



SELECTING FOR STRENGTHS

APODI'S JAN COX EXAMINES THE IMPORTANCE OF FOCUSING ON INDIVIDUALS' STRENGTHS AND TALENTS WHEN RECRUITING.

Over the past decade, Gallup has surveyed more than 10 million people worldwide on the topic of employee engagement, and only one-third "strongly agree" with the following statement: "At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day." A natural conclusion is that in an average organisation, approximately two-thirds of employees do not believe they are maximising the talents they have.

The repercussions of such a massive waste of talent – for the economy, for individual organisations, and to the quality of life of every one of those employees – is mind blowing. When attempting to explain to our clients the impact that such a scenario has on performance, we suggest that they explore this by changing the roles of a small number of employees to maximise their talents. The results are usually dramatic. We then ask the organisation to consider these outcomes if they were to be extrapolated across the whole company.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RECRUITMENT

The implications of such findings for recruitment, development and promotion strategies are significant. At Apodi, we have built a recruitment model that incorporates four key attributes that we test when recruiting every individual. These are: strengths/ talent, competencies, cultural fit and mental toughness.

Most companies traditionally recruit on competencies (i.e. what people can do) rather than on strengths/talent (what they are really good at, have a passion for and are usually inherent within an individual). The problem with recruiting based solely on competencies is that organisations risk hiring people that can do something, but may have no real inclination to do it. They may lack passion or excitement, display little energy for their work and therefore underperform. This results in disengaged employees who are unlikely to stay with a company for long.

Conversely, those companies that have adopted a strengths/ talent-based approach to recruiting are showing dramatic results. Banks in the US are seeing significant increases in sales revenue from representatives recruited based on strengths. Financial services companies in the UK are reporting 'improvements in quality and lower staff turnover', and Starbucks have established a clear link between recruiting for strengths/talent and customer satisfaction.

The benefits can be summarised as follows:

Company	Employee
Increase in productivity	More engaged, happier and motivated
Reduction in staff turnover	More likely to achieve goals
Increase in interview offer to fill rate (% of those accepting job if offered)	Higher levels of energy and vitality
Increased diversity of applicants and talent pools	Develop quicker and more effectively improving career development opportunities

TALENT, COMPETENCIES AND STRENGTHS

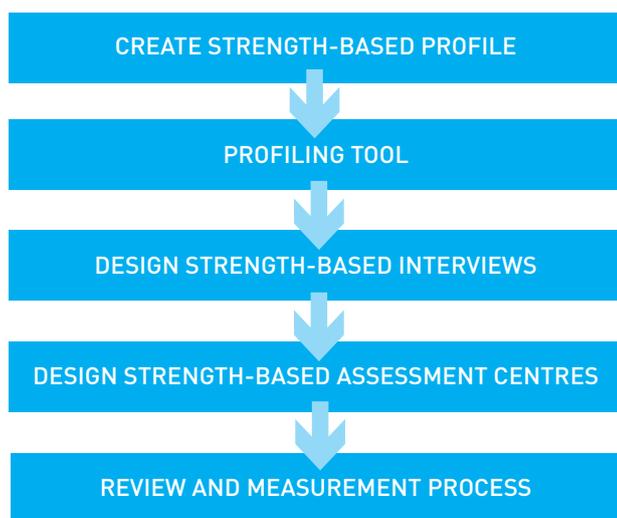
The link between talent, competencies and strengths is simple: talent + competencies (knowledge/skill) = strengths. Talent can be defined as those capabilities that individuals naturally exhibit based on experiences and knowledge usually gained in early life, or those that an individual seems to be 'born with'.

Talent can obviously be displayed in diverse circumstances, however, wherever it is utilised, it gives individuals energy and enthusiasm. Knowledge and skills are those things that are learned, studied and practiced. When combined with innate talent, skills and knowledge can be converted into real strengths. It is these strengths which drive performance.

It is because of this causal link that leading recruitment organisations recommend that clients assess talent and competencies separately and as part of a strength-based assessment process.

HOW TO ASSESS FOR STRENGTHS

A strength-based selection process has many similarities with that used for assessing for competencies. There are, however, some fundamental aspects which must clearly focus on the strengths of an individual. Assessing for strengths can be summarised as follows:



a) Strength-based role profile

A company can develop the profile by reviewing organisational structure and business strategy, developing performance criteria for the role in question, and studying the best performers in the role to identify the strengths that are contributing to success.

To help identify and define the strengths it is seeking, organisations can turn to experts in this field for guidance. For example, Tom Rath in his book *Strength Finder* identifies 34 particular strengths that may be important in different roles in commercial organisations. For instance, a company looking to recruit sales representatives may identify the following strengths as being the key to success in the role:

- Achiever/results focus – real focus on results, targets, completing tasks, meeting deadlines
- Empathy – identifying with customers and seeing what is important from their perspective
- Resilience – dealing with rejection and setbacks easily and moving forward positively

- Self confidence – strong self belief in own abilities
- Initiative – working independently and taking important decisions quickly to make things happen
- Communication – bringing propositions to life through effective communication.

b) Strength-based profiling tool

An appropriate profiling tool should be used to assess the key strengths of each individual applicant and how well they fit the selection criteria. The report generated can then be used as part of the strength-based interview.

c) Strength-based interviews and assessment centres

Fundamentally, interviews and assessment centres need to be focused on how individuals have previously used their strengths to achieve success in their business and personal lives. In addition, they should also explore whether:

- The aspirations each individual has for the future are consistent with the strengths they display
- The individual will be able to apply the strengths they have to the specific challenges the company faces and the challenges of the role.

d) Review and measurement process

Recruitment decisions are among the most important that management can make and yet recruitment is one of the most 'under' managed processes in corporate life. It is rarely subject to stringent review and measurement, and consequently many ineffective and unsuccessful recruitment processes remain in place. Those more enlightened companies considering strength-based recruitment should ensure that new processes are reviewed and measured systematically and regularly. This will drive a system of continuous improvement and encourage buy-in from senior management and the organisation as a whole.

CONCLUSION

A reliance on purely competency-based processes for recruitment decisions is almost certain to ensure sub-optimal recruitment decisions and, ultimately, sub-optimal performance. However, world-class recruitment processes are a strategic imperative for a company's future success. Not only has the strengths/talent model been shown to add value to recruitment decisions, it can be a catalyst for performance improvement across any organisation.



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