Strengths coaching with leaders

P. Alex Linley, Linda Woolston & Robert Biswas-Diener

Positive psychology and coaching psychology share a number of common themes and fundamental assumptions. Blending positive psychology, strengths approaches and coaching psychology, our work in strengths coaching with leaders enhances both leadership and organisational capability. In this article, we explore the role of leaders as climate engineers and provide a brief history of strengths approaches, together with definitions of what we mean by strengths and strengths coaching, and how we use these in practice. We introduce the integrative Realise2 model of strengths and weaknesses which distinguishes between the six areas of realised strengths, unrealised strengths, regular learned behaviours, infrequent learned behaviours, exposed weaknesses, and unexposed weaknesses, before going on to demonstrate how leaders can make weaknesses irrelevant through role shaping, complementary partnering, strengths-based team-working or personal development. We examine the golden mean of strengths use, looking at strengths both overplayed and underplayed, before concluding with a view on the benefits of strengths coaching for both leadership and organisational capability. The Appendix provides 10 summary points in a strengths coaching checklist for leaders.

Keywords: Coaching, strengths, leadership, organisations, positive psychology.

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY and coaching psychology share much of a common heritage, in that they have both developed in response to the status quo of the field, which was deficit-based, pathology-focused, and driven by fundamental assumptions about human nature that were less than positive, to put it mildly. In contrast, positive psychology and coaching psychology are abundance-based, solution-focused and driven (typically) by fundamental assumptions about human nature which hold that people have within them a natural tendency to want to grow and develop their potential, and when their environment supports them in doing so, they thrive (Linley & Harrington, 2005).

This shift in emphasis and assumption has led many practitioners of positive psychology and coaching psychology to operate in ways different to traditional approaches to leadership and organisational capability development (see, for example, Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007; Linley & Harrington, 2006). In this article, we will show how we have blended positive psychology, strengths approaches, and coaching psychology to develop leadership strengths coaching programmes and practices that are focused on developing senior leaders and enhancing the organisational capability of the corporations that employ them.

We begin our article by introducing some of the history of strengths approaches in management and organisations, before going on to look specifically at how this has provided the foundation for our current work in strengths coaching for leaders. Having provided the background for our approach, we then describe some of our key practices, illustrating them with a number of short composite case examples, demonstrating the effects that they have had on our leadership clients and their organisations. To begin, though, we focus on one specific element of the leadership challenge where coaching psychologists can have a significant impact: leaders as climate engineers.

Leaders as climate engineers
Leaders have a unique role in organisations. Not only do they have operational requirements to deliver (as does any employee), but they also have strategic direction to set and people to manage (amongst many other

things!). But one of the leadership roles and requirements that is often not recognised, let alone understood or developed in leaders, is their position as what might be called 'climate engineers.' Simply put, how leaders operate, what they pay attention to, how they respond to challenges and opportunities – in short, their attitudes and their behaviours – combine to hold great sway over the psychological climate that exists within the organisation (Hogan, 2007; Naumann & Bennett, 2000). This leadership shadow was recognised as long ago as the sixth century BCE, by the Chinese philosopher Lao Tsu (cited in O'Toole, 2008, p.70), who posited:

> 'A great nation is like a great man:
> When he makes a mistake, he realizes it.
> Having realized it, he admits it.
> Having admitted it, he corrects it.
> He considers those who point out his faults.
> As his most benevolent teachers.
> He thinks of his enemy as the shadow that he himself casts.'

Recognising this, we contend that leaders have a seminal role in creating a strengths culture in their organisations, and it is to this that much of our strengths coaching interventions have been targeted. These interventions have typically had a dual focus that is characteristic of strengths coaching (see below). First, the strengths coaching has focused on enabling leaders to recognise, identify and develop strengths in themselves and others. Second, it has focused on enabling leaders to enhance organisational capability through strengthspotting in their team and down their reporting line, and then allocating people and resources according to individual and collective strengths as they go about building strengths-based organisations more broadly.

Harnessing strengths at work makes sound business sense: the Corporate Leadership Council (2002), in a study of 19,187 employees from 34 countries across seven industries and 29 countries, using standardized measures of individual performance, found that managers who operated with a strengths emphasis unlocked 36.4 per cent higher performance from their employees, whereas managers with a weakness emphasis unwittingly contrived to reduce their employees' performance by 26.8 per cent. And in our own work with Norwich Union and BAE Systems, we have seen substantial business bottom-line benefits through the adoption of strengths approaches (Smedley, 2007; Stefanyszyn, 2007).

