

The Strengths Wheel

After a client is aware of his strengths and the way they are manifested in his or her life, the next step is to explore ways to optimise strength use. In order to optimise strength use, it is important to become aware of the potential for growth in a given context. For some strengths, there may be sufficient room and opportunities for using them more frequently and/or more intensely. For other strengths, certain limitations may prevent the strengths from being used more. The present exercise can be a valuable tool for gaining access to this information.

Author

The current exercise was developed by Matt Driver (<http://mattdriverconsulting.com>). The current tool was included in this tool-kit with permission of the author.

Goal

The goal of this exercise is to create a graphical representation of the possibility for existing strengths to be used more or less. The advantage of using this approach is that a client can immediately see what strengths are used too little, or too much. In addition, this exercise offers a nice starting point for creating future plans to increase or optimise strengths use.

Advice

Clients' indications of the extent to which they currently use a strength and the room they believe that exists for using the strength more is subjective. For clients, it is nice to receive a copy of this exercise. For instance, they can use it to discuss and explore possibilities with other people that may be involved in the context at hand (e.g. their employer).

Suggested Reading

Driver, M. (2011). *Coaching Positively – Lessons for coaches from Positive Psychology*. Maidenhead: Open University Press /McGraw Hill

Tool Description

Instruction

After identifying the strengths of your client, it can be helpful to investigate if there is room to use those strengths more often. The Strengths Circle on Page 8 can be used to make a graphical representation of the extent to which strengths are used (current use) and the room that exists to use the strengths more (scope). The centre of the circle represents a score of '0' and the outer rim a score of '10'. Ask the client to place two marks in each segment of the circle indicating (1) to what extent they currently use that strength in the chosen context (e.g. work); and (2) how much scope there is for using that strength more in that context. Next, draw lines connecting the two marks to create a triangle. The bigger the gap between the current use and the scope, the bigger the triangle should be and the more potential there is for using that strength more.

Example

On page 7, you will find an example of a completed graph. In this graph, it becomes immediately obvious that the chosen context (work) is far from ideal for expressing and building the strengths of social intelligence and leadership. This is indicated by the small arrows close to the core of the circle. These arrows indicate that the current strength is not used much and that there is not much potential for growth. Often, when this pattern applies to three or more strengths, it is very likely that the current context of the client is far from ideal. These patterns are often visible for clients who don't like their jobs. It can be both an eye-opening and confronting experience for clients to plot their strengths in this way.

What is more visible in the graph, is that gratitude and love of learning represent areas for growth. Both areas are used to a certain extent, but there is ample room for using them more, as indicated by the bigger grey triangles.

Finally, in this graph, there is one arrow that points in the opposite direction. It is possible that some strengths are overused in a given context. In the case of this client, it seems that he may use humour too much in the workplace. Although humour has been associated with many benefits (such as more active coping styles (Lazarus, 1966; Janis, 1958) and optimism (Carver et al., 1993)), when overplayed it can become a weakness. Note that this applies to all strengths; every strength that is used too much, or used in the wrong context loses its adaptive value. As indicated by the grey arrow that points towards the core of the circle, it appears that humour is used a lot by the client, but the scope is not that big. In this case, it is important to manage this strength, by using it appropriately according to the situation and context.

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Evaluation

As noted before, this exercise provides a nice starting point for creating a plan to optimise strength use. Here are some questions that you can ask your client when the graph is completed:

- ✓ What do you notice when you take a look at the graph?
- ✓ Overall, how would you consider your strengths to be useful in this context?
- ✓ Which strengths could be used more?
- ✓ Which strengths leave little or no room for expansion?
- ✓ What could you do to start using your strengths more in this context?

