

Strengthspotting

This is an approved excerpt from
Average to A+: Realising Strengths in Yourself and Others,
by Alex Linley, published by CAPP Press.

To order your own copy of *Average to A+*,
please visit:

www.cappeu.com

or other online or traditional book retailers.

For more information about CAPP and our work in

Strengthening the World

please visit us at

www.cappeu.com

Average
to **A+**

REALISING STRENGTHS
IN YOURSELF AND OTHERS

Alex Linley

CAPP Press
Coventry, England

CAPP PRESS

The Venture Centre
University of Warwick Science Park
Coventry CV4 7EZ
Tel: +44 (0)24 76 323 363
Fax: +44 (0)24 76 323 001
Email: capp@cappeu.org
Website: www.capp-press.org

CAPP Press is a trading name of the Centre for Applied Positive Psychology, a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales, company number 05589865

First published in the United Kingdom in 2008

© CAPP Press 2008

ISBN: 978-1-906366-00-1 (hardback)
ISBN: 978-1-906366-03-2 (paperback)

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without either the prior written permission of the publisher, or a licence permitting restricted copying in the United Kingdom issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd, Saffron House, 6-10 Kirby Street, London, EC1N 8TS. This book may not be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise disposed of by way of trade in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published, without the prior consent of the Publisher. Requests for permissions should be directed to the Publisher.

Printed in the United Kingdom

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

It is the policy of CAPP Press to use paper from sources that are SFI (Sustainable Forestry Initiative) and PEFC (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes) Certified.

CONTENTS

SERIES EDITOR'S FOREWORD	XI
PREFACE	XIII
1 Average isn't Good Enough	1
2 Back to the Beginnings	24
3 Our Negativity Bias and the Golden Mean	50
4 Strengthspotting	72
5 Be Yourself – Better	112
6 Harnessing Strengths at Work	149
7 Golden Seeds and Flourishing Children	184
8 Making Our Greatest Contributions	222
9 The Smallest Thing to Make the Biggest Difference	246
NOTES	248
INDEX	262
STRENGTHS GLOSSARY	270
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	272
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	274

Strengthspotting

“Each of us has much more hidden inside us than we have had a chance to explore.”

Muhammad Yunus,
Banker to the Poor: The Story of Grameen Bank

DO YOU KNOW what your strengths are? Do you know the strengths of your husband or wife? Your mother or father? Your children? Your colleagues at work? Of course, having read this far into the book, you are at an advantage compared to many people, because, sadly, studies to date have shown that only around one-third of people have any meaningful understanding of what their strengths are. You should now, however, be able to take a giant stride forward, just by starting to pay attention to strengths, by acknowledging that strengths exist, and by being aware of the inherent negativity bias that can get in the way of us recognising our strengths. You should also have some sense of what strengths are and what they look like, both of which

are integral elements to how we can go about identifying them. The topic of identifying strengths in yourself and others – or what we call strengthspotting - is the focus of this chapter.

If you think about it carefully, you can probably spot the things that you really look forward to doing. The things in which you just lose yourself. The things that make you feel like ‘the real you’ – fully alive, fully engaged, and fully immersed in the activity. For some of us, we don’t even need to think about them – we just know. We are so used to doing them and have spotted them often enough to know that they are something important that merits our attention. For others of us, we might need to think a little more carefully – either because we haven’t learned to look at things in this way, or because the answers just don’t seem so immediately clear cut. But for every one of us – you can be sure – when we do find the strengths that make us feel this way, life and work will take an important step towards being more productive and fulfilling. As Jonathan Hill, a business psychologist who has worked with strengths for many years, describes it:

“The best evidence for strengths is an attraction to a particular type of activity, or rapid learning in particular areas, or evidence of particular aptitudes at a young age. The distinctive feature of the strengths approach is that it leads us to a philosophy of human development that focuses on what is right with people and the best that they have to offer. It focuses on rapid learning and optimal development, but in a way that acknowledges continual growth and development over the lifespan, thereby recognising that people are developing all the time. But to be best enabled to do that, people first need to know what to look for in themselves that might be their dominant strengths.”

By now, I hope you will be starting to gain a better understanding of your *own* strengths, and in this chapter we explore the different ways

in which we can identify strengths. By the end of the book, I hope you will be a skilled observer of strengths, able to both identify and build on strengths in yourself and to recognise and enable them in others, thereby realising strengths in both senses of the word.

Broadly speaking, there are two major ways through which we can start to identify strengths. The first are individually focused observational techniques, whether through informal self-reflection and observation of others, or through a more formal *Individual Strengths Assessment*, as we go on to discuss below. The second approach to identifying strengths relies on predetermined classifications of strengths, which are then assessed through a strengths-based interview, or through one of several psychometric tools. These too are discussed below, but let's begin by seeing how we can go about spotting strengths every day, in every walk of life.

Day-to-day Strengthspotting

Day-to-day strengthspotting is exactly what it sounds like: spotting strengths in people – whether oneself or others – as we go about our daily activities. As we do so, what are the telltale signs of a strength that we should be looking for? These signs would not necessarily be found together, at least at any given moment in time. But observed over time, it is very likely that patterns will emerge and that the same things will keep coming up time and again. The telltale signs of a strength include the following:

- A real sense of energy and engagement when using the strength;
- Losing a sense of time because you are so engrossed and engaged in the activity;

- Very rapidly learning new information, activities, or approaches that are associated with the strength;
- A repeated pattern of successful performance when using the strength;
- Exemplary levels of performance when using the strength, especially performance that evokes the respect and admiration of others;
- Always seeming to get the tasks done that require using the strength;
- Prioritising tasks that require using the strength over tasks that do not;
- Feeling a yearning to use the strength, while also feeling drained if you have not had the opportunity to use it for a time;
- Being irrevocably drawn to do things that play to the strength – even when you feel tired, stressed, or disengaged.

Strengthspotting is a highly engaging activity – I find! – and most importantly, can be deployed in what might seem like the most unusual and unexpected situations where one might expect to see strengths. For example, on a hot June morning I was one of many hundreds of people stuck in a wall-to-wall queue, packed solidly like sardines in a tin, waiting for access to the London Underground at London Euston train station. It was rush hour, and all the trains were delayed: there had been the ubiquitous ‘signal failure.’

I was due to be the first speaker at a conference, and I was in a rush – no doubt like many of the other people stuck in this queue. As the temperature started to rise, with all the bodies being squeezed against each other, people got impatient and tempers looked like they were starting to fray. At that moment, a London Underground representative emerged from the ‘Up’ escalator, equipped with a loudhailer:

“Ladies and gentleman,” he began, “I do apologise for the delay to your journey this morning. There has been a signal failure further up the line, which has caused significant delays to all services. I do appreciate that this is difficult for you, and I would like to reassure you that we are doing everything possible to keep the delay to your journey to a minimum. Thank you for the patience that you have shown.”

