

Strengths: The Scientific Source Material

In *Strengths: The Evidence* we gave you ten benefits of using your strengths more. Here is the original scientific source material from which those conclusions were drawn.

1. People who use their strengths more are happier:

Govindji and Linley (2007), in a study of 214 university students, showed that people who used their strengths more reported higher levels of subjective well-being (i.e. happiness) and psychological well-being (i.e. fulfillment). Similarly, Proctor, Maltby and Linley (2009) reported similar findings with a study of 135 university students. Seligman, Steen, Park and Peterson (2005) found that people who used their strengths in a new and different way every day reported higher levels of happiness and lower levels of depression, and this lasted over time. Minhas (2010) showed that people who developed their realized or unrealized strengths reported higher levels of happiness and well-being over a four-week period. Park, Peterson and Seligman (2004) found that people who reported higher levels of character strengths also reported higher levels of life satisfaction, especially for so-called “strengths of the heart.”

2. People who use their strengths more are confident:

Govindji and Linley (2007) found that people who used their strengths more reported higher levels of self-efficacy, which is a scientific conception of confidence—the belief that we are capable of achieving the things we want to achieve. This finding was replicated by Proctor, Maltby and Linley (2009) in a study with 135 university students.

3. People who use their strengths more have higher levels of self-esteem:

Minhas (2010) found that people who developed their realized or unrealized strengths reported increases in self-esteem over a four-week period. Govindji and Linley (2007) reported that people who used their strengths more reported higher levels of self-esteem. In a study with 135 university students, Proctor, Maltby and Linley (2009) found that strengths use was associated with higher levels of self-esteem.

4. People who use their strengths more have higher levels of energy and vitality:

Govindji and Linley (2007), in a study with 214 university students, found that strengths use was associated with higher levels of psychological vitality, that is, having feelings of positive energy and buzz.

5. People who use their strengths more experience less stress:

Over a six-month time period with a community sample of 207 people, those people who used their strengths more reported lower levels of stress. This was the case at both the baseline period, where strengths use was associated with less stress, and also over the three-month and six-month follow ups, where higher strengths use predicted lower stress over time (Wood, Linley, Maltby, & Hurling, 2010).

6. People who use their strengths more are more resilient:

Analysis of the Ego Resiliency Scale with Realise2 shows that strengths use is associated with higher levels of resilience for fifty of the sixty Realise2 strengths (CAPP, 2010). The two highest correlations were with Resilience (as you might expect) and Adventure, which suggests that stretching yourself outside of your comfort zone can be a way to build your resilience. The ten strengths where higher strengths use was *not* significantly associated with higher resilience were Adherence, Competitive, Detail, Humour, Order, Planful, Prevention, Scribe, Time Optimiser, and Work Ethic.

7. People who use their strengths more are more likely to achieve their goals: Linley, Nielson, Wood, Gillett and Biswas-Diener (2010) showed that people who used their strengths in striving to achieve their goals were far more likely to achieve those goals. When they achieved their goals, they satisfied their psychological needs and were happier and more fulfilled as a result.

8. People who use their strengths more perform better at work: In a study of 19,187 employees from 34 organizations across seven industries and 29 countries, the Corporate Leadership Council (2002) found that when managers emphasized performance strengths, performance was 36.4% higher, and when they emphasized personality strengths, performance was 21.3% higher. In contrast, emphasizing weaknesses led to a 26.8% decline for performance weaknesses and a 5.5% decline for personality weaknesses. Data from our own work with Norwich Union shows that people working from their strengths perform better and stay with the company longer (Stefanyszyn, 2007).

9. People who use their strengths more are more engaged at work: The opportunity to do what you do best each day, that is, using our strengths, is a core predictor of workplace engagement, which in turn is a core predictor of a range of business outcomes (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). Similarly, Minhas (2010) found that work engagement increased when people developed either their realized or unrealized strengths.

10. People who use their strengths more are more effective at developing themselves and growing as individuals: When focusing on self-development, people improve faster on areas where they are already strong, than they do in areas where they are weak, contrary to some popular perceptions that focusing on weakness development brings the greatest return (Sheldon, Kasser, Smith & Share, 2002). Case study evidence from our own work on leadership development with BAE Systems showed that business leaders who focused on developing themselves and their teams on the basis of their strengths were more effective and successful (Smedley, 2007).

References

CAPP (2010). *Technical manual and statistical properties for Realise2*. Coventry, UK: CAPP.

"Most people think they know what they are good at. They are usually wrong. ...And yet, a person can perform only from strength – Business Management Guru, Peter Drucker

The Clifton Strengthsfinder® assessment measures the presence of talent and strengths in 34 areas with 4 overarching themes. As you can see, each theme comprises many talents.

