

Strengths Based Leadership and Fostering

Creativity in the Workplace

BADM 303

Section 01

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Book Summary

Strengths Based Leadership is a book written by Tom Rath and Barry Conchie, who are both employees of the Gallup Organization. Gallup has been studying human behaviour for more than seventy years, and has been consulting with leaders for the past forty years. The book has been an accumulation of over seventy years of research and consultation which was put together by Rath. Scientists at Gallup studied more than a million work teams, conducted more than twenty-thousand in-depth interviews with leaders, and interviewed more than ten-thousand followers to see why they followed to the most important leader in their life. Based on the research done, Gallup discovered that there were three factors to becoming an effective leader. Those factors were: knowing your strength, investing in others' strengths, and meeting basic needs of followers.

Knowing your strengths is a cornerstone to the book. Rath writes that every leader has different strengths and approaches to leading, and that should be celebrated. There is no certain way to lead. According to the Gallup Organization via a survey conducted with various leaders, there was no one strength in common among leaders. Everyone was different. The way in which leaders lead will always be unique.

To find out strengths that the reader has, the Gallup Organization has included a free code in the book to access the StrengthsFinder program. StrengthsFinder is an online assessment that readers take to see what their five top strengths are. Gallup determined through their research that each leader had different strengths that fit into broader areas of strengths. The broader areas can fit into four domains:

1. Executing
2. Influencing

3. Relationship Building
4. Strategic Thinking

Leaders in the **Executing** domain understand how to get things done. People who fall under this category are entirely focused on completing the task in front of them. Some characteristics of people under this domain are: achievers, responsible, and focused.

Those who fall under the **Influencing** leadership type are motivated to take charge of their team. They aren't afraid of confrontation and will use their confidence to project authority and influence others. Influencers can lead more on the gentle side, guiding followers towards the goal, or they can lead in a more assertive, military general type way. This leader is fantastic at speaking to a broader audience. Commander, communicator, confident, and competitive can be words to describe an influencer.

Relationship Building is the next leadership domain. This leader will bring harmony and positivity to a team. Without a relationship builder, the team is comprised of individuals who won't work as a team. The relationship builder is the glue that brings the team together. They see how each member of the team can thrive. Characteristics to describe a relationship builder are: empathetic, includer, harmonizer, etc.

Finally, the last domain is **Strategic Thinking**. Those who fall under this style can plan for the future. They can absorb information and think about the possible outcomes and steer the team in a positive direction. People with this style can see numerous opportunities for the team. Themes that can fall under this domain include: analytical, futuristic, strategic, indeation, etc.

Not every one of an individual's strengths will fall under one domain of leadership. Leaders are unique with many strengths across different domains. The StrengthsFinder tool focuses on what themes are found in the individual and how to play up those strengths. Gallup recommends that there should be a mix of different leadership styles in the workplace. Each style needs each other to thrive. For example, if you had a team full of relationship builders, no work would actually get done, they would just all talk to each other. Having a mix of styles is vital to the workplace.

The last section of the book talked about how you should use your strengths as a leader to meet the needs of your followers. Gallup found that there were four basic needs of followers:

1. Trust - Do your followers trust what you say?
2. Compassion - Do you care about the well-being of your followers? People follow leaders who are invested in them as people rather than just employees.
3. Stability - Do your followers know what to expect from you? Leaders who are transparent build security and support among followers.
4. Hope - Do your followers feel optimistic and inspired going into the future?

Introduction

So what exactly is SBL method and why is it important? As discussed above, this management approach has derived from a belief that people have much more potential for growth building on their strengths rather than focusing on their weaknesses. To define a strength means to exhibit a near perfect ability when completing a task in a consistent manner. This management style, when exercised properly, does not ignore weaknesses, but focuses on building individual talents and strengths of the team members. The three main pillars of SBL are: 1) Effective leaders invest in their followers strengths, 2) Effective leaders built well-rounded teams out of followers who are

not, and 3) Effective leaders understand the needs of followers. Building up your employees relying on those three principles will allow companies to have stronger, more confident teams, who naturally foster creativity in the workplace in both unionized and non-unionized environments.

