



# Opportunities to Use One's Talents

The Science of Resilience

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## Definition

Talents and strengths are particular or specific skills (Yuen et al., 2010; Lane & Schutts, 2014). Promoting one's talents and strengths as assets and resources can build resilience.

While talents come naturally, skills and knowledge can be acquired and learned. Strengths come from talents that are developed, polished, and perfected with skills and knowledge (Clifton et al., 2006; Schreiner, 2006). Clifton et al. (2006) define a strength as "the ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performance in a given activity" (p. 5). Strengths are personal, physical, and psychological characteristics that improve a person's performance (Wood et al., 2011). The definition of strengths as natural capacities which facilitate optimal functioning and outcomes encompasses five concepts (Linley & Harrington, 2006):

- natural: strengths are innate but are shaped or improved by experiences
- capacity: strengths develop potentials when utilized in the right situations and contexts
- lived experience: strengths reflect a person's motivation and attitudes
- optimal functioning: a person uses their strengths to function in the most effective and efficient way
- valued outcomes: the ultimate goal for using strengths is an increase in happiness, health, and well-being

Self-efficacy, or the belief that one has the capabilities to utilize their motivation and resources to exercise control over a demand, is an important trait needed for talent utilization. A person's beliefs regarding their abilities to deal with a situation by implementing their strengths to improve their performance is defined as strengths-self-efficacy (Tsai et al., 2013; Lane & Schutts, 2014).

### Strengths and Talent Development

All human beings have various talents, capacities, skills, and potential that serve as their resources in life. However, sometimes people are not conscious of their abilities nor develop and utilize these resources to their full potential for various reasons. The Strength Perspective (Weick et al., 1989) focuses on conscious and continuous efforts to grow and develop talents. Focusing on nurturing existing talents and strengths is more likely to result in personal growth, which leads to realized potential. Weick et al. (1989) argue that focusing on shortcomings and problems decreases people's confidence and their capacity in decision-making and problem-solving. Recognizing and applying abilities gives people courage and confidence in making difficult decisions, especially when facing adversity and uncertainty.

Strengths are derived from a person's positive personal and interpersonal traits (talents). A person's natural talents have been said to develop between the age of three to fifteen, mostly through school education and activities (Hodges & Clifton, 2004; Yuen et al., 2010). At that age, a person's strengths, weaknesses, interests, and preferences can be salient.

Their talents can manifest in the form of traditional talents (e.g. talents in music or mathematics) or non-traditional indicators, such as advanced use of a symbol system, the ability to think logically, knowledge utilization for problem-solving, creativity, and leadership (Coleman & Tennessee, 1994; Schwartz, 1997).

Humans' intellectual activity is a complex process that consists of various abilities and factors that are synchronized and correlated (Almeida et al., 2010). Listed are some areas of a person's natural abilities (Gardner, 2011; Morgan, 1996; Standford, 2003; Visser et al., 2006):

- Logical-mathematical: the ability to recognize logical and numerical patterns, grasp abstract symbols, and understand chains of logic. It is related to field-independent, reflective, and numerical cognitive abilities.
- Linguistic: the high capacity to understand sounds, the meaning of words, symbolic thinking, writing, and reading.
- Musical intelligence: the ability to recognize rhythms, sounds patterns, and an interest in musical expressions and instruments. A person with this intelligence is also field-independent, original, and more creative.
- Visual-spatial intelligence: the ability to visualize and navigate objects from different perceptions. It is related to a person's conceptual differentiation (awareness of categorical variations and the ability to accommodate the differences), necessary arithmetic operations (logical-mathematical), and naturalistic intelligence.
- Bodily-kinesthetic: the ability to skillfully move the body and handle objects gracefully. It is related to sensory-active cognitive processing.
- Interpersonal: The ability to appropriately communicate and responds to other people.
- Intrapersonal: the ability to understand the self (one's feelings, emotions, strengths, weaknesses, motivations, and abilities). Both interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence work as social intelligence.
- Existential: human's response to being alive and finding meanings in life.

Gagne (2004) classifies children's natural abilities into four domains: *intellectual* (e.g. reasonings, memory, judgement), *creative* (e.g. imagination, problem-solving), *socio-affective* (e.g. communication, perspective, leadership), and *sensorimotor* (e.g. strengths, visual, auditory). In school-age children and youths, natural talents can be turned into developed skills in different fields, such as academics, arts, business, leisure activities, social actions, sports, and technology (Gagne, 2004). Talent developments need to be the focus of teaching in formal education (Yuen et al., 2010).

Talent development, or a process of turning a person's natural abilities into appropriate requirements (strengths), is a continuous process that can be obtained through formal education or self-learning (Yuen et al., 2010). Talent development at an early age combined with motivation and supports are needed to ensure the ability to perform to one's full potential in adulthood. People's attitudes towards developing themselves (e.g. persistence, curiosity),

combined with the learning strategies they use, influence a person's performances. Realization of one's potential requires a favourable environmental condition (Abbott & Colins, 2004). Culture and the opportunity to resolve genuine problems as a way for knowledge acquisition and development also influence the process (Maker, 1993). However, some people have difficulties in identifying their talents or lack of motivation to develop their talents. Thus, more direct supports are needed to help them grow to their full potential (Yuen et al., 2010).

Ensuring optimal development of a child's and youth's talents needs to address four different aspects: (1) the need to be part of a positive social group; (2) the social, emotional, and cognitive challenges they experienced in daily life; (3) finding opportunities to connect with mentors and other professionals in talent areas; (4) responding to the opportunity to become an expert in the area (Baum et al., 2014). For example, a student with musical talent needs to connect with people with the same interests and a well-known mentor to develop their talent.

Hodges and Clifton (2004) explain that after the age of fifteen, natural talents are fixed and difficult to significantly changed. However, Simonton (1999) argues that some talents need years or decades to emerge. Despite the time it takes a talent appears, a person still can enhance their potentials by improving their skills, obtaining more knowledge, and enhancing their self-awareness (Hodges & Clifton, 2004). Clifton and Harter (2003) posit that there are three stages of strength development at the individual level:

- Talent identification: At this stage, individuals enhance their self-awareness and utilize opportunities to identify their talents.
- Talent integration: In this stage, they have a realization of the talents they own and utilize. Talents become part of a person's identity.
- Behavioural change: Individuals link their success to their talents. Their life satisfaction and productivity are improved.

