Strengths Coaching: A potential–guided approach to coaching psychology

P. Alex Linley & Susan Harrington

As unlikely as it might seem, strengths have been a much neglected topic in psychology until relatively recently. In this article, we provide an historical context for the study of psychological strengths before going on to consider three approaches to understanding strengths. We locate a psychological understanding of strengths in the context of an assumption about human nature that is characterised by a constructive developmental tendency within people, showing how this assumption is consistent with theory and research about psychological strengths, and how it is consistent with the theoretical approach of coaching psychology. We then begin to examine what strengths coaching might look like in practice, together with considering some caveats and future research directions for the strengths coaching approach.
Keywords: strengths, fundamental assumptions, positive psychology.

'…*one cannot build on weakness. To achieve results, one has to use all the available strengths… These strengths are the true opportunities*' (Drucker, 1967, p.60).

WRITTEN ALMOST 40 YEARS AGO, management guru Peter Drucker's words might now seem to have an almost prophetic quality. Yet it is equally difficult to believe that – at least as far as strengths are concerned – so relatively little has been achieved in the intervening four decades. Why could this be? One answer is that with regard to psychological research at least, strengths were largely defined out of the personality lexicon (Cawley, Martin & Johnson, 2000). A second answer is that there is an undeniable 'negativity bias' (Rozin & Royzman, 2001), because the prevailing view is – and much evidence attests – that 'bad is stronger than good' (Baumeister *et al.*, 2001). That is to say – in contrast to Drucker – many people believe that weakness will always undo strength. This leads to a third answer, that the cultural ethos is that strengths take care of themselves, but weaknesses result in risk and associated costs for organisations. On this basis, the argument follows, weaknesses need to be managed or they will undo our good work elsewhere. As we are so often told: 'Work on overcoming your weaknesses more than maximising your strengths' (Smart, 1999, p.138). But does all this really hold true?

In this article, we will argue that strengths have been neglected for too long in both research and practice, yet the modern zeitgeist of coaching psychology and positive psychology suggests they are due for a revival. We will begin by defining strengths, and examining the small amount of work that has been dedicated to understanding strengths to date at a broad conceptual level. We will then examine the implications of this knowledge of strengths for coaching psychology, showing why we believe that strengths represent an inner capacity that can be facilitated and harnessed through the coaching relationship. We then explore the implications of this approach for practice, and provide some early suggestions as to the approach and practice of strengths coaching, while also addressing some of the criticisms that might be levelled against a strengths-based approach to coaching psychology.

What is 'Strength'?

A traditional approach to strengths might have used the arm dynamometer as its assessment metric. The arm dynamometer was a device for assessing the physical strength in

the arm of candidates for steelwork (Arnold *et al.*, 1982), and is a tongue-in-cheek means of highlighting that in this article we are not concerned with *physical* strengths, but rather with *psychological* strengths.

The history of the *psychology* of strengths is relatively short. In large part this is because strengths might be considered under the rubric of personality, and when Allport (1937) proffered his seminal definition of personality, he explicitly defined out 'character' as being in the realm of ethics and philosophy: 'Character is personality evaluated, and personality is character devaluated. Since character is an unnecessary concept for psychology, the term will not appear again in this volume…' (Allport, 1937, p.52). This exclusion of character from definitions of personality was decisive (Nicholson, 1998), and had the effect of excluding a psychology of strengths from the personality lexicon because 'strengths' were considered value-laden – and hence part of *character*, which was of concern to ethicists and philosophers, rather than psychologists (Cawley *et al.*, 2000).

However, Allport notwithstanding, the concept of strengths did appear within the business literature, first with Peter Drucker (1967), as above, and subsequently through the vision of Donald O. Clifton of The Gallup Organization (e.g. Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Clifton & Anderson, 2002; Clifton & Nelson, 1992). The advent of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) promoted the need for a larger conceptual understanding of strengths, and led to the development of the VIA Classification of Strengths. This is a framework of 24 character strengths, organised loosely under six virtues. The 24 strengths are believed to be universal (rank order correlations across 42 different countries produced a mean Spearman's rho=0.75; Seligman, 2005). They were identified through extensive literature searches in psychology, psychiatry, philosophy, and youth development; reviewing historical lists of strengths and virtues from moral studies and religious works; brain-storming with senior figures in the field; and discussions with numerous conference participants (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Of course, this is not to say that strengths were entirely excluded from the map of psychological research, for indeed strengths research had continued for years (McCullough & Snyder, 2000). However, the fundamental distinction is that strengths are now being understood as pieces of a much larger, integrated picture of positive human functioning, rather than as isolated constructs (e.g. optimism, creativity, gratitude) being researched as individual fragments of psychological knowledge. That is to say, we are now moving towards understanding a more holistic psychology of strengths that locates strengths within our assumptions about human nature and our broader knowledge of human functioning, thus painting a much fuller picture of positive psychological health.

