Paper PD02

Attack of the Clones : How to individualize your approach to work and people

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ABSTRACT

The amount of interest a manager and organization takes in its employees is directly linked to how engaged those employees are. With a simple online assessment CliftonStrengths provides managers with the tools needed to individualize their approach to their team. Providing them with the ability to not only understand, but to connect and tailor communications and work to enable each individual to do what they do best every day. Investing in a positive psychology strengths-based approach does not mean that weaknesses are ignored, or that individuals do not have to undertake tasks that they deem "weak areas". Understanding individual strengths is understanding how an individual does something, not what that something is.

INTRODUCTION

It is not a new theory that when employees are engaged they perform better. Each year over $720 million is spent on employee engagement initiatives (LaMotte, 2015) and yet, when asked on a Global scale, only 13% of employees identify as working for an organization in which they are engaged (Mann & Harter, 2016). This is a major issue as with low engagement levels comes numerous other problems such as – low productivity, higher absence rates, higher employee turnover etc. The world of work is changing, and with it, the expectations of employees. Leadership is "playing catch up", having to move from "traditional" styles in the past to innovative styles for the future. Below is an example of the changes which we are seeing within organizations.

Past		**Future**
My paycheck	⟶	My purpose
My satisfaction	⟶	My development
My boss	⟶	My coach
My annual review	⟶	My ongoing conversations
My weaknesses	⟶	My strengths
My job	⟶	My life

This paper discusses the benefits of a positive psychology approach to work and individuals with a view of providing the reader with information with which they can improve communication, productivity, and retention by individualizing their approach to employees in order to get the best from every employee, every day. It provides an example of an intervention which can be used to help organizations move from the past to the future and fulfill the changing expectations of employees today.

Understanding what Positive Psychology is, as well as the mechanics of implementing a positive psychology approach though the medium of the CliftonStrengths assessment will provide a starting point for any organization wanting to change their approach from the traditional, wholly ineffective performance improvement structure to a more forward thinking, constructive structure where employees feel empowered to "do what they do best every day" (Rath, 2015)

A POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY APPROACH

Positive psychology is defined in many ways but is consistently referred to as the scientific study of strengths and optimal human functioning (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003; Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011) which focuses on the entire field of psychology (Guha, 2009) to improve the lives of "normal people" in an ordinary world (Sheldon & King, 2001; Seligman, 2005). In business terms, it is the focus on what individuals do well as opposed to what they do poorly. It is

the understanding that every individual has a different process, even when all individuals are providing the same result.

MOVING FROM THE PAST TO THE FUTURE

Using a tailored approach, understanding what is unique about each individual, meets all of the future state needs of employees outlined above.

Positive psychology not only focuses on the strengths of an individual (as outlined further in this paper) but also looks more generically at what brings contentment, altruism and satisfaction and with employees, on average, currently spending 90,000 hours at work in a lifetime it is not an area of research to be undervalued. Having the ability to determine how to use this approach with employees to bring satisfaction and contentment will allow organizations to get the best from their employees and continue to be prosperous within the ever changing, dynamic business environment of today.

CLIFTONSTRENGTHS

Currently 453 of the Fortune 500 companies use or have used the CliftonStrengths tool (Rigoni, 2015). This online assessment consists of 177 paired statements which, when answered in full, provides a signature report identifying an individual's "strengths".

The CliftonStrengths assessment differs from other types of commonly compared assessments (such as Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) in that there is a 33.4million chance of having the same signature profile as another person. The benefits to the organization and the employee in this respect are the same. Increases in productivity, motivation, "happiness", as well as decreases in employee absence rates employee turnover, and disengagement are consistent outcomes of adopting an individualized, strengths-based approach.

Once employees have completed the assessment they are provided with a signature report which identifies their "top 5" strengths, the characteristics and behaviours that they are most likely to utilize in any given situation. Individuals are provided with both a report and action plan in order to assist them with moving forward with a strengths-based approach.

THE STARTING POINT

The CliftonStrengths Assessment has been taken almost 17 million times to date (September 2017). It is a starting point towards providing employees with what it is that they need from the organization in order to perform their duties to the best of their ability. But this is only the starting point. Understanding your own strengths profile is the starting point, only once this happens can others strengths start to be explored, culminating in an understanding of the strengths of both individuals and groups and the ability to use these strengths to individualize the approach to work and individuals.

AN INDIVIDUALISED APPROACH

Once an organization understands the strengths of its employees it can start to individualize its approach to those employees. Sending the same message to all, whilst time effective at the beginning, is not time effective long term. As individuals with differing strengths we interpret information in unique ways, only by tailoring the message can the organization and managers get the best from their team.

INTERPRETING THE DATA

There are numerous ways, as has been previously discussed, that the information from the assessment can be used – both on an individual level and also from a management level but the third way in which is can be used could arguably be most beneficial for managers of teams.

By collating the signature themes of each individual on a team (the "Top 5" strengths which are reported upon completion of the assessment) managers are provided with a complete view of the strengths of their team. By understanding these strengths as a whole managers, with the guidance of a coach to walk them through the results, have the ability to tailor the project tasks which they are working on with the team to match the strengths of the individual with the view of achieving the best outcome possible on the project. Whilst the assessment is not a selection tool it does provide validated information on the way in which individuals approach their work (although it is important to note that it is not only specific to an individual's worklife – an individual's strengths are their strengths regardless of the situation which they are in). it can be used to determine which individuals are more likely to be the "doers" and which are more likely to be the "thinkers" as well as being a tool which can be used to identify potential areas of conflict within a team.

