MO 455/555: Foundations in Positive Organizational Scholarship
Session 2 (1/14/16)
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Strengths-Based Approaches

Communications on Canvas between session 1 and session 2:
• N/A

Videos and materials needed:
• The VIA Classification of 24 Character Strengths (handout)
• Video: “Let It Ripple: Mobile Films for Global Change” (found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BdQRECe37K0&feature=youtu.be) [8 minutes]
• Video: IBM, Australia and New Zealand (found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkofIsqUbD4) [6 minutes]
• Video from Scotch College in Adelaide, Australia (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRE8wlnLVJc) [2 minutes]

Description and flow of the class:
Slide 1: Session 2: Strengths-based Approaches

- This slide is the introductory slide for the day. The goal for the day is to learn about strengths – individually and collectively – by understanding the benefits in knowing how to identify them in ourselves and others, and how to utilize these skills.

Slide 2: Last class inputs

- As a way of picking up from and sharing feedback that students provided at the end of session 1, this slide highlights some of the “likes” and “changes” that students would like to see.
- This could be an opportunity to comment on the feedback and to discuss ways in which those recommendations will be incorporated into today’s session.

Slide 3: Game plan for this session

- This slide serves as the class agenda or the day. We briefly shared some of the major highlights that we would be discussing, as well as prepared students for the activities we would be engaging in.

Slide 4: Warming up to the power of the idea of strengths

- Activity: Video -- “Let It Ripple”
  - Prior to starting the video, we introduced it by what it contributes. This video provides a great overview about strengths and the benefits to work.
  - Video discusses: What are strengths? What are your strengths? How can you develop them? How can you use them and find them in others? What are the benefits of working off of strengths? How do you become your best self?
  - A couple of possible Prompt questions for students to consider as they watch the video: “What do you find most useful? What speaks to you?”
• **Debrief:** large group responses to “What struck you as interesting?” one thing that you found useful?

• **Student responses:**
  - It’s important to not just focus on the negative, but to focus on what can go “right.” It’s about the positive in ourselves, and the positive in others.
  - Change can start in really small ways.
  - It goes across cultures. This video did a great job of looking around the world.
  - Focusing on the strengths as a supervisor is challenging because it’s not viewed as normal, and not what’s expected. Sometimes it’s expected that if we do focus on strengths only, then we are taking the easy way out by not telling people what’s wrong and only focusing on their strengths.

• **Key concepts:**
  - Shoring up weaknesses is not bad, but it should not be the majority of the human development (for example, we could use an 80/20 rule; 80% focus on strengths and 20% focus on weaknesses).
  - In what kinds of situations do I find myself using my strengths, and how do I leverage my strengths in these situations?
  - Change can begin in really small ways, like the way we think. This influences everything including how we speak and act. Our thoughts and words are very consequential.
  - Consistent with a growth mindset, our strengths are generative. The more we use them, the more we develop them.
  - Different patterns tend to get socialized in certain types of cultures, but the concept of strengths has a global application.
  - Getting feedback from others on how they perceive you is very consequential, and helpful in identifying strengths and weaknesses.
  - If we are helping others identify and work through their strengths, it also builds the capacity of individuals, teams, and organizations.

• What if you apply this at the organizational level?
• There are meaningful ways to cultivate virtues and collective strengths. Some of Kim Cameron’s work talks about how cultivating virtuousness in organizations produces financial benefits. We will discuss later the data and the evidence presented for this in upcoming sessions.
Slide 5: What are strengths?
- This slide provides the opportunity to engage the topic of strengths. We discussed how strengths are only one part of the spectrum of positive organizational work and concepts that will be covered.
- Strengths encourage the possibility for driving excellence.
- You have to be careful about how we leverage our strengths at times as well.

Slide 6: How do strengths develop?
- In this slide we discussed how context and role models are important in understanding the way in which strengths are developed.
- **Activity:** Large group discussion: “Can you give me an example of some place they worked or a place that developed strengths? Think for a minute about the places you’ve been (i.e. schools, work place) and is there an example you can share.”
- **Student responses:**
  - One of my strengths is love of learning. Therefore I was placed in special classes. I am very grateful that whomever made the call to put me in these special environments that allowed me to play and learn in these classrooms. Just being in that space let me think and learn in a different way.
- **Key concepts:**
  - Top 5 on your VIA are considered your signature strengths. Every one of us has something to offer, every one of us has these 5 strengths. Everyone in the community has something to offer.
  - Organizations can either foster or deplete these growth opportunities.
  - Role models show us how we can foster our strengths; role models can be really important.
- An example of an organization that is working from a strengths-based model is St. Peter’s College (found in the extra reading).
- **Activity:** Video from Scotch College in Adelaide, Australia
  - Prior to starting the video, we discussed the contributions from this video. It is a good example of positive education and how to implement strengths building in education. They create strengths-based character
learning. They have fully adopted a strengths-based approach to all of their educational efforts.