A brief early history of strengths approaches

Given the fanfare which is now starting to be accorded strengths-based ways of working, one could easily be forgiven for believing that strengths research and applications only began with the advent of positive psychology, or at least not before the pioneering work of Donald Clifton at The Gallup Organization – especially since in the last few years more than two million people have completed either the Clifton StrengthsFinder™ (www.strengthsfinder.com; Clifton & Anderson, 2002; Rath, 2007), the VIA Inventory of Strengths (www.viastrengths.org), developed by Peterson and Seligman (2004), or the Inspirational Leadership Tool (www.inspiredleadership.org.uk), developed by the British DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) and Caret, a management consultancy (see Morris & Garrett, in press). The Clifton StrengthsFinder™ and the Inspirational Leadership Tool use an ipsative approach to assess 34 and 18 strengths respectively, whereas the VIA Inventory of Strengths uses a normative approach to assess 24 character strengths (for the VIA-IS norm data for the UK population, see Linley et al., 2007). Both StrengthsFinder™ and the VIA Inventory of Strengths typically report back one's 'top five' strengths, whereas the Inspirational Leadership Tool reports back on all 18 characteristics.

Notwithstanding this recent growth of interest, strengths approaches have existed explicitly in the management literature for more than 60 years, beginning – as far as our

historical researches have been able to establish so far – with the seminal work of Bernard Haldane (1911–2002), who went on to become a legendary figure in career development circles, but sadly (at least as far as we have been able to establish), largely unknown and unacknowledged by later strengths and positive psychology researchers.

Writing in the *Harvard Business Review* in 1947, Haldane set out what he believed to be the core reason for people's lack of efficiency at work – which was that senior management and leadership were not sufficiently well equipped to identify the strengths, talents and aptitudes of their people:

> 'One of the reasons for this neglect and waste of manpower is that very few top-management men know and recognise the varieties and number of human aptitudes. Another is general lack of information on how these aptitudes combine to form personality and work patterns. A third reason is a failure to realise the results of misapplication or neglect of talents.' (Haldane, 1947, p.652).

Some 20 years after Haldane – but still over 40 years ago from today – Peter Drucker (1909–2005) picked up on this theme, positing that 'the unique purpose of organization is to make strength productive' (Drucker, 1967, p.60). Organisations were formed, Drucker contended, in order to make the whole more productive and valuable than the sum of its parts – by identifying and combining the strengths of different individuals in a way that made their weaknesses irrelevant:

> '[Making] strength productive…cannot, of course, overcome the weaknesses with which each of us is so abundantly endowed. But it can make them irrelevant.'

Building on these illustrious forefathers, our work on strengths at the Centre for Applied Positive Psychology has been developing over the last decade, and it is to a closer exploration of strengths and strengths coaching in practice that we now turn, including a specific focus on how we build on Drucker's advice about using strengths to make weaknesses irrelevant – a concept we have developed through CAPP's Realise2 model, which goes beyond traditional strengths *identification* approaches, to differentiate between each of realised and unrealised strengths, regular and infrequent learned behaviours, and exposed and unexposed weaknesses, while also providing methodologies for the *applications* of strengths in a range of settings.

Defining strengths and strengths coaching

When working with strengths and strengths coaching, it is important to be clear what one is talking about, and what we mean by strengths. We define a strength as a 'a pre-existing capacity for a particular way of behaving, thinking, or feeling that is authentic and energising to the user, and enables optimal functioning, development and performance' (Linley, 2008, p.9). As our previous research and applications have demonstrated, people who use their strengths more are happier and more fulfilled, and feel as if they have more energy available to them (Govindji & Linley, 2007), they achieve their goals more effectively (Linley, 2003, 2008), they are more engaged (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002), and they perform better at work (Smedley, 2007; Stefanyszyn, 2007; Woolston & Linley, 2008). It is for all of these reasons that we promote strengths coaching as an effective, value-adding organisational intervention, and why Linley (2008, p.47) went so far as to propose that *'realising our strengths is the smallest thing we can do to make the biggest difference.'*

Our work on strengths coaching has similarly evolved in the context of our wider applications of positive psychology and strengths with organisations and individuals. Writing in the *Encyclopaedia of Positive Psychology*, Dominic Carter and Nicky Page (in press), noted how strengths coaching

could be understood both as an *approach* and as an *outcome*, describing it as being:

> 'concerned with facilitating the identification, use and development of strengths to enable optimal functioning, performance and development. It may be understood as an approach to coaching, where the focus is on achieving other goals through harnessing strengths, or it may be understood as an outcome of coaching, where the intention is for the coaching client to gain a better understanding of their strengths, or to develop particular strengths more fully. Most often, strengths coaching is a combination of both of these.'