Executing

- **Achiever** – People exceptionally talented in the **Achiever** theme work hard and possess a great deal of stamina. They take immense satisfaction in being busy and productive.
- **Arranger** – People exceptionally talented in the **Arranger** theme can organize, but they also have a flexibility that complements this ability. They like to determine how all of the pieces and resources can be arranged for maximum productivity
- **Belief** – People exceptionally talented in the **Belief** theme have certain core values that are unchanging. Out of these values emerges a defined purpose for their lives.
- **Consistency** – People exceptionally talented in the **Consistency** theme are keenly aware of the need to treat people the same. They try to treat everyone with equality by setting up clear rules and adhering to them.
- **Deliberative** – People exceptionally talented in the **Deliberative** theme are best described by the serious care they take in making decisions or choices. They anticipate obstacles.
- **Discipline** – People exceptionally talented in the **Discipline** theme enjoy routine and structure. Their world is best described by the order they create.
- **Focus** – People exceptionally talented in the **Focus** theme can take a direction, follow through, and make the corrections necessary to stay on track. They prioritize, then act.
- **Responsibility** – People exceptionally talented in the **Responsibility** theme take psychological ownership of what they say they will do. They are committed to stable values such as honesty and loyalty.
- **Restorative** – People exceptionally talented in the **Restorative** theme are adept at dealing with problems. They are good at figuring out what is wrong and resolving it.

Influencing

- **Activator** – People exceptionally talented in the **Activator** theme can make things happen by turning thoughts into action. They are often impatient.
- **Command** – People exceptionally talented in the **Command** theme have presence. They can take control of a situation and make decisions.
- **Communication** – People exceptionally talented in the **Communication** theme generally find it easy to put their thoughts into words. They are good conversationalists and presenters.
- **Competition** – People exceptionally talented in the **Competition** theme measure their progress against the performance of others. They strive to win first place and revel in contests.
- **Maximizer** – People exceptionally talented in the **Maximizer** theme focus on strengths as a way to stimulate personal and group excellence. They seek to transform something strong into something superb.
- **Self-Assurance** – People exceptionally talented in the **Self-Assurance** theme feel confident in their ability to manage their own lives. They possess an inner compass that gives them confidence that their decisions are right.
- **Significance** – People exceptionally talented in the **Significance** theme want to be very important in others' eyes. They are independent and want to be recognized.
- **Woo** – People exceptionally talented in the **Woo** theme love the challenge of meeting new people and winning them over. They derive satisfaction from breaking the ice and making a connection with someone.

Relationship Building

- **Adaptability** – People exceptionally talented in the **Adaptability** theme prefer to go with the flow. They tend to be "now" people who take things as they come and discover the future one day at a time.

- **Connectedness** – People exceptionally talented in the **Connectedness** theme have faith in the links among all things. They believe there are few coincidences and that almost every event has meaning.
- **Developer** – People exceptionally talented in the **Developer** theme recognize and cultivate the potential in others. They spot the signs of each small improvement and derive satisfaction from evidence of progress.
- **Empathy** – People exceptionally talented in the **Empathy** theme can sense other people's feelings by imagining themselves in others' lives or situations.
- **Harmony** – People exceptionally talented in the **Harmony** theme look for consensus. They don't enjoy conflict, rather they seek areas of agreement.
- **Includer** – People exceptionally talented in the **Includer** theme accept others. They show awareness of those who feel left out and make an effort to include them.
- **Individualization** – People exceptionally talented in the **Individualization** theme are intrigued with the unique qualities of each person. They have a gift for figuring out how different people can work together productively.
- **Positivity** – People exceptionally talented in the **Positivity** theme have contagious enthusiasm. They are upbeat and can get others excited about what they are going to do.
- **Relator** – People exceptionally talented in the **Relator** theme enjoy close relationships with others. They find deep satisfaction in working hard with friends to achieve a goal.

Strategic Thinking

- **Analytical** – People exceptionally talented in the **Analytical** theme search for reasons and causes. They have the ability to think about all the factors that might affect a situation.
- **Context** – People exceptionally talented in the **Context** theme enjoy thinking about the past. They understand the present by researching its history.
- **Futuristic** – People exceptionally talented in the **Futuristic** theme are inspired by the future and what could be. They energize people with their visions of the future.
- **Ideation** – People exceptionally talented in the **Ideation** theme are fascinated by ideas. They are able to find connections between seemingly disparate phenomena.
- **Input** – People exceptionally talented in the **Input** theme have a craving to know more. Often they like to collect and archive all kinds of information.
- **Intellection** – People exceptionally talented in the **Intellection** theme are characterized by their intellectual activity. They are introspective and appreciate intellectual discussion.
- **Learner** – People exceptionally talented in the **Learner** theme have a great desire to learn and want to continuously improve. The process of learning, rather than the outcome, excites them.
- **Strategic** – People exceptionally talented in the **Strategic** theme create alternative ways to proceed. Faced with any given scenario, they can quickly spot the relevant patterns and issues.

