge to those who attempt to bridge the decision-action gap is rationalization. Four of the most common rationalizations that are used by employees are: (a) everyone else is doing it; (b) the impact of the action is very small (no one will get hurt); (c) it is not my responsibility; and (d) I have to be loyal to my company, even if someone gets hurt (Gentile, 2011, p. 123). These types of justification can prevent an individual from taking the necessary action to turn an ethical decision into an ethical action. Now that we have a better understanding of the causes of the decision-action gap, I will take an in-depth look at the possible cure: moral potency.

Moral Potency

The concept of moral conation or moral potency was recently introduced by Hannah and his colleagues (2011). They defined moral potency/conation as, "...the capacity to generate responsibility and motivation to take moral action and persevere through challenges" (Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011, p. 664). Ethical decision making is an important facet of leadership. However, Hannah et al. found no prior research that explains the variance in ethical decision making between individuals with similar cognitive capacities. Rest's Defining Issues Test (DIT) is the most commonly used measure of cognitive moral judgment capacity, and yet it only accounts for 20% of the variance in individual ethical behavior (Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011). Lickona's (1991) Character Development Model includes moral knowing, moral feeling and moral action. Moral action aligns closely with the idea of moral potency. The three attributes associated with moral action are habit, competence and will.

Graham (1986) has identified the three psychological states that come into play when an individual is making a decision about whether or not to respond to an issue within an organization. They are: (a) seriousness of the issue; (b) attribution of personal responsibility for a response and (c) perceived feasibility of response (See Figure 1). While the seriousness of the issue seems to be related to the moral intensity of the situation (Jones, 1991), the other two states relate back to moral potency. Attribution of personal responsibility aligns with moral ownership, one of the components of moral potency, since decision makers need to feel that they have some level of involvement in the situation in order to take action. The perceived feasibility of the response is related to

Figure 1 – Determinants of Decision to Respond



both moral efficacy and moral courage, which are the other two components of moral potency. Moral efficacy gives decision makers a feeling of confidence that they can accomplish their goals when they respond. Moral courage influences individuals to be willing to face potentially adverse consequences when they decide to take action. I will discuss the three components of moral potency in greater detail later in this chapter.

Pettit (2012) has proposed that moral potency is the, “central element in exercising evidence-based leadership for moral agency...which can impact on one’s willingness and perceived ability to act, as well as the capacity to make a real difference” (2012, p. 1). He also identifies moral potency as an important element in the process of translating moral concerns into moral action. He goes on to discuss three critical elements described by Bezzina and Tuana (2011) that need to be in place in order for individuals to be willing to choose a moral action. First, they must be convinced of its

importance. Second, they must be capable of acting in the way required by the situation and finally, they must have the courage to act (Pettit, 2012). These three elements fit closely with the moral potency components of moral ownership, moral efficacy, and moral courage. Each of these capacities needs to be developed in order for an individual to possess moral potency (Hannah & Avolio, 2010).

Moral ownership. Moral ownership is described as the individual's sense of responsibility for a situation with a moral component. The individual is invested enough that he/she is unwilling to let the situation pass by without taking some action to set it right (Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011). As a result, individuals who have high levels of moral ownership are less likely to practice moral disengagement and try to rationalize their way into thinking an unethical decision is correct. Moral disengagement has been described by Bandura (1999) as self-deceit where individuals justify their actions so as to protect their self-image. The more a person's moral ownership is developed, the less likely he/she will be to succumb to moral disengagement and deceive him/herself or others. Empirical evidence of the importance of moral ownership was found by Weaver and colleagues (2005). They were told stories about leaders who were considered good ethical role models because they were not focused on their own advancement. Instead, these leaders were willing to do what was right even if that was in opposition to company goals. The ability to know what the right thing is to do and to pursue that path despite the obstacles is the core of moral ownership. Sekerka and her co-authors describe the "moral muscle." This is an internal mechanism that allows individuals to refocus their immediate responses in a way that points them towards the good of others (2011, pp. 135-136). The use of the moral muscle occurs when decision makers understand they

have ownership of an issue. Hannah and colleagues (2011) propose that moral ownership will be related to higher levels of both moral motivation and moral action.

Moral efficacy. There has been a great deal of work done on helping individuals interpret moral situations and make appropriate judgments. However, very little research has examined how individuals are motivated to decide correctly and then actually make the correct decision once the issues have been interpreted and judged as ethical in nature (Hannah & Avolio, 2010).

Moral efficacy is essentially the confidence an individual has in his/her ability to affect a situation in a positive manner (Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011). Similar to self-efficacy, it relates to the magnitude of the situation being faced and the individual's valuation of his/her ability to succeed. Moral efficacy comes from a combination of supporting means and personal abilities. The supporting means include backing from leadership, peer approval or whistle blower protections. Moral efficacy will be highest when both supporting means and personal ability are high. The decision maker will have higher moral efficacy when his/her abilities are judged sufficient to overcome the magnitude of the situation. According to research, moral efficacy is developed over time. The more success one has in dealing with moral situations, the more efficacious one becomes (Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011). Moral efficacy builds on itself and becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy.

Lickona's (1991) competence and habit are both closely related to the idea of moral efficacy. Competence is having the ability to turn moral judgments and feelings into effective moral action. Meanwhile, habit is the ability to do something because you have done it repeatedly in the past (Barlow et al., 2003). This allows individuals to be

confident in their moral actions. Additionally, our ability to frame ethical challenges is closely related to our abilities and confidence to act in a given situation (Gentile, 2011). As such, moral efficacy is closely related to moral courage, which I will discuss next.

Moral courage. The final component of moral potency, and maybe the most critical, is moral courage. This is the ability to overcome threats or fears to act morally (Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011). One of the critical ethical traits of a healthy organization member is courage and persistence in the face of difficulty (Verschoor, 2003). Individuals must possess the ability to make the right decision despite adversity they may face. “Moral courage requires the ability to endure hardship while holding true to one’s principles” (White, 2011, p. 113). This type of courage needs to be developed prior to leaders facing ethical dilemmas and is critical to the development of moral potency.

Recent research has begun to shed more light on moral courage and its benefits. Hannah and colleagues (2013) conducted a large study on military members looking at the relationship between moral courage and discipline issues, as well as mistreatment of noncombatants. They found that those with low moral courage were 52% more likely to be disciplined for lying, cheating, and stealing. In addition, they found that those with low moral courage were 300% more likely to mistreat a noncombatant than those who scored one standard deviation above the mean on moral courage. This indicates the importance of developing moral courage early in a person’s career.

Lickona (1991) discusses the concept of will in his character development model as it relates to moral action. It is described as the moral energy to do the right thing (Barlow et al., 2003). This attribute relates very closely to moral courage. The decision

maker has to be able to overcome fear or pressure to decide differently in order to arrive at the moral action. This requires a strength of will that is not found in every leader. Other researchers have asked subordinates about the qualities they have appreciated in their leaders. One that was mentioned frequently was the leaders' willingness to support the subordinates, especially at times when they are being pressured and challenged (Weaver et al., 2005). This is further evidence that moral courage is appreciated by subordinates and adds to their perception of ethical leadership.

Each of the three components discussed above is necessary but not sufficient by itself for an individual to have moral potency. Hannah et al. (2011) make several suggestions about what may help individuals develop their moral potency. They discuss emphasizing ethical issues, providing ethical role models, conducting training programs, and promoting moral exemplars as possible ways to encourage an increase in moral potency. In this study, I wanted to determine what the antecedents to higher levels of moral potency were. I proposed that there are strengths of character that are related to moral potency and I sought to discover what they were. Next, I will look at those character strengths in greater detail.

Values in Action (VIA) Character Strengths

The VIA Character Strengths find their genesis in the world of positive psychology. Peterson and Seligman (2004) focused on human strengths instead of weaknesses and on building the best things in life rather than fixing the worst. Positive psychology is focused on three important topics. First, it studies positive subjective experiences such as events that make people happy. Next, it incorporates positive individual traits like bravery and honesty, and third, institutions that enable the first two,

such as institutions of higher education (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The development of character strengths falls squarely into the second area of studying positive individual traits.

From an ethics perspective, the positive psychology movement has been very informative. For example, business ethics researchers have lamented the fact that very little is known about how some individuals are able to make ethical decisions while others are not. Of particular interest are the individuals who make ethical decisions in spite of the fact that there may be challenges from superiors or peers, or that there may be personal risk to the decision maker (Treviño et al., 2006). The ability to understand what strengths of character lead to this type of behavior is very useful to those who hope to understand ethical behavior in society.

When Peterson and Seligman began their attempt to codify a list of universal virtues, they wanted to compile a list that was consistent across countries and cultures. They desired to create a list of virtues that are recognized as being critical to a well-lived life. They looked across cultures and identified six overarching virtues that were similar in the major cultures around the world. They wanted to ensure there was a “coherent resemblance” in different cultures of each of the six virtues they identified (2004, p. 35).

Peterson and Seligman (2004) identified 10 criteria they used when developing the strengths of character. First, “a strength contributes to various fulfillments that constitute the good life, for oneself and others” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 17). Second, a character strength must be morally valued in its own right and not just lead to positive outcomes. Third, when a strength is displayed by one person, it does not diminish others. The fourth criterion is that its opposite should not be able to be stated in

a positive fashion. Fifth, the strength needs to show itself in thoughts, feelings or actions and in such a way that it can be assessed. Sixth, each strength must be distinct from the others without overlap. Seventh, a character strength is embodied by shared stories. Paragons of the strength are celebrated by a society; one example being George Washington and his honesty. Eighth, there will typically be prodigies with respect to each of the strengths. An example of an individual who was a prodigy in the strength of bravery would be Dietrich Bonhoeffer, an individual who regularly voiced his opposition to the policies of Nazi Germany and eventually ended up being killed in a concentration camp because of his involvement in a plot to kill Hitler and overthrow the Nazi regime (Metaxas, 2010). Ninth, there will be individuals who show a complete lack of each strength. The eighth and ninth criteria show that there is a range in each of the character strengths. Finally, the tenth criteria is that the greater society has institutions that cultivate and sustain the strengths of character.

Based on the ten criteria above, the authors were able to develop, test and validate 24 character strengths that are categorized under six moral virtues. The overarching moral virtues are wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. A description of each virtue will be provided later in this dissertation. Each of the 24 character strengths maps to one of these virtues (Peterson & Park, 2006). Subsequent to their identification of the strengths, Peterson and Seligman (2004) were able to develop and validate a scale by which an individual can be assessed on each of the strengths.