In a few seconds, the angst and anger was averted. There was an almost palpable collective sigh of relief from the gathered crowd. What had changed? The London Underground spokesman had read the mood of the crowd, and acted swiftly to avert the rising impatience and anger. How had he done it? In my view, he did so through the very effective use of two core strengths - empathy and emotional intelligence. He used *Emotional intelligence* to read the mood and sense the frustrations of the crowd (a cynic might argue that was hardly difficult to do in the circumstances, but nonetheless, he got it exactly right), but then used his *Empathy* to convey that, not only did he recognise our predicament, but he understood and shared our frustrations. Having conveyed this, he drew the sting of the situation by reassuring us that everything was being done to resolve the situation, and thanking us for our patience, thereby reinforcing the positive behaviour that he hoped to see continue.

I relate this as an example of day-to-day strengthspotting, and strengthspotting in an unusual place. The point illustrates that strengths can come to the fore at any time, from anyone – even from possibly unlikely people in unlikely places. Indeed, there are some strengths that are much more context-dependent, or phasic, than others. *Bravery*, for example, is difficult to display in the absence of situations that call for brave acts, whereas in contrast one can have *Curiosity* about anything at any time. As such, it is likely that there are some strengths

– the phasic strengths – that we may have to look much harder to find, or at least be particularly alert to them when the situations permit.

What does it take to be a strengthspotter? In essence, to spot strengths in whatever we are doing, wherever we are, with whomever, requires only the prepared mind that knows what to look for, and knows what a strength is when it has been “spotted.” Importantly, as we discussed in Chapter 2, there are very likely several hundred different strengths, and by no means have all of them yet been identified, labeled or categorised. Given this, it is very likely that we will spot strengths in people, but that we won’t immediately have a name that we can use to describe what it is that we have seen in them.

Much of our work in strengths research is concerned with exactly these questions of identifying, labelling and categorising strengths. But, for any given person at any given time, this absence of agreed names need not be an obstacle to having a strengths conversation with someone. Even if it seems impossible to name the strength succinctly in one or two of words, the impact of validation and recommendation that comes through having somebody identify a strength in you is equally as powerful when both people just agree the description of what has been identified, even if it cannot be given a specific name. Some examples of our day-to-day strengthspotting are set out below to give you more of a flavour of how this can happen – and we would love to hear your examples too. If you’d like to share them, please visit our website at www.averagetoaplus.org

Consider how we identified the strength of *Esteem Builder*. Jenny works for Children’s Services, and spends a lot of time with people who are in difficult circumstances and who, on first impressions, don’t seem to have too much going for them. Yet, what she is able to do, quite remarkably, is to see the glint of possibility and potential in somebody, and to cherish it, nurture it, and develop it in them. She describes how she will spot something that they have done well, a previous success, or

a natural but possibly latent talent, and bring it to their attention, polishing it, encouraging it, and making sure that they don't dismiss it as irrelevant.

This is hard enough to do with people generally (we are all resistant to positive feedback!), but especially so when people find themselves in persistently difficult life circumstances. Yet once Jenny has spotted that glimmer of positivity in somebody, she won't let it go. Instead, it will be held up to the light, brought to the person's attention, and explored and developed with them until they cannot help but agree that there is something that they are good at, something that they have done well, or some talent that they had somehow lost in the fog of their life circumstances. And with this realisation, they start to shift. It might only be a small shift at first, but a shift nonetheless. They feel better about themselves. They start to see that they do have something to offer the world. They start to see that they are not a worthless person. Suddenly, life is not as bad. Buds of hope and optimism for the future start to sprout. Their self-esteem improves. The *Esteem Builder* has been at work. And when they have achieved something they didn't at first believe themselves capable of, the *Esteem Builder's* catchphrase comes back loud and clear in response, "I knew you had it in you," thereby implanting the person's belief in themselves yet further and yet deeper.



Figure 4.1 Jenny, the *Esteem Builder* at Work

Lift is another example. Nicky works with CAPP, where she is an important and valued member of our team. Her strength of *Lift* helps to explain why. Nicky has an infectious enthusiasm and optimism that can't help but catch your mood and lift it too. But this isn't any Pollyanna-like utopian ideal. Nicky's strength of *Lift* also combines a tenacity and determination that ensures that she – and those around her – can face difficult times with the fortitude and pragmatism that the situation requires. In whatever she does, her positivity, drive, and commitment is there for all to see. It pulls people up by their bootstraps, sending the message, very powerfully, that this is the way that things get done round here. And they do get done, because the positive emotional climate ensures that people want to be part of things, they want to be around, they want to be on the team. *Lift* isn't a feminine emotionality to be dismissed (although this has happened to Nicky in the past). Instead, it is the bellwether of the emotional mood of the team and, of critical importance, the bellwether of the same emotional mood that in turn influences productivity and team performance, as studies are beginning to show.

Have you ever worked with somebody who seemed to be connected to everyone? Who was always just happening to bump into the right people? Who had a telephone directory of a memory that was always putting different people in touch with each other? Who was always seeing the links between ideas that other people missed, and then connecting those ideas with the people who could make them happen? Both Linda and Sally are just such people, for they have the strength of *Connector*. “*Let me introduce you to X*” is a favourite line, as is “*You really must meet so-and-so, let me arrange it for you.*” *Connectors* are the people who keep the relational networks of the world turning, since they get such a buzz from connecting people with people, or people with ideas, such that they appear to have an uncanny ability to get the right people together in the right place at the right time – their own *Connector* version of the golden mean!

These are just three examples of more than one hundred strengths that we have found through our work in this area. The richness of the language, and the richness of our understanding, increases each time we are able to identify, name and understand a new strength. We are completely focused on building this database of strengths over time, identifying them, understanding them, measuring them, and enabling people to apply them in their work and their life. The work is not easy, and it takes a long time to get it right – but it is fundamentally the right thing to be doing.

Listening for Strengths

Given the passion and energy that strengths ignite in people, I became very interested in the question of what strengths ‘sound like.’ I was particularly interested in whether there were identifiable differences that occurred when people were talking about strengths, relative to other topics, or other types of conversation in which we might engage. Starting with a class that I used to teach by telephone (class members were drawn from half a dozen countries around the world), I developed an exercise where I asked someone first to spend about five minutes talking about a weakness, or about something with which they were struggling. Then, second, I asked them to spend about five minutes talking about a strength, or about when they are at their best – it’s important always to do the weakness exercise first, and the strengths exercise second, as will become apparent from the results below.