- While students are watching the video, we prompted them to: “Think about what strikes you in the video.”
- **Debrief (large group discussion):** “What struck you (about the video)?”
- **Student response:**
  - Positive thinking is subconscious. To me this related to learning a language or learning a skill to the point where you practice it so much it becomes subconscious, and this is what’s happening with these 14 year olds at the school.
- **Key concepts:**
  - Visual artifacts can also be reinforcements about strengths of individuals and others.
  - What we choose to communicate conveys a message. This is an opportunity to make a personal connection and share an example. Our instructor shared an example about when her daughter was hired and the first message the organization sent out about her related to her strengths and why they hired her.
  - If managers/leaders would like to get the most traction with this work, they are encouraged to start with this, as first moment matter and have the most impact.

**Slide 7:** How to discover your strengths?

- This slide introduces the concept of strengths finding as compared to strengths developing in the prior slide. Strengths are about cultivating overall character.
- VIA is a not-for-profit, while Gallup’s Strengths Finder is for Profit.
  - VIA, Gallup’s, and Realise2 are the 3 main strengths finders that are most widely utilized.
  - VIA has the most validity, and is more tied to virtues and character versus Gallup.
  - Michelle McQuaid provides additional sources to help individuals find personal strengths and strengths in others. This is an additional
resource that was suggested by our facilitator. This is also an opportunity to share other resources for strengths finding, as many options are available.

- **Activity:** Pair-share for 15 minutes. This time we asked students to get up and go sit with someone different. During this activity, providing the students 15 minutes gives them substantial time to get in-depth with the strengths spotting exercise.
  - **Prompt** questions to discuss: “Based on your VIA, discuss your top 5 strengths. Was your profile consistent with your self notions? How can you deploy your signature strengths during your time as a student?”

[BREAK – 10 minutes]

- **Debrief (large group):** “What did you learn? What came up in your discussions? How can this knowledge of what we’re good at be used?”

- **Students responses:**
  - Using our strengths to develop those same strengths in other people. Mine is bravery, and if hers is not, then I can help her be more brave (perhaps in a compensatory way).
  - We were surprised that some of our strengths were kind of contradictory as a dyad, but it was about bridging the gap and realizing that this is what makes us unique and what we bring to the table.
  - *(Student question)* Is there a magnitude difference amongst the top 5 strengths? How do those vary in magnitude?
    - **Response:** Amongst the top 10 strengths, they are interchangeable and there isn’t a magnitude difference amongst these. After the top 10 then there is variation in magnitude.
  - In Social Work, all of our classes consist of work projects and that fosters a sense of humility, at least in the classroom. It makes us have to put our biases aside, as it is an important part of social work.
  - It’s interesting to think about how these (our strengths change over time). It makes me think about how some of these wouldn’t have been strengths a couple of years ago and now they are.
  - For me, it’s not that my strengths have changed, but they’ve adjusted over time.
  - *(Student Question)* Has anyone developed a type of questionnaire or survey to assess strengths at the organizational level?
    - **Response:** Kim Cameron’s recent work is developing how to measure organizational virtuosity. But overall, this is still a new frontier.

- **Key concepts:**
  - When we bring individual strengths to a dyad or group, we can help develop that in the group because we bring that to the group.
  - When we have a tension between strengths among pairs or groups, it actually makes the pair or group more adaptive.
Organizational practices that are embedded in our jobs can foster or deplete strengths in the workplace.

Influences and recent experiences impact how our strengths change and develop over time.

We are going to get the most authentic passion by leveraging our signature strengths.

Slide 8: VIA strengths framework
- If time does not permit, this is a slide that can be skipped.

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Slide 9: So what’s your signature strength?
- If time does not permit, this is a slide that can be skipped.

Slide 10: In what ways does self-knowledge of character strengths matter?
- If time does not permit, this is a slide that can be skipped.

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Slide 11: Just some of the evidence (1)

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Slide 12: A bit more evidence
• This slide allowed us to introduce two sets of studies that show the impacts of strengths over time. This one in particular shows the evidence of the impact of putting people’s strengths to use over 3 months and 6 months. What the studies find is that using your strengths significantly reduced levels of stress over time, which is something really important to think about. It also increases your self-esteem over six months.
• This study is not just about producing good things. It is also about reducing your stress and increasing positive outcomes in other physiological and psychological aspects.