Peterson and Park (2006) mention the relatively small likelihood that one individual can be high in all the character strengths. They discuss the fact that there are

several strengths that tend not to co-occur in studies. Because of the diversity of the character strengths, this study will attempt to focus on those strengths that are specifically related to moral potency.

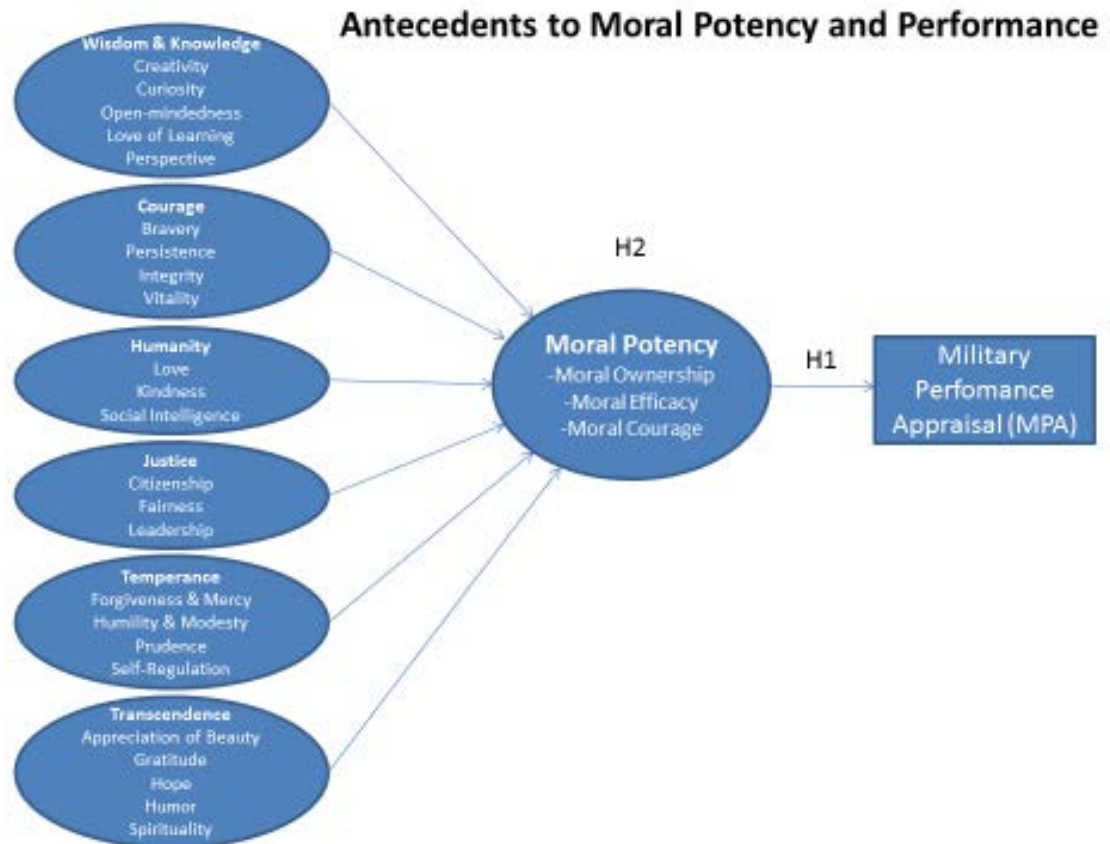
Thus far in the management and psychology literature the VIA character strengths have been studied in many different contexts. An evaluation of the strengths before and after September 11, 2001 has been conducted (Peterson & Seligman, 2003). They have also been studied in foreign environments, such as the United Kingdom (Linley et al., 2007), Japan (Shimai, Otake, Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006), Croatia (Brdar & Kashdan, 2010), and other countries worldwide (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006). A form specifically for youth has been developed (Park & Peterson, 2006) and it has also been tested on a college population (Lounsbury, Fisher, Levy, & Welsh, 2009). However, the character strengths have yet to be evaluated as predictors of ethical behavior. The proposed model for this study is depicted in Figure 2.

Wisdom and Knowledge

The idea behind wisdom is that it is a very broad type of knowledge and judgment. It allows individuals to balance their own self-interest with the interests of others to make an overall decision. Peterson and Seligman (2004) characterize wisdom and knowledge as noble intelligence of which all are thankful and no one is resentful.

The character strengths that are subsumed under the virtue of wisdom and knowledge are creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning and perspective. These strengths are all oriented towards acquiring information and using it for the good of the self and others.

Figure 2 – Proposed Model



Creativity. There are two important components of the character strength of *creativity*. First, the individual must be able to develop ideas that are original. In addition, the original idea must make a positive contribution to the individual’s life or to others (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). An individual who is able to discover novel ideas that are helpful to him/her or to society is considered creative. Creativity is related more to disposition than to intelligence and it is also dependent on numerous outside factors, such as, age, domain of creativity, and field of interest. In other words, a creative person will look different depending on area of interest and age.

Curiosity. *Curiosity* is characterized by an interest in pursuing novel ideas and experiences. Individuals who are continually interested in questioning how things happen or why they happen are characterized as curious. Individual differences in curiosity levels are well known in that some people have questions about everything with which they come in contact while others do not seek to ask those questions and have no interest (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Curiosity is a character strength because it leads people to find out new information and discover new connections. However, as with most of the character strengths, if curiosity is taken to the extreme, it can have detrimental effects when it leads to risky behavior.

Open-mindedness. The underlying premise of open-minded people is that they will evaluate multiple options in a situation when it is appropriately complex. These are not people who always want to look at the options even when the solution is simple and obvious. However, when faced with a challenging decision, they will weigh the options and examine multiple angles in order to arrive at the best solution (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Love of learning. *Love of learning* is understood as a somewhat unusual level of individual interest in a certain subject. When people have an affinity for a subject and want to continually gain knowledge about the subject, they are said to have a love of learning. It gives individuals an ability to persist in the face of obstacles or challenges because they truly desire to know more about the subject. They are interested in the process of gaining knowledge and do not get upset when they are not immediately able to master an understanding or ability to perform. They are more interested in the journey to discovery than the actual mastery. It has been shown that love of learning supports

positive experiences that may help to increase levels of mental and physical well-being (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Perspective. Another character strength that falls under the virtue of wisdom and knowledge is *perspective*. This strength combines knowledge and experience and coordinates its use to improve well-being. Basically an individual is able to listen to input from others and then offer useful advice based on his/her experiences and knowledge (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The ability to discuss issues with others allows decision makers to hear different thoughts on how a situation should be handled. They are then able to weigh those options and determine the best one. The perspective they gain from these discussions gives them additional insight and improves their ability to handle the situation effectively.

Courage

The second virtue discussed by Peterson and Seligman (2004) is courage. Courage is the ability to press on with an action despite fear of the results of that action. The four character strengths that are addressed under courage are bravery, persistence, integrity and vitality.

Bravery. The first character strength under courage is *bravery*. The authors describe bravery as a voluntary willingness to act in a situation of great peril (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Individuals who display bravery are those who act of their own volition and are not forced to act in that way. Additionally, they understand that there are risks involved in the situation they face. It is not bravery if one stumbles into a situation and must deal with it. There needs to be a perception of danger or loss associated with the situation faced in order for someone to display bravery when facing it.

Persistence. The character strength of *persistence* also falls under the virtue of courage. The definition provided by Peterson and Seligman (2004) is voluntarily continuing to pursue a goal despite challenges and obstacles that may arise. When individuals are persistent, they will not give up and will continue to pursue their objective with the intention of accomplishing their goals regardless of the challenges they face. Persistence is unusual because individuals will typically give up on an action once they meet a certain level of resistance. Those who persist will continue to fight for their objective long after most people have given up.

Integrity. Continuing under the virtue of courage, the next character strength is *integrity*. According to Peterson and Seligman (2004), people with integrity regularly practice what they preach, are willing to stand up for their convictions, even when they are unpopular, and treat others with care and concern. A person of integrity is someone who is whole, meaning that his/her beliefs, thoughts, and actions are all in congruence.

Vitality. Individuals with a great deal of *vitality* not only have an inordinate amount of spirit and aliveness, but they are also able to transmit that to others with whom they come in contact. Individuals who are vital have a great deal of energy and are typically very close to fully functioning (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Vital people are at the top of their game. The vital individual exhibits high levels of enthusiasm and directs that enthusiasm to all his/her endeavors.

Humanity

The virtue of humanity includes positive traits demonstrated in caring relationships and a desire to befriend others. The strengths of humanity tend to show themselves in one-on-one relationships versus relationships between an individual and

large groups or communities (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The strengths of humanity include love, kindness and social intelligence.

Love. The experience of *love* as a character strength is described as a mutual feeling of affection between two people. Individuals who exhibit love share aid, comfort, and acceptance with one another (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). People who experience love feel they have someone they can be themselves around, who they can trust, and who they desire to make happy. In terms of the character strengths, the type of love described is requited and not the unrequited type that can be seen in infatuation.

Kindness. People who exhibit the character strength of *kindness* feel that all human beings have worth, that giving is more important than receiving, and that people who experience suffering are in need of care and concern. Peterson and Seligman (2004) make mention of the fact that it has been shown that those with higher levels of moral reasoning tend to be more helpful and kind to others in general.

Social intelligence. When individuals have high levels of *social intelligence*, they are able to perceive emotions, understand their emotional relationships, and decipher the meanings of their emotions extremely well. Those with social intelligence are able to read emotions in others' faces, understand their own emotions, use this type of information to get others to cooperate with them, and act wisely in their relationships based on their reading of the situation (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). While social intelligence can be positive it can also be used for devious purposes.

Justice

The virtue of justice relates to the optimal interaction between individuals and groups. It differs from the virtue of humanity in that it deals with interactions among

people rather than between them (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Justice influences how the members of the group interact and how those interactions affect the group as a whole. Citizenship, fairness and leadership are the character strengths that fall under the virtue of justice.

Citizenship. The character strength of *citizenship* is the first under the virtue of justice. Peterson and Seligman's (2004) definition of citizenship is a sense of responsibility to improve the world around oneself, a willingness to give time for the good of the community, and a focus on helping others. People with high citizenship levels feel a need to get involved in the community around them and help to make that environment better. Their ultimate goal is the betterment of society.

Fairness. Another character strength under the umbrella of justice is *fairness*. Fairness is defined as wanting to ensure everyone gets their fair share, as well as acknowledging that each individual deserves respect, and should not be discriminated against for arbitrary reasons (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Moral reasoning is critical to the concept of fairness. Decision makers need to understand when they are facing a moral decision and then determine the different possibilities for addressing the issue. Next they must decide how they want to handle the situation and then they must take action (Rest et al., 1986). Fairness plays a key role in reasoning out the possible solutions and then selecting the correct option. It also flows into behavior, as the pressure to act immorally must be outweighed by the person's sense of fairness.