So, what happened when I asked people to do this exercise? Remember, the first times I used the exercise were by telephone, where there is no medium of communication other than the speaking and listening that the telephone allows. Equally, it does mean that people

will be carefully attuned to what is being said, even if they don't have access to additional physical cues, like body language or facial expressions. Here are the sorts of observations that characterized the answers of people when they were asked to describe what they experienced when the person was talking about an area of weakness:

- They are more hesitant and struggle to express themselves;
- Their voice sounds dejected and deflated;
- There is a harder emphasis on things;
- They are more critical and unforgiving of themselves;
- Their attention narrows to focus only on the problems they are talking about, rather than their solutions;
- Their tone is heavy and self-critical;
- They express annoyance at their failings;
- They sound disengaged from the conversation, like they are holding something back;
- They express impatience at themselves and their situation;
- They seek avenues of withdrawal from the situation, offering rationalisations and justifications;
- They are more likely to be retrospective and backward looking;
- They tend to feel weaknesses as being constrictive, narrowing their attentional focus;
- The conversation may have more stops and starts, and be harder to progress.

Even just reading through that list again, I can feel my own energy start to drain away. In contrast, when after five minutes or so I asked people to switch over and to talk about their strengths, these were the sort of observations that characterised them:

- The sound and tone of their voice changes in pitch, becoming clearer and more focused;
- They speak rhythmically, having found their own natural pace and flow;
- There is a sense of energy and uplift in their voice;
- They seem happy and relaxed when talking, but also very energised;
- They have a great sense of confidence;
- They sound very authentic, honest, integrated, and complete;
- They use more elaborate language and can explain things graphically;
- They use phrases like “I love” and “it just fits;”
- They are specific in their choice of words and descriptions;
- They demonstrate an insightful and rich knowledge of the topic;
- They find it easy to visualise and explain what they are talking about;
- The passion in their tone and voice is evident;
- They are fully engaged with the conversation and fully present within it;
- They are more likely to be forward looking and optimistic;
- The conversation is very free flowing;
- The description / conversation is much richer, with many more themes interwoven with each other and connections being made;
- Using a musical analogy, people shift from a “minor key” to a “major key;”
- There is a sense of absorption in the subject and a loss of self-consciousness;
- Their responses are more immediate;
- Examples to illustrate strengths themes are often brought from many different areas of people’s lives;
- People can talk about recognising the strength in their childhood

and the early years of their life, making sense of the patterns over time.

The differences here are stark – and remember – the first time I did this, it was on the telephone with about 30 people listening to the one person who was speaking. As such, there were no clues as to body language, posture or physical gestures through this medium – and still the differences were absolutely stark.

Further, as I extended these observations into working with much more diverse groups in physical locations, rather than telephone settings, I was able to build the database of observations and reflections – both from the participants themselves, and from independent external observers who were present, but were not taking part in the activity. Here is some of what these independent observers noticed when people shifted to talking about strengths:

- The energy levels significantly increase;
- The noise levels significantly increase;
- The exercise takes longer to stop;
- There is a shift in bodily posture around the room – people display body language that is much more open, engaged and confident.

But my biggest – and most amusing! - lesson came when my first telephone group asked me about my strengths. I started to talk about the things that I did best, the things that I felt made me uniquely me, and that I loved to do.....and they all started to laugh. I stopped to ask what the joke was, and the class replied that I was doing exactly what they had just listened to in the other participants: my energy and engagement had increased, I was in flow, I was speaking confidently and graphically about my experiences.....and I hadn't even realised it.

I have subsequently run this exercise with many diverse groups of

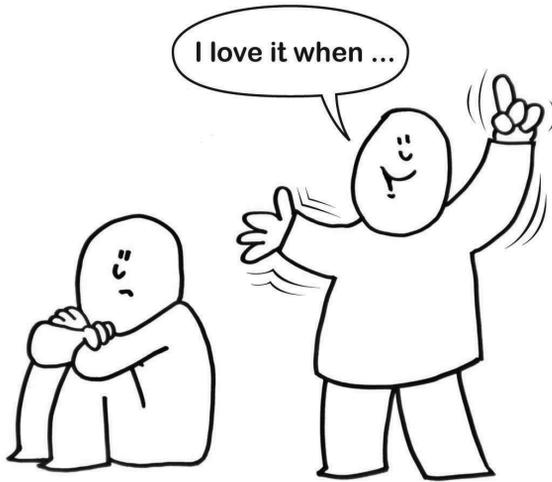


Figure 4.2 Listening for Weaknesses and Listening for Strengths

people, including executive coaches, therapists, HR professionals, educational psychologists, occupational psychologists, corporate boards, insurance claims advisors, recruitment managers and regular people just like you and me – even a group of 120 military leaders drawn from across the army, navy and air force. In each case, the findings have been the same, with participants both experiencing and witnessing the shifts in energy and engagement that I found initially in the teleclass experiment. Of course, the findings are not always identical. I have found that educational psychologists – across several different experiments – demonstrate a remarkable degree of humour and resilience when talking about weaknesses, so much so that the differences with this group have tended to be the least pronounced of

all the groups with whom I have run this exercise.

This leads to an important caveat, which is that while there are certainly remarkable consistencies across these different groups and diverse populations in listening and observing for strengths, there can also be important individual differences: not everyone responds in the same way, and it is very important to keep this in mind. If we do not, we run the risk of misinterpreting the responses of people who are simply different. This caveat applies to all psychological research, which is almost always nomothetic (seeking to create generalisable laws that apply across people), despite being applied in ways that are idiographic (specific to a given individual).

So, why is it so important to do the weaknesses exercise first, and the strengths exercise second, as I mentioned at the outset? You may well have already worked this one out for yourself, but it is all to do with the state in which we leave people when the exercise is finished – in any intervention with people, we have both a professional and a moral responsibility. For almost all people, talking about weaknesses was a negative experience. For almost all people, talking about strengths was a positive experience. Hence, our professional and moral responsibility is to leave people in a positive place, rather than to leave them in a negative place when the exercise is finished.

Underpinning this, as well as our responsibilities to the people taking part, is the scientific case. As Barbara Fredrickson's work on positive emotions has shown, positive emotions can undo the negative effects of negative emotions, and the experience of positive emotions builds psychological, social and physical resources which help people long into the future – some of the evidence indicates very strongly that positive emotions can account for people living up to nine years longer. Further, positive emotions increase our creativity and capacity for learning, as well as our inclinations toward prosocial behaviour, so doing a lot of good all round. More broadly, these implications of the

beneficial effects of strengths use and positive emotions apply across many different areas – in school, at work, and throughout life – thereby again supporting our fundamental view that *using strengths is the smallest thing we can do to make the biggest difference.*

Individual Strengths Assessments

Strengthspotting and listening for strengths are both naturalistic activities – that is, they can and do happen in everyday life, as people are going about their everyday business. They are limited, however, by their reliance on the strength being identified when it happens to come into play. As powerful and validating as this is – I have seen people transformed by having a strength identified in them – it does depend on that strength coming up at that particular moment in time. Given this, at CAPP we have been working on developing a more structured, but still free-flowing means of identifying strengths in people - the Individual Strengths Assessment, or ISA.