## Adaptive Skills to Face Challenges

The development of talent is not linear and steady but personal and non-linear. Savage et al. (2017) argue that talents are developed through a person's response to traumatic/disruptive experiences. People who experienced childhood adversities grow up with some adapted skills which they developed to cope with the stress. The development of talents is also found among people facing bereavement. To cope with the situation, they discover new strengths and talents that give them more appreciation in life (Michael & Cooper, 2013). To explain the phenomena, Ellis et al. (2020) propose the hidden talent framework. They define hidden talents as "a form of adaptive intelligence that enables individuals to function within the constraints imposed by harsh, unpredictable environments" (p. 3). The framework focuses on the development of skills as part of the adaptation process to stress.

Ellis et al. (2020) argue that early life adversities invoke hidden talents and skills to cope with the circumstances that then improves performances in unpredictable environments.

However, the adaptation of the enhanced skills may come with a trade-off, such that that other skill sets are lowered. For example, institutionalized children are better at identifying threat cues and exposure and are more vigilant, but they also have lower cognitive and language functions (McLaughlin et al., 2014). Children with multiple/ chronic trauma exhibit a higher level of strengths in the talents/creative areas and lower strengths in family, interpersonal, and relationship areas (Kisiel et al., 2009).

Uncertainties and challenges evoke skills development and adaptation. By recounting one's experiences, questioning, and reflecting on them, a person can find their strengths, resources and resilience. Broadening the view of one's adversities and challenges to a more positive strength-based narrative helps the person to recover and develop themselves (Hood & Carruthers, 2016). Ellis et al. (2020) define adaptive intelligence as "one's ability to accomplish tasks that reflect significant challenges within the constraints posed by one's lived environment" (p. 7). The application of these talents is crucial to a person's success navigating in normative contexts.

Previous traumatic experience also improves the ability to recover from other traumatic experiences. It can teach people to optimize their strengths and resources (Savage et al., 2017). For example, people who experienced adversities are more resilient and better at coping with workplace challenges. Li et al. (2015) found that nursing students with childhood adversities had higher emotional intelligence. Therefore, they were better at coping with challenges in the nursing profession. The growths are more prominent in people with moderate resilience and people who found meaning in their experience. These people engage in adaptation and tend to recall the strengths they have when facing life challenges (Li et al., 2015).

## Relationship to Resilience

Strengths self-efficacy alone is not sufficient to achieve life satisfaction and happiness. To achieve these goals, a person also needs high social competence, the willingness to continuously develop their strengths, and a positive view of oneself to increase talent utilization. (Govindji & Linley, 2007; Lopez and Louis, 2009; Tsai et al., 2013). Strengths self-efficacy and opportunities to actualize one's talents are associated with an increase in hope, achievements, and life satisfaction (Clifton et al., 2006; Yuen et al., 2010; Lane & Schutts, 2014). For example, strengths self-efficacy among athletes motivates them to recover from a traumatic experience, such as a significant injury (Savage et al., 2017). Awareness of one's strengths helps in identifying life purpose and meanings (Hood & Carruthers, 2016). A person that finds meaning in their life and attains their goals will have better well-being and experience more love and joy in life. However, a continuous and unrewarding search for life meaning is related to some psychopathologies (e.g. depression), poor psychological well-being, and decrease life motivations to engage in meaningful activities (Giligan 2000; Linley et al., 2010; Lane & Schutts, 2014; Hood & Carruthers, 2016).

Finding strengths and meaning in life are also related to the psychological recovery process and mediate social bonds with others. For example, focusing on talents in art, sports, or care for animals has been found to build identity and self-esteem in children, which may help them through adversities and connect them with other children and positive role models (Giligan, 2000). Working with people with similar talents and interests builds a tight social network over time (Baum et al., 2014), which provides social supports and resources necessary for the resilience process. Human-focused talents, such as social competence and perspective-taking, also enforce secure attachment connections with others and influences the way a person resolves conflicts in life (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000).

Strengths self-efficacy has been found to improve independence and relate to better goal-attainment and change in leadership models (Wisner, 2011; Lane & Schutts, 2014). In work domains, strengths play a significant role in one's performance and job satisfaction. A person with the opportunity to utilize their strengths at work has better engagements and work performance (Littman-Ovadia & Steger, 2010; Lane & Schutts, 2014). Having talents aligned with one's work also increases active involvement in decision-making and problem-solving processes. For example, Buhner et al. (2008) found that people with visual-spatial-intelligence are better at problem-solving tasks. For students, being aware of their natural talents increases engagement and self-efficacy at school (Soria & Stubblefield, 2015). Baum et al. (2014) found that gifted students who enrolled in a strengths-based program, in which they had opportunities to develop their talents, abilities, and interests, experienced significant growths in cognitive, emotional, and social domains. Finding a place where they can engage with their interests and strengths helped youth cope with the frustration and negative experiences that they had at school. They also learned to cope with their anxiety, overcoming feelings of hopelessness, and turned it into hope and confidence (Baum et al., 2014).

Strengths self-efficacy is improved when a person has opportunities to share and discuss their strengths with others (Soria & Stubblefield, 2015). Age does not affect strengths self-efficacy. However, older people are better at finding meaning in their life, and therefore have better overall well-being (Littman-Ovadia & Steger, 2010). To engender resilience, especially among vulnerable groups, Weick et al. (1989) propose shifting the perspective to focus on strengths. By focusing on strengths and employing them in daily life, people with disabilities and mental illness were able to reclaim their power, identity, dignity and found their life purpose.

## Opportunities to Use Talents at Work

Work engagement is defined as dedication and absorption in one's work, which shows in the form of high job performance and organizational effectiveness (Song et al., 2012). Employee engagement is an aspect in organizational policies and practices crucial for organizations' long-term success, employees' knowledge acquisition, and self-actualization (Arnold et al., 2007; Song et al., 2012; Pradhan & Pradhan, 2016). Organizations with low

engagement and unmotivated employees will have difficulties in expanding, competing, and surviving the competitions (Amabile & Kramer, 2011). Utilizing one's talents at work creates meaning for workers, which improve their engagement and general well-being (see our write-up on Meaningful Employment for more details).