Leadership. Under the virtue of justice, the final character strength is *leadership*, defined as the motivation and ability to define and establish goals for a group of people and then provide the support needed to achieve those goals (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Individuals who are high in this strength will often take charge in developing a course of action for a group, will work to motivate others, and will generally rise to the task of guiding an organization on a path to successful accomplishment of its goals.

Temperance

Temperance is comprised of strengths that protect an individual from the temptation of excess. There are many forces that tempt individuals to take things to the extreme such as hatred, arrogance, short-term pleasure, and uncontrolled emotions. The strengths of temperance allow the individual to keep these excesses in control and prevent them from becoming problematic (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Forgiveness and mercy. When individuals are offended or transgressed upon, their ability to move past the incident and to give acceptance to the transgressor is known as *forgiveness*. *Mercy* comes into play when the offended individual is able to forgive whether the transgressor deserves it or not. Mercy also means showing compassion for the transgressor because of the circumstances they may be facing. The forgiving and merciful person is able to move past an offense quickly, tries to understand the other person's point of view and is not interested in exacting revenge (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Humility and modesty. The character strength of *humility and modesty* is defined as an accurate view of one's self with an ability to acknowledge your own mistakes and openness to ideas from others (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Basically, individuals with high levels of humility and modesty are aware of their limitations and have a view of themselves that is not overblown.

Prudence. *Prudence* is known as a form of reasoning whereby individuals are able to consider both long and short term consequences of their actions and resist the desire to act impulsively. Overall, the prudent person is focused on the long term and will strive to have balance in their life rather than looking only for what benefits them in the short term. Contingency planning, saving money for the future, and staying away from situations that have been tempting in the past are all examples of prudent choices (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Self-regulation. “*Self-regulation* refers to how a person exerts control over his or her own responses so as to pursue goals and live up to standards” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 500). Self-regulation is the means to keep emotions, impulses, and other behaviors in check and not letting them overwhelm the individual’s intellect. When individuals are able to override their natural instincts because those instincts may have long term repercussions, they are said to be exhibiting self-regulation.

Transcendence

The final virtue described by Peterson and Seligman (2004), is transcendence. This category includes strengths that allow an individual to connect with the larger universe and allows them to add meaning to their lives. This is the most abstract of the virtues.

Appreciation of Beauty. The character strength of *appreciation of beauty* involves the ability to identify and take enjoyment from things one sees in the physical and social world. People with high scores in this strength frequently find themselves impressed with things in nature or when interacting with others. They take great pleasure in experiencing life and all that it has to offer and they appreciate the nuances that it

brings. The authors propose three types of goodness: (a) physical beauty, (b) skill or talent and (c) virtue or moral rightness (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). When individuals have an appreciation for these types of goodness, it indicates higher levels of character.

Gratitude. Thankfulness and appreciation when receiving a gift are the essence of the character strength of *gratitude*. People who are glad to be alive, take joy in their circumstances, and are quick to give thanks for the good things that happen to them have high levels of gratitude. There is a humbleness involved in expressions of gratitude as though the receiver is not truly worthy of receiving that which is being given. The authors mention three components of gratitude, namely (a) a sense of appreciation towards the other person, (b) a sense of goodwill to that person, and (c) a disposition to act in a reciprocal manner (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Hope. *Hope* is an emotional construct by which an individual has an optimistic outlook for the future and has a cheerful attitude towards what lies ahead. The hopeful individual believes that things will work out for the best and that he/she should plan optimistically for the future in order to ensure a positive outcome. Furthermore, when faced with a challenge, the hopeful person will focus on the next opportunity and make every attempt to improve the outcome (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Humor. A cheerful outlook on adversity and the ability to make others laugh are two of the main components of the character strength of *humor*. Humorous people enjoy pointing out situations that are incongruous and will work hard to brighten other people's days with laughter. They rarely allow themselves to be gloomy and can often find a laugh even in a difficult situation (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Humor can have a

positive effect on many situations and has the ability to lighten the mood in times of difficulty.

Spirituality. The character strength of *spirituality* also comes from the virtue of transcendence. Spirituality is a belief in a transcendent power that is sacred and divine. While the nature and understanding of this power can be different between cultures and also between individuals, it helps the person deal with questions of purpose and meaning in their lives (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). People with high scores in spirituality believe that they are, in some sense, responsible to a higher authority and not just to their own whims and desires. In most cases the spiritual power addresses guidelines for how lives should be lived and also standards of what is right and wrong.

In sum, there would appear to be similarity between the constructs of character strengths and moral potency. Since moral potency is a fairly new construct, there has been little empirical research done regarding the relationship between moral potency and other constructs. I used this study to explore these constructs more deeply in order to determine if relationships exist. Our research question is as follows:

Research Question – Are any of the 24 Values in Action Character Strengths related to moral potency?

Individual Performance

I propose that there moral potency and individual performance are related. At the United States Air Force Academy, individual performance is measured using a rating system known as the Military Performance Appraisal (MPA). The Academy has a systematic development program that is geared towards developing their cadets into officers of character. The MPA is one of the key pieces of this developmental program.

This appraisal is competency-based and takes into account input from each cadet's immediate supervisor and additional raters, who are typically other cadets, as well as other individuals who interact with the cadet in an official capacity such as instructors and coaches ("Military Performance Appraisal," 2013). The ten competencies that are measured for cadets in their junior year are, a) being a role model, b) being a respectful wingman, c) supporting the standards for professional development, d) effective communication, e) applying team dynamics, f) focusing effort, g) effective decision making, h) getting results, i) empowering and inspiring others, and j) managing conflict. It is my view that individuals who are low in moral potency are unlikely to be rated high on these competencies.

In addition to measuring performance, another goal of the MPA system is to help cadets internalize the Air Force's Core Values of integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do. Everything that is evaluated in the MPA ties back to these core values. This leads to our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 – Moral potency will be positively related to level of individual performance.

Moral Potency as a Mediator of the Character-Performance Relationship

A final area of these relationships that I investigated is the role of moral potency as a mediator between the character strengths and individual performance. I proposed that the character strengths will be related to moral potency and moral potency will be related to individual performance as hypothesized above. I also predict that any relationship that exists between the character strengths and performance will be fully mediated by the level of moral potency. Our final hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 2 – Moral potency will mediate the relationship between certain character strengths and performance, such that higher levels of the previously identified character strengths will relate to higher levels of moral potency, which will lead to higher levels of individual performance.

Table 1 – Research Question and Hypotheses

Research Question – Are any of the 24 Values in Action Character Strengths related to moral potency?

Hypothesis 1 – Moral potency will be positively related to level of individual performance.

Hypothesis 2 – Moral potency will mediate the relationship between certain character strengths and performance, such that higher levels of the previously identified character strengths will relate to higher levels of moral potency, which will lead to higher levels of individual performance.

Chapter 2 – Methods

Organizational Context

The United States Air Force Academy's vision is to be, "The Air Force's premier institution for developing leaders of character" ("The United States Air Force Academy Outcomes," 2009, p. 2). Character-based officership is the ultimate goal of the institution for its graduates. The nation relies on its military officers to faithfully execute their responsibilities in the national interest, regardless of their personal beliefs. Every officer in the United States military swears an oath to uphold the Constitution. The Air Force Academy has developed desirous outcomes in their graduates that reflect what is meant by the term *leaders of character*. There are three overarching categories of these outcomes and each includes an ethical outcome, showing how critical an ethical mind-set is to being known as a leader of character ("The United States Air Force Academy Outcomes," 2009). The three categories are: (a) "Committed to Societal, Professional and Individual **Responsibilities**;" (b) "Empowered by Integrated Intellectual and Warrior **Skills**;" and, (c) "Grounded in essential **Knowledge** of the Profession of Arms and Human and Physical Worlds" ("The United States Air Force Academy Outcomes," 2009, p. 3).

The very first outcome under *Responsibilities* is *Ethical Reasoning and Action*. There are three main aspects to this outcome. First, one must have the *head* to understand the situation and weigh the moral correctness of given situations. Second is the *heart* to consider the human aspect of the situation and take that into account in the decision-making process. Finally, the *hands* must be utilized to have the conviction to carry out the moral action even when faced with challenges. The Air Force Academy

strives to instill ethical reasoning and action in all its graduates ("The United States Air Force Academy Outcomes," 2009).

Under the heading of *Skills* come the outcomes of critical thinking, decision making, and courage. *Critical thinking* includes the ability to analyze information and come to a sound conclusion. Although this type of thinking goes beyond ethical decision making, it is critical in that realm in order to ensure the best possible solution is reached. Cadets are taught to understand the situation, critically examine the information available and then make appropriate conclusions and to effectively share them with others.

Decision making is a process that must be learned through experience. As such, cadets are constantly challenged with situations in which they face new situations and decide what actions to take. The development of these skills is critical to officers of character. Finally, *courage* is described as the ability to take action in the face of adversity. The Air Force Academy focuses on the development of moral, physical, and mental courage to ensure its graduates can respond in situations of high stress or fear and still push forward in leading their subordinates ("The United States Air Force Academy Outcomes," 2009).

Finally, under the heading of *Knowledge* is the outcome of *ethics and the foundations of character*. Cadets are educated in the philosophical underpinnings of ethics and given a myriad of opportunities to practice using their moral judgment during their Academy experience. They participate in seminars focused on understanding ethical judgment and they are continually challenged with crucible-type experiences that allow them to test their mettle in a safe training environment ("The United States Air Force Academy Outcomes," 2009).

Character development is a critical part of the Air Force Academy's development plan and it pervades every aspect of the cadet experience. One goal of this study was to further improve this program by identifying strengths of character that encourage moral potency and ethical leadership.

Participants

The participants in this study were volunteers from a pool of junior Air Force Academy cadets who were enrolled in the Behavioral Sciences 310 (BS310), Foundations for Leadership and Character Development course during academic year 2013-2014. All cadets are required to take this course during their junior year. The cadets are offered an opportunity to earn extra credit for the course by participating in institution-sanctioned research projects. Each semester, cadets enrolled in the course are able to log into a computer system that shows them all the sanctioned research studies that are being conducted during the semester. They are able to choose the ones they prefer and enroll online. In addition to the ability to access a large pool, I chose this group of cadets because they have completed more than half of their Academy training, and they are well-versed in the concepts of character, leadership, and integrity. As juniors, cadets fill roles as non-commissioned officers, such as, element leader and first sergeant. In these roles, they are required to lead small groups of cadets from lower classes. They practice the leadership skills they have been taught and get hands on experience leading others. At this point in their cadet careers, they have learned what it means to be officers of character and are working to develop themselves to achieve that goal. Each semester, approximately half of the class is enrolled in the course. Exactly 496 cadets were enrolled in the fall and 385 were enrolled in the spring for a total of 881.