The ISA combines the strengthspotting skills of a strengths coach with the telltale hallmarks of a strength that we explored through the listening for strengths exercise. It involves the strengths coach in asking a series of questions, in a semi-structured and free-flowing way, that then allow the person to talk about their strengths in an easy, natural manner, as part of a conversation. As this conversation is happening, the strengths coach is noting and identifying the strengths that shine through. The strengths are not typically fed back to the person as they are identified – this would often break the flow of the conversation. Instead, they are noted by the strengths coach, who then seeks additional validation and support for what they have heard, by asking additional follow-up or supporting questions. Towards the end of the conversation, or at another appropriate point, the strengths coach then

feeds back what they have heard to the client.

It is amazing just how powerful – and transformative – this process can be. In our experience of delivering ISAs, we have seen numerous examples of people who became more confident and integrated with themselves as a result of being able to understand their strengths more fully – and to understand them more fully in context, a critical consideration. One example was a client working in a civil engineering firm – we'll call him Nigel - who was disengaged from his work and wondering what he was going to do in terms of his future career. Following the ISA, he felt in touch with who he really was for the first time in a long time, recognising his great strengths in creativity and appreciation of beauty that were simply not being used in his current role. Equipped with this knowledge, he started to re-design how he spent some of his time outside work, so that he could do more that played to these strengths. And at work, feeling more confident and integrated, he went to see his line manager, explored the work options where he could make his best contributions through his strengths, and negotiated increased responsibility and a pay rise as a result!

Or consider another client, who we will call Victoria. Lacking self-confidence, despite having lots of things going for her, Victoria was someone who had many different strengths, but had never had the opportunity to acknowledge, celebrate or really use them to any great extent. Following the ISA, she was like a person re-discovered – in touch with herself and with all the many things that were good about her, in such a way that she was more confident, more integrated with who she was as a person, and more able to work out her own right directions and right decisions in life. Again, as a direct result of the ISA, Victoria has been able to start thinking in a much more meaningful way about her future career options and directions.

What does the ISA look like, and how does it work? As I began to describe above, the ISA is a conversation with a strengths coach about

your strengths – but the beauty of it is that it is not explicitly about your strengths, but rather it gets to explore your strengths through the ‘back door’ into your consciousness – remember that only about one-third of people could give a meaningful answer to the question “What are your strengths?” In contrast, the ISA uses questions like the ones I include below, all designed to encourage people to talk about their great experiences, their enjoyment, their best successes, about who they are, at their core, when they are at their best.

The ISA questions cover each of the emotional, thinking and behavioural aspects of people, and range over the past, present and future, always looking for consistent themes that would indicate the presence of a strength – and it is hugely important that each of these aspects is covered. Here is one example of why. We once ran an ISA with a client – we’ll call her Jane - who was proving to be very difficult to connect with and to get the sort of responses and indicators that we would typically look for in identifying strengths. This continued – right until we started to ask questions about the future. And then everything changed. It was like a light bulb went on for Jane – and for us, it was a real eureka moment too! Talking about the future, Jane came alive. All the passion, the energy, the verve and desire that come through when talking about strengths were there in bucket loads when she was talking about the future. The reason? Quite simple, really. Jane’s strengths were all future-focused. She was always inimitably geared towards what she was going to do next, what her plans were for tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, even next decade – and not remotely interested in what she had done before, or what she was doing today – unless and until it connected with her path into the future.

As this example illustrates, it is important to recognise that the ISA doesn’t work according to a script. It is, unfortunately, not a fool-proof process, whereby anyone can read the questions from the list, and

establish what someone's core strengths are. In contrast, it is a subtle but powerful combination of the questions of the ISA and the expertise of the strengths coach. The ISA questions move people into the right territory to be thinking about their strengths. The coach's own strengths, together with their skill and experience, allow them to draw those strengths out through the conversation, before feeding them back to the client in such a way that the client understands, values, and engages with the strengths.

To that end, we have an ongoing debate about whether the language used to describe the strengths when they are fed back should be the language of our emerging classification, or in contrast whether it should be anchored firmly in the language used by the client as they provided their descriptions. Neither approach is entirely right, but what is always right is to follow the client's agenda and direction, and to do what is right for them. Sometimes clients find it helpful to connect to a larger classification of strengths, and value feeling the security of a context for the strength that has been mapped and explored by others before them. For other people, using this pre-existing language and classification can get in the way of what they perceive – often quite rightly - as being their unique and idiosyncratic descriptions of what it means to have *Delivery*, to be a *Talentspotter*, or to be *Proactive*. Given this, the right way is always the way that is right for the client – whatever that may be.

Here are some sample ISA questions for you to consider. You may wish to think about your own answers to these, and to see what strengths your responses may lead you to identify in yourself. Or you might want to try them out with some of the people around you, seeing what sort of responses you receive, and what you can glean about that person from how they respond:

- What sort of everyday things do you enjoy doing?
- What makes for a really good day for you? Tell me about the best day that you can remember having?
- What would you describe as your most significant accomplishment?
- When you are at your best, what are you doing?
- What gives you the greatest sense of being authentic and who you really are?
- What do you think are the most energising things that you do?
- Where do you gain the most energy from? What sorts of activities?
- What are you doing when you feel at your most invigorated?
- Tell me about a time when you think that “the real me” is most coming through.
- Do you have a vision for the future? What is it about?
- What are you most looking forward to in the future?
- Thinking about the next week, what will you be doing when you are at your best?

All of these questions start to open up the dialogue around strengths, around what energises and invigorates people, what gives them a sense of authenticity, and enables them to be at their best.

Even so, it is also a very useful approach to ask some questions as part of the ISA that are focused on weaknesses and the activities that drain the client. Very often, people’s responses to these questions will serve to reinforce and re-affirm the messages that have been coming through about their strengths, but equally they will sometimes open up new and fertile ground that helps the strengths coach to understand the person better in context – to understand them more holistically, in relation both to what they do well and to what they don’t do so well, or even what they wish they could stop doing or avoid altogether!

People's responses to these types of questions can also serve to validate the indicators that were coming through for strengths, by showing the differences in response, whether it is through vocabulary, tone, energy, passion or even engagement in the conversation. We would expect to see lots of these when people are talking about strengths, and have equally seen them disappear almost immediately when the conversation turns to talking about weaknesses. When this happens, it provides good supporting evidence for the effect of both strengths and weaknesses – and on those few occasions where it doesn't happen, it serves as an important reminder that there are always exceptions to the general rule. Knowing this requires the strengths coach to be carefully attuned to the conversation and to ensure that they pick up on the other cues that are present, as well as paying attention to the differences that may exist in the nature of the conversation itself.