Defining strength

This renewed interest in the concept of 'strength' prompts us to consider exactly what a 'strength' is. Clifton used the term *talent* to refer to 'a naturally recurring pattern of thought, feeling, or behaviour that can be productively applied' (Clifton & Anderson, 2002, p.6), while *strength* referred to 'the ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performance in a given activity' (Clifton & Anderson, 2002, p.8). Understood in this way, strengths are produced through the refinement of talents with knowledge and skill (Clifton & Anderson, 2002), and the only value-label applied to a strength is that it 'can be productively applied.'

In contrast, Peterson and Seligman (2004) adopt a more explicit virtue ethics approach in their definition of strengths as 'the psychological ingredients – processes or mechanisms – that define the virtues. Said another way, they are distinguishable routes to displaying one or another of the virtues' (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p.13). As such, to be included as a strength within the

Peterson and Seligman (2004) classification, a construct must facilitate the display of virtue, which in turn is considered to lead to a 'good life.' This definition of strength is imbued with a moral valence that goes beyond the positive valence that is typically associated with 'strength.'

Building on both of these definitions, and recognising that – in our view at least – strengths need not always be morally imbued, but should be defined in a way that specifies both the process and the outcome of using a strength, in an earlier article (Linley & Harrington, 2006, p.88), we defined a strength as 'a natural capacity for behaving, thinking, or feeling in a way that allows optimal functioning and performance in the pursuit of valued outcomes.' This definition effectively broadens the potential remit of strengths much wider, and opens the door to the consideration of capacities that may be tremendously productive, yet which do not carry an inherent moral value. This is arguably a more pragmatic definition, capturing the phenomena likely of interest in real world applications, such as coaching psychology, and as such is the definition we shall use throughout this article when we talk about 'strengths.'

A theory of strengths
How we think about strengths is inevitably shaped by how we think about human nature, and how we answer the question of what it means to be human. Within psychology – and especially therapeutic psychology, the legacy of Freud has been the 'ghost in the machine' that haunts much, if not everything, of what we do (Hubble & Miller, 2004). The unwritten view is that human beings cannot be trusted, and as such should be controlled and directed. However, just as positive psychology more generally has challenged us to reconsider our fundamental assumptions (Linley & Joseph, 2004), so has strengths psychology specifically raised this issue: 'To break out of this weakness spiral and to launch the strengths revolution in your own organisation, you must

change your assumptions about people' (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001, p.8).

Buckingham and Clifton (2001) go on to argue that the two most prevalent assumptions about people are: (a) that each person can learn to be competent in almost anything; and (b) that each person's greatest room for achievement is in their area of greatest weakness. Stated like this, coaching psychologists might disagree, and argue that much of what they do is already focused on working with people's strengths rather than fixing their weaknesses. If this is the case for you, we applaud you and your work, and offer the language, concepts and theory of strengths psychology as a foundation on which you can build and expand your strengths-based practice further.

However, when working as a coach in organisations, it is also often found that there are multiple and conflicting agendas in organisations that do not always allow the coach to do as much as they might wish to play to the strengths of their coaching client. For example, consider these questions in the context of your coaching, while also thinking about the conflicts you may be facing between the agenda of the organisation and the agenda of the coaching client.

Do the organisations you work with employ you to 'round the edges' of your client, addressing the things that they aren't too good at and that might be perceived to be holding them back or costing the organisation in some way?

Or do the organisations you work with employ you to sharpen and hone their employee's strengths, building on the qualities that have already got them this far?

Do they employ you to plug the gaps in employee's skills and competencies, working with them in their 'areas for development' (read: weaknesses)?

And if you work with individuals outside of an organisational context, do the individuals you work with typically retain you to 'fix their problems' or 'harness their strengths'?