Advantages of SBL to leaders and teams

The advantages of SBL are numerous and available to both leaders and team members. One such advantage is improving the contribution and engagement of team members. Team members have strengths too and it pays to acknowledge those strengths. Gallup conducted a study on team member's strengths and found that leaders who were more capable of making use of team member's strength had a higher capacity to engage members of their team than those who didn't (Strengthscape, 2019). A leader that focuses on team member's strength is also likely to improve their contribution to the work at hand. Leaders that offer encouragement when the team needs it, improve the likelihood of achieving success. The book *Strengths-Based Leadership* identifies relationship building as a strength that a leader should possess, thus the best leader for improving engagement should have the quality of relationship-building to ensure the team is united (Rath & Conchie, 2008). SBL also leads to the creation of stronger teams through selective hiring.

SBL helps leaders hire the right people. A leader that understands his strength also understands that people have different strengths. As such, SBL enables leaders to look for a diverse strengths base and not simply for people with the leader's strength (Strengthscape, 2019). Effective hiring is important because then it results in a stronger team. Rath points out that having a team made up only of relationship-building experts means that more talk than work would be performed. On the other hand, having a team with an executor, influencer, relationship builder and strategic

thinker, as Rath points out, is more likely to succeed and achieve their goals. Leaders and team members also stand to benefit from improved creativity.

SBL encourages creativity. When every member of the team is allowed to utilize their unique strengths, creativity is likely to go up unlike when they are forced to be other people (Strengthscape, 2019). SBL acknowledges the fact that different individuals have unique leadership qualities thus allows them to be creative in work allocation. One team member will know what the other member is best at and therefore find creative ways to assign work based on individual strength (Mindtools, n.d.). SBL encourages delegation, which leads to team power.

SBL helps leaders to delegate and increase the power of the team. Every leader is faced with numerous tasks each day and doing them all could result in burn out. SBL, however, is capable of bringing a leader to the realization that they can't do it all, thus helps them ask for assistance (Mindtools, n.d.). A leader that recognizes the strengths of team members is more likely to get them to open up and share freely. This opening up increases their confidence to share their ideas and in the process educate each other and increase their power (Mindtools, n.d.). A confident team is more likely to be satisfied with their jobs (Mindtools, n.d.) and therefore decreases quit rates and improves productivity. It is not only the team members that succeed but a leader also gets the chance to hone his/her leadership skills especially when they see how effective their leadership is (Mindtools, n.d.). SBL is not only limited to the corporate world as unions can utilize it too.

Risks associated with SBL and its weaknesses (for leaders and workers)

Despite many advantages of SBL mentioned above there are some weaknesses that are associated with utilizing SBL in the workplace. Firstly, encouraging people to only focus on their strengths can potentially limit the growth that may arise from someone working on developing their weaker sides. In some cases, it would be beneficial to push the team out of the comfort zone

in order for them to discover skills they haven't discovered before. The job may become too comfortable discouraging creativity and innovative thinking. By focusing just on individual strengths and talents may cause overlooking important knowledge or skill gaps (Mindtools, n.d.). Avoiding typecasting your team members will ensure that they do not become bored, frustrated or resentful towards the employees who are developing new areas of expertise.

Sometimes, strong team cohesion may lead to groupthink where some team members are afraid to go against “the majority”. That can extend into hiring talent with similar approaches and thinking rather than people who can bring in fresh ideas and outlook on things.

A big part of successfully utilizing SBL in the workplace is not only understanding individual strengths and talents of people but also being aware of their weaknesses to have a clear understanding of what is holding the team back and helping them develop their weaknesses into strengths to ensure teams’ success.

Strategies to implement SBL in organizations

While understanding one’s own strengths and talents as a leader is important, understanding the strengths of the individual members in a team is vital, because this will allow leaders to maximise the potential of team members which will allow for better overall team performance.

One of the ways in which organizations can implement a strengths-based approach would be to first implement this strategy at the executive level, and require members of each tier of management in the organization to participate. Implementing this approach from the top down has the benefit of allowing employees to see strengths-based leadership in action before being placed in a position where they are expected to work by depending solely on their own skills (Bacon,

2017). Rutigliano (2011) explains that recognition by executive leadership of the message that workforce strengths are vital to the success of the organization is a key proponent of endorsing this initiative. Promoting strengths must be important to the leaders of the organization for it to be important for the employees. In analysing this information, it can be viewed that when senior executives and top level managers understand that allowing employees to identify and explore their strengths in the workplace will allow them to be more innovative creative and motivated at work, the organization will benefit through better idea generation, execution and higher rates of productivity. This is in contrast to - for example - where management will take an autocratic approach to leadership which will limit the employee's authority to make decisions by themselves (Rutigliano, 2011).