The weakness questions look like this:

- What are the activities that you really dislike doing? Why is that?
- Are there things that you never seem to get done, or things that you always try to avoid? What are they?
- What are the activities that drain you when you have to do them? Has it always been this way?

It's important to note that, in the case of all these questions, the ISA conversation is just that – a conversation. It is not an interview, or somebody reading from a scripted list of questions. As such, the strengths coach is always at liberty to tailor the questions as is appropriate for them to feel comfortable, and for them to feel that they fit within the context and flow of the conversation, as well as the needs and expectations of the client.

Very often, when the questions are written down formally as they are here, they can feel presented in a formal and constraining way – but conversational language is almost never like that, so the strengths coach should feel at liberty to speak as they would naturally speak through the ISA. They should use the questions as a helpful framework and prompt, rather than as a gilded cage that constrains and gets in the way of what would otherwise be a nicely flowing conversation!

As the conversation draws to a natural conclusion – when the responses are all pointing in the same direction, and little new material or indicators are coming through – it is very often helpful to ask people what, on the basis of the conversation, they think their strengths are. This can also be a good opportunity to introduce the question around other feedback that people may have had through formal or informal processes, and whether that feedback is consistent with what they have started to identify through the ISA conversation.

Even though only around one third of people can meaningfully identify their strengths when asked, through the process of an ISA conversation people will typically be able to start to identify key themes and emerging consistencies that point them in some helpful directions to recognising and realising their strengths. Inviting the client into this discussion is also a great way to engage them in the feedback process.

ISA Experiences. There are a number of recurring topics that tend to come up through our experience of developing and delivering ISAs, and it is worth considering them here. First is always the question about “*What are my top strengths?*” Paradoxically, answering this question without appreciating the wider context and implications for it can be unhelpful. This is because we need to know, top strengths for what? When? How many? Misinterpreting the subtext of these questions can lead to faulty assumptions and hence faulty responses and recommendations.

It's an open question as to how many strengths a given individual has, and also an open question as to how many of those strengths are 'top strengths.' As we see below, psychometric strengths assessments typically report back on a predetermined number of strengths, often the top five strengths from the assessment. But that does not helpfully indicate the strengths that may be equally as powerful and important, but for a number of reasons came out somewhere just below the 'top five' in the assessment. It also does not take any account of how those strengths may shift, some moving out into the foreground and others receding into the background, as the context and hence need changes. As such, talking about 'top strengths' needs to be qualified with the understanding:

- (1) that there is not any fixed number of 'top strengths' that people may have;
- (2) that strengths may recede into the background, or advance into the foreground, depending on context and need, so that;
- (3) strengths need to be understood in context, and so;
- (4) the number of strengths that we should focus on at any one time depends on the requirements of the situation - some situations may require a wider combination of strengths, other situations may require just one or two.

A second question that almost inevitably comes up at the end of an ISA is "What next?" Of course, this is impossible to answer in the abstract, since next steps are always a result of the particular combination of strengths and situations that a person is presented with at any given time. These next steps are typically to do with questions of how the client can use their strengths more effectively in their work and in their life more broadly. Often, this can be about helping the client to find or create situations where they can deploy their strengths more, or

exploring ways in which they can have conversations with others (spouse and supervisor being classic examples) about what they would like to do to maximise their strengths more in the future.

Almost always – and almost inevitably – the conclusion of an ISA is characterised by the client’s realisation of a deeper insight and understanding of themselves, particularly when they are at their best, and what they can do to achieve that more often. There is also a marked shift in realisation towards the practical steps that can be taken to re-shape and refine their life and work on this basis.

If you wondered about the value of an ISA for people who have already received a lot of feedback – and indeed who might already know their own strengths well – consider my own experience. I have spent the last seven or more years working in this field, explicitly focused on identifying, understanding and assessing strengths. So when I arranged to have an ISA with Janet Willars, one of our expert strengths coaches, I was very interested to see what would come out.

And what did come out? A *lot* of validation for what I already knew, as well as two new insights that built on this. First, I was able to recognise a strength that had been latent for quite some time, but which was now being more fully developed through – yes, you’ve guessed it – a change in circumstance and need that was inviting this strength to move into the foreground. And second, I realised another strength to a far greater depth than I had ever done before: recognising that the extent of this strength went far beyond the traditional definition, and as a result, that there was actually something that was subtly, but importantly and powerfully, different about it – something that was much more uniquely me - and all that within a 45-minute conversation!

As you can see, ISAs are a tremendously powerful way of opening up a conversation about strengths, and enabling people to talk in ways that allow the expert strengths coach to identify and draw out the core strengths that the person is describing through their responses. As well

as the ISA, there are also several other approaches to the open-ended identification of strengths, as we go on to consider next.

Other Open-ended Approaches to Strengths Identification

Bernard Haldane and The Dependable Strengths Articulation Process. Bernard Haldane (1911-2002) is arguably the person who first introduced a systematic focus on strengths, and especially the appropriate identification of strengths. Despite this, he is sadly not well-recognised within the modern strengths field, but was known as a leading innovator in career development. Writing in the *Harvard Business Review* in 1947, Haldane provided an explanation for people's lack of efficiency at work:

“One of the reasons for this neglect and waste of manpower is that very few top-management men know and recognise the varieties and number of human aptitudes. Another is general lack of information on how these aptitudes combine to form personality and work patterns. A third reason is a failure to realise the results of misapplication or neglect of talents.”

The same might be argued today, in spite of advances in our understanding of ‘human aptitudes.’ Haldane’s work was pioneering and is perhaps best characterised by his view that, because you are unique, there is something you are better at than anyone else. It was from this basis that Haldane’s methods for identifying strengths were all focused on using a person’s own language, rather than prescribing the strengths to be assessed according to a predetermined classification. Haldane developed a number of open-ended approaches for the identification of strengths, but these ultimately converged around the Dependable Strengths Articulation Process for which he is best known.

When completing the Dependable Strengths Articulation Process, participants are first asked to identify a number of experiences of which they feel proud, which they did well, and which they enjoyed. Participants then tell the stories of these experiences to other people in their group, who are asked to try and identify the strengths that they see being illustrated in the experiences (what we might now refer to as “strengthspotting”). The participant then sorts through the strengths identified, and identifies six to eight strengths that they believe are their Dependable Strengths®. Further information about articulating Dependable Strengths can be found through the Center for Dependable Strengths at www.dependablestrengths.org

Mike Pegg and the Strengths Way. Mike Pegg is a British consultant and writer who has been working with people to build on their strengths for the last 40 years. His model is based on three steps to success, which he describes as (1) Strengths, (2) Specific goals, and (3) Success. *Step 1: Strengths* is about knowing your strengths, which Pegg describes as the activities in which you consistently deliver As, that you find fulfilling, that give you positive energy, and where you find yourself at ease but where you also excel. *Step 2: Specific goals* is about achieving clarity around the specific goals that you want to achieve, and focusing on them. *Step 3: Success* contains the three themes of *Strategies* (clarifying the strategies that give the greatest chance of success), *Solutions* (finding creative solutions to challenges and also to managing weaknesses), and *Success* (focusing on an inspiring environment, effective implementation tools, and enabling people to integrate their learning in their own way).