One of the ways for leaders to improve employees' engagement is by creating a space for individuals to show their talents and realize their true potentials. Knowing people's talents and strengths and providing them with opportunities to utilize their strengths contributes to their self-development and job satisfaction (Littman-Ovadia, 2017). For example, people can use a sense of humour to alleviate tensions and utilize their creativity to solve work problems (Bakker & van Woerkom, 2018). Utilizing strengths provides employees with an opportunity to be authentic and self-realized. It also leads to self-improvements and mastery, which will improve performances at work (Bakker & von Woerkom, 2018).

People with proactive and extraverted personality are more likely to engage in activities that utilize strengths in their daily tasks. However, even people who are empowered sometimes are not aware of their strengths (Bakker & van Woerkom, 2018). Companies need to increase individuals' opportunities to utilize their strengths at work, which can be done by (a) analyzing people's strengths, opportunities, and weaknesses (e.g. by using SWOT analysis), and (b) assigning people tasks based on their strengths or giving them additional opportunities to use their strengths at work (Lavy & Littman-Ovadia, 2017). For example, companies can allocate tasks based on employees' strengths, allowing people to work in groups/partners or mentors, and leading with specific leadership styles (e.g. transformative or empowerment styles) (Bakker & van Woerkom, 2018).

When employees are supported to use and develop their strengths, they feel appreciated as individuals. The appreciation improves self-esteem, level of energy, and coping skills, which in turn reduces work threats and challenges and increases goal attainments and tasks accomplishments. Giving people opportunities to utilize their strengths and talents is easier than improving their weaknesses. Lavy and Littman-Ovadia (2017) analyze the relationships between opportunities to utilize one's strengths at work with their contributions outside work requirements and job satisfaction. They found that strengths utilization mediated work engagements and improved positive affects at work, which then increased overall job satisfaction. Strength use is also related to an increase in self-efficacy and a decrease in stress-related work and absenteeism. The opportunities to utilize their talents link individuals' identity to the organizational identity, which in the long term instills a commitment to the leaders and the organization. Organizational leaders should create these opportunities at work to ensure organizational goals attainment and personal growths of their employees (Arnold et al., 2007; Pradhan & Pradhan, 2016).



## Case Study

Roberts et al. (2005) give an example of talent and strengths identification and utilization at work. After doing the Reflected Best Self exercise (see the Improving section) and getting feedback from his family, friends, and peers, “Robert” recognized a pattern and found common themes from the feedback.

- People said that he took a stand when his superior crossed ethical boundaries and that he was not afraid to confront people who did a wrong thing. That meant he held on to his values and has courage. At work, he will be his best when he makes good decisions and shows good examples to others. He will also act professionally at work.
- His willingness to pursue further education and investigate an issue at work creatively means he has curiosity and perseverance. These traits, at work, will help him to face challenges and obstacles.
- He is also a team builder, flexible, and acknowledges other people’s effort. This means he is a team builder who is thriving when working closely with others.

After knowing his strengths, Robert became more confident in working with his colleagues and people who were older than him. He learnt that his colleagues appreciated the way he treated others and had courage to offer new ideas to his manager. From the Reflected Best Self exercise, he was also aware of his colleagues’ skills and strengths and stopped taking them for granted (Roberts et al., 2005).

## Mutual-Aid Approach

Utilizing one’s potentials and strengths in a group also gives advantages and opportunities to help others. In mutual-aid practices, one harnesses their strengths and talents to the advantages of their themselves and others. By identifying and utilizing each person’s potentials and talents in a group, each group member can contribute to managing their affairs, functions, and development (Steinberg, 2013). Mutual aid is practiced by various groups, whether it is an informal social network (e.g. family, neighbours, peers) or a self-organized and self-directing support group. Contributing one’s strengths and potential in a group has various benefits, depending on the focus of the group itself. A group can help its members to fulfil their personal growth, act as their social advocate, provide them with alternative patterns for a living, and provide sanctuary (Katz, 1981). Utilizing one’s talents in a group not only promotes one’s mastery of talents but can be used as a way to support other people in solving their problems. For example, by contributing to anonymous (e.g. A.A.) or support groups (e.g. Parents Without Partners), a person can use their knowledge, experience, and skills while helping others to cope with their situations (Katz, 1981).

## Improving

Talents and strengths can be identified through a change in mindset (Wieck et al., 1989). For example, instead of wondering “what is wrong with me?” and “why did it happen to me?”, start asking “what are my strengths?” and “how do I develop the skills to make me a better person?”. Shift the focus from the problem to resources that you have to overcome the problem (Wieck et al., 1989).

### Improving in a Mutual-aid situation

Making a note of each other’s strengths and talents increase people’s appreciation and confidence in their skills and fosters bonds with others. According to Steinberg (2013) this acknowledgement can be done in the form of:

- Recognizing and praising a person’s contributions to the group, which connects group members with group activities, fosters a sense of identity, and shares the responsibility.
- Encouraging people to elaborate and explain their ideas or feelings. This will show what the group needs people’s strengths.
- Encouraging all group members to put in ideas when the group needs to make a decision.
- Fostering flexibility by allowing group members to switch roles.
- Asking all group members to voice their opinions, including their differences. Identifying all ideas and differences will help in sorting through all outcomes and implications from a decision.
- Encourage and help people who have trouble to speak up to give their opinion.

### The Reflected Best Self Exercise

The reflected best self exercise was developed by Roberts et al. (2005) to help people identify their full potential. The exercise focuses on finding and realizing one’s unexplored positive attributes to improve their performance. It consists of five steps:

1. Step 1: collect feedback about your strengths from a variety of people who knows you (e.g. family members, colleagues, friends, mentors). Asked them to provide examples of the moments when your strengths were meaningful to them.
2. Step 2: recognize the patterns and common themes by analyzing the stories and adding your inputs. Examples of the common themes are adaptability, perseverance, curiosity, courage, etc. The common themes might be something that you are not unaware of or expected. The exercise helps in identifying one’s strengths and see the strengths from broader perspectives.
3. Step 3: write a description of yourself that summarizes the information from previous steps with your observation. The self-portrait gives you an insightful image that works as guidance for future actions. Write the description in the narrative instead of bullet points. Writing a narrative fosters the idea in your head and help you draw the connections with your strengths.