Very often, with an organisational contract – and even with a coaching contract

with an individual – the implicit specification may be to fix weakness, because weakness is believed to result in risk and cost. Yet the agenda of the coaching client might often be more concerned about how they can play to their strengths. This is a difficult contractual dynamic, and one that might place the coach in a situation where their own aspiration is to help the client to play to their strengths, but the organisational agenda (of the ultimately paying client) is one of weakness mitigation, risk reduction, and damage limitation – which, so the organisational mindset goes, are all best achieved by dealing with weakness rather than playing to strength.

An answer as to the efficacy of dealing with weakness is often found with the benefit of organisational experience, where the most crushing question is usually this: What are the issues that come up each year at an employee's annual review – the same issues that were supposed to have been addressed last year (or the year before, or the year before that)? Many people recognise this as the developmental treadmill, running ever faster but going nowhere, because, as we quoted Peter Drucker (1967, p.60) at the beginning of this article, 'one cannot build on weakness.'

As coaching psychologists, however, we need more than the rhetoric of business books to convince us that our assumptions might need to be challenged. As such, we go on to present a theory of strengths that draws from the assumptions about human nature shared by Karen Horney and Carl Rogers, that there is an innate developmental tendency within each of us to actualise our potentialities, to become what we are capable of becoming – in strengths psychology parlance, to play to one's strengths. We will first outline the key assumptions of this approach to human nature, and then demonstrate how this approach accounts for both existing theories – and data – about the psychology of strengths.

In essence, both Karen Horney and Carl Rogers (among many others, including Aristotle and Carl Jung; see Joseph & Linley,

2004) argued that inherent within people are socially constructive forces that guide people towards realising their potentialities. When people's tendency toward self-realisation is allowed expression, Horney argued: '…we become free to grow ourselves, we also free ourselves to love and to feel concern for other people…the ideal is the liberation and cultivation of the forces which lead to self-realisation' (Horney, 1951, pp.15–16). Rogers also believed that human beings are organismically motivated toward developing to their full potential, and are striving to become all that they can be, a directional force of becoming that he referred to as the actualising tendency: 'This is the inherent tendency of the organism to develop all its capacities in ways which serve to maintain or enhance the organism' (Rogers, 1959, p.196). Rogers was conceptualising the actualising tendency as the basic drive toward the development of our capacities: 'It is the urge which is evident in all organic and human life – to expand, extend, to become autonomous, develop, mature – the tendency to express and activate all the capacities of the organism, to the extent that such activation enhances the organism or the self' (Rogers, 1961, p.35).

The central theme that runs throughout these fundamental assumptions about human nature is that human beings have a natural tendency to want to develop their capacities, to exploit their natural potential, to become all that they can be. Of course, it is only too evident that this does not always happen, since this directional force can be thwarted and distorted through external influences that disengage us from ourselves. Organisationally, employees are continually encouraged to focus on and address their weaknesses, a message that is often reinforced via HR processes such as performance appraisal and pay/reward schemes. In general, individuals are not encouraged to develop and capitalise on their strengths and what they do best.

As a result, people may often find it very difficult to actually know what their strengths

are (Hill, 2001). This being so, it is arguably a large part of coaching and coaching psychology to strive to re-engage the individual with their natural self, to help them to identify, value and celebrate their inner capacities and strengths, to help them understand why sometimes they feel 'in their element' at work, and at other times they feel tired, disengaged and de-motivated. Adopting a strengths approach allows people to engage with themselves in what they do best, and to begin to discover the power within them that coaching so often sets out to release.

It is notable that this is a central theme throughout many of the leading books in the field. For example, Whitmore (2002, p.8) describes coaching as 'unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.' Gallwey (2002, p.177) describes the Inner Game approach to coaching as 'the art of creating an environment, through conversation and a way of being, that facilitates the process by which a person can move toward desired goals in a fulfilling manner.' More importantly, perhaps, Gallwey (2002, p.215) goes on to describe the most important lesson of the Inner Game: *'It all begins with desire'* (original italics). Desire is the force that motivates us to achieve, yet where does desire come from? This is where Horney and Rogers would argue that the tendency toward self-realisation, or actualising tendency, is felt: in desire, as the force that drives us on, as a natural, self-generating ambition.