An integrative understanding of strengths and weaknesses: The Realise2 model

One of the key ways in which we work with strengths in our leadership coaching is through the use of CAPP's Realise2 model, which distinguishes between realised strengths, unrealised strengths, regular learned behaviours, infrequent learned behaviours, exposed weaknesses and unexposed weaknesses (see www.realise2.org).

Realised strengths are those strengths that you recognise and use regularly – but there can still be surprises here, in that there may be many things we have as strengths, but which we don't automatically recognise and accept as such (Kaplan, 1999). *Unrealised strengths* are those strengths that may be lying dormant in us, waiting for the opportunity to arise or for the right situation to call them forth (Lyons & Linley, 2008).

Regular learned behaviours are those activities that we do often and at which we may be very good, but which are not energising for us. Regular learned behaviours can present a real psychological trap of which we need to be aware, since we can do things regularly – and be asked to do them more – because we are good at doing them, yet to do so repeatedly over time would lead to an increasing sense of feeling disenfranchised and disengaged, because the critical

energising component is missing. *Infrequent learned behaviours* follow exactly the same pattern, with the exception that they are behaviours practiced less frequently and so – as long as they remain practiced infrequently – present a lesser risk to our psychological health and well-being.

Exposed weaknesses are those weaknesses that are out in the open and causing you problems. As we go on to explore below, these are the weaknesses that need to be most effectively managed to make them irrelevant. *Unexposed weaknesses* are those weaknesses that could trip you if the situation or context changed, but at the moment that are safely irrelevant to what you need to deliver. As long as they are kept that way, they can be safely ignored. But if the situation changes and they are pushed into the foreground (becoming exposed weaknesses) then they will need to be managed quickly and effectively if performance is not to be undermined – all of which provides fertile ground on which to work for the strengths coach.

With our coaching clients, we have found that this more comprehensive positioning of strengths, learned behaviours and weaknesses is well-received by senior leaders, who typically are fairly self-aware and have experienced a variety of psychometric personality assessments in the past as they have progressed up the leadership ladder, and as a result of which are familiar with a lot of what traditional assessment approaches can reveal to them. In contrast, the Realise2 approach provides a more holistic framework and tool for the identification, assessment and development of strengths, together with the identification, assessment and management of both learned behaviours and weaknesses.

The fact that we don't automatically gloss over weaknesses by calling them 'development areas,' but instead tackle them head on as weaknesses, as well as dealing with the traditionally confusing anomaly of learned behaviours (we're good at doing it but don't enjoy it and aren't energised by it), leads to a franker and more authentic conversation

with our clients, and one that is perfectly suited to coaching scenarios. Talking about weaknesses as weaknesses, and labelling them as such, enables a much more honest and open acceptance and ownership of the problem area, rendering it much more pliable through the weakness management interventions that we then work through with our senior leader coaching clients.

Building on the advice of Goffee and Jones (2006), we are very explicit in our work that leaders should be able to reveal weaknesses – appropriately – and then go on to make them irrelevant. By revealing weaknesses appropriately, leaders are exercising yet another example of their role as climate engineers. First, they are being authentic and setting a trend for honesty and openness within their organisation, by which they enable and give others permission to do the same. Second, they are inviting help and support, since by acknowledging their own weaknesses and limitations, they are reaching out for others to step up and help them – a first step in complementary partnering or strengths-based teamworking as we go on to discuss below.