4. Step 4: redesign your job by inserting your strengths and utilizing them in your work activities.
5. Step 5: pass the 'good enough' bar and utilize your strengths to aim for excellence.

## StrengthsQuest

Based on the Clifton and colleagues' (2006) StrengthQuest® program, here are some steps you can do to develop and utilize your strengths in life:

- Find your life purpose, goals, or legacies you want to leave behind. What is your life motivation? Identifying your life purpose or goals helps to generate optimism, give you a sense of direction and excitement. Talents are more powerful if you know your goals.
- Know your talent. Sometimes your talents are the things you do not perceive as special and the things you take for granted. Embrace your talents, even if they do not seem valuable or important.
  - See Appendix A for self-reflection questions to find your talents.
- Appreciate your talent. You have the responsibility to develop your talents.
- Sometimes, you feel that something is wrong or missing in your work. It may be caused by a mismatch between your talents and the job you are doing.
- Build positive relationships with others. Your talents will grow in a positive environment. By having positive relationships, you can identify how far you have developed your talents, other talents you want to develop, share your strengths, get some feedback, and work together to develop your strengths.
- Practice your talents. Experience and practice refine your talents.
- Teach others. Teaching helps you learn and give you more insights to develop your strengths.
- Have a positive self-concept. If you positively perceive yourself, you will perceive others and the world in positivity. Learn to know yourself, embrace your talents and strengths, and accept yourself.
- Identify your weaknesses or any knowledge, skill, or talents you do not have that will negatively influence your performance. Manage your weaknesses by obtaining the necessary skills and knowledge.
- Acknowledge other people's talents and strengths. Acknowledging people's talents will reduce conflict, improve your quality of life, and help you to see them from a different perspective.

## In Children and Youth

There are various ways to bring out hidden talents in children and youth, particularly in educational settings. Hidden talents should be incorporated into teaching and learning strategies at school. Ellis et al. (2020) suggested some strategies to integrate hidden talents into learning strategies at school:

- Children who have to shift their attention between their school assignments and family obligations are better at task switching and sometimes have difficulties in focusing their attention on one task. Instead of giving a single assignment to complete, switch focus between assignments and use a more dynamic teaching approach.
- Create environments where students can learn by applying the skills in changing contexts. Provide students with feedback for their performance.
- Emphasize the importance of mastery and not comparing students' performances
- Fill the curriculum with skills and concepts that are relatable to the students

## Talent Development in the Workplace

Talent development in the workplace is defined as:

Talent development focuses on the planning, selection and implementation of development strategies for the entire talent pool to ensure that the organisation has both the current and future supply of talent to meet strategic objectives and that development activities are aligned with organisational talent management processes. (Garavan et al., 2012, p. 6)

A comprehensive needs assessment is crucial to determine the best strategy for talent utilization and development (Rothwell & Kazanas, 2003; Zarestky & Cole, 2017; Bakker & Woerkmom, 2018). A comprehensive assessment involves analyzing the present gaps between people's strengths (talents, skill, competencies) and their weaknesses. The most common needs assessment is SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) or SOAR (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results) analysis. A comprehensive assessment for talents development and utilization can be done through:

- Identifying the employees: who they are, their locations, topic/area of interests they want to utilize or develop, and their motivations to learn.
- Classifying them into broad subgroups with similar needs, for example, by classifying them through:
  - Their job responsibilities, results, and goals. The category can be subclassified based on tasks (unit of work), positions, job class (jobs occupying the same levels with similar responsibilities); job category/family (similar jobs with different levels of responsibilities); and occupation (similar jobs in different organizations)
  - The individual/career market: Categorizing learners based on their education, performances, experiences, or career goals
  - The workgroup market: based on their placement in the organization, for example, people in one department (supervisors and subordinates)
  - The external market: grouping people with similar external clients/organizations

A strategic needs assessment can be done top-down, bottom-up, or negotiated. Data collection for people's strengths and weaknesses can be done through interviews, questionnaires, observations, tasks/ performance evaluations, group discussions, Delphi procedures, etc. For example, to identify employees' strengths, they can fill-out strengths inventory questionnaire, do the "best-self" exercise, or ask for feedback from their co-workers and other people. Needs assessments can be done by viewing the company's strategic needs (aiming for cultural changes), coordinative needs (improving learners' education/knowledge), and operational needs (e.g., employees training). Finally, it is important to identify the company's psychological environment in supporting employees' strengths; this can be done by completing an environmental scan: consider the strategies (through analyzing trends, issues, problems) that will improve the company's relationships with the general public and external stakeholders. The external environment consists of various sectors: economic, political, technological, social, market, geographic, supplier, and distributor.

Talent use and development supports can be done in different forms. Flexibility in work arrangements is crucial in accommodating employees' use of strengths. However, there are a lot of challenges in applying a flexible work culture. People who work in flexible work environments are sometimes perceived as less productive, especially if flexibility is not in the corporate culture. Flexibility and family-work balance needs to be weaved into the culture and supported by corporate policies (Eversole, Venneberg & Corwder, 2012). Other ways to support the use and development of one's talents at work are listed below (Lombardozi & Cassey, 2008; Garavan et al., 2012).

- Formal programs: these programs usually cover a broad spectrum of development, e.g. personal development programs, feedback-based development intervention, skill-based development programs.
- Relationship-based developmental experiences, for example, through mentoring by senior employees or peers. The learning process can be found in the form of directly communicating information or teaching skills to learners and observing and asking questions to peers or senior employees.
- Job-based developmental experiences. Working on challenging tasks at work pushes people to learn new skills and information and utilize what they have. A challenging task pushes people to access and learn from various resources and discuss new strategies and ideas with their peers and supervisors for decision-making and resolving problems.
- Doing informal/non-formal developmental activities, for example, by doing some new activities. Doing new activities allows people to utilize the skills and knowledge they have.
- Customize talent development strategies to meet the individual's needs. Personalization and customization strategies are beneficial in the short and long term. The development process needs to be continuous, at the right time and combining formal and informal training and strategies.