At d-Wise, whilst we do not use it as a selection tool to determine the makeup of a team we do take it into consideration and will add to a team if there is a need for a particular strength. The data provided by the assessment

allows us to determine where there is potential excellence within a team within a particular domain (in the example below the large number of strengths within the "strategic thinking" domain would be an example of this) and also where there may be potential weaknesses or areas of conflict. This understanding of areas of conflict is arrived at by interpreting the statistics on common pairings of strengths as provided by the Gallup Organisation. An example of this would be the competition theme being a least likely pairing with the connectedness theme (0.01) which, when interpreted, could suggest potential conflict between the individuals which have those themes in their Top 5.

Whilst the data does not suggest that there are significant statistical differences between countries and cultures having an understanding of an individual's strengths when working with cross-cultural teams provides a shared language which allows individuals within that team to be clearer in their requirements. At d-Wise we use the strengths language within teams when a situation requires a particular behaviour. We may call on an individual to keep the group on track by using their discipline, or we may call upon someone with ideation when we are in the planning stages of a new project.

The strengths grid below is an example of a fictitious team alongside examples of the way in which the data can be interpreted and used. It is intended to provide the reader with more context around the different dimensions of the CliftonStrengths assessment as well as the practical application. When a manager understands their teams strengths then they have the ability to tailor their messaging and work to those strengths. One of the overall goals of the assessment data is to be able to interpret and apply it to every day situations to achieve a "near perfect result from every interaction" (Rath, 2007).

Scenario
[Jeff manages a team of eight sales people, every week he shares the same motivational message with his team "go get out there and win, take the competitors down and fight to the last breath to get all the business you can". He then shares the team leaderboard.
Whilst this messaging will no doubt motivate some of the team, others might not have typical strengths associated with "winning" and "taking down competitors".
By taking the CliftonStrengths Assessment Jeff could see that with just five words (each team members "top 5" strengths) his team were very different and although were doing the same job, would do it in a very different way.

Below is a look at Jeff's Team Grid. Highlighted are two strengths – Achiever and Individualization, which a large number of his team share. Armed with a team grid like this Jeff can see how best to approach the team as a whole but also how to tailor his message to individuals. The competitive approach that Jeff would naturally take because of his strengths would not necessarily work with Ricardo's relationship building strengths, particularly his harmony, and so Jeff would be better to tailor his approach with Ricardo. The below grid also shows us that Duane has a large number of strategic thinking strengths, understanding this Jeff may decide to call upon Duane to lead teams that are involved with forward planning and innovation of ideas].

Team Members	Achiever	Arranger	Belief	Consistency	Deliberative	Discipline	Focus	Responsibility	Restorative	Activator	Command	Communication	Competition	Maximizer	Self-Assurance	Significance	Woo	Adaptability	Connectedness	Developer	Empathy	Harmony	Includer	Individualization	Positivity	Relator	Analytical	Context	Futuristic	Ideation	Input	Intellection	Learner	Strategic
Jeff						1							2		3												4						4	
Ricardo								3				1										2		5		4								
Stacey	2	1						3						4			5																	
Micah	4					5													3									2						1
Chris	5												2	3		4								1										
Jo	1												2											3									4	5
Duane																									5				4	1			2	3
Kat	5							3				4					1							2										
Simion																						2		3		4	1					5		

At d-Wise we have found that the understanding CliftonStrengths has provided us with a shared language and an ability to communicate more effectively, particularly as an organization growing in multiple countries with differing

cultures. The language of strengths is used as common ground to not only build teams but also to build very detailed understanding of individuals that we would not have access to without the assessment information. With just 34 words an organization can build a culture of strengths to ensure that each individual feels like an individual, regardless of their role or location.

THE STRATEGIC ELEMENT OF IMPLEMENTATION

It is well documented that when introducing and type of change within an organization that will always be resistance and in terms of assessments such as CliftonStrengths the resistance is usually a lack of understanding of the application of the results by the individual. Ensuring that employees have clear messaging around the use of the assessment and providing coaching around the results of the assessment are pivotal for the successful use of the tool.

Implementing a strengths-based culture within a team or organization needs the same level of strategic planning as any other project if the implementation is to be successful. Having a strengths strategy, as well as certified coaches that can embed the strengths strategy has allowed us to successfully implement a strengths-based culture at d-Wise where the language of strengths is being used between co-workers to increase understanding and productivity alongside coaching sessions being provided for individuals, teams, managers and the organization as whole.**

CONCLUSION

There is no hard and fast rule for improving employee engagement or improving work performance, but understanding an employee's strengths, understanding what unique qualities they bring to their role, and understanding how to leverage these qualities is a step in the right direction.

As communication methods have gotten easier, communication effectiveness has gotten less effective. Messaging needs to be tailored now more than ever with the rise in remote working, cross team working, virtual working etc. and expectations have also changed. Employees no longer just want to come to work, they want to be understood, they want to believe in the organization and its values. At d-Wise we believe that an understanding of the uniqueness of every employee and the strengths that they bring takes us closer to this expectation and in turn, provides the business with a range of advantages, the least of which is higher performance and productivity from employees.

Understanding an individual's strengths profile, the ways in which they naturally react to stimulus (in this case an opportunity, a request, collaborative work – any scenario likely to happen within an organization) will enable those who interact with that individual to tailor their approach to language and work. An individual's "Top 5" report isn't about placing them in a category, people are more than their five words. However, experience has shown us that understanding an individual's Top 5, and tailoring communication to those Top 5 accordingly has provided an invaluable insight, for which there are plenty of user testimonies that can be provided.

Taking the step into the future and becoming a strengths-based organization isn't an easy step, it takes work, commitment, effort. But the rewards are exponential.

Understand what is unique about every individual - Understand their strengths.

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RECOMMENDED READING
StrengthsFinder 2.0 – Tom Rath
Now, Discover Your Strengths – Marcus Buckingham

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