Marcus Buckingham and the SIGNs of a Strength. Having left The Gallup Organization where he made his name through co-authoring *Now, Discover Your Strengths* with Donald Clifton, Marcus Buckingham turned his attention to the identification of strengths through more open-ended approaches, developing the S-I-G-Ns of a strength in his

later book, *Go Put Your Strengths to Work*. According to Buckingham, the S-I-G-Ns of a strength are that you feel *Successful* when you are using it; that it feels like an *Instinct*, something that you feel drawn to do; that you experience *Growth* through using it; and you feel that you have satisfied a *Need* when you have been using it. Buckingham suggests a 3-step process for strengths identification from this basis: (1) Capture (making a note of what you are doing when you feel powerful, confident, natural, etc., and also when you feel drained, frustrated, forced, etc.); (2) Clarify (in each case asking yourself where this applies, where it does not, and how far it can be generalised); and (3) Confirm (testing possible strengths against a set of 12 questions which relate to what you do, the way you do it, how you feel about it and how successful you are in it).

Each of these more open-ended approaches to the identification of strengths converge around similar themes that are the telltale signs of a strength – telltale signs that we consider in detail in this chapter particularly and throughout the book more generally. But as much as open-ended approaches are valuable, there are also situations where the focus is instead on a more formal assessment of the *presence* or *absence* of particular strengths. This is where strengths-based interviewing and psychometric strengths assessments come into focus.

Strengths-based Interviewing

Listening for strengths in day-to-day situations and Individual Strengths Assessments are both open-ended and free-flowing ways of assessing the strengths that exist in a given individual. In contrast, strengths-based interviewing is concerned with assessing the presence or absence of particular pre-determined strengths, and then establishing the degree to which those strengths may exist in any given indi-

vidual. Just as more traditional competency-based interviews seek to assess the extent to which candidates have the particular competencies that are required for the role, so strengths-based interviews are designed to assess that candidates have the particular strengths that are required for the role.

There are, however, some important distinctions and differentiators between the two approaches. Whereas competency-based interviews are very much grounded in past experience, strengths-based interviews are not constrained by the search for evidence that someone has before done the particular thing in question. In contrast, strengths-based interviews draw from people's natural talents and preferences for particular ways of thinking, feeling or behaving, and these natural aptitudes, recurring over time, are indicative of what it is that the person is most likely to continue doing – with energy and engagement - into the future. As such, the evidence used to support decision-making in strengths-based interviews comes from a much wider body than just previous relevant work experience: it could extend to any parts of a person's life where that strength has been at play, thus rendering the process much more inclusive and a more level playing field. Further, competency-based interviews tend to steer away from expressions of emotion and passion, and yet, as you will now know, these are some of the hallmarks of what shines through when people are talking about strengths.

Strengths-based interviews typically begin with some generic warm up questions, such as *"What has been your best day at work? Why?"*, *"When are you at your best?"* and *"What are the things that most energise you?"* These questions are not included as part of the scoring, but are used to settle the candidate into the interview, and to help them move into a frame of mind that is conducive to the questions that follow. That said, very often people's responses to these opening questions can be very revealing and tell the interviewer a lot about the person.

The interview questions themselves will all be designed to assess a specific strength in the person. Typically, an interview would include between three and six questions for each strength that was being assessed. The candidate's responses are scored using a deliberately spaced distribution of 0, 3, or 5. Candidates who clearly are failing to demonstrate the strength score 0. Candidates who are able to demonstrate some of the strength, but are not completely consistent with it, score 3. And candidates who exemplify the strength are scored 5. The spacing between the scores helps to ensure that interviewers think carefully about how to score any given response, rather than just shading into the next score bracket without due consideration.

In every case, the interviewer is listening for a particular set of 'listen-fors' – typical responses provided by people who have the strength to a very high degree, and hence who may be considered the prototypical exemplars of that strength. Some sample strengths-based interview questions, and their scoring keys and listen-fors, are provided below:

Time Optimizer -

How would you say that you manage your time?

- 0 I don't / unsure
- 3 Quite / fairly / reasonably well / effectively. May describe occasions when this does not happen
- 5 Make the most of every minute / Very effectively / Superb / Effective use of time comes naturally to me

Explainer –

How does it make you feel when you have explained something to another person?

- 0 Nothing / alright (noncommittal answer)
- 3 Pleased that I have been able to explain it
- 5 Get a real buzz from explaining things to people / need to hear enthusiasm / energy

Planful –

Would you describe yourself as someone who is eager for action or do you like to plan carefully before doing something important?

- 0 Eager for action only
- 3 Plan carefully but with some pullback
- 5 Always plan carefully

Of course, the secret - as with any interview - is to be looking for consistency across responses, and congruent lines of evidence all pointing in the same direction. That is why we always ask several questions about any given strength, to ensure that people's responses are not skewed or misrepresented by their misunderstanding or misinterpretation of one of the questions. Second, asking several questions about any given strength allows us to ensure that there is consistency across the interview responses as a whole. Seeing this consistency is a good indication that the strength is possessed to a high degree, as well as being both stable and reliable within the person.

Experiences of Strengths-based Interviewing. Our experiences of designing and delivering strengths-based interviews have been very rewarding. Not only have we delivered substantial organisational benefits, including enhanced retention and improved performance, to clients like Norwich Union, but we have also heard and seen many examples of candidates who simply found the process to be much more open and effective for them. In fact, it is not unusual for people to take part in a strengths-based interview, but then to decide for themselves that they do not want the job – and not necessarily because they are not able to do it, but because they realise themselves that the *fit* between what the job requires and what they are bringing to it is not a close one. It is far easier to withdraw oneself, or ultimately to face rejection, on the basis of closeness of fit and circumstance, than it is to do so through lack of ability or competence.

Another key element of this approach is that it enhances the candidate recruitment experience, something that is increasingly important to consumer-facing firms, for whom the candidate may already be an existing client, be related to other existing clients, or be a potential future client. At the very least, having a positive recruitment experience does the organisation's reputation no harm; at best, it can build both the organisation's consumer and employer brands in tandem. Strengths-based interviewing approaches have consistently delivered this improved candidate experience - as well as, fundamentally, delivering people better able, interested and motivated to do the job. Unlike traditional competency-based recruitment, which focuses on getting people who can do the job, strengths-based recruitment is about recruiting people who not only *can* do the job, but also *love* to do the job. I am always reminded of the claims advisor whose colleagues described her as "leaving skid marks on the carpet because she cannot get to her desk fast enough to start work." How much does that say about what she thinks of her job?