Secondly, when organizations begin to implement Strengths Based Leadership, it may be a good idea to start small. For example, instead of implementing this approach in the entire organization, at one time, starting from one department or division would be a better approach. This will allow other employees and departments to see the benefits of implementing this strategy in their own departments based on the merits of visible results of the other such as greater productivity (Bacon, 2017). It can be stated that beginning with one department would allow the organization to identify how best to apply the strategies, and identify and handle any potential problems when they arise on a smaller scale, and adapt the practice based on the successful traits to the rest of the organization in turn.

A third way in which organizations can incorporate SBL practices would be to incorporate strengths conversations into performance management and performance reviews in the organizations. These conversations will enable managers to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of their teams and to be able to utilize this knowledge to lead their teams towards

better performance. This approach will also enable organizations to identify potential future leaders and to take measures to help them develop better into these roles (Gallup, No Date). It can also be identified that having these types of strengths conversations will also allow organizations to help their employees to discover their potential, by helping them to identify what drives them, and to learn about strengths they may not have identified in themselves (Freeburg, 2017)

Another approach companies can take would be to implement this approach into the hiring process or workplace onboarding program. As the popular human resources statement goes, attracting and retaining the best employees will have an enormous impact on the overall performance of a company. In the pursuit of becoming a strengths based organization, implementing this approach from even before the hiring process begins will allow companies to consider an applicants skills, talents, experiences, and knowledge, and to choose the best person for the job, while building diversity and inclusion in the company. Additionally, once the company has hired the most suitable candidate, having a new-employee integration procedure will allow new hires to become accustomed to the organization and helps to achieve peak productivity faster.

SBL in unions - how can unions benefit from this approach to leadership?

According to Ruth Mayhew, union leadership is basically divided into three roles: organizers, negotiators and shop stewards. The role of organizers is basically to meet with employees and convince them why they need to be in a union by spelling out the benefits the employees stand to gain (Mayhew, n.d.). An organizer's job description requires individuals with strong convincing power. Rath and Conchie would recommend the influencing leadership type to organizers. Influencers have the power to influence others to believe in a cause and are confident and good communicators (Rath & Conchie, 2008). According to Gallup, followers often possess traits such as trust, stability, and support (Rath & Conchie, 2008). An organizer in a union would

need to understand that their power lies in good communication skills in order to be transparent and improve the trust of employees so that they can join a union. An organizer would require the strength of confidence in order to generate hope in their followers, who are the employees they are trying to convince. SBL is effective for organizers in unions but also to another union leader known as the negotiator.

The role of negotiators is to negotiate with management for better employee benefits (Mayhew, n.d.). This job description would benefit from a relationship-building and executing strength-based leadership. A negotiator is the bridge between employees and management and should ensure that proper work relations are maintained at all times. Relationship builders are the glue that holds the entire team together (Rath & Conchie, 2008) and as such should be keen not to encourage a fall out between employees and management. Negotiators thrive by ensuring that management can be compassionate towards their employees who are their followers. Negotiators also need to be an executor by utilizing its strength to get things done. Rath and Conchie state that the characteristics of executors include responsibility and achieving. Negotiators should therefore always be focused on achieving a win-win situation for both management and employees (Mayhew, n.d.). SBL does a wonderful job in helping negotiators become relationship builders and executors and possesses benefits shop stewards as well.

A shop steward deals with employee grievances and presents the same to management (Mayhew, n.d.). Rath and Conchie would call this strength, relationship building because the stewards always strive for good relationships between management and employees. A good relationship, when attained, creates benefits to employees/ followers by improving their trust, tapping into their hope and showing them compassion. These benefits would mean that a union has succeeded in its role in helping management manage better and employees gain better working

conditions. The responsibilities of a union lie in their responsibility to both employees and management, which shows that unions could benefit by utilizing SBL to play their various roles and ensuring they are successful in all of them.

Communication Plan on how Creativity will be Fostered

Objective

The objective of this communication plan is to build on employee's strengths to foster creativity in the workplace. To do this, management strategy "Strengths Based Leadership" will be used in both unionized workplaces and non-unionized workplaces.

Goals

There are multiple goals for the objective. Each goal will revolve around employees taking the Strengths Finder Test, finding their strengths, and being able to build on those strengths in the workplace. Through building on employee strengths, creativity will follow.