A total of 189 individuals completed time 1 and time 2 of the study. Of these 189, 122 were male (64.6%) and 67 were female (35.4%). There were three other individuals who completed time 1 of the study, but did not return for time 2. One cadet disenrolled between the time 1 and time 2 offerings, one cadet did not fully complete time 2 of the study and one cadet did not return to complete time 2 because of scheduling issues. We listwise deleted these individuals from the data. The overall participation rate for time 1 and 2 was 21.8% (189/881). We were only able to gather MPA data on 149 participants. Five individuals were either on exchange from another service academy or could not be found in the system by the administrators of the program, and 35 participated in the spring semester, so their MPA scores were not available at the time of this writing. As a result, we used 149 as our sample size when computing regressions involving MPA.

Measures

Values in Action Inventory of Strengths. (VIA-IS; (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005). The VIA-IS is a 120-item questionnaire that uses a five-cell response format. Participants are asked to answer each question in relation to “whether the statement describes what you are like,” with a score of 1 meaning “very much unlike me” and 5 meaning “very much like me” (Linley et al., 2007). Examples items include, “I am a brave person” (bravery) and “I believe honesty is the basis for trust” (integrity). There are five items for each of the 24 character strengths. The responses are averaged within each of the 24 subscales, and all of the subscales have satisfactory internal consistency as measured by Cronbach’s coefficient alpha (all $\alpha > .68$; see Table 2) (Peterson, Park, &

Seligman, 2006). The test-retest correlations over a four-month period are approximately .70 (Matthews, Eid, Kelly, Bailey, & Peterson, 2006).

Moral potency. As mentioned earlier, moral potency is a combined measure of moral ownership, moral efficacy, and moral courage. Individuals must feel a sense of duty to take moral actions, feel confident in their ability to complete the actions successfully, and be willing to take the actions in spite of opposition. The Moral Potency Questionnaire (MPQ) is a 12-item scale developed by Hannah and Avolio (2010). The scale consists of four items measuring moral courage (e.g., I will... “go against the group’s decision whenever it violates my ethical standards”), three items that measure moral ownership (e.g., I will... “take charge to address ethical issues when I know someone has done something wrong”), and five items that measure moral efficacy (e.g., I am confident that I can...take decisive action when addressing a moral/ethical decision). The first seven items (moral courage and moral ownership are rated based on level of agreement from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). Moral efficacy items are measured on strength of confidence ranging from 1 (not confident at all) to 5 (totally confident). The overall moral potency score is determined by averaging all 12 item scores.

Military Performance Appraisal (MPA). The MPA is the primary means by which cadets are evaluated in regard to their military performance. During their four-year experience at the Air Force Academy, each cadet progresses through a set of leadership experiences based on the Leadership Growth Model (*Developing Leaders of Character at the United States Air Force Academy - A Conceptual Framework*, 2011). The four elements of the model are Personal, Interpersonal, Team, and Organizational.

Table 2

VIA Character Strength Reliability Estimates from VIA Institute on Character Data

Character Strength	Definition	Cronbach's Alpha
Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence	Ability to identify and take enjoyment from things one sees in the physical and social world	.85
Bravery	A voluntary willingness to act in a situation of great peril	.8
Citizenship	Sense of responsibility to improve the world around oneself, a willingness to give time for the good of the community, and a focus on helping others	.68
Creativity	The ability to develop original ideas that make a positive contribution	.9
Curiosity	An interest in pursuing novel ideas and experiences	.82
Fairness	Desire to ensure everyone gets their fair share; acknowledges that individuals deserve respect, and should not be discriminated against	.71
Forgiveness and Mercy	Ability to move past an incident and give acceptance to the transgressor whether they deserve it or not	.83
Gratitude	Thankfulness and appreciation when receiving a gift	.83
Hope	An optimistic outlook for the future and a cheerful attitude towards what lies ahead	.76
Humility and Modesty	An accurate view of one's self with an ability to acknowledge your own mistakes and an openness to others' ideas	.77
Humor	A cheerful outlook on adversity and the ability to make others laugh	.85
Integrity	Willing to stand up for convictions, even when they are unpopular; treat others with care and concern	.75
Kindness	Understanding that all human beings have worth, giving is more important than receiving, and people who are suffering deserve care and concern	.71
Leadership	Motivation and ability to define and establish goals for a group of people and then provide the support needed to achieve those goals	.69
Love	A mutual feeling of affection between two people	.77
Love of Learning	A somewhat unusual level of individual interest in a certain subject	.77
Open-mindedness	Ability look at multiple options in a situation when it is appropriately complex	.72
Persistence	Voluntarily continuing to pursue a goal despite challenges and obstacles that may arise	.87
Perspective	Ability to use knowledge and experience to improve well-being	.78

Table 2 (Continued)

VIA Character Strength Reliability Estimates from VIA Institute on Character Data

Character Strength	Definition	Cronbach's Alpha
Prudence	A form of reasoning whereby individuals are able to consider both long and short term consequences and resist the desire to act impulsively	.78
Self-Regulation	Ability to exert control over one's own responses so as to pursue goals and live up to standards	.77
Social Intelligence	Ability to perceive emotions, understand emotional relationships and the meanings of own emotions extremely well	.8
Spirituality	A belief in a transcendent power that is sacred and divine	.91
Vitality	An inordinate amount of spirit and aliveness and the ability to transmit that to others	.83

("www.viacharacter.org/www/Research/Psychometric-Data,")

This model is commonly referred to as the PITO Model. Freshmen competencies are based on the personal component of the model, while sophomores are primarily assessed on interpersonal skills, juniors on teamwork, and seniors on organizational-level skills. While each of the classes has a different set of competencies upon which they are evaluated, the upper classes continue to be evaluated on a few of the competencies from earlier years in addition to the new ones in order to ensure mastery ("Military Performance Appraisal," 2013). Each cadet progresses through the four phases of the model and each semester they receive an MPA, on a 0.0-4.0 scale, which is similar to a grade point average (GPA). The MPA process is intended to be developmental and allows for comparison among cadets who are peers within a given unit. The MPA serves as a measure of military performance and is used as a proxy for individual performance in this study.

Since this study focused on a sample of junior cadets, our focus was primarily on the competencies that make up the teamwork portion of the PITO model. Junior cadet MPAs are comprised as follows: subjective rating from their immediate supervisor, 70%, end of semester Commissioning Education exam, 15%, and objective scores including room inspections, uniform inspections, and participation in major military training events, 15%. For the subjective score, the cadet's rater gives an initial score based on his/her performance of the competencies discussed below. Personnel outside the cadet's squadron can provide input through an online system directly to the officer in charge of that squadron. This input can come from anyone who works with the cadet in an official capacity, such as, academic instructor, flying training commander, or athletic coach. Comments such as these are strictly voluntary. The officer in charge of the squadron, called the Air Officer Commanding (AOC) reviews this input, as well as the rating given by the chain of command and then makes a final determination of the MPA. Each squadron is given a mean level MPA of 3.0 for each class and a range from 2.0-4.0. This means that when all the MPAs for a given class in a squadron are averaged, the result is a score of 3.0. In this way, each squadron ends up with an approximately normal distribution of MPAs for each class ("Military Performance Appraisal," 2013).

As mentioned, each class has a list of 10 competencies upon which they are rated, based on the PITO model. For the junior class, there is one personal competency, three interpersonal competencies and six team competencies on which they are evaluated. The ten competencies are used by the chain of command as the basis for determining a cadet's overall MPA. The first competency is **perform as a polished role model** at the personal

level. This competency is focused on knowing the standards and acting as an authentic leader.

The next competency is **serve as a respectful wingman**. A wingman is someone who always stays with their comrade and provides assistance when needed. This is the first interpersonal competency and evaluates an individual's focus on the well-being of others, as well as treating others with respect and dignity. The third competency is **supports standards for professional development**. This competency is also interpersonal and is based on the ability to confront others when standards are being violated and also the ability to put the mission first by supporting organizational goals. The fourth competency is **effectively communicate** and is the final interpersonal one. This competency evaluates an individual's ability to share ideas clearly and concisely and also to understand others' views and integrate them with one's own ("Military Performance Appraisal," 2013).

The team-related competencies on which the juniors are evaluated begin with **apply team dynamics**. Cadets at this level are expected to build group identity, as well as delegate responsibility appropriately and evaluate intended and unintended consequences of decisions. The next competency is **focuses effort**. In this area, the expectation is that the cadet can integrate diverse talents in a group environment and also provide guidance and direction to a group of subordinates. **Practice effective decision-making** is the next competency that is evaluated for the junior-cadet MPA. Cadets must demonstrate sound judgment and the ability to think critically about a situation. The next competency is **get results**. Successful cadets must use their knowledge and skills to work in support of the organization's goals. They need to motivate their team to perform

well and be able to make adjustments when necessary. **Empower and inspire** is the ninth competency on the list for junior cadets. They must show the ability to mentor subordinates, inspire those who work for them to give their best effort and also to be available to help when necessary. The final competency is **manage conflict**. Leaders who do well in this competency are able to gain cooperation from their subordinates, use their interpersonal skills to help others work through conflict when it arises, and work hard to resolve misunderstandings ("Military Performance Appraisal," 2013).

All junior cadets are evaluated on the 10 competencies described above which are commensurate with their development through the program, and their overall MPA is based on how well they accomplish each one. The overall score is an indicator of how an individual is meeting the requirements that have been established. Cadets are given regular feedback on areas for improvement. Moral potency is based on an individual's understanding of his/her ownership of a moral issue, his/her competency in handling the situation and his/her courage to persevere despite difficulty. These constructs are expected to be related to the competencies on which the cadets are rated and I will discuss this in greater detail later in this dissertation.

Demographic Information. In addition to the scales described above, participants were asked several demographic questions to determine if there are differences among certain groups (e.g., leadership role, athletics, club participation, prior military experience, etc.). The demographic questions assess the following:

- 1) Leadership position (element leader, squadron staff, group staff, wing staff, none of the above)
- 2) Participation in intercollegiate athletics (yes or no)
- 3) Membership in a cadet club (yes or no)

- 4) Attendance at a military preparatory school (yes or no)
- 5) Prior military experience (yes or no)
- 6) Type of probation (honor/conduct, athletic, or academic) (yes or no)
- 7) Participation in the Academy's coaching program (yes or no)
 - Cadets in this program are paired with an active duty mentor and they meet regularly to discuss issues about leadership and character development.