- Sometimes, people do not realize that they are utilizing and developing their potentials at work. Reflecting on daily activities helps them to realize what they have learned and apply that day. Most of the time, the process happens in people's heads, but writing a daily journal will help in realizing talents in the long-term (See Appendix B for Worksheet to Identify Success Factors).

Amabile and Kramer (2011) found that writing a daily journal helps in realizing and developing talents in the long term and improve people's inner work life, joy, and engagement. Writing down the experience provides insights into the activities where one utilized their talents and strengths and help them realize the good outcomes that came from utilizing their talents. Writing down traumatic or stressful events helps to see the event from different perspectives and can help individuals to bounce back faster. When writing a daily entry, try to answer these questions:

- What significant events did you experience today?
- How did it affect you?
- What progress did you make today?
- What are the things you do that support you and enhance your performance today?  
How do I keep them going?
- What setbacks did I have? How do they affect me?
- What can I learn from today's experience?
- Did my work positively affect other people today?

For leaders in organizations, leading subordinates need to go beyond motivating and giving employees feedback on their work. Leaders with the transformational leadership style instill a sense of purpose and belongingness to the organization. Transformational leadership involves charismatic and inspirational motivation, opportunities for intellectual development, personal consideration, and setting an example for the followers (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Barling et al., 1996).

There are various ways to improve employees' engagement at work. Here are some examples of activities and behaviours at work that leaders can establish (Barling et al., 1996; Ghadi et al., 2013). However, the change in behaviours takes time to be recognized; therefore, it takes a long time before the leader can see any improvements at work. Abrell (2011) found that it took supervisors six to nine months to see employees' improvements after changing their leadership style.

- As a supervisor, be a role model for your subordinates.
- Act in the ways that show your subordinates that you are open to changes. This way, your subordinates will know that you are more likely to be open to their proposal for changes and new ideas. They are also more likely to perform high-risk tasks.

- Work effectively and put the organization first. Acting as a role model increases your subordinates' effective performance and their willingness to put the organization's interest above their self-interests.
- Pay attention to your subordinates' demands, potentials, achievements, and growths. Identify and note each subordinates' strengths, weaknesses, and achievements to understand them better (see Appendix C for talent review process). That way, you can provide them with work that lets them utilize their strengths, which are more meaningful for them. Building relationships that are based on these considerations will foster a sense of belonging to the organization, therefore increase employees' engagement at work.
- Create a supportive environment at work. Provide a space for your subordinates to brainstorm, discuss, and contribute to solving problems at work. By giving them space to creatively solve problems at work and present their new ideas, you allow them to make more innovative contributions toward the work.
- Encourage your subordinates to find their own solutions.
- Show your subordinates a future vision of what they are going to be.
- Recognize the subordinates' needs and requirements. Ask the right questions to find their requirements.

The training resulted in improvements in the managers' leadership style.

## Interventions

### Strength-based Education

Strength-based education stands on the perspective that individuals already have the resources that need to be developed. The practice helps students to identify their dominant talents and apply them in the learning process and professionally in the future (Lopez and Louis, 2009). Lopez and Louis (2009) explain five principles of strength-based education:

- The measurement of strengths, achievements, and other determinants of positive outcomes (Lopez & Louis, 2009, p. 2)
- Individualization: educators need to help students identify their strengths and tailor their learning experiences based on those strengths. Students should share their strengths with others, see others through their strengths, and contributing their talents to their teams. Students receive feedback on their goal-pursuing activities.
- Develop networking opportunities for students to share their strengths. Networking, for example, through mentoring relationship helps students to identify their strengths and empower them to bring out the best of their strengths.

- Giving students opportunities to utilize their strengths outside the program. Autonomy improves their self-efficacy, a sense of competence and increases their appreciation for collaboration and team network.
- Encourage the development of strengths through various practices over time.

Passareli et al. (2010) analyzed a two-year strength-based international adventure outdoor education program. Adventure and outdoor programs can enhance connections to the environment, improve self-awareness, and provide challenges to entice personal growth. The course consisted of seven sessions of strengths-based education in which students learned about signature themes. They also had discussions with instructors and other students. After they completed the program, they wrote a self-reflection of the program. Sessions listed below:

1. Session 1: reviewing participants signature themes.
2. Session 2: exploring strengths philosophy.
3. Session 3: classroom discussions. Topics: signature themes, common themes in groups. Followed by group presentations.
4. Session 4: identify actions to develop 3-5 desired strengths.
5. Session 5: scavenger hunt. Meet 10 people and learn about their strengths.
6. Session 6: progress evaluation to see how far participants have developed toward their goals.
7. Session 7: group discussions regarding participants achievements and the outcomes of the program.

The participants reported enhanced mindfulness about themselves and the environment. The authors also noted how the program provided them with learning opportunities and a space to engage in positive discussions that resulted in better resources and strategies. Participants became more flexible in thinking and interacting with other people. They also found the courage to overcome physical challenges (Passareli et al., 2010).

Soria and Stubblefield (2015) analyzed the outcomes of a different strengths-based education programs and found that knowing, developing, and applying strengths increases students' self-awareness and confidence. Understanding themselves helps them to find meanings in life, increase their self-efficacy, and give them the courage and confidence to face challenges in life. Applying their strengths and talents in daily life also helped students to find connections, build relationships, and foster a sense of connectedness. Their talents and strengths also helped them to react better to difficulties. In the short-term, strengths-based intervention improves positive affects, which mediates life satisfaction, work engagement, and reduces burn-out. This effect in the long-term improves psychological capital (Meyers & van Woerkom, 2017).

Another model used as the foundation of strengths-based intervention is the aware-explore-apply model. The intervention consists of three steps: finding, loving, and developing strengths (Niemic, 2019). An experienced mentor identifies the strengths by listening to



participants' success stories, taking notice of their experiences, and labeling them with themes. Then, different methods, such as self-reflections or answering direct questions, are used to help people identify and acknowledge their strengths. The implementation of the aware-explore-apply model consists of three phases (Niemic, 2019):

- Cultivating awareness of one's strengths and positive qualities. Practicing mindfulness and strengths-spotting in various situations are some ways to cultivate awareness of one's strengths.
- Explorations of the utilization of overused and underused qualities
- Applications of the strengths in different situations.

### The Be Your Best Self Program

The Be Your Best Self program is based on the strengths-based therapeutic recreation (TR) concept. TR connected the leisure and well-being model with strengths-based narratives to induce recovery. Positive components of the leisure and well-being model (e.g. engagement, hope, autonomy, independence, perseverance) are also components that mediate the recovery process (Hood & Carruthers, 2016). Hood and Carruthers (2016) developed this program to boost mental health patients' potentials.

The *Be Your Best Self* program aimed to help people with mental health problems find their strengths and potentials to improve their well-being. People with mental health problems often define themselves by their illness and struggle to find their strengths. By shifting their view to their strengths, Hood and Carruthers (2016) aimed to empower them in their recovery process.

The program ran for 1.5 hours/ week for 12 weeks long. It integrated strengths-based narrative therapy with post-traumatic growth concept acceptance and commitment therapy (Hood and Carruthers, 2016). The structure of the program consisted of:

- Recap of the previous week's discussion and homework (up to 15 minutes)
- Introduction of the topic of the week and ice-breaker activity
- A material package for each session, including in-session exercises, post-test, and homework
- Assessments before starting the program and after finishing the program

The program consisted of three sections (Hood & Carruthers, 2016):

1. Section one: the mentors explained the role of narrative in shaping a person and ways to construct one's narrative.
  - a. Session 1: introduction of the concept of narrative. The participants listened to two versions of the same song and discussed how the differences triggered different emotional responses. The activity showed participants that each narrative has different impacts on well-being.

- i. Homework: participants answered a set of questions about the way they define themselves in the past and the present.
  - b. Session 2: started with a review of the previous session. The topic of session 2 was the exploration of strengths and potentials that transpired from experiencing a mental illness. Participants were instructed to pay attention to different parts of their story to create a more balanced narrative between their strengths and challenges. They wrote a list of their strengths and challenges on a worksheet.
- 2. Section 2: exploring personal strengths and how they aid the recovery process and well-being improvement.
  - a. Session 3: Participants watched two video clips about the brain neural pathways that create narratives. The session was followed by an art project that identified participants' strengths.
    - i. Homework: participants wrote down their strengths and talents used in the project that day. They wrote down self-reflections of how they feel after using their strengths.
  - b. Session 4: participants learned about the multiple intelligences model and the eight abilities that represent intelligence. They were given the result of their strengths and intelligence analyses. The session is followed by discussions of leisure activities that bring out participants' four top intelligence and participants' current activities that utilize those strengths.
    - i. Homework: participants had to identify two leisure activities for each of their top intelligence. They also had to write down their daily activities, various intelligence that they used in those activities and reflected on how it made them feel.
  - c. Session 5: participants did a personality assessment (using the Colors of Personality scale) to identify their other strengths. Participants then discussed examples of activities that utilized their strengths and how they could develop them.
    - i. Homework: participants wrote reflections of their top personalities and assessed the states of the feeling on a 5-point scale
  - d. Session 6: participants discovered that leisure activities are one of the vehicles to discover their strengths and abilities.
    - i. Homework: participants engaged in at least two leisure activities, wrote down the experience in their journal and assessed their feeling states on a 5-point scale
- 3. Section 3: exploring how to utilize personal strengths for personal growth.
  - a. Session 7: a modified LeisureScope: participants identified their preference for ten broad categories of leisure and gave feedback on their meaningful leisure time experience.

- i. Homework: participants identified some specific leisure pursuit that was in their top three categories of interest
- b. Session 8: participants discussed how leisure activities work in improving their strengths. They ranked various activities (from LeisureScope) by identifying: (1) the easiest leisure activity, (2) moderately-difficult activities, and (3) the hardest activity on the list. Participants then completed a task with a partner in which they identified their three personal strengths, three activities that utilize their strengths and ranked the activities. The session ended with a discussion about barriers and what facilitate leisure activities.
  - i. Homework: participants had to participate in two leisure activities twice a week and write down self-reflections of those experiences
- c. Session 9: finding the best possible life and the best possible self. Participants interviewed each other about their best possible life, what strengths they need to achieve it, and what to do to achieve it.
  - i. Homework: participants wrote down their best possible self, strengths needed, and the role of leisure in achieving their best self
- d. Session 10: participants took the Best Possible Life exercise and identified common goals. They then discussed the required steps to achieve the goals. The session ended with a discussion about overcoming barriers toward the goals. They did a written exercise of converting negative self-statements into positive statements.
  - i. Homework: participants had to use the positive strengths and their statement twice in the following week when they faced difficulties. Participants rated their experience on a 5-point scale.
- e. Session 11: participants learned about the concept of post-traumatic growth and identified strategies to turn their mental illness experience into resources needed for their recovery. Their exercise was identifying the challenges they faced from their mental illness and the positive potentials they have learned from those challenges.
  - i. Homework: participants had to identify their feelings after analyzing their negative experience for a positive outcome
- f. Session 12: participants self-reflected on their experiences throughout the program and the ways it changed them. Participants then completed some strengths assessments.

### Early Assessment for Exceptional Potential (EAEP) – young minority and/ or economically disadvantaged students

EAEP is an assessment model to identify and develop children’s potential that is aimed at children from kindergarten to third grade and can be inserted into their curriculum (Coleman

& Tennessee, 1994). Coleman and Tennessee (1994) identified four exceptional potentials and their identifiers:

- Exceptional Learning (Acquisition and Retention of Knowledge)
  - Exceptional memory
  - Learns quickly and easily
  - Advanced understanding of area
- Exceptional User of Knowledge (Application of Knowledge)
  - Exceptional use of knowledge
  - Advanced use of symbol systems: expressive and complex
  - Demands a reason for unexplained events
  - Reasons well in problem solving: draws from previous knowledge and transfers it to other areas
- Exceptional Generator of Knowledge (Individual creative Attributes)
  - Highly creative behavior, especially in areas of interest or talent
  - Does not conform to typical ways of thinking, perceiving
  - Enjoys self-expression of ideas, feelings, or beliefs
  - Keen sense of humor that reflects advanced, unusual comprehension of relationships and meaning
  - Highly developed curiosity about causes, futures, the unknown
- Exceptional Motivation (Individual Motivational Attributes)
  - Perfectionism: striving to achieve high standards especially in areas of talent and interest
  - Shows initiative; self-directed
  - High level of inquiry and reflection
  - Long attention span when motivated
  - Leadership: desire and ability to lead
  - Intense desire to know (Coleman & Tennessee, 1994, p. 66)

The primary identifiers were assessed through (a) observations of the children's daily behaviour; (b) peer/self-nomination; (c) analyzing children's work and performances. A four-part action plan was made for each classroom (see Appendix D for The Action Plan template). After the project, teachers found that they had clearer ideas on how to build their curriculum based on the students' needs (Coleman & Tennessee, 1994).

### Transformative Leadership Training

Barling et al. (1996) developed a 1-day group-based training program in which participants learned the concept of transformational leadership and how they can implement it in the workplace. The sessions consisted of two segments:

1. In the first segment, participants identified the characteristics of the best and worst leaders they had encountered followed by facilitators' brief explanation about different

types of leadership. Participants then analyzed and placed these characteristics into three types of leadership: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire. After the activity, facilitators gave the participants further explanations about different types of leadership and what are the outcomes for each leadership style.

2. In the second segment, participants learned to apply the information they got from the previous segment to their work situation. Participants did various exercises focusing on ways to lead with a transformational leadership style, such as doing role-playing. This session was followed by group discussions.

## Assessment

Various measurements and assessment strategies are used to see the relations of strengths with outcomes in life (Jimerson et al., 2004). For example, MacDonald and Validivieso (2000) measure youths' strengths to four possible life outcomes: aspect of identity (e.g. self-confidence, self-worth, mastery, belonging and membership, self-awareness), area of ability (e.g. physical health, mental health, intellectual, social and cultural abilities), developmental opportunities, and emotional and motivational support. Talents and potentials assessment in children can be done through observation, self-identification, and portfolio (Schwartz, 1997). Strength-based assessment measures behaviours, skills, competencies, and characteristics that contribute to a person's achievements, act as resources that help in adversities and promote their personal growth (Jimmerson et al., 2004). Below are some measurements used to identify and assess talents and strengths.

### **The Career and Talent Development Self-Efficacy Scale (CTD-SES; Yuen et al., 2010)**

- Assessing life-efficacy to utilize essential skills in three domains: talent development, positive work attitudes, and the right career
  - See Appendix E for talent development subscale
- Targeted for students (adolescents)
- Measured on a 6-point scale, from 1= *“extremely lacking in confidence”* to 6= *“extremely confident”*
- Reliability: .90 for the total scale

### **The Strengths Self-Efficacy Scale (SSES; Tsai et al., 2013; See Appendix F)**

- An 11-items scale measuring perceived abilities to develop and utilize personal strengths in daily life
- Each item is measured using a 11-point scale from 0 = *“not at all confident”*, 5= *“moderately confident”*, to 10 = *“extremely confident”*
- Reliability: .95

### **Strengths Ownership Scale (Wisner, 2008; Wisner, 2011; see Appendix G)**

- A 7-item scale measuring a person's demonstration of their strengths
- Measured on a 6-point scale from 1= "strongly disagree" to 6= "strongly agree"
- Cronbach's alpha: .86

#### **The Strengths Use Scale (Govindji & Linley, 2007; see Appendix H)**

- A 14-items scale measuring how much a person uses their strengths in various settings
- Rated on a 7-point scale, 1= "strongly agree" to 7= "strongly disagree"
- Cronbach's alpha: .95

#### **Strengths Knowledge Scale (Govindji & Linley, 2007)**

- An eight-items scale that measures people's awareness of their strengths
- Rated on a 7-point scale, 1= "strongly agree" to 7= "strongly disagree"
- Cronbach's alpha: .89

#### **The Clifton StrengthsFinder® (Louis, 2009; Schreiner, 2006)**

- Aims to identify and measure raw talents that can be developed into strengths for personal development and growths
- A 30-45 online questionnaire with 180 item pairs to measure 34 possible talent themes
- Results in top-five signature themes

#### **The Values in Action (VIA) and VIA for children (Peterson & Seligman, 2006)**

- Aims to identify a person's strengths and changes in their strengths
- Consists of six virtues: wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence and 24 related character strengths that aid a person's success
- For complete questionnaire: [Questionnaire Center | Authentic Happiness \(upenn.edu\)](http://www.questionnairecenter.org)

#### **Goals-Strengths Use (Linley et al., 2010)**

- Assessing the extent a person utilizes their five signature strengths to attain the three goals they defined
- The items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale format from 0= "not at all" to 4= "very much"
- Higher scores indicate greater signature strengths utilization

#### **Multiple Intelligences Profiling Questionnaire III (MIPQ III; Tirri & Nokelainen, 2008)**

- 35-items measurement aims to understand a person's strengths. The measurement is based on Gardner's multiple intelligence theory
- The measurement consists of nine dimensions: linguistic (verbal and written), logical-mathematical (academic problem-solving and systematic and logical thinking), musical, spatial (visual imaging and spatial perception), bodily-kinesthetic (the handyman and body coordination component), interpersonal, intrapersonal (self-reflection and self-

knowledge), and environmental intelligence (love for nature, nature conservation, environment-friendly consumer habits).

- Rated on a 5-point scale from 1= *“totally disagree”* to 5= *“totally agree”*
- Cronbach’s alpha: range from .53 to .89

**SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results) Framework (Zarestky & Cole, 2017)**

- Strengths-based analysis that focuses on possibilities and development
- Key components: aspirations and results; orientations toward actions and activities; focusing on possibilities; analysing innovation and breakthroughs and engagement of all levels; focus on planning, implementation and self-improvement; and attention to results

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## Appendix A: Self-reflections

Below are some questions adapted from Clifton et al. (2006, p. 31-33) that aim to help college students identify their talents:

### Self-assessment of talents

- What is your signature talent that you use more frequently?
- What is the signature talent you develop them most?
- Which talents do you want to maximize the most at school/training program/university?