Goal 1

The first goal is to have management disseminate the StrengthsFinder test to every one of their employees. To track which employees have completed the test, management will have an excel sheet which tracks which employees have completed the test. This will be done to get a complete picture of each employees' strengths according to the test.

Goal 2

The second goal is to for management to go over the results of the employees test with each employee. Again, to keep track, management will keep an action plan regarding each employee. That action plan will consist of their strengths as an employee, and how to tap into those

strengths as management. This will give a personalized one-to-one meeting towards management and employees to better know what will make them more satisfied.

Target

The target audience for this plan are employees and management.

Management will have to adapt to how they manage their employees. Each employee will end up with certain strengths after the test, and management will have to find ways in which to utilize those strengths on a daily basis.

Employees will have to take the test and have a discussion with their manager regarding their strengths. Employees will have the opportunity to explore their strengths more in-depth at work and use them more consistently.

Tools and Timeline

Management will have to provide each employee with the StrengthsFinder test, which is around \$30 for each employee.

The timeline for the rollout:

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9
Employees take the Test									
Management Reviews Test Results									

Management Discusses Strengths with Each Employee									
Implementation									
Evaluation of Management Style									

The rollout would take place over the course of nine weeks so that will give enough time for employees and management alike to adjust to the new management style. This will also give time for employees to digest their strengths, and for management to think of ways to use each employees strengths more consistently.

Evaluation

Key Performance Indicators to Track Creativity

Studies have shown that 70% of the time, employee engagement in companies is low, most often as a result of management failing to create workplace environments where employees feel challenged, engaged and enthusiastic to work in. failing to engage employees results in poor performance that is detrimental to the long-term health of the organization.

Studies carried out by Gallup, shows that strengths based leadership and management practices will lead to employees being happier and more productive based on the notion that they are better at certain things compared to others. A study carried out by Gallup of 1.2 million employees provided the following information regarding key performance indicators that will help to track the success of an organization. It showed that 67% of employees agreed that they were more engaged in their work when managers focused on the employee's strengths.

The Strengths Finder Test

One of the authors, Lucas Faustman, found that there was a free code inside the book to unlock the StrengthsFinder test online. Lucas decided to take the test and document how it works, and what employees can expect when taking the test.

Lucas went on the Strengths Finder website created by Gallup, and went to the redeem code area of the website. The website then made me create a free account. I can sign in wherever I want and see my results.

Then Lucas was delivered to the test. Below is what Lucas saw before taking the test which went over the test as a whole. The explanation was well written, and Lucas didn't have issues understanding what was asked of him. The twenty second time limit for each question was clever because it made the respondents have to answer with their gut instead of overthinking each question.

0%
START FINISH

CliftonStrengths Assessment

Welcome to the CliftonStrengths assessment.