Procedures

Participants were solicited from the pool of students who were enrolled in the BS310 course in the academic year 2013-2014. Participants were asked to complete a series of surveys at two different times. The surveys were intentionally phased to avoid problems regarding response sets and common method variance. In the first phase, participants were asked to complete surveys regarding the character strengths (VIA-120) and the first portion of the demographic questions. Subjects were requested to attend and complete the surveys onsite in both phases for several reasons. First, completing session one at one time period and session two at another mitigates the problem with common method variance. Survey research that is conducted at one time includes a challenge of using data from a single source at a single time in a single format that is associated with statistical artifacts in the data. By creating two sessions this problem is reasonably managed (Lindell & Whitney, 2001). Another concern I attempted to address ahead of time was the lack of control over the participant's environment and susceptibility to fake responses that can come with allowing participants to complete the survey online on their own (Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava & John, 2004). In order to prevent this from being an issue, participants were required to complete the sessions in person at a designated location and were required to show evidence of completion before departing.

Cadets at time one completed an informed consent document (ICD) telling them that the study continued into an additional session at a later time. They were also informed that the surveys included identifying information—their social security number—to be able to link the phase one and phase two surveys, as well as their MPA score from the end of the semester of their enrollment in BS310. Since identifying data are not part of the research, once the surveys were linked, the identifying information was deleted. For the phase one administration, they were given a sheet with a pre-assigned, 3-digit, “Participant ID Code” and a place for them to write their social security number. The VIA-120 is completed using the VIA website. After they completed the 120 items, they were asked to enter a 7-digit research code. This allowed their input to be tied to the author’s research project in the VIA system. The 3-digit “Participant ID Code” was then requested. In this way, when the VIA staff sent us the data with the 3-digit code, I was able to match it up with the social security number the participants filled out with their ICD. This prevented the VIA staff from having access to the participants’ social security numbers.

In the second session, cadets were asked to complete the MPQ and the remaining demographic questions. Participants were asked for their social security number again at phase 2 so I could match the data with the phase 1 inputs and the MPA scores. At the conclusion of this second survey, cadets were debriefed and informed that the study was complete. For surveys at both time periods, participants completed surveys in a large classroom through an online site on their personal laptops. MPA scores were gathered at the end of the semester from the office that maintains them at the Air Force Academy. A

list of the social security numbers of the participants was provided to this office and the corresponding MPAs were annotated and returned to the author.

Chapter 3 - Results

Means and standard deviations for all the variables in our study can be found at Table 3. This table also contains the correlations between the variables and the reliability estimates (Cronbach's Alpha) for each of the variables. There were four variables that had alphas below .70. These were: citizenship (.60), hope (.63), leadership (.53), and self-regulation (.69). These scores are concerning because they bring into question whether those subscales are actually measuring the variable in question.

I conducted an overall analysis of variance on the data using the 8 demographic variables and moral potency scores. There were no significant differences found in any of those categories. As a result, I treated the data as one comprehensive group of people. All future results are based on my analysis of the overall group.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

My first step in analyzing the data was to conduct a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the moral potency data to confirm the previous findings that it is a single construct with three components (Hannah & Avolio, 2010). I mirrored the competing model analyses comparing four models conducted by Hannah and Avolio in their initial article regarding moral potency (2010). As seen in Table 4, I hypothesized a three factor model first with each component of moral potency separate. Next, I combined moral courage and moral ownership into a single factor and kept moral efficacy as a separate factor. This model made empirical sense because courage and ownership both lean towards an individual's *willingness* to do something while efficacy is related more to *ability* to do something (Hannah & Avolio, 2010). The third model I tested was the single factor model with all items loading on a single moral potency factor. Finally, I

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations, Reliability Estimates, and Correlations for Character Strengths and Moral Potency (N = 189) and MPA

Variables	Mean	s.d.	Beauty/Excell	Bravery	Love	Prudence	Citizenship	Creativity	Curiosity	Fairness
Beauty/Excell	3.554	.8504	0.863							
Bravery	3.811	.6440	.218**	0.785						
Love	4.071	.6903	.296**	.175	0.792					
Prudence	3.767	.7503	.195**	-.042	.117	0.826				
Citizenship	3.859	.5362	.166*	.111	.338**	.348**	0.598			
Creativity	3.589	.7607	.233**	.312**	.059	.008	.219**	0.879		
Curiosity	4.048	.5380	.309**	.310**	.094	.086	.139	.521**	0.705	
Fairness	4.138	.5930	0.303	.067	.224**	.333**	.595**	.208**	.206**	0.814
Forgiveness	3.728	.6816	.264**	-.049	.177*	0.128	.301**	.181*	.165*	.443**
Gratitude	3.982	.6198	.438**	.225**	.364**	.301**	.342**	.005	.335**	.373**
Integrity	4.513	.3985	.130	.257**	.118	.346**	.359**	.269**	.160*	.336**
Hope	4.143	.5490	.241**	.176*	.418**	.254**	.375**	.216*	.428**	.275**
Humor	4.214	.6520	.127	.302**	.247**	-.151*	.252**	.312**	.344**	.156*
Persistence	4.285	.5231	.117	.133	.167*	.315**	.331**	.131	.234**	.116
Open-mindedness	4.249	.5525	.225**	.124	.114	.549**	.128	.286**	.340**	.094
Kindness	4.286	.5203	.247**	.157*	.183*	.075	.330**	.154*	.200**	.431**
Leadership	3.906	.5043	.270**	.251**	.250**	.221**	.527**	.321**	.341**	.557**
Love of Learning	3.377	.9118	.283**	.155*	-.148*	.136	-.013	.318**	.426**	.079
Humility	3.606	.8113	.118	-.069	.156*	.415**	.422**	-.064	-.116	.471**
Perspective	3.896	.6380	.260**	.178*	.084	.331**	.184*	.340**	.316**	.108
Self-Regulation	3.499	.7100	0.213	.184*	-.006	.424**	.238**	.201**	.160*	.180*
Social Intel	3.933	.5780	.188**	.297**	.301**	.141	.289**	.280**	.311**	.144*
Spirituality	3.626	1.1112	.162*	.087	.113	.188**	.253**	-.031	.164*	.219**
Vitality	3.750	.6833	.211**	.249**	.231**	.096	.282**	.307**	.570**	.219**
Moral Courage	3.773	.5689	.184*	.521**	.083	.081	.175*	.270*	.302**	.260**
Moral Ownership	3.787	.5531	.227**	.237**	.167*	.176*	.286**	.156*	.156*	.249**
Moral Efficacy	3.900	.5318	.114	.376**	.124	.121	.292**	.217**	.297**	.225**
Moral Potency	3.8289	.44370	.207**	.485**	.150*	.150*	.310**	.272**	.326**	.301**
MPA***	3.1701	.37000	.009	-.117	.096	.128	-.012	-.090	.097	.101

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*** MPA Correlations based on N=149

Table 3 (Continued)

Means, Standard Deviations, Reliability Estimates, and Correlations for Character Strengths and Moral Potency (N = 189) and MPA

Variables	Mean	s.d.	Forgiveness	Gratitude	Integrity	Hope	Humor	Persistence	Open-mindedness	Kindness
Beauty/Excell	3.554	.8504								
Bravery	3.811	.6440								
Love	4.071	.6903								
Prudence	3.767	.7503								
Citizenship	3.859	.5362								
Creativity	3.589	.7607								
Curiosity	4.048	.5380								
Fairness	4.138	.5930								
Forgiveness	3.728	.6816	0.759							
Gratitude	3.982	.6198	.242**	0.781						
Integrity	4.513	.3985	.215**	.226**	0.698					
Hope	4.143	.5490	.219**	.545**	.182*	0.631				
Humor	4.214	.6520	.159*	.233**	.161*	.333**	0.855			
Persistence	4.285	.5231	.044	.202**	.361**	.404**	-.023	0.784		
Open-mindedness	4.249	.5525	.068	.137	.291**	.262**	-.066	.340**	0.729	
Kindness	4.286	.5203	.338**	.360**	.334**	.197**	.324**	-.031	-.009	0.757
Leadership	3.906	.5043	.314**	.328**	.327**	.388**	.388**	.140	.139	.437**
Love of Learning	3.377	.9118	.103	.134	.148*	.081	.007	.110	.419**	.089
Humility	3.606	.8113	.342**	.230**	.300**	.146*	.017	.113	.071	.171*
Perspective	3.896	.6380	.171*	.179*	.336**	.351**	.195**	.324**	.580**	.063
Self-Regulation	3.499	.7100	.125	.247**	.346**	.297**	.036	.361**	.404**	.036
Social Intel	3.933	.5780	-.004	.301**	.205**	.238**	.362**	.058	.143*	.325**
Spirituality	3.626	1.1112	.250**	.523**	.195**	.263**	.024	.035	.102	.381**
Vitality	3.750	.6833	.130	.507**	.149*	.590**	.400**	.284**	.067	.337**
Moral Courage	3.773	.5689	.125	.242**	.288**	.205**	.234**	.117	.209**	.256**
Moral Ownership	3.787	.5531	.154*	.259**	.232**	.218**	.184*	.135	.212**	.249**
Moral Efficacy	3.900	.5318	.120	.250**	.354**	.293**	.245**	.270**	.156*	.199**
Moral Potency	3.8289	.44370	.161*	.309**	.372**	.302**	.279**	.227**	.233*	.286**
MPA***	3.1701	.37000	.030	.089	-.051	.030	-.141	.160	.121	-.023

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

***MPA Correlations based on N=149

Table 3 (Continued)

Means, Standard Deviations, Reliability Estimates, and Correlations for Character Strengths and Moral Potency (N = 189) and MPA