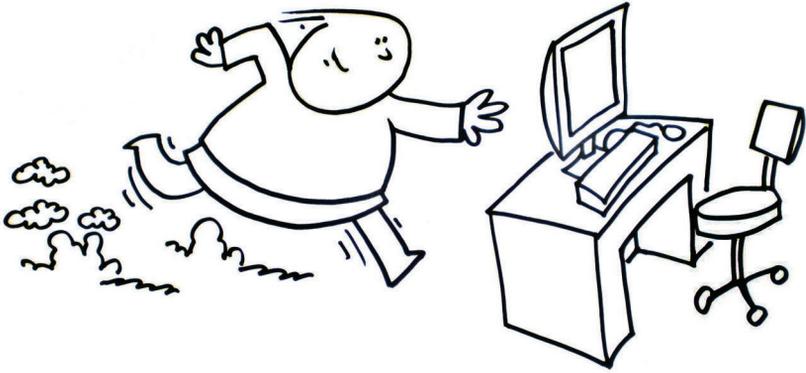


Figure 4.3 The Effect of Strengths-based Recruitment

The process described so far works well for generic roles where there is a degree of consistency across the role and the work that is required. But how does this translate to roles that are less easily defined, more variable and fluid? In such cases, it is important to recognise the potential for role shaping – the idea that it is much easier for roles and jobs to be shaped to fit the person, than it is for the person to be shaped to fit the role or the job!

Role shaping is most applicable and effective in roles where there may be a number of different ways in which the outcomes can be delivered, and so where different people may deliver the same outcomes but in quite different ways. Where this is the case, the recruitment focus shifts to examine the strengths that people naturally bring to the role, rather than being focused specifically on the presence or absence of pre-determined strengths.

Through this approach – which we often conduct using the ISA described above – one is able to gain a sense of where the candidate’s attention is most likely to be focused. The question becomes one of where they naturally pay attention, thereby indicating their natural focus and preferences, rather than assessing the presence or absence of particular strengths. This focus of attention underlies where the candidate is likely to direct their energy, time and focus, and provides an answer to the fundamental question of *“What would this person do if they were appointed to this role?”*

This question is often at the heart of leadership appointments, since, by definition, people in leadership roles manage their own time and priorities (as well as those of others), thereby having a large degree of freedom and autonomy to determine on what they focus. And it is here that an understanding of strengths adds a richer depth and context to those recruitment discussions, through the consideration of the fit between the strengths and attentional focus that the individual brings, and the needs of the organisation at that point in time.

As I have aimed to demonstrate in this section, strengths-based interviewing is a very effective way of assessing people for the presence or absence of particular strengths in a comprehensive way. It can, however, be time-consuming and resource-intensive. This being so, other approaches to identifying strengths may be more appropriate and scalable across larger numbers of people, among them the use of psychometric strengths assessments.

Psychometric Strengths Assessments

Psychometric may seem like a frightening word, but it simply refers to the measurement of psychological phenomena, or things – in this case, strengths. Psychometric strengths assessments traditionally

have followed the same sorts of approaches as many standard personality assessments. That is, they invite people to agree or disagree with a series of statements that are then combined in particular ways to establish the strengths that an individual has. Those strengths are then attributed to the individual to a greater or lesser degree – typically as a function of the extent to which she agreed or disagreed with the different statements in the assessment. Approaches such as this, however, are fundamentally limited, since they are able only to assess a predetermined number and selection of strengths. It seems obvious to say, but they can only assess what they assess. In contrast, approaches like listening for strengths or the ISA are more fully able to capture and identify strengths as they naturally exist and arise in the person, without the limiting framework of a particular predetermined set of strengths.

That said, many people have been introduced to strengths through taking an online strengths assessment, such as the Clifton StrengthsFinderTM or the VIA Inventory of Strengths, and strengths assessments such as these have been instrumental in raising people's awareness of strengths and beginning to create a language around strengths that people can use. Here are brief details of the major strengths assessments that are available. You can find out more about each of them by visiting the websites provided for each below.

Clifton StrengthsFinderTM: The Clifton StrengthsFinderTM was developed by Donald O. Clifton and colleagues at The Gallup Organization, in the United States. Don Clifton is recognised as the father of strengths psychology, and received a presidential commendation from the American Psychological Association to that effect in 2002. Clifton was interested in the fundamental question of what you discover when you study what is right with people, and dedicated his life to doing this. In order to establish the factors that facilitated top-level performance across a number of different professional occupa-

tions, Clifton and his team of researchers at The Gallup Organization interviewed thousands of professionals with the aim of identifying the themes of talent that differentiated the top performers from the rest.

Strengths were developed from one's innate talents, they argued, through the application of knowledge and skill. Working from these definitions, Clifton and colleagues identified hundreds of themes of talent from their interviews with professionals, but condensed these to what they described as the 34 most prevalent themes. Details of the 34 talent themes are given in the bestselling, *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, by Marcus Buckingham and Donald Clifton. These themes are assessed through the online Clifton StrengthsFinder™, available at www.strengthsfinder.com or through the access code included with many of the books published by The Gallup Organization. The assessment takes around 30 minutes to complete and you receive a feedback report that details your top five of the 34 themes.

VIA Inventory of Strengths: Developed by the leading positive psychologists Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, the VIA Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) measures 24 character strengths that are believed to be universally valued across culture and history – and as we discussed in Chapter 2, the cross-cultural data certainly support this. The VIA-IS was developed through extensive literature searches of historical inventories of strengths and virtues; the examination of writings that addressed good character from psychiatry, youth development, philosophy, and psychology; together with brainstorming with colleagues and conference participants.

The 24 character strengths identified are conceptually clustered under six broad headings: *Wisdom and knowledge*; *Courage*; *Humanity*; *Justice*; *Temperance*; and *Transcendence*. Character strengths are defined as “the psychological ingredients – processes or mechanisms – that define the virtues. Said another way, they are distinguishable routes to displaying one or another of the virtues.” As such, an explicit focus of

this approach was that character strengths were held to be morally valued and to be enablers of the “good life.” The VIA-IS consists of 240 items (10 items for each of 24 strengths) that respondents rate using a five-point scale. Typically, it takes 30-45 minutes to complete. The VIA-IS provides a free report detailing the respondent’s top five character strengths, known as “signature strengths.” It has been completed to date by more than half a million people around the world, and the UK data for the VIA-IS has been reported by myself and my colleagues. The VIA-IS is freely available through either www.viastrengths.org or www.authentic happiness.org

Inspirational Leadership Tool: Drawing on studies of more than 2,600 workers from across a range of companies in the UK, who had been interviewed about what inspired them to follow a leader, this tool was developed by Caret Consulting on behalf of the British Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). As well as this research, the authors also looked at other studies and literature reviews of leadership, including the work of Beverley Alimo-Metcalfe, Warren Bennis, Richard Boyatzis, Jim Collins, and Daniel Goleman.

