



10th Annual Conference
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Robinson Executive Centre Wyboston MK44 3AL
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From Competencies to Strengths – a New Approach to Selection

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Agenda

- Strengths and selection – our journey
- What's right with competencies? And what's wrong?
- Summarising the difference
- Our original approach
- Should we be pre-defining the strengths required?
- The continuum
- Our suggestions for assessing strengths
- Sharing examples

Exercise: talking the 'Strengths' language

- Talk to the person sitting next to you about:
- Something you do in your work which you find engaging, absorbing and interesting
- And something you do in your work that you can do but don't find very interesting or engaging

Definition of a strength

- “a pre-existing capacity for a particular way of behaving, thinking, or feeling that is authentic and energizing to the user, and enables optimal functioning, development and performance”
(Alex Linley – Centre for Applied Positive Research)
- “something that energises you, which leads to your personal growth and development and which results in peak performance” (Strengths Partnership)

Definition of a competency

- 'Competency' is now generally defined as the behaviours that employees must have, or must acquire, to input into a situation in order to achieve high levels of performance (CIPD 2004)
- A 'competency' is a skill or characteristic of a person which enables him or her to carry out specific actions at a superior level of performance (Hedges 2006)
- A job 'competency' is an underlying characteristic of a person in that it may be a motive, a trait, a skill, an aspect of one's self-image or social role, or a body of knowledge which he or she uses. (Boyatzis, 1992)
- A 'competency' is the set of behaviour patterns that the incumbent needs to bring to a position in order to perform its tasks and functions with competence (Woodruffe, 1992)

Strengths & selection – our journey

- Introduced to Strengths and ©Strengthscope in development (internally and with clients)
- Started to explore use of strengths in selection
- Tailored our approach to have more of a strengths focus (but still assessing competencies)
- Started to talk to our customers about using strengths in selection
- Developed our own strengths model and produced our first client proposal

Motivational fit

- We've always believed in the importance of assessing motivational fit
- We've always included it in our assessments
- It's a start but its not enough
- Example

Example motivational fit questions

- What were your reasons for applying to this role, considering your current and longer term job or career interests?
- What do you think you'll enjoy about the job?
- What interests you about the company?
- How long do you expect to stay in the job?
- These roles have aspects that some people find a challenge. For example, selling other relevant services and products to customers or agreeing collection of debt with angry or upset customers. Being honest, what aspects of the role do you think you will least enjoy?
- Why?

What's right with competencies?

Methodology is:

- Reliable,
- Fair,
- Objective,
- Consistent,
- Predictive
- Legally defensible

And what's wrong with them?

- Most recruiters and careers services run campus sessions on competency based interview techniques
- Candidates share their experiences *“Just had a phone interview for a graduate scheme. I know how useful preparation is so here's what happened...it was 56minutes long btw...”* (wikijobs.com)

We're certainly not the only ones feeling it...



“At Ernst & Young we have concluded that current custom and practice – competency based recruitment – has become a mechanical process that neither recruiter nor candidate thinks truly assesses an individual’s talent and potential”

(Stephen Isherwood, Ernst & Young senior manager of graduate recruitment, Financial Times, Oct 13th 2008)



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Exercise: what's wrong with competencies?

- Work in your group with the scenario given to you
- Discuss the situation to identify weaknesses in the selection process which have resulted in this situation
- Make particular reference to where using a competency based approach has introduced problems

Summarising the wider issues tmp.worldwide with competencies *WE'RE ALL YOURS*

- They don't measure what an individual wants to be doing
- They ignore the fact that working in a team allows for individual differences and smart use of complementary strengths
- Their use suggests that everyone needs to do the same thing in the same way
- They can work to discourage diversity



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Summarising the key differences

Positive psychology –
focus on strengths

Natural talents
that energise us

Measure authenticity and
awareness of strengths and
ability to use strengths

Can the individual use
their strengths to achieve
the role outcomes?

Happy and energised
in the role – achieving
peak performance

Traditional psychology –
focus on competencies

What can and can't do

Measure behaviours,
personality traits and ability
that make up competencies
required for the role

Can the individual
demonstrate the behaviours
required for the role?

Can do the job

Our original approach to Strengths assessment

- Define the role in terms of outcomes or what needs to be achieved
- Define the strengths that mean an individual will be truly energised in achieving those outcomes
- Measure achievement of outcomes
- Measure strengths

Our original approach – the tools for measuring Strengths

- Psychometric tool
- Measure 'fit' in terms of the number of strengths that match the required strengths
- Strengths Interview
- Can also design killer questions, SJTs and assessment exercises / simulations around the strengths that you want to assess

What others are doing

Approach 1

- Define strengths required for the role
- Sift on strengths and then put psychometric aside
- Interview for can do/ will do against each strength
- Questions for each strength required
- Looking for a quick and authentic response around what the candidate wants to do / can do
- Issue 1 – is it truly authentic?
- Issue 2 - subjectivity

