

Psychological strengths and the coaching engagement

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contents

Strengths

Assumptions

Practice

Implications

Questions for coaching psychologists

Background:

- Drucker (1967) > ***“to achieve results, one has to use all the available strengths.....” ... “ are the true opportunities..”***

Vs.

- ***Allport (1937) > character was the concern of ethics and philosophy (Cawley et al 2000)***
- ***‘Negativity bias’ (Rozin & Royzman 2001) +***
- ***Baumeister et al (2001) + Smart (1999)***

strengths will look after themselves but with weaknesses there are risks and costs to the organisation

Positive Psychology

“Is the science of optimal human functioning”(cited in Linley 2006)

“....seeks to understand and build the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive”
(cited in Linley 2006)

Strength:

“a natural capacity for behaving, thinking, or feeling in a way that allows optimal functioning and performance in the pursuit of valued outcomes”

(Linley and Harrington 2006)

In the UK....

top strengths endorsed are:

***Open-mindedness, Fairness, Curiosity,
Love of learning, and Kindness***

(UK $n = 17,056$; Linley et al, in press Personality and Individual Differences)

Don Clifton – “father of strengths psychology” (APA 2002)

Argued against the assumptions that :

1. one could become competent in almost anything
2. One’s area of greatest potential for growth was in the area of their greatest weakness

***Instead : one’s talents were unique/enduring +
Greatest growth was in areas of greatest strengths (Buckingham & Clifton 2001)***

3 positions (Horney in Linley 2006)

- Man is sinful, driven by primitive instincts, and should be controlled
- Man is neither good or bad, and society should elevate the good and control the bad
- Man has inherent tendencies toward growth and development

Innate, constructive developmental tendencies.....

E.g. ***“people are intrinsically motivated towards well-being and optimal functioning”*** (Joseph 2006) and ***“people are their own best experts”*** (Joseph 2003).

This meta-perspective has also been applied to ***group learning, conflict resolution and peace processes*** (e.g. Barrett-Lennard 1998)

If.....then..

- If person-centred...then coach raises awareness/explores/develops/refines/applies the strength....?????[*]** contextual strength???

- ***However...a strengths assessment***

>coaching conversations.....driven by client's agenda

Why.....?

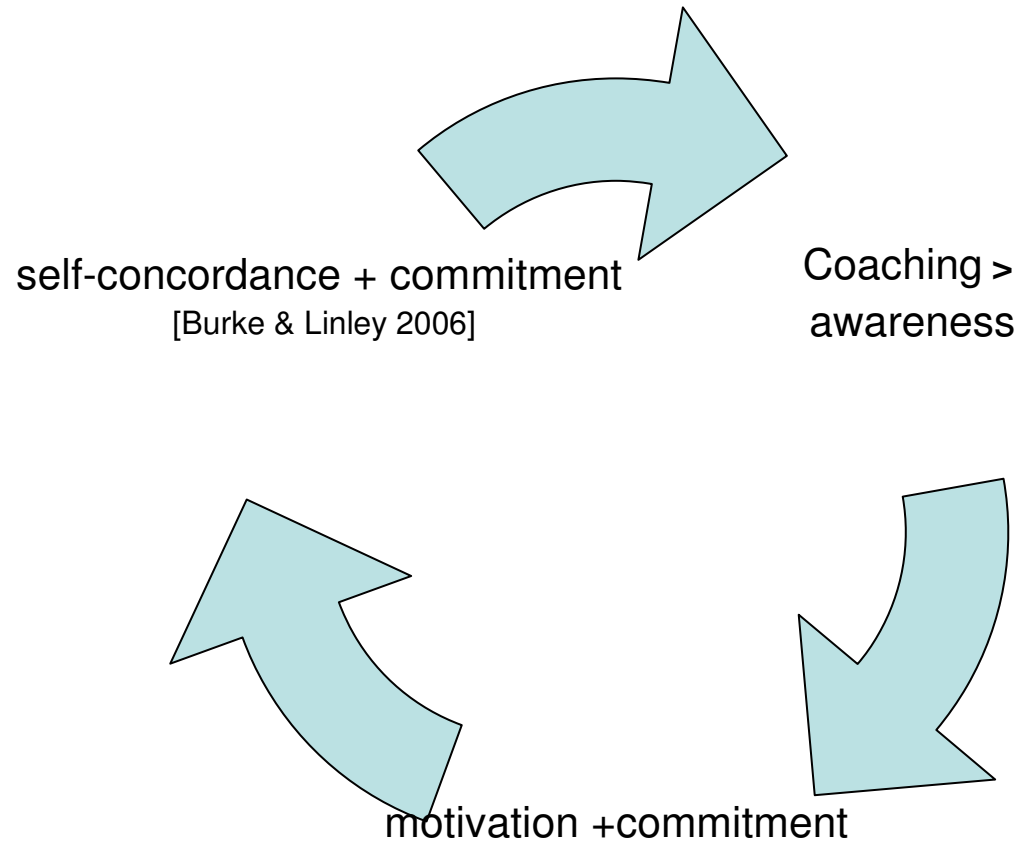
- **Universal** (e.g. Park et al, 2006)
- Associated with **well-being** (Govindji & Linley 2006)
(and goal attainment, Linley 2006)

Happiness + positive emotions.....?

- >**Longevity** (e.g. Nun study, Danner et al 2001)
- >**Physical health** (e.g. Pressman & Cohen 2005)
- >**Team performance** (e.g. Losada & Heaphy 2004)

Coaching & motivation

[intrinsic motivation > g-a + w-b]



How does a strength feel?

(Linley 2006)

- Authentic
- Energising
- Intrinsic motivation
- Yearning to use
- “The real me”
- Fulfilling

“Where does a strength best fit in relation to these fundamental assumptions?” (Linley 2006)

Praxis

(and the client's experience)

Problem focus:

**Defensive, closed, insular, withdrawn, negative emotion
(negative consequences)**

Strengths focus:

**Proud, open, receptive, engaged, positive emotion
(good consequences)**

(Linley 2006)

Strengths coaching questions

- **When are you at your best?**
- **What are the things that you do best?**
- **How do you know when you are at your best?**
- **What is it that makes you exceptional?**
- **What is the answer coming from inside you?**

(Linley, Harrington & Hill 2005)

Strengths coaching questions

- **How have you found a solution like this before?**
- **What are the key strengths that you can draw upon now...?**
- **How can your strengths help you with 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?**

(Linley, Harrington & Hill 2005)

implications

- Strengths can be readily harnessed through the coaching psychology engagement
- People like to use their strengths and have better goal attainment when doing so
- Using strengths in coaching psychology can be used in almost any area (e.g., being organised!)

See Linley & Harrington (2006), Strengths Coaching, ICPR, for further information

- Do we need **help** to do what we're best at?
 - Can we really **change** weaknesses?
 - Could a weakness be an undeveloped strength?
 - Strengths overplayed.....???
- (e.g. develop your top strengths or all your strengths?)

(Linley 2006)

Where can you find out more?

- www.viastrengths.org
- www.strengthsfinder.com
- www.cappeu.org
- www.positivepsychology.org
- www.personalitystrengths.com

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For more information contact Dr.Linley at:
The Centre for Applied Positive Psychology

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