The ILT measures 18 attributes of leadership that were identified as inspiring followers to follow leaders. These 18 leadership attributes are clustered in four dimensions of inspirational leadership: *Creating the future; Enthusing, growing, and appreciating others; Clarifying values; and Ideas to action.* Respondents to the ILT choose between 54 paired statements using a five-point scale, and the tool typically takes around 15-20 minutes to complete. It provides a free report detailing the ranking of the participant’s 18 leadership strengths, together with more detailed coverage of their top six and bottom four leadership strengths, with developmental suggestions for each. Given that the ILT was developed specifically for use with leaders, many of the items are only relevant to people working in leadership positions. As such, unlike other psychometric strengths assessments, it is not appropriate for general use. The

tool is available at www.inspiredleadership.org.uk

You may well have taken one of these several strengths assessments that are available. These are certainly a valuable starting point, and can begin to provide a language and perspective on strengths that otherwise can be missing. But it is important to recognise that they are not the complete and final answer to your question of “*What are my strengths?*” Indeed, it was my sense of gnawing discontent and dissatisfaction when I had taken some of these assessments that led me into the work I now do on strengths. And that same sense of unease has been shared by many of the thousands of people that I have worked with on strengths since.

The problem is this. It sounds obvious (and it is when you see it), but any strengths assessment tool is, by definition, limited to the strengths that it assesses. Whatever the number of strengths, the assessment has limitations, because, as we discussed in Chapter 2, the number of strengths likely runs into hundreds or more. No single strengths assessment gets anywhere near assessing that number, so they are unlikely effectively to capture *your* individual strengths in a way that is comprehensive. Similarly, it is typically the case that when an assessment is reported back, only a given number of “top” strengths are reported. So not only are we assessed on the basis of a limited number of pre-selected strengths to begin with, but we then receive a feedback report focusing on a subset of these pre-selected strengths.

What happens, then, if your top strengths were not even covered by the initial selection of strengths assessed? You may well feel, like myself and many others, that while the feedback report does indeed capture some accurate, helpful, and insightful elements of who you are at your best, and does provide a language and framework for you to start thinking about how and where you can make your best contributions, there is still something missing. A nagging sense that something isn’t quite right. That somehow, it isn’t the ‘whole me.’

As it happens, my top strength on the VIA Inventory is curiosity, and equipped with this knowledge, it probably won't come as a surprise that I couldn't rest with this nagging sense that something wasn't quite right. Why? What was it? What was missing? Why did I feel this way? These questions flitted in and out of my mind with such persistent regularity that I couldn't ignore them. I wanted to get to the root of why I felt this way – and also to see if other people had had the same experience.

So, at conferences, on courses, and in conversations with people around the world, I asked them. Not everyone shared my disquiet – some found their assessments to be insightfully complete – but many people did. And as we discussed it, the disquiet became more lucidly clear: while the strengths assessments had captured *some* elements of who we were at our best, they had not captured our unique individuality in any complete or total way. Of course, it is unfair to expect that they would do – but in seeking to realise our strengths more fully, we do need to acknowledge the limitations of these assessment approaches. It is for these reasons that using more open-ended approaches to strengthspotting, in conjunction with more structured assessments, is so important.

Second Generation Strengths Assessments: Realise2

As a result of these concerns, together with my team at CAPP, we have been working to establish a means of assessing strengths that combines the best of both of these approaches, and minimizes the limitations of each, while still delivering a gold standard experience of strengths identification and development. Realise2 is the product of this work.

Realise2 assesses a large number of strengths according to *energy*, *performance* and *use* (see www.realise2.org). Our strengths work shows consistently that being *energising* is the core hallmark of using a strength, and that when this is the case, people are always acting authentically. As such, assessing for whether an activity is *energising* provides an efficient but reliable means to establishing the presence of a strength. The performance dimension is concerned with how good we are at something. The use dimension is concerned with how often we do it. By assessing each of these dimensions, across a large number of strengths, Realise2 is able to identify strengths - whether they are realised or unrealised, and weaknesses - whether they are exposed or unexposed, together with the possible strengths and possible weaknesses, and learned behaviours, that may exist somewhere in between.

Realise2 enables people to see their strengths and weaknesses much more comprehensively, and provides them with action planning tools to maximize the contribution of their strengths, while minimizing the impact of their weaknesses. Having a deep knowledge of your strengths and weaknesses, and then being able to do something effective about them, is at the heart of realising strengths in yourself and others. This is why CAPP has developed Realise2 – in a single word, to *realise* strengths both through knowing them and through making the most of them – the dual meaning of realise, and the dual meaning of Realise2.

Realising strengths is what this book was written to achieve. In the chapters that follow, we go on to look at how we can each do more to realise strengths, whether that realisation is in ourselves (Chapter 5, *Be Yourself - Better*), through our work (Chapter 6, *Harnessing Strengths at Work*), or in children (Chapter 7, *Golden Seeds and Flourishing Children*). You can realise, too.

Key Points

- When people are talking about strengths, they are more positive, energetic, and engaged. Their body language is open and receptive, and they are enthusiastic about the conversation.
- When people are talking about weaknesses, they are more negative, hesitant, and disengaged. Their energy levels drop and they appear more withdrawn. Their body language is closed and defensive, and their attentional focus is narrowed.
- Approaches to strengths identification can be qualitative and open-ended, such as day-to-day strengthspotting and Individual Strengths Assessments, or quantitative and psychometric, such as strengths-based interviews or psychometric strengths assessments.
- Traditional psychometric strengths assessments are constrained by assessing only a limited number of strengths and then typically reporting back only on a certain number of 'top strengths.'
- In contrast, we all have a symphony of strengths that advance into the foreground or recede into the background as the situation requires. As such, strengths identification approaches should combine both qualitative and quantitative approaches wherever possible.

Areas for Reflection and Action

- See which and how many strengths you can spot in the people around you through your normal daily interactions. Discuss your observations with them, and see if and how they resonate with the person whose strengths you have spotted.
- Pay attention to the tone, flow and energy of the conversations you are having with people, to see what indicators they may provide for the presence of particular strengths. Discuss your observations with others to invite their perspectives as well.
- Take a strengths assessment. See how the results compare with the ways in which you view yourself, as well as the results of other personality profiles you may have completed. Discuss the results with people close to you who will also be able to provide their own perspectives on what they see as your strengths.

Strengthspotting

This is an approved excerpt from
Average to A+: Realising Strengths in Yourself and Others,
by Alex Linley, published by CAPP Press.

To order your own copy of *Average to A+*,
please visit:

www.cappeu.com

or other online or traditional book retailers.

For more information about CAPP and our work in

Strengthening the World

please visit us at

www.cappeu.com