

Assessment of Strengths-based Leadership Domains and their Impact on Student Academic Success


Deborah L. VanOverbeke, Professor


Amy R. Gazaway, Student Success Coordinator

Oklahoma State University



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Importance of Academic Success

- Bachelor's grads earn 38% more than high school grads (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005)
- Rate of return on investment to society is estimated at 10.3% (Trostel, 2010)
- Annual revenue loss from student attrition for single higher ed institution estimated at >\$13 million per year (Raisman, 2013)
- Only 59% of full-time, 4-yr. higher ed students graduate within a six year timeframe (Kena et al., 2014)




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Academic Success Defined

- College student success = academic grading outcome allowing continuation of degree program
- Timely graduation within the six-year timeframe



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Strengths-based Philosophy

- Identification & development of talents = Best opportunities for growth, satisfaction, and near perfect success (Gallup, Inc., 2009)
- Greater return on investments of energy & resources when developing talents instead of weaknesses (Gallup, Inc., 2006)
- Encourage managing weaknesses/deficiencies through approaching them with one's talents & complimentary partnerships (Gallup, Inc., 2012)




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“One should waste as little effort as possible on improving areas of low competence. It takes far more energy to improve from incompetence to mediocrity than it takes to improve from first-rate performance to excellence.”

-Peter Drucker



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Strengths Terminology

Talent X **Investment** = **Strength**

A naturally recurring pattern of thought, feeling or behavior that can be productively applied.

Time spent practicing, developing skills and building knowledge.

The ability to consistently provide near perfect performance.



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Strengths Development Results

- Professional Outcomes (Rath & Conchie, 2008)
 - Higher self-confidence
 - Greater engagement
 - Increased productivity
 - Higher income
 - Greater satisfaction
- Additional Student Outcomes (Hodges & Harter, 2005; Gallup, Inc., 2006)
 - Increased credits earned
 - Higher GPAs



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The Clifton StrengthsFinder®

- Developed by Dr. Donald Clifton
 - Father of Strengths-based Psychology
 - Leading researcher with Gallup, Inc.
- Research conducted over 30+ years, 22+ countries, 2M+ respondents
- Measures talent that generates performance
 - Top 5 Talent Themes (Theme = Group of similar talents)
 - Each talent is associated with one of 4 Domains of Leadership:
Executing, Relationship Building, Influencing, Strategic Thinking



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Clifton StrengthsFinder® Quick Reference Card

Achiever

People especially talented in the Achiever theme have a great deal of stamina and work hard. They take great satisfaction from being busy and productive.

Activator

People especially talented in the Activator theme can make things happen by turning thoughts into action. Once a decision is made, they want to act quickly.

Adaptability

People especially talented in the Adaptability theme prefer to “go with the flow.” They tend to be “now” people who take things as they come and discover the future one day at a time.

Analytical


People especially talented in the Analytical theme search for reasons and causes. They have the ability to think about all the factors that might affect a situation.


Arranger

People especially talented in the Arranger theme can organize, but they also have a flexibility that complements this ability. They like to figure out how all of the pieces and resources can be arranged for maximum productivity.



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Top 5 examples

- Harmony – look for consensus
- Relator – close relationships to others
- Developer – recognize and cultivate potential in others
- Responsibility – take psychological ownership of what they way they will do; honesty, loyalty
- Achiever – work hard and have great deal of stamina; will be busy and productive



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Top 5 Examples

- Responsibility, focus, achiever, learner, discipline
 - Need to:
 - know expectations
 - set short & long term academic & study goals
 - have a study routine
 - need a quiet place to be undistracted to study and retain info



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Domains of Leadership

- ***Executing***
 - Achiever, arranger, belief, consistency, deliberative, discipline, focus, responsibility, restorative
- ***Influencing***
 - Activator, command, communication, competition, maximizer, self-assurance, significance, woo
- ***Relationship Building***
 - Adaptability, developer, connectedness, empathy, harmony, include, individualization, positivity, relator
- ***Strategic Thinking***
 - Analytical, context, futuristic, ideation, input, intellection, learner, strategic




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Research Purpose

To learn if a relationship exists between college students' innate talents as identified by the Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment and their academic success



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Methods

- Subjects: Students enrolled in food science diversity course, mostly non-majors
- Completed Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment (n=175)
 - Dominant domain of leadership = 3 or more talents in a leadership domain (n=101)
- Number of official major changes
- Number of semesters below 2.0 retention GPA



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Methods

- Exam performance (points earned by question type)
- Extra credit participation
- Extra credit earned
- Statistical analysis
 - ANOVA
 - Means separated using Fisher's protected LSD
 - Pearson correlation coefficients generated



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Results – Overall Academics

- More *Executing* talents (4) → Fewer major changes
- More *Strategic Thinking* talents (4) - -> More major changes
- More *Executing* talents (3-4) → Fewer academic semesters below 2.0
- More *Strategic Thinking* talents (3-4) → More semesters below 2.0
- Correlation between major changes and semester GPAs below 2.0 → $r=0.44$



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Results – Course Specifics

- *Executing & Strategic Thinking* → Better performance on multiple choice & matching
- *Executing & Strategic Thinking* → More extra credit completed
- Increase in *Executing* talents → Increase in extra credit points earned ($r=0.23$)
- Increase in *Influencing & Relationship Building* talents → Less extra credit completed ($r=-0.16$, $r=-0.13$)



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Implications

- High *Strategic Thinking* students may need focused strengths development to best apply talents toward academic success
- Approaches to student evaluation & assessment should be varied or well-rounded to not disadvantage students based upon their dominant talents



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Overall Take Home Message




Actively engaged students and young professionals!



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