How do these assumptions about human nature – and the assumptions about people that have informed some of the most influential coaching models – sit with what we know about strengths? The short answer is 'very well.' First, consider how Clifton and Anderson (2002, p.6) present talents, which they believe to be the underpinning foundation of strengths: 'A talent is a naturally recurring pattern of thought, feeling, or behaviour that can be productively applied. A great number of talents naturally exist

within you…They are among the most real and most authentic parts of your personhood…There is a direct connection between your talents and your achievements. Your talents empower you. They make it possible for you to move to higher levels of excellence and to fulfil your potential.' From this basis, 'strengths are produced when talents are refined with *knowledge* and *skill*' (original italics; Clifton & Anderson, 2002, p.8).

Second, consider how Peterson and Seligman (2004) describe possible criteria for a signature strength. They suggest, among other things, that a signature strength conveys a sense of ownership and authenticity ('this is the real me'); a sense of yearning to act in accordance with the strength, and a feeling of inevitability in doing so; and that there is a powerful intrinsic motivation to use the strength (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p.18).

Third, the definition provided by Linley and Harrington (2006). A strength is 'a natural capacity for behaving, thinking, or feeling in a way that allows optimal functioning and performance in the pursuit of valued outcomes.'

In each case, there is a strong emphasis on the fact that strengths are natural, they come from within, and we are urged to use them, develop them, and play to them by an inner, energising desire. Further, that when we use our strengths, we feel good about ourselves, we are better able to achieve things, and we are working toward fulfilling our potential. Consider the definition of coaching psychology provided by (Palmer & Whybrow, 2005, p.7; adapted from Grant & Palmer, 2002) as being 'for enhancing well-being and performance in personal life and work domains underpinned by models of coaching grounded in established adult learning or psychological approaches', and it becomes clear that a strengths-based approach to coaching psychology offers significant added value.

Playing to our strengths enhances well-being because we are doing what we naturally do best (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2005),

and generating feelings of autonomy, competence, confidence, and self-esteem there from. Playing to our strengths enhances performance because we are going with our own flow, rather than struggling upriver against the currents of our natural capacities. And most fundamentally, a strengths-based approach is solidly grounded in established learning and psychological approaches that have a lineage back to Aristotle, through Carl Jung, Karen Horney, and Carl Rogers, to the modern coaching approaches of Whitmore and Gallwey, integrating finally with the definition of coaching psychology that now underpins the further development and direction of this new discipline. As we hope to have shown, a strengths-based approach to coaching psychology is one that is built on firm psychological principles which guide us in facilitating our clients to harness their own natural abilities in the fulfilment of their potential, resulting in significant benefit for individuals, family units, organisations and societies. In the next section, we will give some consideration as to what a strengths coaching approach might look like in practice.

Strengths coaching in practice

Is the concept of strengths coaching new? To psychology and coaching psychology it may be, but in athletics 'strength coaches' have long been employed to help athletes assess their strengths and build on them, and in social work, the strengths coaching perspective has a worthy tradition (Noble, Perkins & Fatout, 2000; Saleebey, 1992). In each case, the emphasis is upon a focus on human potential and positive client attributes as the foundation stones of any success. While it is recognised that the identification and understanding of problems and obstacles can be important, this is counterbalanced with an equal, if not greater recognition that the identification of, and playing to, client strengths is the goal that should guide both assessment and intervention.

It remains an open question as to how one might best identify strengths, especially in light of the point above that many people find it difficult to recognise their own strengths (Hill, 2001). There is obviously a strong argument that if strengths are characterised by an intrinsic yearning to use them and a feeling of inevitability in doing so, and they are a natural part of us, that they will shine through under most circumstances. This view accords very closely with the non-directive approach of person-centred therapy, and is that adopted by our colleague Stephen Joseph (see Joseph & Linley, in press). Within this approach, the coach is a keen observer of the ebb and flow of the coaching conversation, being finely attuned to the subtle nuances of language and emotion that might indicate the presence of a strength. The coach might then choose to reflect these observations back to the client, working with them to identify and celebrate the strength, to raise the strength within their consciousness, and to explore, develop, refine and apply the strength.

However, this approach assumes that the coaching conversation would provide a suitably conducive environment for the natural display of strengths, and that the coach is then able to detect and identify these strengths. Our approach adopts what we believe to be a more pragmatic standpoint, that is, that the coaching conversation does not, of necessity, always allow this to happen – and for at least one very good reason. Some strengths are contextual, being dependent upon the context for their display, and if the coaching conversation – without being at fault – does not provide this context, the strength is unlikely to shine through (consider, for example, the difficulty in identifying the emotional flexibility of a call centre worker or the insight of a top salesperson through a coaching conversation). For these reasons, we subscribe to a more pragmatic assessment approach to strengths, believing that strengths assessments can provide the context for a depth and breadth of coaching conversations that would not otherwise be possible – but always, we are at pains to point out, being predi-

cated on the basis that this strengths assessment is being driven by the client's agenda, rather than the agenda of the coach.