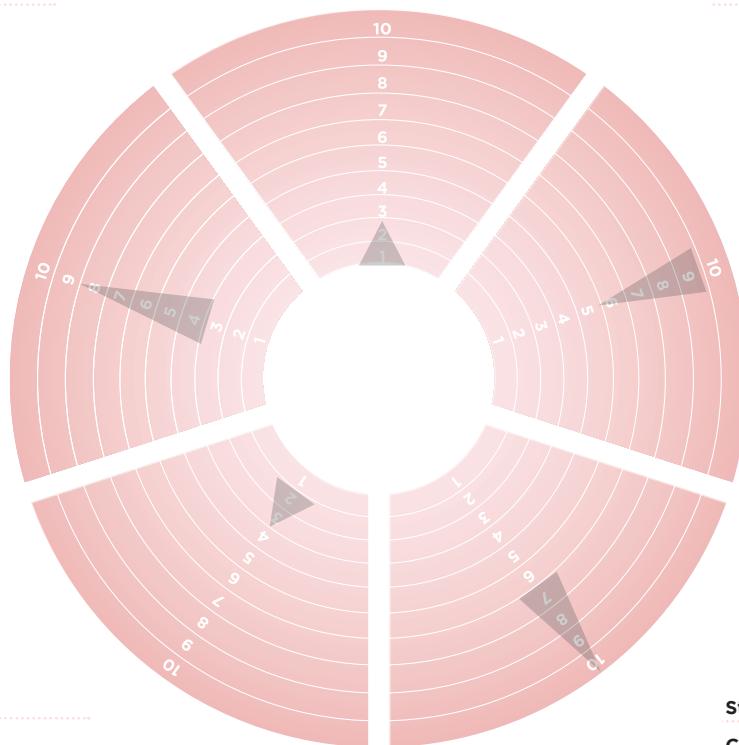
Context: Work

Strength: Gratitude
Current Use: 3
Scope: 8

Strength: Social Intelligence
Current Use: 1
Scope: 2

Strength: Humour
Current Use: 9
Scope: 5

Strength: Leadership
Current Use: 2
Scope: 3



Strength: Love of Learning
Current Use: 7
Scope: 10

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Context:

Strength:

Current Use:

Scope:

Strength:

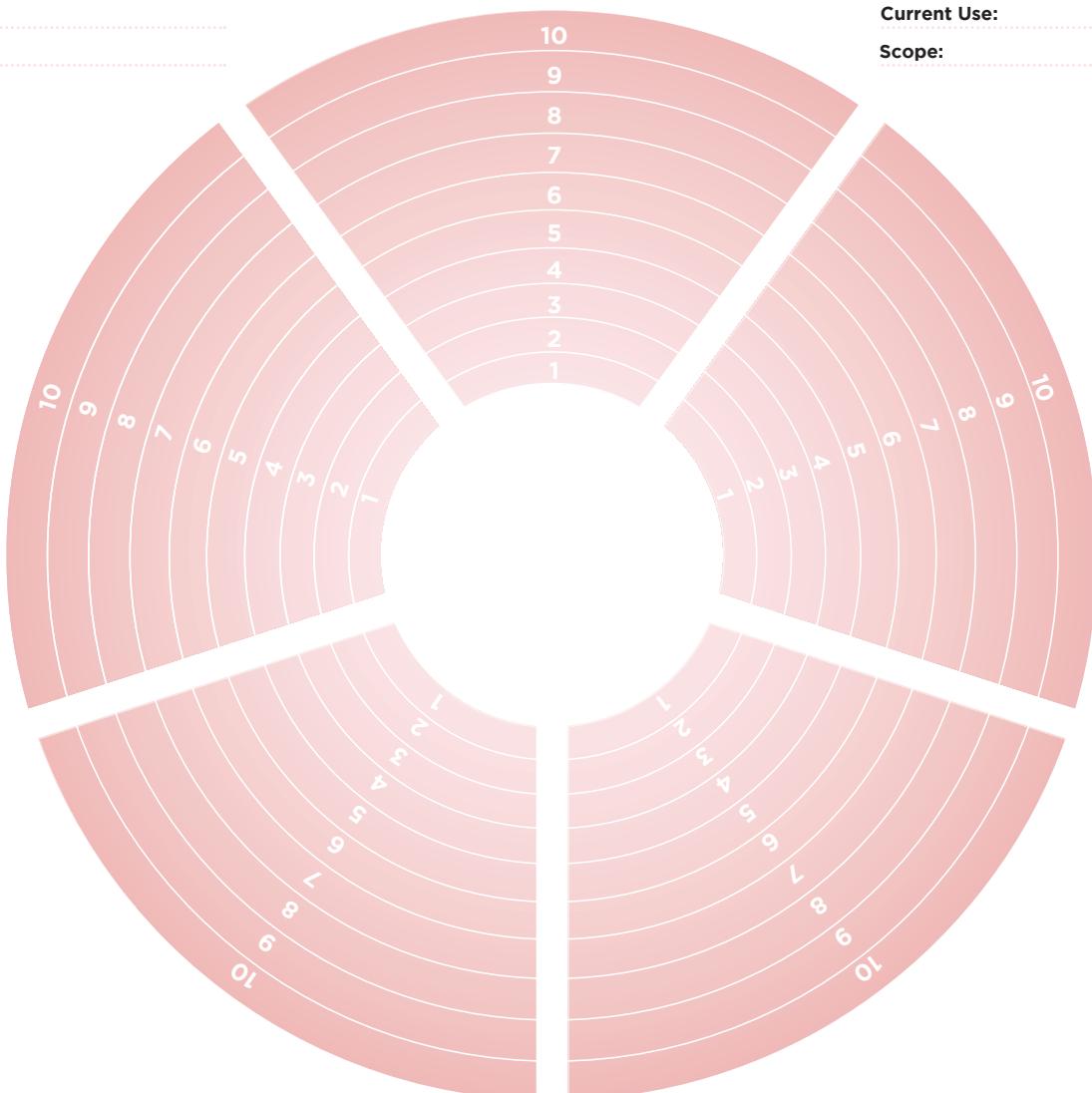
Current Use:

Scope:

Strength:

Current Use:

Scope:



Strength:

Current Use:

Scope:

Strength:

Current Use:

Scope: