

## Why strengths-focused recruitment?

When incorporating strengths into the organisation's systems and processes, one useful place to start is to look at how strengths can be embedded into the recruitment process to ensure that people are recruited into roles that fit them best and allow them to play to their strengths.

We are all familiar with the costs of recruiting the wrong person: low engagement and productivity, disruption to the workflow and the business, and low team morale. In addition, providing a bad experience for job applicants can damage your reputation and your brand, turning away otherwise good candidates out of their own choice.

By adopting a strengths focus you can pass on an early message to potential new employees that you are a strengths-focused organisation, you can add energy to the selection process, and most of all, you will gain an early insight about people's strengths and get the best snapshot of people's authentic selves.

## What is strengths-focused recruitment?

Strengths-focused recruitment involves building into the selection process a mechanism for getting people to talk about and reveal their strengths. In strengths-focused recruitment there is a shift away from "what can you do?" to "what do you enjoy or love doing and therefore, what do you do well?" and because of this, there is more opportunity to learn about the real person and select the individual who is the best fit for the job.

Used to its full potential, strengths-focused recruitment moves away from the traditional competency-based selection process and moves towards a selection process that identifies the strengths required within a role and selects people not just on the basis of whether they will perform well in aspects of the role, but also whether they possess the necessary strengths that mean they will derive energy and fulfilment when carrying out the role.

Some organisations have taken the step of identifying core strengths required for a role, similar to the way an organisation might identify competencies, and then build their selection process around this. They ensure their recruiters are skilled in identifying strengths and are comfortable conducting interviews that are strengths-focused. Assessment centres can also be designed to enable people to demonstrate their strengths as they take part in work-based scenarios and allow the observers to spot both high performance and high energy.

Alternatively, organisations dipping their toe in the 'strengths' water, can build strengths focus into their recruitment process by focusing solely on strengths-focused interviews. Strengths-focused interviews that encourage candidates to identify and talk about their strengths create a more positive and engaging experience for the candidates, allowing them to more easily reveal their innate attributes and articulate what it is that energises them and drives their best performance at work.

By identifying people's strengths, this will add further information to feed into the recruitment decision and determine whether someone is a good 'fit' for the job based not just on their experience and competence, but also on their strengths.

## Strengths spotting

Those involved in the selection process need to ensure they are really good at 'strengths-spotting' or noticing the strengths in others. Linley (2008) talks about looking at people through 'strengths-tinted lenses' so that you can really pay attention to the signs of people's strengths.

People can't fake genuine energy and the spark that comes from talking about their strengths, so you will be able to see and sense the energy and enthusiasm that comes from people when they are talking about their strengths, what they love doing and what energises them. You will see it in their animated body language, and hear it in the tone, pitch and pace of their voice, and the words they use. You will hear words such as 'really enjoy', 'love'. You will also see the pride and genuine interest when they talk about situations when they have been utilising or playing to their strengths.

## Strengths based questions

### Setting the scene

When you adopt a strengths approach in your recruitment, candidates will always notice a difference; it won't feel like the sort of interviews that they have experienced in the past. In order to prepare them for something that will feel a bit different, it is a good idea for the interviewer to explain the approach that they will take. For example:

*"We are particularly keen to find out about you as a person, your strengths and attributes, as well as what you are interested in. So, as well as exploring your experience and your skills, we will also be asking you questions about what you find most energising or when you find that you are at your best."*

You might also want to start the interview off on a positive note by asking them a question like:

*"Tell me about a successful and energising day that you have had recently." Or  
"Tell me about something that you have done recently that you were really proud of."*

And then follow up with questions such as:

*"What did you find especially energising and enjoyable about it?"*

*"What did that experience tell you about the sort of things you are really good at and enjoy doing at work?"*

### Exploring strengths

If you would like to generate a clear idea of the candidate's strengths - what they believe they are good at and what energises them - there are a number of very powerful questions you can ask:

- *What are you good at? How do you feel when you do this thing? (Check for energy)*
- *When do you feel like you are most like yourself at work?*
- *When are you at your best?*
- *What do you love doing?*
- *What energises you?*
- *What comes easily to you?*
- *What sort of things do you tend to learn most quickly?*
- *When do you find that you get most engaged and energised in your work?*