If one were to adopt this pragmatic approach to strengths assessment, there are two explicit strengths measures, at present, that merit consideration. The Clifton StrengthsFinder (www.strengthsfinder.com) was developed by Donald O. Clifton and his colleagues at The Gallup Organization. Based on more than 30 years of research, it is predicated on Clifton's belief that 'to produce excellence, you must study excellence.' The StrengthsFinder assesses 34 themes of talent, primarily within applied occupational settings, and provides a feedback report that documents one's top five themes of talent, based on an ipsative scoring method that compares your response to each theme of talent with your response to each other theme of talent. The measure is atheoretical, with the 34 themes having been retained as those which were the most prevalent from a larger pool of several hundred themes that were identified through structured interviews with excellent performers across different occupations, countries, and cultures (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

The Values-in-Action (VIA) Strengths Questionnaire (www.viastrengths.org) was developed by Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman. It was one of the major early initiatives of the positive psychology movement, designed to provide a classification of strength and virtue just as the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* provides a classification of mental disorder and disease (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The VIA Questionnaire measures 24 signature strengths, which are loosely organised under six virtues (wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence). The feedback reports again provide the respondent with a brief description of their five signature strengths, based on an ipsative scoring approach. The VIA Questionnaire is broadly theoretically-based, having been developed on the basis of extensive

academic groundwork (as described above, see also Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Relative to existing personality assessment approaches, strengths assessments do arguably advance the agenda of personality assessment – but it is still very early days, and much work remains to be done. Of existing personality assessments, those which might be considered most closely allied with the strengths approach are the personality type indicators, such as the MBTI® and the Type Dynamics Indicator (TDI). The approach taken by type assessments of personality is very much one that can be used to identify the strengths of each personality type, but we would caution again that the universe of strengths is much broader than could be captured purely by an assessment of personality type.

Overall, though, the crux of the strengths perspective is that it changes the nature of the questions one asks as a coach from being diagnostic and problem-focused to potential-guided and solution-focused (Linley, Harrington & Hill, 2005). Consider the following examples of a strengths-based approach to the coaching conversation:

What are the things that you do best?
How do you know when you are at your best?
What are the key strengths and resources that you can draw upon to find a solution to this situation?
Tell me about a time when you were successful at doing this before….
Who do you know who has done this successfully? How did they do it?
What do you feel is the answer that is coming from inside you?

While, of course, the specific question is always shaped by the client and their context, we hope that the above examples will serve to provoke a re-evaluation of the traditional approach that one might take as a coaching psychologist, and facilitate the exploration of what a strengths-based approach might look like, how it works, and why it works. These are fundamentally important questions that we are only at the

beginning of trying to answer, and there is clearly a broad research and practice agenda in front of us as coaching psychology researchers and practitioners.

Some of the more important research questions may be: How do strengths contribute to the achievement of goals? What are the effects on well-being and performance of playing to one's strengths? What are the effects on stress and burnout of playing to people's strengths? Does playing to one's strengths influence people's motivation? How best can we, as coaching psychologists, identify and/or assess people's strengths? How best can we, as coaching psychologists, adopt a strengths coaching model within our practice? How does a strengths coaching approach compare in terms of effectiveness and efficacy with other coaching psychology models? And is there a downside to playing to one's strengths?

This last question provides a useful caveat. Some people might consider that we do not need any help to do what we're best at – that it should come naturally – but what we do need is help to overcome our weaknesses. For many, this is the prevailing cultural ethos laid down to managers and the mindset adopted by many employees, as shown with the quote from Brad Smart above. The underlying theme of this approach is that if we do not manage weakness, then it will undo the best efforts of any strength. However, here we must be careful to consider the nature of the weakness, and whether it is actually integral to successful performance. Often, when we take a second look, it would be possible to redefine roles and positions to accommodate weakness and play to strength, so the real issue may lie in the organisational culture and climate.

On the other hand, there may be situations where there is a very real level of minimum competence that it is necessary for one to possess. For example, if a manager unintentionally alienates his staff, emotional intelligence training might help (Salovey, Caruso & Mayer, 2004). While the training will never develop the manager into a paragon of emotional intelligence, it might well do enough to limit the damage that he or she would otherwise inflict. This having been achieved, he or she should then be free to focus on what they are best at and play to their strengths.