Variables	Mean	s.d.	Leadership	Love of Learning	Humility	Perspective	Self-Regulation	Social Intel	Spirituality	Vitality
Beauty/Excell	3.554	.8504								
Bravery	3.811	.6440								
Love	4.071	.6903								
Prudence	3.767	.7503								
Citizenship	3.859	.5362								
Creativity	3.589	.7607								
Curiosity	4.048	.5380								
Fairness	4.138	.5930								
Forgiveness	3.728	.6816								
Gratitude	3.982	.6198								
Integrity	4.513	.3985								
Hope	4.143	.5490								
Humor	4.214	.6520								
Persistence	4.285	.5231								
Open-mindedness	4.249	.5525								
Kindness	4.286	.5203								
Leadership	3.906	.5043	0.525							
Love of Learning	3.377	.9118	.119	0.826						
Humility	3.606	.8113	.275**	-.049	0.831					
Perspective	3.896	.6380	.239**	.307**	.108	0.807				
Self-Regulation	3.499	.7100	.278**	.268**	.259**	.351**	0.691			
Social Intel	3.933	.5780	.292**	.069	-.005	.326**	.133	0.703		
Spirituality	3.626	1.1112	.214**	.139	.224**	.116	.137	.067	0.935	
Vitality	3.750	.6833	.371**	.225**	-.106	.180*	.196**	.376**	.172*	0.797
Moral Courage	3.773	.5689	.351**	.265**	.035	.203**	.199**	.213**	.162*	.292**
Moral Ownership	3.787	.5531	.286**	.234**	.148*	.229**	.256**	.195**	.274**	.279**
Moral Efficacy	3.900	.5318	.306**	.267**	.077	.174*	.235**	.153*	.228**	.299**
Moral Potency	3.8289	.44370	.392**	.319**	.100	.245**	.282**	.228**	.269**	.361**
MPA***	3.1701	.37000	.060	.067	.025	.130	-.043	.085	.107	.049

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

***MPA Correlations based on N=149

Table 3 (Continued)

Means, Standard Deviations, Reliability Estimates, and Correlations for Character Strengths and Moral Potency (N = 189) and MPA

Variables	Mean	s.d.	Moral Courage	Moral Ownership	Moral Efficacy	Moral Potency	MPA
Beauty/Excell	3.554	.8504					
Bravery	3.811	.6440					
Love	4.071	.6903					
Prudence	3.767	.7503					
Citizenship	3.859	.5362					
Creativity	3.589	.7607					
Curiosity	4.048	.5380					
Fairness	4.138	.5930					
Forgiveness	3.728	.6816					
Gratitude	3.982	.6198					
Integrity	4.513	.3985					
Hope	4.143	.5490					
Humor	4.214	.6520					
Persistence	4.285	.5231					
Open-mindedness	4.249	.5525					
Kindness	4.286	.5203					
Leadership	3.906	.5043					
Love of Learning	3.377	.9118					
Humility	3.606	.8113					
Perspective	3.896	.6380					
Self-Regulation	3.499	.7100					
Social Intel	3.933	.5780					
Spirituality	3.626	1.1112					
Vitality	3.750	.6833					
Moral Courage	3.773	.5689	0.679				
Moral Ownership	3.787	.5531	.518**	0.604			
Moral Efficacy	3.900	.5318	.478**	.414**	0.745		
Moral Potency	3.8289	.44370	.828**	.740**	.833**	0.820	
MPA***	3.1701	.37000	.055	.089	-.018	.044	0.774

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

***MPA Correlations based on N=149

tested a hierarchical model with the three individual scales loading onto the higher order latent construct of moral potency. In this way, I repeated and verified the model testing conducted by Hannah and Avolio (2010). Several fit measures based on Hu and Bentler (1999) were used to assess the goodness-of-fit of the latent structure of the underlying components of efficacy, ownership and courage.

As shown in Table 4, the findings indicated support for the originally hypothesized three-factor model as a better fit for the data than the one- and two-factor models. The results indicated that the overall model-to-data fit was acceptable [$\chi^2(df) = 88.669(51)$, $p = .001$; CFI = .932; NFI = .857; SRMR = .065]. The hypothesized model was essentially the same as the higher order model which is not surprising since they are mathematically equivalent. I found support for the higher order model as the most parsimonious model and the best fit of all the models tested. As such, I find support for the construct of moral potency with three subcomponents as originally presented by Hannah and Avolio (2010).

Linear Regression of Character Strengths on Moral Potency

The second step in our data analysis was to regress each of the 24 character strengths to moral potency. I wanted to see if individuals with higher levels of moral potency had higher specific strengths than those with lower levels of moral potency. Twenty-three of the twenty-four character strengths were determined to be statistically related to moral potency when they were evaluated on an individual basis. Table 5 shows the beta weights, t-scores and significance levels for each of the character strengths. Humility ($p = .171$) was shown to not be significantly related to moral potency. In

Model and structure	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	NFI	CFI	SRMR
1. Three factors as indicators of moral potency (MO, MC, and ME separate)	88.669**	51	N/A	0.857	0.932	0.065
2. Two factors as indicators of moral potency (MC and MO combined, plus ME)	105.735**	52	17.065**	0.83	0.903	0.0659
3. One factor as indicator of moral potency (all 12 items)	163.428**	54	74.759**	0.737	0.803	0.0775
4. Higher order moral potency factor (MO, MC and ME load onto higher factor)	88.669**	51	0	0.857	0.932	0.065

Note. NFI = normed fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual; MO = moral ownership; MC = moral courage; ME = moral efficacy. The $\Delta\chi^2$ is in relation to Model 1. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Character Strength	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Bravery	0.334	0.044	0.485	7.579	0.000
Leadership	0.345	0.059	0.392	5.827	0.000
Integrity	0.415	0.076	0.372	5.486	0.000
Vitality	0.234	0.044	0.361	5.292	0.000
Curiosity	0.269	0.057	0.326	4.713	0.000
Love of Learning	0.155	0.034	0.319	4.61	0.000
Citizenship	0.256	0.058	0.31	4.453	0.000
Gratitude	0.221	0.05	0.309	4.441	0.000
Hope	0.244	0.056	0.302	4.325	0.000
Fairness	0.225	0.052	0.301	4.314	0.000
Kindness	0.244	0.06	0.286	4.085	0.000
Self-Regulation	0.176	0.044	0.282	4.015	0.000
Humor	0.19	0.048	0.279	3.979	0.000
Creativity	0.159	0.041	0.272	3.869	0.000
Spirituality	0.107	0.028	0.267	3.812	0.000
Perspective	0.17	0.049	0.245	3.458	0.001
Open-mindedness	0.187	0.057	0.233	3.282	0.001
Social Intel	0.175	0.055	0.228	3.208	0.002
Persistence	0.193	0.06	0.227	3.187	0.002
Beauty/Excellence	0.108	0.037	0.207	2.889	0.004
Forgiveness	0.105	0.047	0.161	2.236	0.027
Prudence	0.089	0.043	0.15	2.079	0.039
Love	0.096	0.046	0.15	2.07	0.040
Humility	0.055	0.04	0.1	1.375	0.171
Dependent Variable: Moral Potency					

addition to humility, gender ($p = .640$) was also found to not be significantly related to moral potency when considered by itself.

Stepwise Regression

Table 3 shows the means, standard deviations, reliability estimates and first order correlations among the character strengths and moral potency. Based on the pair-wise correlations and the large number of predictors in our model, I realized that there was a large amount of overlap in the amount of variance explained by each of the character strengths. As a result, I conducted a step-wise regression to determine the best fitting model for a multiple regression including all of the character strengths. The stepwise regression procedure was used to determine the importance of each of the predictor variables in accounting for levels of moral potency. The results of this analysis can be found in Table 6. The best fitting model included six of the character strengths as significantly, positively related to levels of moral potency. Higher levels of bravery ($B = .228, p < .001$), leadership, ($B = .157, p = .016$), love of learning ($B = .086, p = .003$), integrity ($B = .184, p = .008$), spirituality ($B = .05, p = .033$), and vitality ($B = .087, p = .034$) were all shown to be positively related to higher levels of moral potency (see Table 7).

According to this analysis, the model including these six character strengths (bravery, leadership, love of learning, integrity, spirituality, and vitality) accounted for 42.3% of the variance in moral potency. Bravery provided the largest impact, accounting for 23.5% of the variance. Leadership accounted for nearly 8%, while love of learning accounted for 5%, integrity accounted for 2.7%, spirituality accounted for 1.7% and vitality accounted for 1.4% of the variance in moral potency levels.

Table 6 Stepwise Regression Analysis of Character Strengths on Moral Potency (N = 189)									
Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.485 ^a	.235	.231	.38911	.235	57.442	1	187	.000
2	.560 ^b	.313	.306	.36972	.078	21.133	1	186	.000
3	.603 ^c	.364	.353	.35683	.050	14.679	1	185	.000
4	.625 ^d	.391	.378	.35006	.027	8.221	1	184	.005
5	.639 ^e	.408	.392	.34600	.017	5.342	1	183	.022
6	.650 ^f	.423	.403	.34269	.014	4.559	1	182	.034

a. Predictors: (Constant), Bravery
b. Predictors: (Constant), Bravery, Leadership
c. Predictors: (Constant), Bravery, Leadership, Love of Learning
d. Predictors: (Constant), Bravery, Leadership, Love of Learning, Integrity
e. Predictors: (Constant), Bravery, Leadership, Love of Learning, Integrity, Spirituality
f. Predictors: (Constant), Bravery, Leadership, Love of Learning, Integrity, Spirituality, Vitality

Table 7 Regression Weights from Stepwise Regression (N = 189)						
Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	(Constant)	.790	.315		2.507	.013
	Bravery	.228	.042	.331	5.485	.000
	Leadership	.138	.057	.157	2.441	.016
	Love of Learning	.086	.029	.177	3.025	.003
	Integrity	.184	.068	.165	2.683	.008
	Spirituality	.050	.023	.126	2.152	.033
	Vitality	.087	.041	.134	2.135	.034

a. Dependent Variable: Moral Potency

Moral Potency and Individual Performance

My next step was to regress moral potency scores on individual performance scores to determine if there was a statistical relationship between these two variables. Results from this analysis can be found in Table 8. I determined that there was no statistically significant relationship between moral potency and individual performance ($B = .039$, $p = .593$). As a result, I failed to find support for hypothesis 1. In an effort to discover the reason for the lack of correlation between moral potency and performance, I also performed individual regressions of the 24 character strengths on individual performance (see Table 9). Surprisingly, I found that only one of the 24 character strengths, persistence ($B = .134$, $p = .028$), was significantly related to individual performance. This leads me to question the validity of the MPA as a measure of performance. I will discuss this issue later in the dissertation.

Moral Potency as a Mediator

Hypothesis 2 suggested that moral potency would act as a mediator of the relationship between the six character strengths from our research question (bravery, leadership, love of learning, integrity, spirituality, and vitality) and individual performance. Since none of the six character strengths were statistically related to MPA, nor was there a relationship between moral potency and MPA, I failed to find support for hypothesis 2.