Making weaknesses irrelevant

Taking his lead from Drucker's (1967) advice that one should focus on making weaknesses irrelevant, Linley (2008, p.171) sets out how to go about doing so, providing a framework that we have used to great effect in our strengths coaching with senior leaders (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Making Weaknesses Irrelevant Decision Tree.
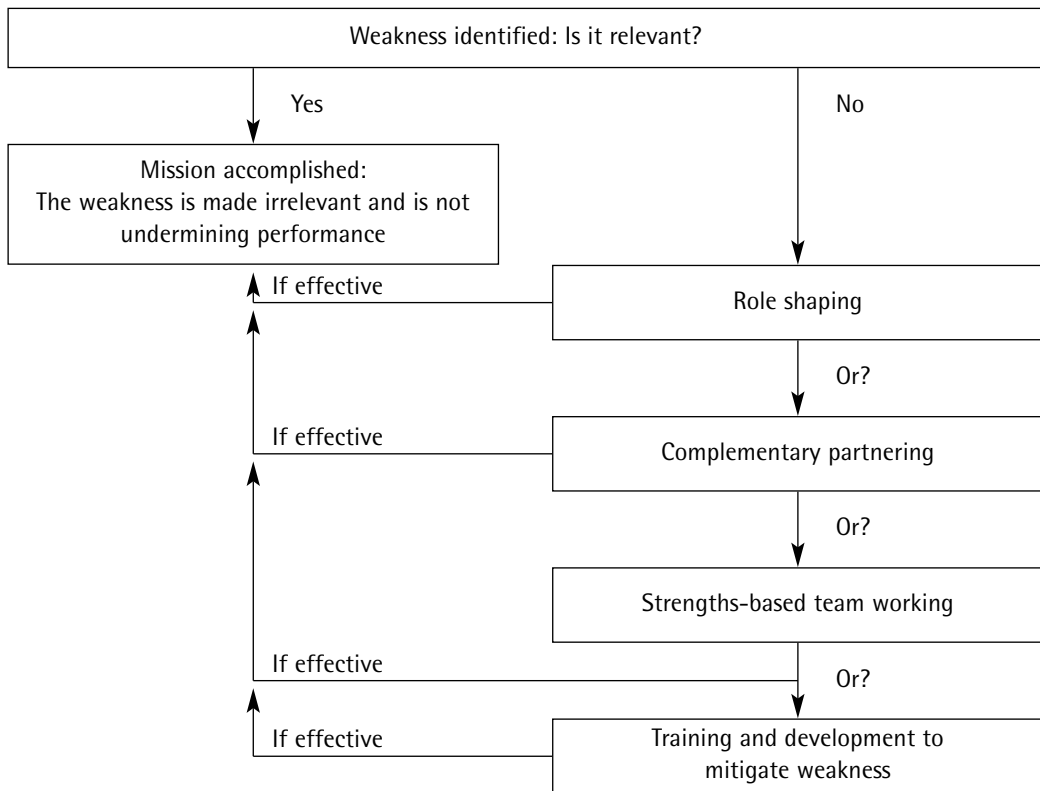
Source: Linley, A. (2008). *Average to A+: Realising Strengths in Yourself and Others.* Coventry, UK: CAPP Press. Reproduced with permission of CAPP Press.

Case Study 1: Role shaping. First, one should examine the leader's role. Is this something that they absolutely have to do, or can the role be shaped and crafted in such a way that the weakness-inducing activity is made irrelevant? For example, one client found himself deeply de-energised by the number of management meetings that he found he was required to attend, with the attendant bureaucracy and loss of time on other activities. One of his key strengths lay in his capacity for deep thought and analysis when he was able to create the space and time to be on his own, since this then enabled him to step back and look objectively at the bigger picture.

In doing so, this client was able to see that the way in which various business units were being reviewed was ineffectual and inefficient, and to make recommendations for changes to the review process as a result. These recommendations were accepted and led to a significant reduction in the number of management meetings required. In turn, this led to substantial savings in time, both for those who would have attended the meetings and also for all those who would have been involved in preparing the financial and management data to be reviewed at the meetings.

The strengths coaching also enabled this client to see more clearly what he was good at – specifically, thinking and analysing – and to find more time to do this, while also identifying those things that de-energised him and creatively finding ways to delegate these activities to others. Through his strengths coaching, the client not only increased his own contribution through finding the time for effective thinking, but also increased the amount of productive, value-adding time for many of his colleagues, resulting in the saving of many 10s of person-days over the course of a year.