### Motivations, dreams, and desires

- What are you hoping will happen while you are in [the study program, e.g. college]?
- What do you want to gain from the education?
- Imagine that you have completed [an educational] program. What is great about the experience?
- Which of your talents you believe have the most important role in fulfilling your goals?
- Which talents do you want to develop through classes, programs, or activities?
- What comes into mind when you think about developing your talents and strengths?

### Self-assessments of intellectual interest and curiosities

- What topic is the easiest for you to learn?
- In what area have you got compliments before?
- What is it that you really desire to understand about?

### Vocational, career, and graduate school aspirations

- Up until now, what is the most fulfilling experience you have had?
- Which careers seem to attract you?
- In what career would you be able to utilize your talents?
- Based on your general career interest, what trainings will you need?
- Which courses and opportunities can help you to prepare your career?

### Time and energy demands

- What are your family responsibilities, and how much time does it require each week?
- How many hours per week you must work to meet your financial needs?
- To get a high achievement in class, how much time do you have to spend to study each week?
- Which of your most natural talents can you count on to make your efforts time- and energ-efficient?

**Self-assessment of academic abilities**

- In what areas do you have the greatest academic abilities?
- On what types of test do you score highest?
- What has been your favorite type of assignment?
- What subjects do you most enjoy studying?
- How have your greatest talents helped you succeed in the past?
- What academic tasks employ your most powerful talents?
- In which academic tasks would you like to discover how to better apply your greatest talents? (Clifton et al., 2006, p. 33)

## Appendix B: Identifying Success Factors Worksheet

Amabile and Kramer (2011, p. 217)

*Directions:* Use this worksheet to identify success factors. A “success factor” is a past experience or personal characteristic linked to, and correlated with, successful advancement in the organization. Identify success factors by asking individuals who have already achieved success—such as key position incumbents—about their most important developmental experiences and about what they did (or skills they demonstrated) in the midst of those experiences.

Pose the following questions to key position incumbents. Then compile and compare the results. Ask other key position incumbents in the organization to review the results.

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1. What is the single most difficult experience you encountered in your career?  
(Describe the situation below.)

---

2. What did you do in the experience you described in response to question 1?  
(Describe, as precisely as you can, what actions you took—and what results you achieved as a result.)

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3. Reflect on your answer to question 2. What personal characteristics do you feel you exhibited or demonstrated in the action(s) you took? How do you feel they contributed to your present success?

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## Appendix C: Talent Review Process

Heinen and O'Neill (2004) give an example of the talent review process:

- Employees made summary of accomplishment over the past 12 months and their career plan. The document is submitted to their managers.
- Managers assess the area of strengths and improvements the employees have made and identify areas that needs improvements.
- Managers rate the employee's current contribution, analyze their career potential and the reality of the employees' career plan.

Below are some criteria to identify high-potential people:

- High performance track record
- Early strength shown in "must-have" competencies, including demonstration of "active-learner" characteristics
- Capacity to learn from experience
- If at entry or midcareer, seen as likely to succeed at least two levels up, given proper developmental support (Heinen & O'Neill, 2004, p. 78).



## Appendix D: Action Plan Template

Coleman & Tennessee (1994)

GRADE:

WHO NEEDS SUPPORT IN MY CLASSROOM: A list of names and the types of exceptional potential that the child exhibit

OPTIONS TO PROVIDE: lists of supports and activities to enrich students' potentials

RESOURCES NEEDED:

SAMPLES OF THE ACTION PLAN:

## Appendix E: Talent Development Subscale

Yuen et al. (2010)

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<i>Extremely lacking in confidence</i>					<i>extremely confident</i>
Explore my capabilities in academic subjects						
Recognize my potential strengths in extra-curricular activities.						
Achieve the academic goals I set myself.						
Choose recreational activities in which I am interested.						
Actively participate in different kinds of activities and contests to enrich my experience.						
Achieve the goals set in extra-curricular activities.						

## Appendix F: The Strengths Self-Efficacy Scale

Tsai et al. (2013)

From the scale 0= *not at all confident* to 10= *extremely confident*, how confident are you in your ability to...

1. Use your strengths at work
2. Use your strengths without any struggles
3. Find ways to apply your strengths in the things you do everyday
4. Accomplish a lot using your strengths
5. Apply your strengths at work/ school
6. Use your strengths in many situations
7. Use your strengths to succeed
8. Find ways to use your strengths at work/ school everyday
9. Use your strengths at any time
10. Use your strengths to help you achieve your goals in life
11. Practice your strengths in areas where you excel

## Appendix G: The Strengths Ownership Scale

Wisner (2008)

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<i>Strongly disagree</i>					<i>Strongly agree</i>
I can name my top five strengths						
My strengths are evident in my leadership style						
I believe that knowing others' strengths improves teamwork						
Understanding my strengths helps me be realistic about my expectations for the future						
Understanding my strengths helps me do what I do best						
I am planning my future around my strengths						
When I think about the people that I lead, I try to see how their strengths will contribute to our work together.						

## Appendix H: The Strengths Use Scale

Govindji & Linley (2007)

**Instruction:** The following questions ask you about your strengths, that is, the things that you are able to do well or do best

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	<i>Strongly disagree</i>						<i>Strongly agree</i>
I am regularly able to do what I do best							
I always play to my strengths							
I always try to use my strengths							
I achieve what I want by using my strengths							
I use my strengths everyday							
I use my strengths to get what I want out of life							
My work gives me lots of opportunities to use my strengths							
My life presents me with lots of different ways to use my strengths							
Using my strengths comes naturally to me							
I find it easy to use my strengths in the things I do							
I am able to use my strengths in lots of different situations							
Most of my time is spent doing the things that I am good at doing							
Using my strengths is something I am familiar with							
I am able to use my strengths in lots of different ways							



For more information about R2 or to discover how you can bring the program to your organization, business or educational setting, please contact us.

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