Table 8					
<i>Regression Analysis of Moral Potency on MPA (N=149)</i>					
Predictor	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Moral Potency	.039	.073	.044	.536	.593
Dependent Variable: MPA					

Character Strength	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Persistence	.134	.060	.182	2.216	.028
Perspective	.087	.048	.148	1.801	.074
Humor	-.088	.051	-.140	-1.714	.089
Open-mindedness	.088	.053	.136	1.650	.101
Prudence	.059	.040	.121	1.474	.143
Bravery	-.076	.052	-.119	-1.452	.149
Curiosity	.078	.062	.102	1.244	.216
Fairness	.064	.052	.101	1.232	.220
Spirituality	.032	.027	.099	1.198	.233
Love	.050	.047	.088	1.063	.290
Creativity	-.038	.039	-.081	-.979	.329
Social Intel	.045	.053	.072	.859	.392
Love of Learning	.024	.033	.060	.728	.468
Leadership	.045	.062	.059	.718	.474
Gratitude	.034	.050	.059	.689	.492
Kindness	-.043	.063	-.059	-.683	.495
Integrity	-.047	.075	-.052	-.627	.532
Hope	.031	.059	.043	.522	.602
Vitality	.024	.047	.041	.500	.618
Self-Regulation	-.019	.042	-.037	-.455	.650
Forgiveness	.020	.046	.036	.441	.660
Humility	.015	.039	.032	.386	.700
Beauty/Excellence	-.005	.037	-.011	-.129	.898
Citizenship	-.004	.057	-.005	-.065	.948
Dependent Variable: MPA					

Chapter 4 - Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to determine which character strengths were related to moral potency as well as how moral potency was related to individual performance. Because moral potency is a fairly new construct, this is the first study of which we are aware that has investigated these relationships. Below, I discuss the limitations and contributions of this study and directions for future research.

Moral Potency

The first contribution made by this study was to verify the reliability of the relatively new construct of moral potency with a sample of United States Air Force Academy cadets enrolled in their junior year. My analysis confirmed the construct was comprised of three components: moral courage, moral ownership, and moral efficacy, which are distinct from one another. Thus, I was able to confirm the findings of the original authors regarding the construct and its makeup (Hannah & Avolio, 2010). Moral potency is a construct that can be used to improve ethical decision making. I believe when individuals are made aware of the construct and provided ways to improve their moral potency by working on each of the three components they will be better able to bridge the decision-action gap described earlier in this dissertation.

Character Strengths as Antecedents of Moral Potency

The next contribution made by this research was to establish which of the 24 character strengths were statistically related to levels of moral potency. There are only two other studies of which we are aware that analyzed personal antecedents of the components of moral potency. May, Luth, and Schwoerer (2013) investigated the influence of business ethics education on moral efficacy, moral meaningfulness, and

moral courage. They found a significant increase in the 3 dependent variables for groups that were exposed to business ethics education versus those who did not. In addition, Hannah, Avolio, and Walumbwa (2011) tested the relationship between authentic leadership and moral courage and found a positive and significant relationship between the two variables. However, there is no research that we are aware of that has investigated which individual characteristics are related to levels of moral potency. In this study, we were able to make an initial determination in that regard. When we conducted a stepwise regression we found six character strengths that accounted for 42.3% of the variance in moral potency scores. Each of the six and their implications are discussed below.

Bravery. *Bravery* in the character strengths is described as a willingness to take action in situations of great peril (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). We found that bravery accounted for 23.5% of the variance in moral potency. Increasing levels of bravery in individuals relates strongly to increases in levels of moral potency. As mentioned earlier, bravery falls under the virtue of courage, so it is little surprise that it is related to moral potency, which contains the component of moral courage. The definition of moral courage adds the additional aspect of not just acting, but acting morally (Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011). So it stands to reason that an individual who has high levels of bravery will be more likely to have moral courage. However, there must also be aspects of moral efficacy and ownership if the individual expects to have moral potency.

That said, because of the large impact that bravery had in this study on levels of moral potency, it is definitely an area on which we can focus our efforts in developing individual leaders. We should develop activities and scenarios that allow individuals to

practice acting courageously, and correcting them when they fail to do so. Sharing stories of courageous acts is another way to impress upon trainees the importance of acting courageously. Focusing on ways to improve levels of courage in individuals should have a corresponding positive effect on levels of moral potency.

Leadership. The character strength of *leadership* is described as the ability to set goals for others and then provide the necessary support for them to achieve those goals (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Leadership accounted for 7.8% of the variance in moral potency scores. Leadership is aligned closely with moral ownership because when individuals exhibit leadership, they are willing to take control of situations and provide direction to those involved. This coincides with moral potency because the individuals must feel that they have ownership of the situation and a need to become involved because of that sense of responsibility. It makes sense that an individual who is high in leadership ability is more likely to take action in an ethical dilemma. Therefore, it is understandable that there is a relationship between leadership and moral potency.

Another characteristic of effective leaders is their interest in serving those who work for them (Greenleaf, 1977). Servant leaders are focused on the well-being of their subordinates. As a result, the leader will be interested in supporting subordinates faced with ethical dilemmas, as well as standing up for them when faced with ethical choices. This corresponds very closely to the moral potency construct we have described in this dissertation.

Giving individuals opportunities to practice leadership is one of the best ways to improve their performance. Since we found a relationship between leadership and moral potency, it follows that opportunities to practice leadership will also increase potency.

The more opportunities that individuals have to develop their leadership skills, the more likely they will be to take ownership of ethical situations they face and stand up for those who work for them.

Love of Learning. The character strength of *love of learning* is an attribute of a person who has an unusually high interest in a specific subject. As mentioned earlier, love of learning has been shown to support positive experiences and it can increase mental and physical well-being (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). I found it accounted for 5% of the variance in moral potency scores.

The relationship between this strength and moral potency can be explained in three ways. First, those with high love of learning scores typically have high levels of cognitive engagement. They want to learn how to get better and they are not frustrated when they do not succeed on the first attempt (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This correlates with moral efficacy and the knowledge that one is able to accomplish a task set before them. Second, persistence and resilience are hallmarks of those who have a love of learning. This also relates to moral efficacy, and moral courage, as well. Those who love learning are willing to push on in their efforts despite opposition and challenges. Finally, love of learning is epitomized by positive feelings towards acquiring new skills. This encourages higher levels of competence and efficacy. When individuals have a love of learning, they are more likely to strive to get better at things and to persist when faced with difficulties. These characteristics are critical to individuals developing higher levels of moral potency.

Integrity (Honesty). *Integrity* is described as standing up for convictions and treating others with care and concern (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). I found it accounted

for 2.7% of the variance in moral potency scores. It is not surprising to see a relationship here as this is very much in line with the construct of moral potency. In order for individuals to have moral potency, they must be able to stand up for what is right and be willing to talk with others frankly about what they feel. This requires integrity at the very foundation.

Individual integrity can be developed through repetition and practice. Many children are taught the importance of integrity and honesty by their families. Honor codes are another way that integrity can be emphasized and taught. A focus on the larger perspective also seems to be useful when teaching about integrity. When individuals can see a broader perspective, they can typically understand why telling the truth is more important than the short-term benefits that can come from lying.

Spirituality. *Spirituality* accounted for 1.7% of the variance in scores for moral potency and can be summed up as a belief in a transcendent dimension of life (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The belief in some form of higher power helps to explain the relationship between spirituality and moral potency. When an individual feels subject to the guidelines of someone or something else, they tend to gain an appreciation for those rules and a desire to follow them. When this is the case, they are more likely to make decisions that are in line with those beliefs and to be willing to stand up for them when challenged.

While we do not want to force a belief system on anyone, it is important to realize that those who are high in spirituality are more likely to respect authority and to place others' needs ahead of their own. This is beneficial in the arena of moral potency

because individuals are being asked to focus on doing the right thing and not necessarily that which is best for themselves.

Vitality (Zest). *Vitality* is understood as having a great deal of energy, as well as the ability to transmit that energy to others (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Vitality accounted for 1.4% of the variance in individual scores on the moral potency questionnaire. The relationship between vitality and moral potency is not necessarily a direct one. Vitality is an activated positive emotion and as such means that the person with it has enthusiasm and energy to address situations (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This allows the individual to pursue solutions with high levels of passion and thus relates to the moral potency component of moral courage. Individuals who possess vitality have the ability to stand up to pressure.

Motivation can be difficult to develop. However, if individuals are given good reasons for what they are being asked to do, they are more likely to be energized to perform those tasks. When tasks are approached with high levels of vitality, they are more likely to be accomplished effectively. Physical and emotional well-being are two of the correlates of vitality (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). As a result, individuals should be encouraged to maintain or increase their overall health in an effort to increase vitality.

In this study, I found the previous six character strengths to be positively related to moral potency. This is the first study that I am aware of that has investigated the personal antecedents of the moral potency construct. This is a good initial step in determining how we can increase moral potency in individuals so that they are better able to bridge the decision-action gap and move from moral decisions to moral action.

Moral Potency and Individual Performance

The fact that I did not see a relationship between levels of moral potency and military performance appraisal (MPA) scores as a proxy for individual performance is disappointing. MPA is one of three measures of performance, along with GPA and Athletic Performance Appraisal (APA), used to determine cadets' leadership positions while at the Academy, as well as their placement after graduation. When this metric is the basis for such critical decisions, it is important that it be an accurate measure of performance. Because the Air Force Academy is charged with developing officers of character, it is important that any assessment of individual performance include some measurement of the person's character. Intuitively, it would make sense that this measurement would include or relate to moral potency.

Character Strengths and Individual Performance

I expected the competencies that make up the MPA score for the cadets during their junior year, to be related to the character strengths. In this section, I discuss each of the competencies and which character strengths we expected to be related to them. This will help us to understand where the deficiencies in the MPA assessment lie and how we can improve the measure to make it more reflective of the performance the Air Force Academy wants to encourage.

MPA Competencies. Earlier in this dissertation, we described the competencies that make up the junior class MPA. As mentioned, each cadet is evaluated based on these competencies. Since the expected relationships were not present between MPA and the character strengths, I explain which character strengths I expected to be related to MPA

and why. In this way, we can get a better handle on what MPA should really be measuring.

The first competency is that of **being a role model**. Of the six character strengths that were related to moral potency, we would expect bravery, integrity, and leadership to be related to role modeling. As an effective role model, demonstrating these three strengths is critical in providing an image of what a superior should be. In this way, the subordinates can learn how to behave based on what is demonstrated by their leader.