It is important to acknowledge that with senior leaders such as this one, role shaping is something that will happen almost naturally, through the combination of autonomy, discretion and attention. By autonomy, we refer to the fact that leaders are largely in charge of their own destiny and direction – and further, that of the organisation as a whole. By discretion, we refer to the fact that leaders – much more than almost any other employees – are able to choose what they spend their time on. By attention, we refer to the fact that leaders are similarly able to decide where they focus their attention – and, critically, that attentional focus will almost always be according to where their strengths and natural preferences lay, notwithstanding a concerted (but de-energising) effort to deliver other necessary outcomes (that may be calling on learned behaviours and/or weaknesses).

Of course, it is probably utopian to believe that it is always possible for a person – even a senior leader – to design their work in such a way that they are *only* ever working from their strengths. This being so, is there anything that can be done to make working from weaknesses more effective and less draining? Unfortunately, there is no 'magic bullet' solution for circumstances such as this.

In practice, however, we have often taken one of two approaches. First, we explore if the activity can be recast or redesigned in a way that it is playing to a different strength or strengths that the person may have. If the leader is not good on detail, but has to spend time doing detailed checking that cannot be passed off to someone else, explore if there is a Persistence strength upon which they can call. Reframing something as requiring Persistence (a strength they have) versus Detail (a learned behaviour at best, a weakness at worst) can enable a subtle yet powerful psychological shift. As strengths coaches, we can be highly effective in helping our clients to reframe their activities in this way where it is possible for them to do so.

Second, if even these sleights of mind are not possible, we recommend that the weakness-inducing activity is buffered by other activities that will recharge one's energy and engagement. Doing something that is enjoyable and fulfilling either side of something that is draining and disengaging provides a

way to counteract the negative impact of having to work from our weaknesses. These activities and approaches, whether they involve shaping our role or buffering our weaknesses, are effective not only for individual leaders themselves, but also for those people around them. Ideally, we should seek to find ways in which the strengths of one person may be used to buffer the weaknesses of another, as we explore next in relation to complementary partnering.

Case Study 2: Complementary partnering.
Second, Linley (2008) suggested, one should look at the opportunity for complementary partnering in making weaknesses irrelevant. Directors and their PAs are often quintessential examples of complementary partnering, with many senior directors freely admitting – in private conversation at least! – that they would not know where to be, or what to do, without the steady, guiding hand of their PA to assist them.

One organisation with which we work had employed a superb negotiator and salesperson, but a superb negotiator and salesperson with a challenging flaw – he found it excruciating to complete the spreadsheets that were necessary to log and track his sales and negotiation activities. Many traditional organisations would have sent him on the requisite spreadsheet training course, with the attendant loss in motivation and morale as he worked through his spreadsheet issues. In contrast, this progressive organisation did quite the opposite. Recognising his value-add through sales and negotiation – this was the reason they had employed him – they simply hired an assistant who took care of the spreadsheets on his behalf, her strengths in Detail and Structure being used to complement his talent for sales and negotiation.

Far too often, organisations strive to create the mythical well-rounded individual who is good at everything, but serve only in crushing the potential brilliance of their leaders as they create stultifying mediocrity, while commending themselves on the fact that everyone has reached the minimum

required standard of the organisational competency framework. But at what price?

Coaches have an important role to play in helping senior leaders stand up against the march of mediocrity that competence frameworks have spawned, countering them through a recognition that spikes of brilliance deliver far more value than does a marginal performance increase from slightly less than average to average. In this way, they will be helping to play their part in shifting organisations from their deficit-focused mindset to one that is better characterised by the abundance approach that informs positive psychology and coaching psychology, and which proffers the potential to transform working life and organisational performance (Linley, Harrington & Page, in press).

Case Study 3: Strengths-based teamworking.
Third, taking complementary partnering a step further, its principles can be applied across an entire team – and as Drucker (1967, p.60) has argued, 'to make strength productive is the unique purpose of organization' – and, we extend, the unique purpose of teams. Working with senior leadership boards, we have been taking a strengths-based team coaching approach which we have evolved over the last three years. In essence, this involves ensuring a common understanding of strengths-based ways of working across the senior leadership team (SLT), identifying the strengths of that senior leadership team both as individuals and as a group, and then allocating roles and responsibilities according to those strengths. In an early assignment where we used this approach with BAE Systems, our intervention to identify the strengths of the SLT and then to allocate work according to those strengths led to significant advances in project delivery and the completion of a number of business-critical organisational change initiatives (see Smedley, 2007).