This is where coaching psychologists can provide a uniquely valuable input, since as an independent and objective sounding board for the client, removed from the agendas and preconceptions that might be found within the organisation, the coaching psychologist can deliver difficult feedback but within a supportive and facilitative environment. And when this feedback is delivered in a way that is potential-guided, being focused on future achievement on the basis of past success, building on the foundations of what the client does well and the successes that have propelled him or her this far, then the whole nature of the coaching conversation changes. From being defensive, closed, and insular, clients become engaged, open, and receptive. They leave the coaching session feeling celebrated, valued, and appreciated, with a re-engaged enthusiasm, energy, and motivation, being keen to get back to work, or life, and perform even better.

This should be the hallmark of good coaching psychology, we suggest, not least because again it is premised on sound psychological models. As Fredrickson's work on positive emotions has shown, the experience of positive emotions serves to broaden our thought-action repertoires (increasing creativity and stimulating mental flexibility), and build cognitive resources that act as buffers against subsequent negative events (Fredrickson, 1998; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Fredrickson *et al.*, 2003), as well as being integral to human flourishing (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). This being the case, it should arguably be the role of the coaching psychologist to facilitate the positive emotions of their clients, not least because positive emotional experience has been shown to predict performance success (Losada & Heaphy, 2004). We suggest that strengths coaching is an exemplary and

sustainable way of facilitating positive emotion in clients through harnessing their natural capacities, and allowing them to do more of what they do best, predicated as it is upon an understanding of the constructive developmental tendencies that we believe exist in all of us.

Conclusion

In this article we have introduced the field of strengths psychology, examining the small literature available to date and suggesting how a psychology of strengths can be understood within the context of a fundamental assumption about human nature that posits a constructive developmental tendency toward the fulfilment of one's capacities and the fulfilment of one's potentials. We have explored how adopting a strengths approach to coaching psychology leads to a shift in the perspective of the questions we might ask, changing them from being diagnostic and problem-focused to potential-guided and solution-focused. We have argued that a strengths coaching approach identifies and capitalises on people's natural capacities, helping them to understand where their capacities may be and building on the resources they already have, and leads to increased engagement, energy and motivation. In turn, these create greater experiences of positive emotion which research has shown engender increased creativity, mental flexibility, resilience, and enhanced performance. As such, we suggest that the strengths coaching approach is a model of coaching psychology, with a solid theoretical and empirical grounding, that harnesses the inner potential of people, thereby facilitating their optimal performance and well-being. It is yet another example of the powerful integration of coaching psychology and positive psychology.

Correspondence

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to either:
P. Alex Linley
School of Psychology,
Henry Wellcome Building,
University of Leicester,
Lancaster Road, Leicester, LE1 9HN, UK.
E-mail: PAL8@le.ac.uk
or
Susan Harrington
Potenthos Ltd.,
University of Warwick Science Park,
Barclays Venture Centre,
Sir William Lyons Road,
Coventry, CV4 7EZ, UK.
www.potenthos.com
E-mail: sueh@potenthos.com

References

Allport, G.W. (1937). *Personality: A psychological interpretation.* New York: Holt.

Arnold, J.D., Rauschenberger, J.M., Soubel, W.G. & Guion, R.M. (1982). Validation and utility of a strength test for selecting steelworkers. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 67,* 588–604.

Baumeister, R.F., Bratslavsky, E., Finkenauer, C. & Vohs, K.D. (2001). Bad is stronger than good. *Review of General Psychology, 5,* 323–370.

Buckingham, M. & Clifton, D.O. (2001). *Now, discover your strengths: How to develop your talents and those of the people you manage.* London: Simon & Schuster.

Cawley, M.J., Martin, J.E. & Johnson, J.A. (2000). A virtues approach to personality. *Personality and Individual Differences, 28,* 997–1013.

Clifton, D.O. & Anderson, E.C. (2002). *Strengths-Quest: Discover and develop your strengths in academics, career, and beyond.* Washington, DC: The Gallup Organization.

Clifton, D.O. & Nelson, P. (1992). *Soar with your strengths.* New York: Dell Publishing.

Drucker, P.F. (1967). *The effective executive.* London: Heinemann.

