

Proposal Title: Creating S.P.A.C.E: A Positive Psychology Intervention for Improved Resilience and Well-Being

Preferred Working Group:

- 1) Military Leadership, Command and Control and Basic Competences
- 2) Military Education

In the early 2000s, the field of psychology had become proficient in the understanding, treatment, and prevention of psychological disorders due to the validation and use of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). Noticing this focus on ailment, as opposed to flourishing, Seligman (2000) called for a shift towards a more “positive psychology”, or a focus on understanding psychological well-being and ‘things that are right’ with people. Critical to this movement towards a positive psychology were Peterson and Seligman (2004), who created a classification identifying 24 character strengths that have empirically been shown to contribute to a positive life, and are associated with indicators of improved well-being including less negative affect, more environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, sense of autonomy, and the presence of positive relationships (see Harzer, 2016 for a review).

Several military doctrines emphasize the importance of character for successful military leadership (e.g., United States, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada). Matthews and colleagues (2009) investigated whether there were differences in the character strengths of U.S. and Norwegian military cadets relative to an age-matched sample of U.S. civilians, and found that the two military samples were more similar compared to the civilian sample, and were higher on the strengths of honesty, hope, bravery, and teamwork. More recently, Chérif and colleagues (2020), investigated the relationships among military cadet’s core strengths and resilience, and found that resilience was associated with higher rankings of perseverance, bravery, and humor in their list of signature strengths. This research suggests that the presence of character strengths is important for the resilience and well-being of future military leaders and might be relevant in predicting their success.

Proposed Intervention

Strengths-based interventions, those that help individuals focus on particular strengths and encourage their usage in a new way, have been identified as highly effective in increasing well-being and ameliorating depression (see Schutte & Malouff, 2019). We propose one tool for promoting resilience: the ability to create S.P.A.C.E., a five-step strategy that combines approaches from both character strengths and mindfulness practice which are inextricably linked with resilience and human flourishing. It is meant to prompt individuals to interrupt negative thought and emotional responses and instead leverage mindfulness practices and character strengths use. Details for the intervention will be provided and ideas for future research discussed.