CAPP & Arriva Case Study (ABP 09)

- Objective: to 'recruit for natural talent'
- Steps in approach:
 - Understand the role by the role outcomes. Measuring outcomes (not the how). Understand what great performance looks like & the strengths
 - Using strengths based interviews. Train managers in being able to identify those it's not for (0), learned behaviour (3), real passion (5). Explore using strengths e.g. 'are you a great listener'

What others are doing

Approach 2

- Define strengths required / used
- Use strengths psychometric to sift
- In interview establish key strengths
- Measure extent of mapping
- Also measure:
 - Authenticity (energy / ease of examples)
 - Awareness (of using strengths and balancing them)
 - Likely use in future
- Issue: problem of self awareness and ability to grasp the concept of strengths

Issues with these approaches

1. Do certain personality types give a more energetic and therefore more 'authentic' display of their 'strengths' (e.g. Extroverted, Outspoken, Dynamic)
2. Should we be pre-defining the strengths required for the role?

Some are predefining strengths

e.g. Ernst and Young

“Assessing the strengths an organisation requires of its graduate intake requires the same rigour applied to identifying competencies. Of a possible 50 strengths we identified 16 that a successful Ernst & Young graduate would need to demonstrate”

(Stephen Isherwood, Ernst & Young senior manager of graduate recruitment, Financial Times, Oct 13th 2008)

We would like to go so far as to tmp.worldwide say for some roles... WE'RE ALL YOURS

- It doesn't matter which strengths an individual has as long as they can achieve the relevant outcomes and feel energised as a result of the strengths that they have used
- If an individual is (aware of and) using their strengths productively they are more likely to reach optimal performance and reach their potential

The Continuum

**Predefined
Competencies
+ Motivations**

**Predefined
Competencies
+ Strengths**

**Predefined
Strengths**

**Strengths but
not predefined
Pure outcomes
based**



Complexity of role and level of autonomy



Volume of recruitment & organisational readiness

Thoughts so far?

- What are your thoughts so far?
- Coming up: the next level of detail around the measures

Defining the outcomes of a role

- Example for our own Senior Consultant role:
‘Achieves successful and sustainable (profitable, long lasting and valuable to the client) client relationships (i.e. over more than one project)’
- We have just three more so have kept it simple and high level
- We are happy with this for assessment and development so we have complete alignment

What we need to measure

1. Have they achieved the role outcomes?
2. Did they enjoy it and want to do more of it?
3. Key strengths
4. Potential for growth in areas of strength

How will this work in practice?

1. Outcomes Interview
2. Exercises designed to elicit the outcomes required in the role
3. Stretch or situational exercises and interview questions to assess potential
4. Strengths Interview at the end of the day to pull together the experiences of the entire day

Outcomes interview

- Focus on the outcomes of the role asking questions to seek evidence of having achieved the outcomes in the past
- Situational where candidates do not have experience
- Questions also around what they enjoyed and want to do more of
- Scoring focused on achievement of the outcome and enjoyment/ energy experienced

Exercises

- Designed to replicate role activities that reflect the outcomes required
- Measure if task outcomes successfully achieved using both task materials produced by the candidate and assessor feedback on candidate performance
- Ignoring HOW the task was achieved
- At end of task, measure the 'enjoys doing' through a review where the assessor asks questions of the candidate to explore how it felt

Strengths feedback interview

- Identify significant / standout strengths (using psychometric and prompt cards)
- Questions exploring their significant strengths as used in a normal feedback interview
- PLUS open questions about where they have used those strengths in the exercises earlier in the day
- If predefining strengths; would be looking to map their significant strengths to those for the role/team/organisation/culture

Draft integration matrix

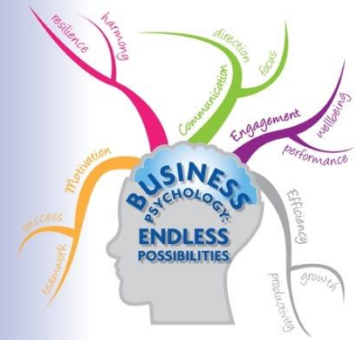
Outcome	Outcomes Interview	Exercise	Overall Score (1 to 5 scale)
Outcome 1: Achieves the design and delivery of best practice and high quality recruitment and assessment solutions	Can achieve the outcome e.g. 3	e.g. 4	e.g. 3 – so can achieve outcome (competency)
	Energised by achieve the outcome e.g. 4	e.g. 2	e.g. 2 – but isn't energised in achieving outcome (not a strength)

Conclusions

- We are sold on the use of strengths in selection
- Particularly in relation to:
 - a less mechanical approach
 - not so easily rehearsed
 - less about 'can do' and more about 'made to do'
 - flexibility in teams and diversity in approach
 - these being the areas that allow most potential growth
- We will certainly be pursuing this approach



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Questions?