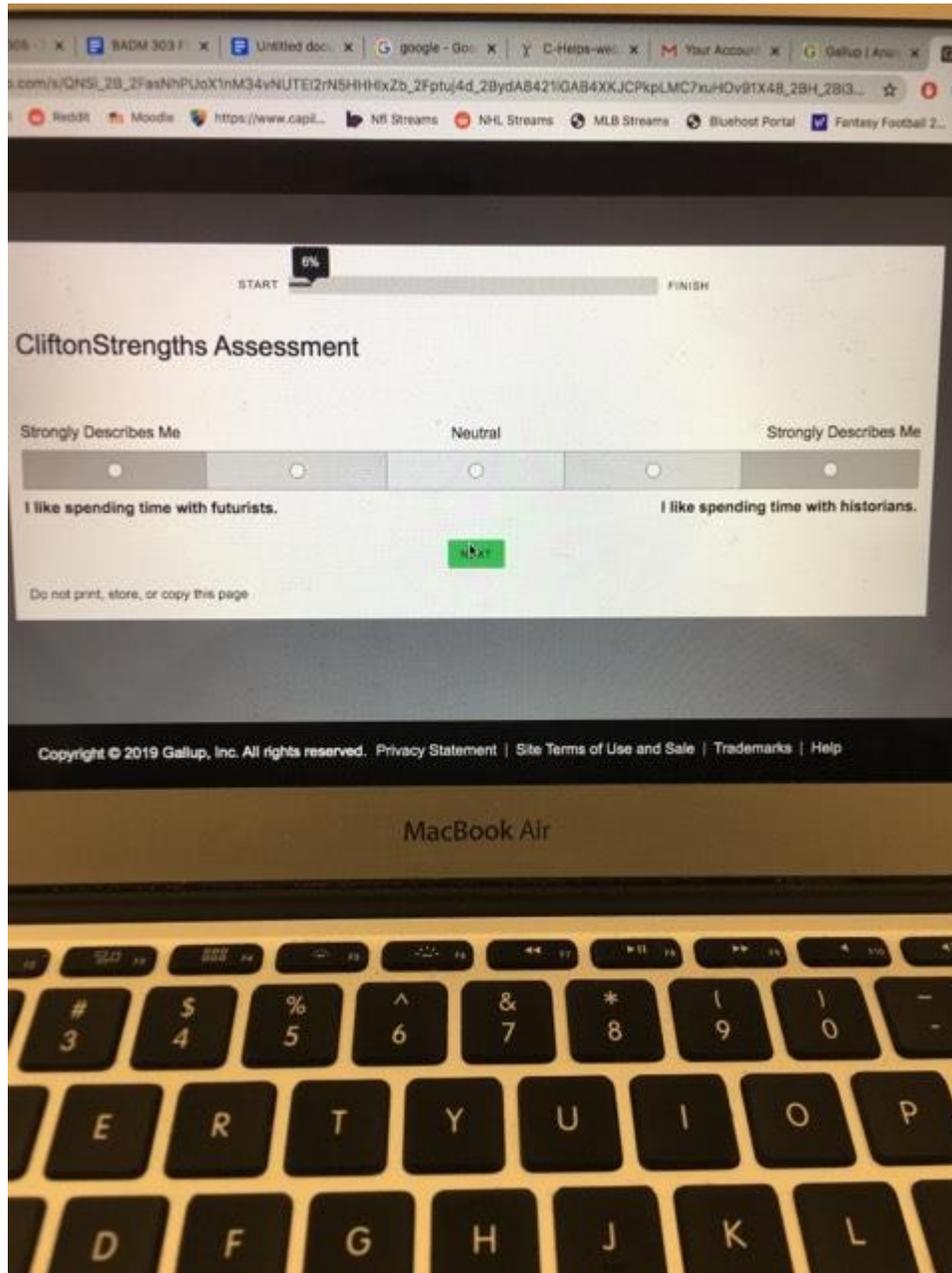
Once you click "Next," you will be directed through a series of demographic questions. These questions are completely confidential and will be used for research purposes only.

After the demographic questions, your CliftonStrengths assessment will begin. You will first see an instruction page. Read that page carefully. There are 177 paired descriptors. Select which descriptor fits you best as well as the extent to which it does so. You will have 20 seconds to respond to each pair.

The average completion time of this assessment is 35 minutes.

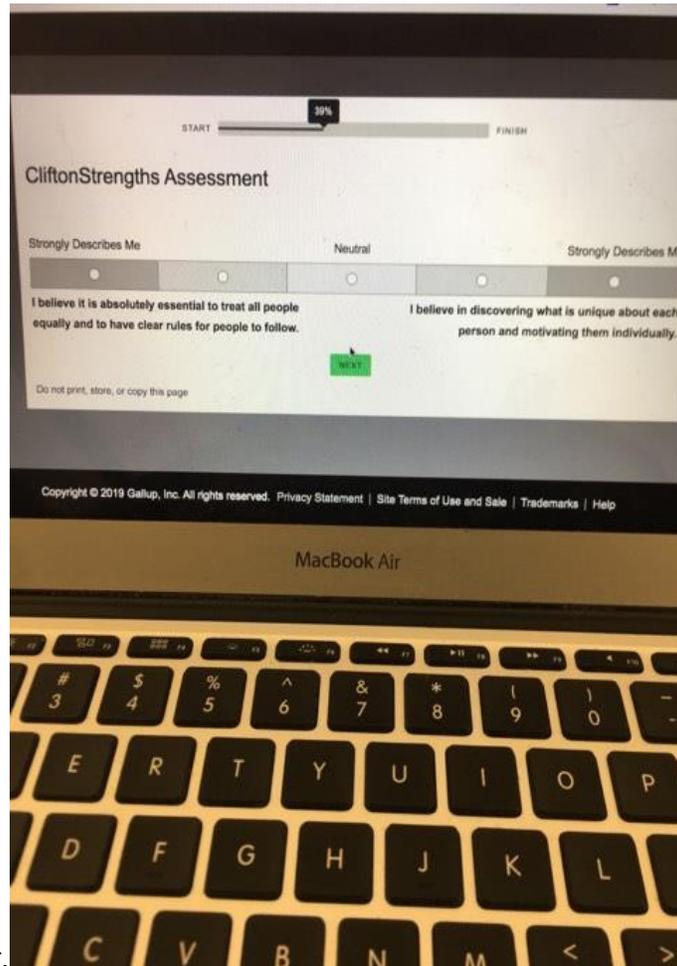
BACK [NEXT](#)

