

Notes on the Benefits of a strength based approach to management

The evidence is mounting that when people are able to use their strengths they are more likely to be engaged, energized, authentic, and feel generally at their best.

Emphasising strengths:

- Supports a positive workplace and enhancing communication, across all sections and levels
- Encourages a culture of resilience (especially useful in a time of change and stress) and supportiveness amongst all staff.
- *Realising strengths can be seen as the smallest thing that is likely to make the biggest difference to workplace performance because of its positive impact on so many aspects of sustainable improvement* Lewis 2011
- Among employees receiving a strengths feedback, productivity improved by 7.8% compared to employees who didn't.
- Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002) found that work units that offered their people a higher than usual opportunity to use their strengths everyday were significantly more engaged, which was linked to a strong likelihood of better performance on customer loyalty and employee retention and productivity.
- The Corporate Leadership Council showed that focusing on performance strengths increased performance by 36.4%, while focusing on performance weaknesses made performance decline by 26.8%.

“Working hard to manage weaknesses, while sometimes necessary, will only help us prevent failure. It will not help us reach excellence”. Dr. Martin Seligman

The Fundamental elements of the Strengths Approach

1. Focuses on what is right, what is working, what is strong.
2. Recognizes strengths as part of our basic human nature; therefore, every person in the world has strengths and deserves respect for their strengths.
3. Believes our areas of greatest potential are in the areas of our greatest strengths.
4. Believes we succeed by addressing our weaknesses only when we are also making the most of our strengths.
5. Believes using our strengths is the smallest thing we can do to make the biggest difference.

These are some of the signs of when you are using strengths:

- losing the sense of time passing;
- A sense of energy and engagement when doing certain things
- very rapid learning;
- repeatedly successful performance;
- good completion on tasks;
- An attraction towards certain tasks; and a real pleasure in performing some tasks.

From Linley (2008)

Strengths based leadership

Rath and Conchie name four sets of strengths and advise that teams have at least one member with strengths from each:

1. **Executing** – This is the ability to get things done. A good executor is skilled at arranging and controlling tasks, events and people, is consistent and focused, and is prepared to take responsibility for jobs.
2. **Influencing** – This is the strength to "sell," influence or persuade others to support ideas, projects, tasks, attitudes, or organizational approaches.
3. **Relationship building** – This is the ability to encourage people to work together toward a common goal or ambition.
4. **Strategic thinking** – A strategic thinker is skilled at analyzing information, seeing links and connections, and thinking both inside and outside the box.

[Strengths Based Leadership: Great Leaders, Teams and Why People Follow](#) Tom Rath & Barry Conchie 2009.

Marcus Buckingham's first book is the basis of the strengthsfinder work - *First, break the rules - what the world's greatest managers do differently*, by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman. (Also see [Strengthsfinder 2.0](#) by Tom Rath)

This book identified that an employee's weaknesses cannot be removed by training - all training can do is provide ways to manage the weaknesses. The successful manager builds on people's strengths. First published in 1999 the book is based on two massive Gallup polls over the last 20 years involving over 1 million people.

It found that there are 12 core elements needed to attract, focus and keep the most talented employees.

Core elements needed to attract and keep the most talented employees are:

- 1) Do I know what is expected of me at work?
- 2) Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my job right?
- 3) At work do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
- 4) In the last seven days have I received recognition or praise for good work?
- 5) Does my supervisor, manager or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
- 6) Is there someone at work who encourages my development?
- 7) At work do my opinions seem to count?
- 8) Does the mission/purpose of my company or organisation make me feel like my work is important?
- 9) Are my co-workers committed to doing quality work?
- 10) Do I have a best friend at work?
- 11) In the last 6 months, have I talked with someone about my progress?
- 12) At work, have I opportunities to learn and grow?

There is an increasing amount of organisational development knowledge and experience 'focusing on strengths'. Below are some relevant facts and figures about the benefits of such an approach to business management, employee engagement and productivity.

Prime source: *Positive Psychology at Work: How positive leadership and Appreciative Inquiry Create Inspiring Organisations* by Sarah Lewis, 2011

Employee engagement makes a huge difference to organizations' effectiveness, profitability and productivity. Stairs and Gilpin (2010) found evidence that employee engagement is positively related to:

1. wellbeing and attendance,
2. employee retention,
3. effort and performance,
4. quality, sales performance, income and turnover, profit,
5. customer satisfaction,
6. shareholder return, business growth, And success.

Examples of some benefits relating to employee engagement:

It is estimated that currently only 19% of employees are highly engaged in their work (Stairs and Gilpin, 2010. p.162).

1. On average engaged employees take fewer than three days a year sickness leave (actively disengaged average more than six days a year).
2. On average there is a 4% difference in employee turnover between organizations in the top and bottom quartiles on employee engagement. This may not sound much, but it equates to \$120,000 per business unit per year.
3. Employees who are most committed perform 20% better and give a 57% increase in discretionary effort.

From Stairs and Gilpin (2010)

Benefits of strength based feedback:

An employee whose supervisor focuses on her strengths is over 2 1/2 times as likely to be engaged as one whose supervisor focuses on her weaknesses (Rath, 2007).

Hodges and Asplund (2010) analysed some of the extensive Gallup data and found:

1. Among employees receiving some strengths feedback turnover rates were 14.9% lower than for those employees receiving nothing.
2. Those units where managers received strengths feedback showed 12.5% greater productivity post-intervention compared to those units where the manager received nothing.
3. Among those employees receiving a strengths feedback, productivity improved by 7.8% compared to employees who didn't.

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