The next competency is to **be a respectful wingman**. A wingman is a gender neutral term for someone who stays with another person in all situations and provides assistance when needed. In order to succeed in this competency, wingmen must demonstrate bravery and have integrity. They should not be afraid to support their colleagues even in difficult situations and they must be able to tell others the truth, even when it is not what the others want to hear.

Supports the standards for professional development is the next competency. Success in this competency requires bravery, leadership, and integrity. Individuals must be willing to stand up for what is right and not give in to peer pressure or other negative influences. Additionally, leadership is required to provide an example and also the necessary resources for subordinates to be successful. Finally, leaders must be able to give honest assessments of their subordinates' performance so they can learn and grow.

Effective communication is the next competency and entails the character strengths of leadership and integrity. In order to effectively communicate, individuals need to be honest about their opinions and they must be willing to step forward and take

charge of the situations they face. We should see evidence of leadership and integrity reflected in MPA scores.

Applying team dynamics is the next competency and requires leadership, love of learning, and vitality. Individuals who are able to form a team and have it perform successfully must have leadership skills. They need to be able to get a group of individuals to work together towards a common goal. Additionally, they need to be interested in the task at hand and willing to persevere through challenges until a successful solution is found. Finally, they must have a great deal of energy in order to motivate the members of their teams to high levels of performance.

Focusing effort is another component of MPA that we need to discuss. Leadership, love of learning, and integrity are the character strengths I anticipated would be related to this competency. Leaders' main roles are to get their subordinates on task and to provide necessary resources for success. When focusing effort, one must have a firm grasp of what needs to be accomplished. This requires a desire to learn about the task and truly understand how to handle it. Additionally, someone who is focusing the efforts of others cannot be afraid to speak the truth. They must be confident enough to tell others when they are falling short and to show them how to fix their deficiencies.

Effective decision making requires elements of bravery, leadership, love of learning, and integrity in order to achieve success. Not all decisions are popular and so decision makers must be brave enough to make ones that may not be popular. Decisions also require the vision and understanding of the big picture that leaders must possess. Love of learning is required because the decision maker may not be familiar with all the options or aspects of the choice. They must be motivated to explore all the options and

find the best choice for the situation. Finally, there needs to be a high level of integrity in order for the decision maker to stick to their choice and not waver. Inconsistency in decisions can be the downfall of a leader.

Getting results is the next competency and requires bravery, leadership, and vitality. It takes energy and vision to be able to motivate others to get the job done. It may also require the ability to go against the wishes of others in order to achieve the desired goals. Getting results is not for the faint of heart or those who lack a vision for the future. Excitement for the task is also beneficial in motivating others to work hard toward the desired goals.

Empowers and inspires others is another one of the competencies encompassed in the MPA. This work requires leadership, love of learning, spirituality, and vitality. Leadership and vitality are necessary for many of the reasons described in regard to getting results. Love of learning is beneficial in understanding what is required and what obstacles may arise. It also allows the individual to remain focused and not to become discouraged by failures. Spirituality is beneficial because of the individuals' beliefs in something bigger than themselves. When the leader can get others to focus on a higher goal and get them away from a self-centered attitude, then the group is much more likely to be successful. The leaders do not have to convert others to their belief systems, but rather get them to put the focus on a higher cause than themselves.

Finally, **managing conflict** is an important component of the MPA score. Character strengths of bravery, leadership, integrity, and spirituality are all required to be successful in this area. Bravery will be seen in the ability to handle a difficult situation like conflict and not back away or seek to avoid it. Leadership allows the individual to

show others that they need to focus on the long-term vision rather than short-term, minor disagreements. Integrity allows the leader to maintain an objective role in the situation and not play favorites in dealing with the conflict. Finally, spirituality allows the leader to look to a transcendent power in an effort to resolve the conflict. Rather than making decisions based on what is best for the leader, he/she can make a determination based on his/her understanding of the situation in light of his/her spiritual background. This allows the decision to be more objective.

While the correlations above are only notional, it is easy to see the connections that should exist between the character strengths and MPA (individual performance). Because we were unable to find any relationships between the character strengths and MPA with the exception of perseverance, we question the validity of the MPA as a measure of performance. Additional work is needed to determine what is actually being measured by the MPA.

Moral Potency as a Mediator

Unfortunately, because of the lack of relationships between MPA and any of the other variables, we were unable to test our mediation hypothesis. The fact that moral potency did not relate to any of the character strengths, except persistence, and it did not relate to moral potency is concerning. Further research needs to be conducted to find out what variables actually are related to MPA. Since it is supposed to be a measure of performance and yet it is not related to several character strengths that we would expect to find in our participants, there is a disconnect between the desired performance and what is actually being measured.

Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations of the current research that may be improved in future studies on the subject. First, the sample size of 189 is relatively small. Future studies should include larger groups in order to ensure the validity of the results. Because of the small sample size and the large number of paths that needed to be estimated in our model, I was unable to utilize structural equation modeling to analyze our data. A sample of closer to 600 would have been required in order to achieve a power level of .80. Additionally, our sample was comprised of only Air Force Academy cadets. The students at this institution are not representative of the general population. Although the current research was focused on discovering ways to improve the character development program at the Air Force Academy, future research should be conducted to see if the conclusions found here are generalizable to a larger population.

Another issue with the current study is the fact that the character strengths and moral potency information were self-report data. In order to combat concerns about common method variance, I separated the collection of the two constructs by time increments from 2 weeks to 1 month. However, the fact remains that the data were collected from the individuals about themselves. In order to combat this potential bias in the future, it would make sense to compare the self-report data on individuals to that which is reported on them by their superiors, subordinates, or both. In much the same way as 360-degree feedback is conducted, we can analyze the similarities and differences between the scores provided by an individual and his/her supervisor or subordinate. This

will give us a better idea of the validity of the measures and also give a more well-rounded view of the individual being evaluated.

Currently, there is a 360 multi-rater version of the moral potency questionnaire available. I am not aware of a similar version of the VIA Character Strengths, but the development of such a scale could provide a great deal of useful information to researchers and individual leaders. Rather than having only self-report data to evaluate, I can work to triangulate the scores and understand more clearly where a person falls on the moral potency scale, as well as on each of the character strengths.

In the character strength data that I collected, I found some issues with the reliability of the scores. Citizenship, hope, leadership, and self-regulation all had Chronbach's alphas of less than .70. Leadership, in particular was very low at .53. I explored dropping an item from the leadership scale to see if the validity improved, but found that there was no corresponding increase in alpha when this was done. I recommend that future researchers consider using different scales with higher reliabilities for these character strengths. Another scale measuring leadership, in particular, may have better reliability and would give a better understanding of the relationship between individual leadership and levels of moral potency.

A final limitation of this study was the use of MPA as a proxy for individual performance. The MPA is used by the Academy in making decisions about individuals' futures. As such, it is important that we understand exactly what it is measuring and how accurately. In this study, not only were MPA scores not statistically related to moral potency, but they were also unrelated to 23 of 24 character strengths. Because of the mission of the Air Force Academy, even if there was no relationship between moral

potency and performance, I expected to see relationships between MPA and character strengths such as bravery, honesty, citizenship, and leadership. Based on the lack of support I found for a relationship between MPA and any of the other variables (MPA was only related to persistence), I feel the need to question the usefulness of the measure.

Based on the ten competencies that are used to guide the subjective portion of the MPA, I expected that the MPA score would be related to moral potency and to several of the character strengths. Since that was not the case, current procedures for assessing MPA are not adequate and should be reassessed. Future research should investigate the use of other measures of performance that are more accurate or robust in order to determine if moral potency and character strengths are related to individual performance. We need to analyze the components of MPA, as well as the process that is used to arrive at the scores. It is reasonable to expect that measures of individual performance should be related to desired outcomes.

This study is the first that I am aware of that investigated possible personal antecedents to moral potency. While, I chose the character strengths for this study, there are many other possible variables that can be tested in the future as predictors of higher levels of moral potency. Ethical leadership is one such construct that should be investigated as a possible predictor of moral potency. As mentioned earlier, Hannah et al. (2011) have already studied the relationship between authentic leadership and moral courage and determined that it is positive and significant. Ethical leadership is described as demonstrating appropriate moral conduct through actions and relationships (Brown et al., 2005). When a leader is practicing ethical leadership, I expect that subordinates' levels of moral potency will rise. When they are being led by someone who acts ethically

and communicates an ethical vision, the subordinates will be positively influenced and are more likely to be able to stand up for the things in which they believe.

Another interesting area to study in regards to the development of moral potency is its relationship to level of moral reasoning. Kohlberg and Lickona (1976) proposed 6 levels of moral development that are evaluated by the Defining Issues Test (DIT-2). These levels are a) obedience and punishment orientation, b) self-interest orientation, c) interpersonal accord and conformity, d) authority and social-order maintaining orientation, e) social contract orientation, and f) universal ethical principles. As individuals grow in their morality, they progress through these stages. An interesting research question would be to assess the corresponding increase in the level of moral potency as level of moral reasoning increases. If a positive relationship can be identified, this will further aid our efforts to increase the level of moral potency in decision makers by continuing to develop their moral reasoning abilities.

Since moral potency is such a new construct, there has not been any research conducted in a longitudinal fashion. Important research can be conducted in the future to look at how individual moral potency scores change over time. Especially regarding our target population in this study, it is important for us to know if the Air Force Academy's character development program is having a positive impact. If we are able to track cadets' moral potency scores over their four-year experience and even beyond, as they become commissioned officers, we can determine if improvements in their scores can be tied to the concepts they are learning while at the Academy. The goal of such a research undertaking would be to determine if individuals increase their moral potency over time as they learn and encounter challenges that help them develop. If that is not the case,

then we must look at the program to see why we are not achieving positive outcomes. Moral potency scores can be used as a metric to evaluate the effectiveness of the character development program at the Air Force Academy or elsewhere. Additionally, exit interviews could be conducted that ask questions about which experiences had the greatest impact on the cadets developing higher levels of moral potency. In this way, we can determine what programs should be retained and which need to be improved.

Conclusion

This study has contributed to the existing literature by helping to identify several strengths of character that are related to moral potency. The world in general and the military in particular needs leaders who are able to move from decision to action in the ethical realm. Our leaders cannot be intimidated or afraid. They must be willing to take the right action regardless of the situation or the consequences. This study serves as a first step in figuring out how to instill greater levels of moral potency in future leaders so that they will be able to successfully navigate the challenging waters of the business world and the military environment. As I said at the beginning, “Everything rises and falls on leadership” (Maxwell, 1998, p. 225). This study is an effort to provide our leaders with the best possible preparation to be successful in their endeavors.

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