Slide 12: A bit more evidence
• This slide shows evidence of another study, where they asked participants to journal every night about their top 5 strengths that they used that day. What they found was that over 6 months period of time, just by focusing on it, changes your behavior to increase the positive (such as happiness) but it also decreases depression.
• This study shows that the focus is not just about producing happiness, which increases capacity for performance, but it decreases poor performance.

Slide 13: Beginning to use the framework through strengths-spotting
• **Activity:** Pair-share exercise with this prompt -- “Now we are going to practice strengths-spotting. Get into pairs with a person next to you and tell a story about a good experience that you’ve had in the last two weeks. The job of the other person is to spot the strengths as you are exhibiting. This is an exercise in practicing strengths-spotting. Share your observations back to your partner.” [7-8 minutes; a quick strengths-spotting activity]

• **Debrief (large group discussion):** “What do you get from trying to do the strengths-finding?”
• **Student responses:**
o You can infer some of a person’s strengths by the small things that they talk about
o I really like the practice of “flexing that muscle.” I did feel kind of bad because she was talking and I was staring at my sheet. So I need to get better at practicing this.
o She didn’t have to say that she was authentic, but her actions and the way she told the story showed that she is an authentic person.
o At a sub-conscious level, I think I can identify it. But actually verbalizing it makes it concrete.
o It felt really good and validating to hear someone talk about my strengths.

• Key concepts:
o You can learn what people value by listening to others. How they narrate tells us things about what they value.
o Watching others behavior and the “way” they convey their story, tells us some of their strengths and helps us identify some of their strengths.
o Social capital is being built when affirmations are taking place and strengths are being identified.
o Strengths-spotting can create a positive spiral. These positive spirals are dynamic and mutually reinforcing. The more you practice them, the more strength you gain.

• Extracurricular activity challenge: In the next couple of weeks, try strengths-spotting. Try this with someone around you and see what it does for them and you.

Slide 14: In what ways does looking for and gaining knowledge of other people’s character strengths matter?
• If time does not permit, this is a slide that can be skipped.

Slide 15: Coaching as a profession that does strengths-spotting
• Even though we had to skip this slide due to time constraints, students were encouraged to learn more about the possibilities of coaching as a professional
position. This slide provides a window to discuss one way in which strengths-spotting can be a part of a person’s career.

Slide 16: Assessing strengths from reflection from others
- If time does not permit, this is a slide that can be skipped.

Slide 17: Pause – How does a strengths approach fit a POS approach to organizations?
- If time does not permit, this is a slide that can be skipped.

Slide 18: How does an organization use a character strengths approach to build a culture?
- Activity: Video: IBM, Australia and New Zealand
  - Prompt questions for students to consider while watching the video:
    “As we watch this video, think about how they are doing this strengths focus from a cultural change perspective. What is their logic or rationale? What are they accomplishing?”
- Debrief (Large group discussion): “What were some of the major take-aways?”
- Student responses:
  - A lot of times we base what we can do based on what we’ve done in the past.
  - We can make people aware of what our strengths are helps others trust that you are going to do a great job.
  - It’s like being on a sports team. Once you’re on a roll, that positive momentum keeps building. This video really reminded me of that.
- Key concepts:
  - One important way to expand capacity or build capacity is through strengths finding.
  - Being aware of other’s strengths and supporting those strengths creates more efficient work environments.
- Capabilities and capacities are not static. There is a positive momentum about them. As a leader, can you capitalize on the positive momentum or the generative dynamic? As a leader, you have to know what might be able to unleash this capability – to unleash the potential to work on big problems.
- Energy produces resources, and fostering strengths unleashes this energy.
- There is such a strong connection between positive/generative environment and physical health. The same exists for toxic environments in producing negative health effects.

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Slide 19: How does an organization build a strategy based on strengths?
- If time does not permit, this is a slide that can be skipped.

Slide 20: Strengths-based perspectives in doing change
- If time does not permit, this is a slide that can be skipped.

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Slide 21: Further reading

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Slide 22: NEXT CLASS: FIRST COMPPELLING CASE WRITE-UP – HAND IN AT BEGINNING OF CLASS
• If time does not permit, this is a slide that can be skipped.

Slide 22: Next Class: First compelling case write-up
• We reminded students that their first compelling case study assignment is due at the beginning of the next class.

• Since we had to skip so many slides due to time constraints, we encouraged students to watch the videos in the slides that we were not able to go over.

Slide 23: Quick feedback on today
• Before students leave, they were asked to fill out the feedback index card (“What worked well? What would you like to see be improved?”) and submit them.