The team coaching intervention was focused very much on the enabling of strengths identification and recognition in individuals themselves as well as across the

wider team, and the creation of project pairings and teams according to strengths complementarities, leading to people working together who previously would not have done on a functional basis, but were now invited to do so on a strengths basis. On this basis, we were acting as what Clutterbuck (2007) would describe as an 'external team coach,' bringing a wider perspective to the process and interpersonal issues of the way in which the team could work together most effectively.

Fourth and finally in the 'Making Weaknesses Irrelevant' decision tree, Linley (2008, p.171; see Figure 1) recognises that there are some instances where none of these three strategies described so far can be applied. The role cannot be crafted differently, there is no one with whom one can partner, there is no wider team to share the burden – and still the weakness-inducing task must be overcome, the necessary output delivered. When this is the case, the coaching psychologist is presented with yet another opportunity to demonstrate the value of their practice, since when nothing else can make the weakness irrelevant, one is left with the need for training and development.

This training and development may take the form of coaching, skills training, behaviour modification, didactic instruction, or any number of other training and development interventions – but the essential point being to ensure that the weakness is developed so far as is necessary to make it irrelevant, such that it no longer undermines performance, rather than it being developed to the level of mastery that so many competency frameworks seem to demand, and which as such extract a heavy price from limited L&D budgets that would otherwise be better spent on turning good into brilliant through realising the strengths of the people and the organisation, rather than spending time fruitlessly on fixing weaknesses beyond the level to which they need to be fixed. Coaches and coaching psychologists can become powerful advocates of this new developmental focus in organisations, that of achieving high performance through understanding what works and building on it, rather than focusing on weakness and forever trying to plug the gaps.

Strengths under-played and over-played; Finding the Golden Mean

Another recurrent theme in our strengths coaching with senior leaders – and a golden thread for the coach who is looking for a simple intervention that will have powerful developmental outcomes – is helping leaders to calibrate their readings of strengths in themselves, understanding more about strengths underplayed and strengths overplayed.

We have seen these themes in our work with so many leaders that we might hesitantly contend that – like the leader's role as climate engineer – they may constitute a major blind spot for the leader's otherwise vigilant eye. The evolution and development of leaders seems to render their vulnerability to strengths over- or under-played as almost inherent. Either leaders discount something they are good at because they simply don't recognise it in themselves, taking it for granted, or they take a strength too far because, thinking that this is what got them where they are today, they don't recognise the signals that the environment has changed and so need they. Essentially, as argued by Goffee and Jones (2006), leaders need to be excellent at situation sensing, knowing what is the right thing to do and when, a key part of which is ensuring the active calibration of their strengths.

'Versatile leadership' is the phrase used by Kaplan and Kaiser (2006) to convey this, making the case that we all tend to veer to one or other pole of any leadership dichotomy – with 'forceful-enabling' and 'strategic-operational' being the people and process parameters on which Kaplan and Kaiser focus. Quite simply, leaders who can do both – versatile leaders – perform much better than those who cannot – as the data show, leadership versatility predicts as much as 42 per cent of the variance in overall lead-

ership effectiveness (Kaiser, Lindberg & Craig, 2007).

Tracing this idea of optimal balance back to Aristotle (1998), Linley (2008, p. 70) introduced the idea of the 'golden mean [of strengths use]: the right thing, to the right amount, in the right way, and at the right time.' By helping leaders both to appreciate and to apply this golden mean, coaches and coaching psychologists are mining a rich seam of powerful leadership development that enjoys the beautiful asymmetry of a simple intervention with profound effects.

Case Study 4: Strengths over-played. One client with whom we have worked provides an example of how he was able both to dial back on a strength when he was taking it too far, and how he was able to dial up a strength when he recognised he could be doing more with it. This particular coaching client has strengths in Incisive and Questioner – amongst many others – but these combined mean that he asks great questions that drive right to the heart of the matter. In one instance, he was questioning a junior colleague about a sensitive issue, and recognised that he was at risk of probing too far. Remembering the dangers of strengths over-played, he dialled back and toned down his questioning, thereby achieving a positive outcome that would otherwise have been at risk.