Linking this to the job being applied for, and knowing that for a job to be a good 'fit' for someone there must be opportunities within it for the individual to play to their strengths, you can ask:

- *"You have highlighted from what you have said, that you have strengths in ....., is that right? What opportunities do you see to play to your strengths and use them more within the role you are applying for?"*

- *“What could you do to ensure that you have the opportunity to play to these strengths within the role you are applying for?”*
- *“How could you capitalise on these strengths in this new role?”*

## Identifying untapped potential

We all have strengths that we do not find we get enough opportunity to use. Changing job roles is an ideal opportunity for individuals to consider what these untapped strengths might be and to choose a role, or even shape a role, that will provide opportunities to put these strengths to work, thus leading to higher levels of performance, engagement and job satisfaction.

During the interview process, you can reveal some of these hidden strengths by asking questions such as:

- *“What do you love doing at work, and believe you do well, but don’t get the opportunity to do very often at the moment?”*
- *“What do you really love doing at work that you wish you could do more often?”*
- *“What opportunities do you perceive within the role you are applying for that will allow you to use these strengths/do these things more?”*

## Discovering learned behaviours

In work we learn to be good at what we have to do; we believe that we need to strive to be good at every aspect our job role or the organisation’s competency framework. Many of these requirements of the job we find we can do to a very high standard, but we also find that they drain our energy. Being able to do something well but also finding that we dread the thought of doing it, is a sure sign of a ‘learned behaviour’. Learned behaviours do not lead to individuals giving of their best and people should be encouraged to think about how they can minimise their use.

To identify learned behaviours, you can ask questions such as:

- *“What sort of things do people tell you that you are good at, but you actually find that they drain you?”*
- *“What sort of things do you always leave until last? What sort of things are always left on your ‘to do’ list, or left unfinished?”*
- *“What aspects of your work do you do well, but don’t find very interesting or engaging? What do you do to get around this?”*

Linking them to the job being applied for, you could ask:

- *“To what extent do you foresee the need to do such tasks in the role you are applying for?”*
- *“How could you manage this so that you maintain your effectiveness and your fulfilment at work?”*

## Discussing weaknesses

This is always a tricky area in the selection process, since it is questionable how honest people will be about their weaknesses when they really want the job! You could introduce this by saying something like:

- *“We are not all good at everything, and we don’t expect people to be. We notice that the things that we are not good at often de-energise us...”*

You can then ask:

- *“What do you perform less well and that also de-energises you?”*

- *“What have you done in the past to compensate for these aspects?”*
- *“How important do you believe these aspects will be in your new role?”*
- *“If important, what could you do to develop these aspects, or call on other strengths that you have to help you?”*

## Linking strengths to competencies

It is very likely that you will want to talk to people about their skills and experience, and assess their level of capability against critical aspects of the role, or against a set of competencies.

A strengths focus can also be added to traditional competency-based interview questions, by asking further questions about the individual's reaction to the task or situation. For example, when a candidate describes their response to a question such as: “Can you tell me about a time when you have successfully coordinated a team of people towards achieving a challenging goal”, you can ask further follow-on questions such as:

- *“What did you particularly enjoy about that situation?”*
- *“How did you feel about this situation you found yourself in?”*
- *Was there anything you didn't enjoy about it?*

People's responses will help you identify whether the activities described were enjoyable and energising to them. They might give responses that indicate they were in a state of 'flow' when carrying out the task, loving the challenge and losing sense of time. This is a sure sign of a strength that can be re-applied in a future role.

