

Strength-based Development Versus Weakness Improvement in Career Development

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WHAT IS STRENGTH-BASED DEVELOPMENT AND WEAKNESS IMPROVEMENT IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES?

Strength-based development focuses on identifying individual strengths and leveraging them to improve professional performance. In the context of career orientation, strength-based development identifies potential job opportunities that can maximize the utility of these individual strengths.

Conversely, weakness improvement aims to identify potential barriers in an individual's work and opportunities to overcome them. While strength-based development focuses on boosting individual strengths, weakness improvement focuses on transforming weaknesses into strengths.

The strength-based development approach leverages the positive attitudes and confidence levels of clients. It relies on the premise that everyone possesses unique strengths, and the key lies in recognizing and effectively utilizing these strengths. By focusing on tasks that align with innate strengths, individuals can achieve higher levels of productivity and efficiency.

Conversely, focusing solely on weaknesses can lead to negative self-perception. When an individual constantly dwells on their focus areas and questions why they struggle in these aspects instead of acknowledging alternative strengths, they undermine their self-confidence.

Another argument regarding strength-based development and weakness improvement is that "your weaknesses will never develop, while your strengths will develop infinitely." From this perspective, overcoming weaknesses may be time consuming, with little to no return on investments; hence, investing time and effort in enhancing strengths may be more beneficial.

WHAT IS MORE POPULAR?

In the context of organizations, it is generally assumed that employees feel more valued and take greater ownership of their actions when their performance discussions and feedback are based on strength-based development. Conversely, discussions centered on weaknesses may not always yield positive outcomes.

During the 2024 APCDA conference, I conducted a small poll among participants

regarding their preferred approach in career coaching. Remarkably, 10 out of 11 respondents selected strength-based development. This trend aligns with my own observations highlighting the increasing adoption of strength-based development in recent times. However, exact data or statistics on the use of each approach are currently lacking.

OBSERVATIONS OF THE TWO APPROACHES AND KEY CONSIDERATIONS

While I am interested in discussing the positive aspects of the strength-based development approach, I am equally eager to delve deeper into potential opportunities for the effective application of both approaches.

First, strengths and weaknesses must be evaluated within the context of specific roles. Not all strengths are universally applicable across all roles and situations. For instance, prudence, which is defined as “being careful about one’s choices; not taking undue risks; and not saying or doing things that might later be regretted,” is identified as a strength by the Values in Action survey. Such a strength would be valuable in low-risk-taking roles, such as accounting, administration, or risk management where cautious decision-making is critical. However, this strength could transform into a weakness in roles requiring high-risk decision-making, such as in new market ventures and venture capital, where rapid decision-making under uncertainty conditions is essential. Hence, discussions about strengths or weaknesses must always be contextualized within specific roles, as some characteristics may act as strengths in certain contexts and weaknesses in others.

Moreover, competencies must be prioritized based on their criticality to a

specific role. This is because a candidate may lack certain competencies critical for success in a job role but possess others that may not significantly affect job performance. Hence, when choosing areas for focusing improvement efforts, it is crucial to consider how each competency impacts overall performance.

Another important consideration is the overuse of competencies. To illustrate this, let us consider the example of prudence. The quality of prudence is considered a strength for a risk management officer, as it helps the officer in foreseeing and mitigating risks effectively. However, if this competency is overused, it can lead to drawbacks such as excessive paperwork and documentation of unnecessary evidence. This could impact the work efficiency of the officer, as well as their colleagues. In such situations, the officer may need to be more flexible and tolerant regarding paperwork.

APPLICATIONS OF THESE APPROACHES IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT COACHING/CONSULTING

Considering the above observations, I suggest some principles for career coaching that integrate both strength-based development and weakness improvement.

To explore career paths and find the right job, the strength-based development approach may be effective. This approach can identify the strengths of our clients. As career coaches, we can then guide our clients to seek job roles or career paths that prioritize these strengths for success.

To advance in specific career areas, a combined strength-based development and weakness improvement approach may be beneficial. This approach can be visualized as in the development matrix below.

		SKILL RATING		
		Low	Middle	High
CRITICAL FOR ROLE/ EXPECTED ROLE	Mission critical			
	Middle			
	Less critical			

Table 1: Development Matrix

Using this matrix, we can map the strengths and weaknesses of our clients to the requirements of their desired job roles to best assist them. If their strengths align closely with the critical requirements of their desired job role, they can flourish in that role. Conversely, if their strengths are less critical for the role, they may lack motivation owing to the ignorance or underutilization of their strengths.

On the other hand, if their weaknesses are critical for the role, they might feel stressed or depressed. In such cases, they may need strategic upskilling plans to convert these weaknesses into strengths, enabling them to excel in their jobs—an area where career coaches can offer valuable assistance.

In conclusion, I believe that while strength-based development and weakness improvement are valuable, they are mere tools. The crucial aspect is how we, as experts, leverage them to help our clients discover their optimal career path and achieve their fullest potential.