In a contrasting example, working with a junior team as they grappled with a major systems problem, he was able to deploy his Questioner strength in tandem with his ability to solve problems, a strength we call Resolver. The result: an intervention with this junior team that not only solved the problem with which they were grappling, but in the process, he calculated, had saved the organisation more than £1,000,000 in costs (of course, this can only be his estimate, but it conveys the point) – and all as a consequence of his learning from coaching that sometimes one should 'turn up' a strength and do it more.

Case Study 5: Appropriate work allocation. In another example of the valuable perspective that coaches can introduce through recognising strengths underplayed and overplayed, a coaching client was helped to shift his traditional view of work allocation that things should be divided equally. Having a small and specialist team – of two people – this leader had always divided the work equally between them – the problem being, he recognised in retrospect, that he did so without consideration for what that work involved or what their aptitudes were [one is reminded, notwithstanding our great respect for this leader, of Haldane's (1947) assessment about senior management and their (in)ability to identify the aptitudes of their people].

Through strengths coaching, his perspective and understanding shifted, such that he was able to develop a richer view of what was 'fair' in relation to work allocation, namely, first, that it was not unfair to allocate work differentially according to the strengths and abilities of different employees, and second, that it was entirely legitimate to ask a lot more from someone when they were operating from an area of strength. When people are working from their strengths, they are more energised and more effective, and so can be legitimately relied upon to achieve greater output than when they are being drained by working from their weaknesses.

Strengths Coaching: A powerful approach with value-adding outcomes

As we have demonstrated throughout this article, strengths coaching is both a powerful *approach* to coaching, whereby strengths are used more effectively in the attainment of goals, and a value-adding *outcome* of coaching, whereby the coaching is used to enable the realisation and development of an individual client's strengths. Applied to senior leaders, strengths coaching can be used both to develop individual leadership effectiveness and to enhance wider organisational capability, the former through the realisation of individual leaders' strengths,

and the latter through the identification and co-ordination of the strengths that exist throughout the organisation.

Given their unique role as organisational climate engineers, leaders have a tremendous power and a sobering responsibility for setting the corporate tone, establishing the 'way things are done around here.' As Ulrich (2008) contends for HR practitioners, we likewise believe that a core role of the coaching psychologist working in organisations can be 'to use their strengths to strengthen others' – particularly, we contend, the senior leadership population - who are then enabled to use their role as climate engineers positively and effectively in strengthening the organisation more broadly. By enabling leaders to realise strengths in themselves and others, strengths coaches can help leaders to unlock the best of what the people throughout the organisation have to offer, and thereby to guide the organisation to the higher plateaux of organisational performance to which all leaders aspire.

The authors
**P. Alex Linley, Linda Woolston &
Robert Biswas-Diener**
Centre for Applied Positive Psychology.

Correspondence
P. Alex Linley, PhD,
Centre for Applied Positive Psychology,
The Venture Centre,
University of Warwick Science Park,
Coventry, CV4 7EZ,
United Kingdom.
E-mail: alex@cappeu.org

References

Aristotle (1998). *The nicomachean ethics* [Trans. D. Ross]. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Biswas-Diener, R. & Dean, B. (2007). *Positive psychology coaching: Putting the science of happiness to work for your clients.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Carter, D. & Page, N. (in press). Strengths coaching. In S.J. Lopez (Ed.), *The encyclopaedia of positive psychology.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Clifton, D.O. & Anderson, E.C. (2002). *StrengthsQuest: Discover and develop your strengths in academics, career and beyond.* Washington, DC: Gallup Press.

Clutterbuck, D. (2007). *Coaching the team at work.* London: Nicholas Brealey.

Corporate Leadership Council (2002). *Performance management survey.* Washington, DC: Author.

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

Goffee, R. & Jones, G. (2006). *Why should anyone be led by you? What it takes to be an authentic leader.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Govindji, R. & Linley, P.A. (2007). Strengths use, self-concordance and well-being: Implications for strengths coaching and coaching psychologists. *International Coaching Psychology Review, 2*(2), 143–153.

Haldane, B. (1947). A pattern for executive placement. *Harvard Business Review, 25*(4a), 652–663.

Harter, J.K., Schmidt, F.L. & Hayes, T.L. (2002). Business-unit-level relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and business outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 87*, 268–279.

Hogan, R. (2007). *Personality and the fate of organizations.* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Kaiser, R.B., Lindberg, J.T. & Craig, S.B. (2007). Assessing the flexibility of managers: A comparison of methods. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment, 16*, 40–55.

Kaplan, R.E. (1999). *Internalizing strengths: An overlooked way of overcoming weaknesses in managers.* Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership.

Kaplan, R.E. & Kaiser, R.B. (2006). *The versatile leader: Make the most of your strengths – without overdoing it.* San Francisco: Pfeiffer.

Linley, P.A. (2003). *Unpublished data set – VIA strengths and goals.* University of Leicester, UK.

Linley, P.A. (2008). *Average to A+: Realising strengths in yourself and others.* Coventry, UK: CAPP Press.

Linley, P.A. & Harrington, S. (2005). Positive psychology and coaching psychology: Perspectives on integration. *The Coaching Psychologist, 1*(1), 13–14.

Linley, P.A. & Harrington, S. (2006). Strengths coaching: A potential-guided approach to coaching psychology. *International Coaching Psychology Review, 1*(1), 37–46.

Linley, P.A., Harrington, S. & Page, N. (in press). Finding the positive in the world of work. In P.A. Linley, S. Harrington & N. Page (Eds.). *Oxford handbook of positive psychology and work*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Linley, P.A., Maltby, J., Wood, A.M., Joseph, S., Harrington, S., Peterson, C., Park, N. & Seligman, M.E.P. (2007). Character strengths in the United Kingdom: The VIA Inventory of Strengths. *Personality and Individual Differences, 43*, 341–351.

Lyons, L.S. & Linley, P.A. (2008). Situational strengths: A strategic approach linking personal capability to corporate success. *Organisations and People, 15*(2), 4–11.

Morris, D. & Garrett, J. (in press). Strengths: Your leading edge. In P.A. Linley, S. Harrington, & N.J. Page (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of positive psychology and work*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Naumann, S.E. & Bennett, N. (2000). A case for procedural justice climate: Development and test of a multilevel model. *Academy of Management Journal, 43*, 881–889.

O'Toole, J. (2008). Speaking truth to power. In W. Bennis, D. Goleman & J. O'Toole (Eds.), *Transparency: How leaders create a culture of candor* (pp.45–91). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Peterson, C. & Seligman, M.E.P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rath, T. (2007). *StrengthsFinder 2.0*. New York: Gallup Press.

Smedley, T. (2007). The powers that BAE. *People Management, 13*(22), 40–43.

Stefanyszyn, K. (2007). Norwich Union changes focus from competencies to strengths. *Strategic HR Review, 7*, 10–11.

Ulrich, D. (2008). Use your strengths to strengthen others. *Workforce Management, 87*(5), 28–29.

Woolston, L. & Linley, P.A. (2008, Autumn). Strengths coaching at work. *People and Organisations at Work*, 8–10.

Appendix: Strengths Coaching Checklist for Leaders

1. Act according to the golden mean of strengths use: do the right thing, to the right amount, in the right way, at the right time.
2. Use your strengths volume control to dial strengths up, or to dial them down, as the situation requires.
3. Hone your situation sensing skills, so that you know better when to do more and when to do less. Asking others and inviting feedback can be helpful here.
4. Reveal your weaknesses appropriately, because you then give others permission to do so, as well as extending an invitation to them to help you with yours.
5. Having revealed your weaknesses appropriately, work on making them irrelevant through role shaping, complementary partnering, strengths-based team working – or if really necessary – putting in the necessary hours and effort to develop yourself to the point of competence in your weak areas.
6. Play to people's strengths as a way of enabling you to manage their weaknesses and make them irrelevant. This applies to you as an individual, to your team and wider business unit, and to the organisation as a whole. What are your organisational strengths? How can you build on them to make your organisational weaknesses irrelevant?
7. Be mindful of where you apply yourself. Leaders enjoy the power of autonomy, discretion and attention, all of which will predispose you to spend your time using your strengths – great news for you, as long as it is also the right thing for the organisation.
8. Every day, be mindful of your leadership role as a climate engineer. Even without realising it, your actions, attitudes, and behaviours set the tone for 'the way things are around here.'
9. Leverage your leadership role as a climate engineer by becoming an expert strengthspotter – identifying and developing your own strengths, as well as those of your team and your wider organisation. Celebrate success while still dealing effectively with failure.
10. Enhance your organisational capability by ensuring the strategic alignment of strengths – in your employees, your teams and business units, your organisation as a whole – with your corporate goals. At what do your collective strengths enable you to be the best?