## Next steps

If you want to 'strengthen' your recruitment process, here are some steps to help its implementation in your organisation:

1. Determine how you wish to align your recruitment process with your overall culture and philosophy. If you have a strengths focus at the heart of your organisation's way of being, you already have a head start, and it makes sense to send out this message clearly right from the very start of the recruitment process.
2. Decide how your advertising of the role will capture and communicate your focus on strengths. Once again this is an opportunity for you to 'strengthen' your brand and reputation.
3. Decide the degree to which you want to introduce strengths into your recruitment process. Do you want to start by ensuring that your one to one interviews are strengths-focused? Do you wish to identify a framework of strengths (core strengths and those related to individual roles). Do you want to add a strengths focus to the whole selection process, including Assessment Centres?
4. Dependent upon how you decide to proceed, you may need to create a task team to re-design the selection process, or bring in external expertise to help you with this. Alternatively, you can use some of the questions in this document to add a strengths emphasis to your existing interview material and decide how you want to record strengths identified through the interview process.
5. Determine how you will communicate with all those involved in the selection process and ensure that they are adept at 'strengths-spotting.'

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6. Determine how you will brief candidates about what to expect at their forthcoming interview.
7. Decide how you can enhance the selection process for all candidates by offering feedback that is strengths-focused, and therefore useful even for unsuccessful candidates.
8. Enjoy the experience and notice the results!

## The questions all in one place

Questions	Responses
<p><b>Opening the interview</b></p> <p><i>We are particularly keen to find out about you as a person, your strengths and attributes, as well as what you are interested in. So, as well as exploring your experience and your skills, we will also be asking you questions about what you find most energising or when you find that you are at your best.</i></p> <p><i>Tell me about a successful and energising day that you have had recently.</i> Or <i>Tell me about something that you have done recently that you were really proud of.</i></p> <p>Follow up with:</p> <p><i>What did you find especially energising and enjoyable about it?</i> Or <i>What did that experience tell you about the sort of things you are really good at and enjoy doing at work?</i></p>	
<p><b>Exploring Strengths</b></p> <p><i>What are you good at? How do you feel when you do this thing? (Check for energy)</i></p> <p><i>When do you feel like you are most like yourself at work?</i></p> <p><i>When are you at your best?</i></p> <p><i>What do you love doing?</i></p> <p><i>What energises you?</i></p> <p><i>What comes easily to you?</i></p> <p><i>What sort of things do you tend to learn most quickly?</i></p> <p><i>When do you find that you get most engaged and energised in your work?</i></p>	

<p><i>You have highlighted from what you have said, that you have strengths in ....., is that right? What opportunities do you see to play to your strengths and use them more within the role you are applying for?</i></p> <p><i>What could you do to ensure that you have the opportunity to play to these strengths within the role you are applying for?</i></p> <p><i>How could you capitalise on these strengths in this new role?</i></p>	
<p><b>Identifying untapped potential</b></p> <p><i>What do you love doing at work, and believe you do well, but don't get the opportunity to do very often at the moment?</i></p> <p><i>What do you really love doing at work that you wish you could do more often?</i></p> <p><i>What opportunities do you perceive within the role you are applying for that will allow you to use these strengths/do these things more?</i></p>	
<p><b>Discovering Learned Behaviours</b></p> <p><i>What sort of things do people tell you that you are good at, but you actually find that they drain you?</i></p> <p><i>What sort of things do you always leave until last? What sort of things are always left on your 'to do' list, or left unfinished?</i></p> <p><i>What aspects of your work do you do well, but don't find very interesting or engaging? What do you do to get around this?</i></p> <p><i>To what extent do you foresee the need to do such tasks in the role you are applying for?</i></p> <p><i>How could you manage this so that you maintain your effectiveness and your fulfilment at work?</i></p>	

<p><b>Discussing weaknesses</b></p> <p><i>We are not all good at everything, and we don't expect people to be. We notice that the things that we are not good at often de-energise us... ...What do you perform less well and that also de-energises you?</i></p> <p><i>What have you done in the past to compensate for these aspects?</i></p> <p><i>How important do you believe these aspects will be in your new role? If important, what could you do to develop these aspects, or call on other strengths that you have to help you?</i></p>	
<p><b>Linking strengths to competencies</b></p> <p>For each example of use of competency discussed:</p> <p><i>What did you particularly enjoy about that situation?</i></p> <p><i>How did you feel about this situation you found yourself in?</i></p> <p><i>Was there anything you didn't enjoy about it?</i></p>	

<b>Perceived Strengths map</b>	
Strengths	Untapped Potential
Weaknesses	Learned Behaviours

**Overall comments**