Lucas went on to the test. The picture below is a picture of what each question on the test looked

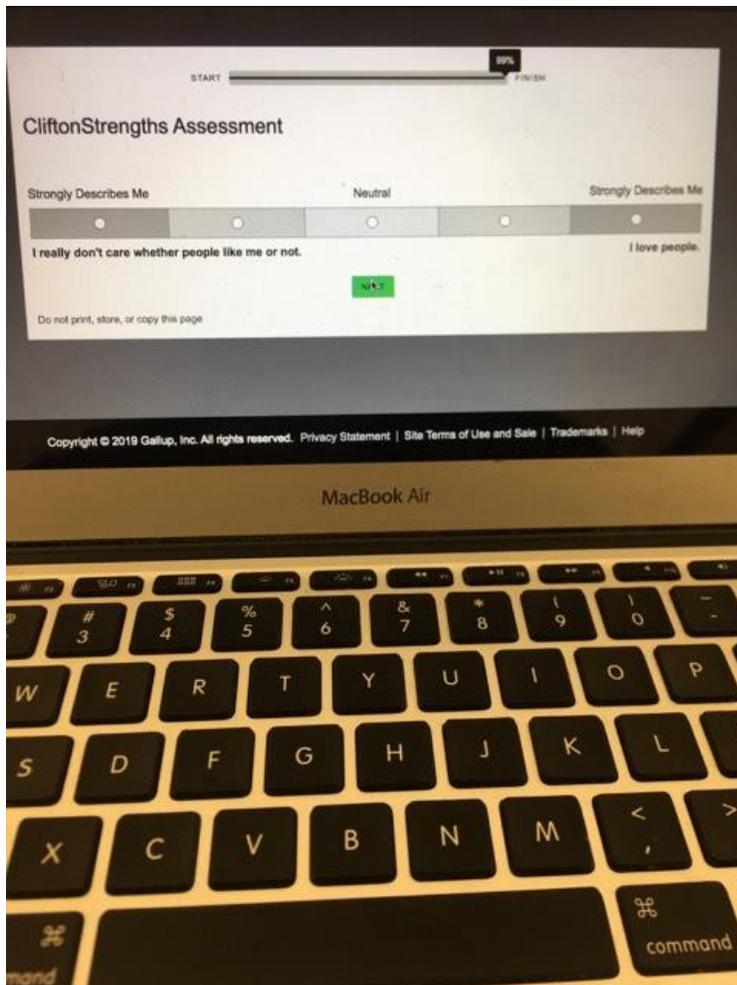


like.

Not every question was black and white. Some questions were difficult to answer as both answers could somewhat describe me. Below are two more examples of questions asked in the survey that

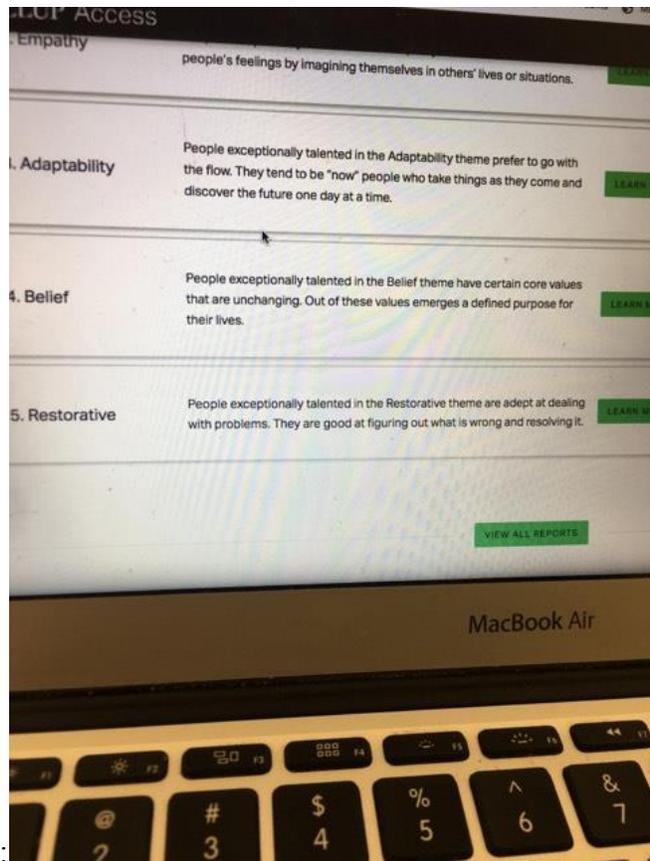


Lucas thought was difficult to answer.