Fredrickson, B.L. (1998). What good are positive emotions? *Review of General Psychology, 2,* 300–319.

Fredrickson, B.L. & Branigan, C.A. (2005). Positive emotions broaden the scope of attention and thought-action repertoires. *Cognition and Emotion, 19,* 313–332.

Fredrickson, B.L. & Losada, M. (2005). Positive affect and the complex dynamics of human flourishing. *American Psychologist, 60,* 678–686.

Fredrickson, B.L., Tugade, M.M., Waugh, C.E. & Larkin, G. (2003). What good are positive emotions in crises? A prospective study of resilience and emotions following the terrorist attacks on the United States of September 11th, 2001. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84,* 365–376.

Gallwey, T. (2002). *The inner game of work: Overcoming mental obstacles for maximum performance.* New York: Texere.

Grant, A.M. & Palmer, S. (2002, May 18). *Coaching Psychology.* Meeting held at the Annual Conference of the Division of Counselling Psychology, British Psychological Society, Torquay, England.

Hill, J. (2001). *How well do we know our strengths?* Paper presented at the British Psychological Society Centenary Conference (April), Glasgow, Scotland.

Horney, K. (1951). *Neurosis and human growth: The struggle toward self-realisation.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

Hubble, M.A. & Miller, S.D. (2004). The client: Psychotherapy's missing link for promoting a positive psychology. In P.A. Linley & S. Joseph (Eds.), *Positive psychology in practice* (pp.335–353). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Joseph, S. & Linley, P.A. (in press). *Positive therapy.* London: Routledge.

Joseph, S. & Linley, P.A. (2004). Positive therapy: A positive psychological theory of therapeutic practice. In P.A. Linley & S. Joseph (Eds.), *Positive psychology in practice* (pp.354–368). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Linley, P.A. & Harrington, S. (2006). Playing to your strengths. *The Psychologist, 19,* 86–89.

Linley, P.A., Harrington, S. & Hill, J.R.W. (2005). Selection and development: A new perspective on some old problems. *Selection and Development Review, 21*(5), 3–6.

Linley, P.A. & Joseph, S. (2004). Toward a theoretical foundation for positive psychology in practice. In P.A. Linley & S. Joseph (Eds.), *Positive psychology in practice* (pp.713–731). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Losada, M. & Heaphy, E. (2004). The role of positivity and connectivity in the performance of business teams: A non-linear dynamics model. *American Behavioral Scientist, 47,* 740–765.

McCullough, M.E. & Snyder, C.R. (2000). Classical sources of human strength: Revisiting an old home and building a new one. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 19,* 1–10.

Nicholson, I.A.M. (1998). Gordon Allport, character, and the 'culture of personality': 1897–1937. *History of Psychology, 1,* 52–68.

Noble, D.N., Perkins, K. & Fatout, M. (2000). On being a strength coach: Child welfare and the strengths model. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 17,* 141–153.

Palmer, S. & Whybrow, A. (2005). The proposal to establish a Special Group in Coaching Psychology. *The Coaching Psychologist, 1,* 5–12.

Park, N., Peterson, C. & Seligman, M.E.P. (2004). Strengths of character and well-being. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 23,* 603–619.

Peterson, C. & Seligman, M.E.P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Rogers, C.R. (1959). A theory of therapy, personality and interpersonal relationships, as developed in the client-centered framework. In S. Koch (Ed.), *Psychology: A study of a science, Vol. 3: Formulations of the person and the social context* (pp.184-256). New York: McGraw Hill.

Rogers, C.R. (1961). *On becoming a person.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Rozin, P. & Royzman, E.B. (2001). Negativity bias, negativity dominance, and contagion. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 5,* 296–320.

Saleebey, D. (Ed.). (1992). *The strengths perspective in social work practice.* New York: Longman.

Salovey, P., Caruso, D. & Mayer, J.D. (2004). Emotional intelligence in practice. In P.A. Linley & S. Joseph (Eds.), *Positive psychology in practice* (pp.447–463). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Seligman, M.E.P. (2005). *Positive interventions (and other new stuff).* Paper presented at the Fourth International Positive Psychology Summit, October, Washington, DC.

Seligman, M.E.P. & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist, 55,* 5–14.

Smart, B. (1999). *Topgrading.* Paramus, NJ: Prentice Hall Press.

Whitmore, Sir J. (2002). *Coaching for performance* (3rd ed.). London: Nicholas Brealey.