The survey took Lucas around twenty minutes to complete, however, the average time for completion according to Gallup is around thirty-five minutes.

After the survey was completed, Lucas was taken to another page that showed his results. The top five strengths were shown, along with what management style each trait falls under.



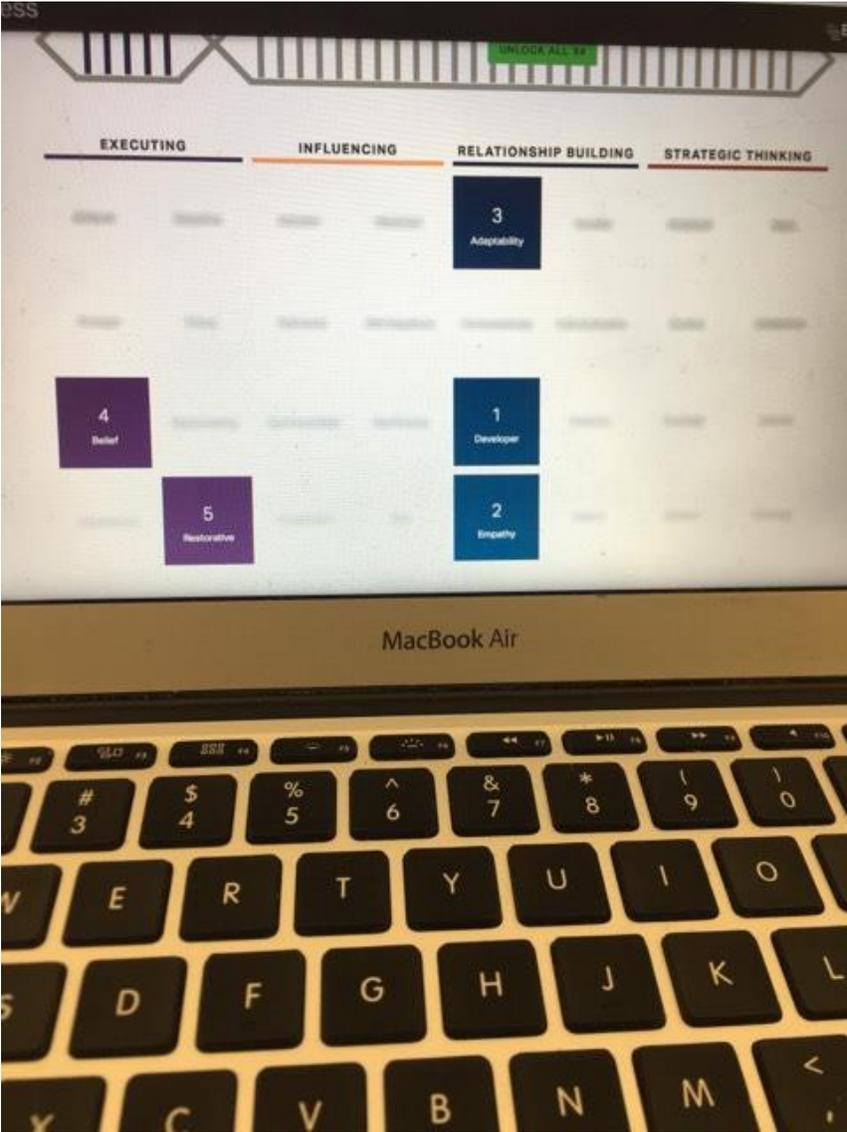
Lucas's results looked like this:

Lucas Faustman

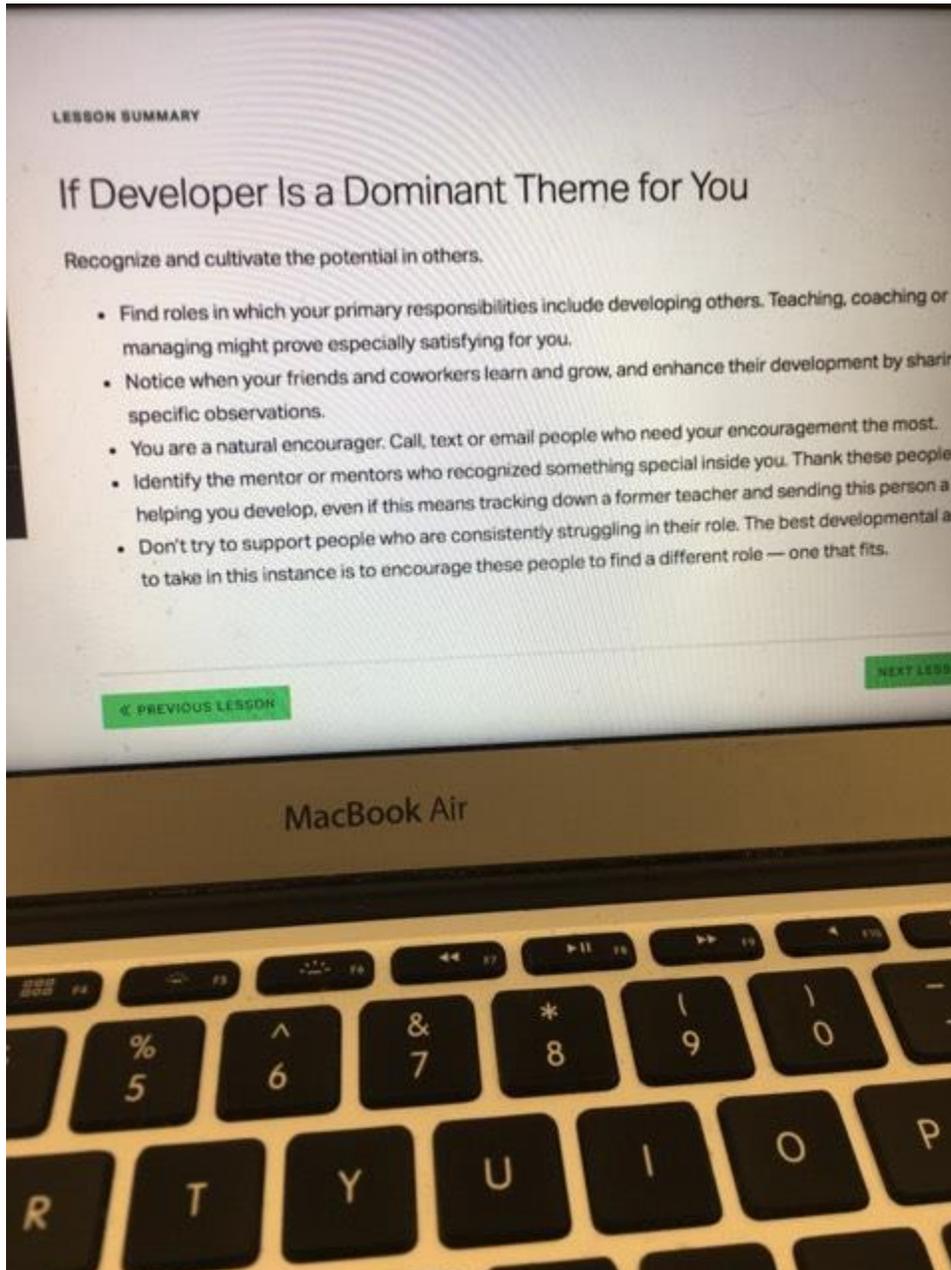
Developer | Empathy | Adaptability | Belief | Restorative

- 1. Developer** People exceptionally talented in the Developer theme recognize and cultivate the potential in others. They spot the signs of each small improvement and derive satisfaction from evidence of progress.
- 2. Empathy** People exceptionally talented in the Empathy theme can sense other people's feelings by imagining themselves in others' lives or situations.
- 3. Adaptability** People exceptionally 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.

Then, lower down the page, the strengths were divided in the appropriate style.



Lucas then clicked on each trait and he was brought to another page that looked like this:



Each trait was further discussed into more detail. There is useful information describing the trait and strategies on how to play into the strength. For example, Lucas' dominant theme was a developer, which falls into the relationship-building style. The trait above describes that Lucas should have teaching, coaching or managing responsibilities. This is very useful information to have as management. Through the test, management can better assign responsibility to help employees use their strengths more consistently.

Conclusion

References

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