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Talent Management: Network Knowledge

**“What high-performing  
companies should be  
striving to create:**

**A great place  
for great people  
to do great work.”**

**Marilyn Carlson**

# Table of Contents

- 4 From the CEO  
John Dutton
- 6 Engagement  
Ian Kershaw
- 9 Are “average” salespeople the secret to revenue success?  
Siobhan Ogilvy
- 11 Developing emotional intelligence in leaders  
MHS Talent Assessment Research and Development Team
- 16 End-to-end processes  
Ruth Gibson
- 21 Mapping informal employee networks to drive change  
András Vicsek
- 25 Sales people  
Ian Price
- 28 Team alignment and performance  
Dr Tom Janz
- 33 Are we doing enough to develop career competency?  
Dr Helen Watts
- 36 Harnessing strengths for maximum performance  
Trudy Bailey



# From the CEO

At Synermetric we are great fans of transparency and the sharing of knowledge. It governs how we run our business inside and out. It's why we strive to work in partnership with our clients, and why we began to publish eBooks full of expert articles for free. This time last year we were publishing our very first eBook. I am happy to say we are now on our third volume and still going strong.

For those of you who are new to our eBooks, inside you will find a diverse range of articles from experts with different perspectives on talent management. These are people we are proud to have in our network and we like to use these publications to display their knowledge and expertise. For those of you who have read and shared our previous eBooks, welcome back and we hope you enjoy this one as much as the previous volumes. You will recognise some familiar faces as well as some new voices amongst the article authors.

## As you read further, we encourage you to:

- Start with the article that sparks your interest the most –  
No need to begin on the first page
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Many thanks for reading!

**John Dutton**  
CEO and Chairman, Synermetric Ltd

# Happy New Year!

Bring in the new year with our New Year offer!

To celebrate the first months of 2016 and thank our wonderful community we are happy to offer readers **15% off all products until 31st March 2016**.

Use the code **NEWYEAR2016** when you check out at [www.synermetric.com](http://www.synermetric.com) to claim your discount.

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**Thank you** for being a part of our valuable community.

Best wishes for 2016,

from all of us at Synermetric



# Engagement

This time it's personal

Ian Kershaw

Right now, how many people in your organisation are thinking of taking their skills elsewhere, and why?

Pre-recession, 1999 Gallup research into the phrase 'People leave their manager, not their job' exemplified thought on employee engagement. This approach was also popularised by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman in their book *First, Break All The Rules*, published in the same year.<sup>1</sup>

Post-recession, the burning question is 'is this still true?' Research carried out by ourselves at Talent Q<sup>2</sup> and our parent company Hay Group<sup>3</sup> points to more fundamental issues at work. The thing is, organisations haven't really considered the impact that the economic downturn has had on employees. Hay Group's research shows that 63% of employees feel that the hard work they've put in to help their organisations survive has not been appreciated, and 57% feel they've been treated as a low-value commodity by their employer. In addition, TalentQ's research shows that 47% of employees don't feel that they're treated as individuals at work. It's almost as if organisations believed that their employees should have just been grateful to have a job!

**Organisations haven't really considered the impact that the economic downturn has had on employees.**

Recent quarterly unemployment figures point to the lowest number out of work since 2008.<sup>4</sup> Holding on to your talented people has never been so important. As the war for talent rages on, finding replacements for your top talent isn't just costly and time consuming; it's becoming increasingly difficult to actually find great people. Now consider where your talented people are likely to go - your competitors.

If this wasn't scary enough, take a moment to consider the journey your employees have been on in the past five years or so:

- Have their workloads increased as cutbacks set in?
- Have their family lives suffered due to longer hours and less time at home?
- Have their friends and colleagues been made redundant?
- Have they had any opportunities for learning and development?
- Have they had to endure pay or benefits freezes?

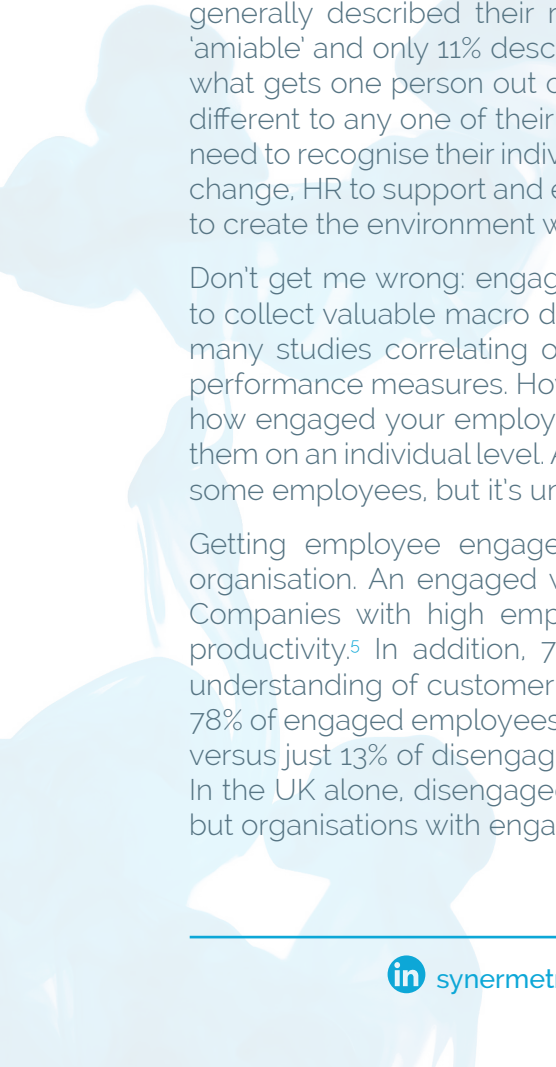


With the advent of specialist job websites and the ease with which job applications can be submitted online, it's never been easier to apply for a job. As a result, passive job seekers become active and turnover rates rocket higher.

So how do organisations retain their employees in the current environment? The answer to this conundrum lies in another interesting output from our research: 80% of employees say that if their organisation did treat them as an individual, they'd feel more motivated and more engaged in their roles.

As we know, line managers can have the biggest impact at an individual level, be it positive or negative. Change in individual engagement therefore needs to come not at an organisational survey level, but with each manager equipped with an appropriate skillset to have necessary conversations with employees throughout the year. All too often these conversations only scratch the surface at review and appraisal time – if they happen at all. Many of these conversations also only ever deal with competence or behavioural level outcomes such as what the employee has done that needs to continue, what needs to stop, and what needs to start that might not yet be happening.


**In order to engage employees, organisations need to recognise their individuality.**



Whilst these topics are important from a tactical perspective, managers also need to understand what motivates, drives, and engages each member of their team. Employees generally described their relationship with their line managers as 'professional' or 'amiable' and only 11% described their relationship as 'personal'. The point here is that what gets one person out of bed and fired up for the day ahead may be completely different to any one of their colleagues. In order to engage employees, organisations need to recognise their individuality. It is incumbent upon the line manager to drive this change, HR to support and equip them with the required skills, and the wider business to create the environment within which this can occur.

Don't get me wrong: engagement surveys are now used across many organisations to collect valuable macro data to help shape their people strategy. Indeed, there are many studies correlating overall employee engagement levels to critical business performance measures. However, whilst macro data can provide a useful overview of how engaged your employees are, it offers little insight into what actually motivates them on an individual level. A new coffee machine on the second floor may well please some employees, but it's unlikely to prevent talented individuals from leaving.

Getting employee engagement right can have a revolutionary impact on your organisation. An engaged workforce will do more than reduce employee turnover. Companies with high employee engagement have reported increases of 21% in productivity.<sup>5</sup> In addition, 70% of engaged employees indicate they have a good understanding of customer needs, compared to just 17% of disengaged employees.<sup>6</sup> 78% of engaged employees would recommend their company's products or services, versus just 13% of disengaged employees. If you're still not convinced, let's talk profit. In the UK alone, disengaged employees cost £44 billion annually in lost productivity, but organisations with engaged employees report 22% higher profitability.<sup>7</sup>



The people who met the demands of your business during the toughest economic recession in decades are the same people who have the skills and experience to take it forward to new levels. Unfortunately, while businesses have been preoccupied with their economic survival, they may have forgotten employee motivation and the importance of individual identity within the organisation. If organisations want to retain skills and experience, it is vital to understand and act on the individual drivers of employees who may well be looking to move elsewhere right now.

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## About the author

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As a Principal Client Partner at Talent Q, Ian Kershaw manages relationships with key clients, ensuring they each have an easy and rewarding personal experience using tools and services to support their people decisions. Immediately prior to joining Talent Q, he carried out a similar role at SHL for six years, having previously held Operations and Commercial Director roles in a variety of private sector enterprises from multi-site retail to major indoor and outdoor event construction via the wholesale and logistics of a clothing brand.

This background helps him translate the science and jargon from the world of psychometrics into practical, deliverable, and easy-to-understand solutions that address the demands you face when sifting, recruiting, retaining, or developing your employees. Mr Kershaw is passionate about ensuring that the use of psychometrics and any associated consultative interventions drive measurable benefit for the client organisation.



# Are “average” salespeople the secret to revenue success?

Siobhan Ogilvy

According to CSO Insights, on average only 55% of salespeople make quota, which of course means that nearly half fail to deliver on target.<sup>1</sup> Thus the quandary of every sales manager: “How do I keep my best closers performing at the highest levels, while developing my non-performers to increase our chances of successfully, and predictably, achieving quota?”

When evaluating team performance, experts will point to the established 20/60/20 Rule: 20% of the sales organization will be top performers; 60% percent will reside in the middle and consistently fall shy of quota; and 20% will dramatically underperform and remain at risk.


While it’s tempting to allocate more resources to your biggest closers, data shows that focusing only on top performers yields limited return. In contrast, the upside of creating performance gains in the middle of the organization is compelling. A recent Sales Executive Council study found that a 5% performance improvement from the middle 60% yielded over 70% more revenue on average than a similar 5% shift in the top 20% alone.<sup>2</sup>

Success requires not only increased focus on this key group, but also new techniques and technologies that can:

- Clearly and quickly identify key skills or knowledge gaps that are holding back your “middle” reps;
- Reinforce key messages and data points that will make reps more successful in the field, while creating behavioural changes that can support more deals over the long-term;
- Support more effective coaching among your sales leadership that helps not just the middle segment, but everyone.

This division between people and process is becoming central to sales performance. Emerging sales enablement solutions divide into sales process optimization (automating processes to remove inefficiencies) and sales knowledge optimization (automating the delivery of relevant information and the measurement of knowledge retention). The first approach includes sales methodologies, sales content management, order management, and quoting tools. The second includes sales training, sales coaching, predictive analytics for opportunities, and social collaboration tools.

In the optimization category, which is more “people” than “process” in focus, mobile sales performance platforms like Qstream are addressing the challenge at scale.<sup>3</sup> Using their mobile device, reps submit answers to brief scenario-based sales challenges. The platform maintains ongoing engagement through simple game mechanics and



social collaboration. An onboard analytics engine instantly compiles the data points from aggregate responses to deliver actionable, real-time insights to management – including targeted coaching opportunities.

At 60%, the identified "middle" is the majority of your sales workforce, and thus represents the greatest potential return for improvement. The good news is that in practice, this group can reap the most benefit from coaching and targeted skills reinforcement once gaps are clearly understood. But for many organizations, a distinct shift away from processes and assets and toward people is required. Transforming the middle of your sales force begins with the acknowledgement that sales reps are people. They possess ingrained behaviour, and changing that behaviour cannot be achieved through traditional methods alone.

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3. *Qstream* is a product of Qstream, where Ms Ogilvy is Marketing Director for Europe.

## About the author

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Siobhan Ogilvy is the Marketing Director for Europe at Qstream, an online platform combining mobile, science, and software to ignite high-performance sales teams. Siobhan has experience in technology sales and marketing, and prior to Qstream worked in various roles in the pharmaceutical industry, most recently as Category Manager for consumer healthcare medicines.

*Qstream* was developed at Harvard and engages sales reps in fun, challenging competitions. It delivers predictive, real-time insights that sales managers and coaches can use to build smarter, more confident sales teams at scale. It is helping today's top brands outperform their peers by up to three times average annual revenue growth.

# Developing emotional intelligence in leaders

The current state of leadership development

MHS Talent Assessment Research and Development Team

Let's open this article by posing some questions:

- Do you believe that there is enough focus on leadership development within organizations?
- Can we improve current leadership development efforts?
- Does leadership development training provide a worthwhile return on investment?

If you answered "yes" to any of the questions above, this article can help you create a stronger business case for leadership development and particularly the integration of emotional intelligence (EI) into an organization.

Between April and May 2013, Multi-Health Systems Inc. and the Human Capital Institute investigated these questions by examining leadership development efforts via a survey involving 784 respondents from over 500 organizations worldwide. In this article, we will present and elaborate on the key findings from this survey:

- Most organizations use at least one type of leadership development method, suggesting that the importance of developing strong leaders is well-accepted.
- Many employees are dissatisfied with current organizational efforts towards leadership development (Figure 1).
- One of the most effective leadership development methods is emotional intelligence assessments.

These findings suggest that there are many opportunities to improve or incorporate leadership development training efforts within various organizations. Our findings also suggest that the most commonly used leadership development methods (Figure 2) are rated among the least effective (Figure 3).

Figure 1: How current leadership development efforts are perceived in organizations today



Figure 2: Leadership development methods most commonly used in organizations

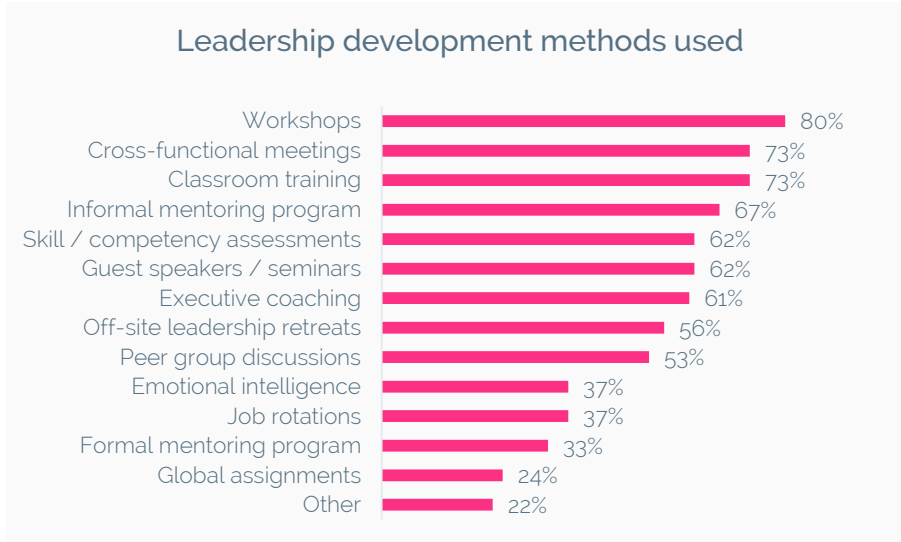
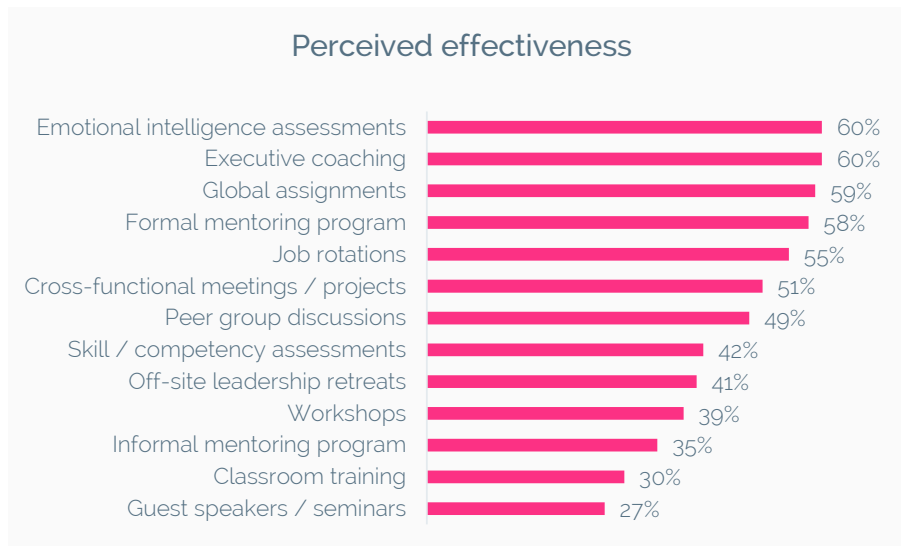


Figure 3: Percentage of HR managers who find each method to be "effective" or "very effective"



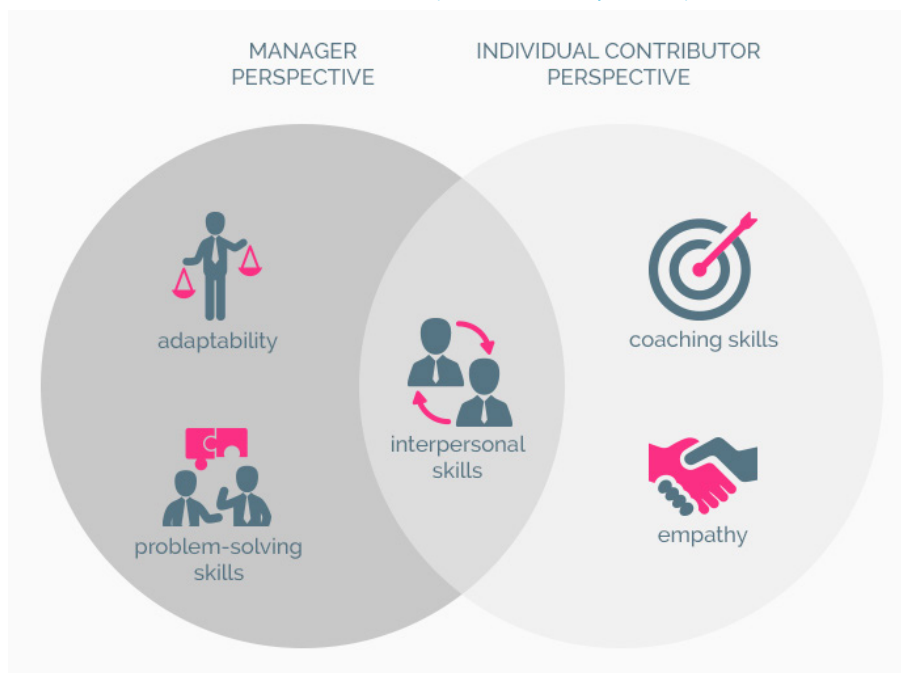
However, the relative effectiveness of your leadership development programs will not matter if there is a disconnect between managers and their direct reports as to which skills they view as important.

Our research suggests that there is a large discrepancy between what managers value in the workplace versus what employees value.<sup>1</sup> While both managers and employees felt that interpersonal skills were crucial to the workplace, managers emphasized adaptability and problem solving while employees felt it was important for managers to demonstrate coaching and empathy skills.

This disconnect means we need to do a better job of uncovering expectations of

leadership, particularly when working with intact teams. Leadership literature has long explained that different leadership qualities are valued at different management levels – the importance placed on specific leadership competencies varies depending on the organizational level, culture, or situation in which an individual functions.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 4: Top three leadership competencies identified by managers and individual contributors as most important in today's workplace

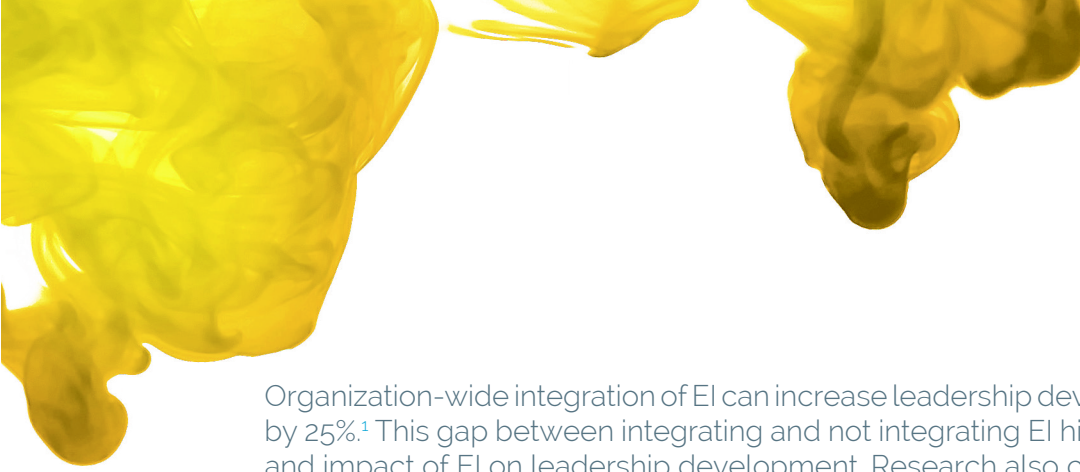


For employees, their primary goal is to complete assigned tasks within given time frames. Consequently, in their eyes, successful leaders will provide them with the technical and emotional support (i.e. coaching and empathy) needed for them to succeed and develop in their roles. Managers must demonstrate the ability to empathize, understand, encourage, engage, and connect with employees, all of which are skills encompassed in emotional intelligence (EI).

## Leadership and emotional intelligence

According to the Human Capital Institute, "if leadership is mainly engaged in human relations, then leadership, at its core, is largely about emotions."<sup>1</sup> The understanding, regulation, and use of emotions by leaders can have a substantial impact on their ability to lead. Research supports this connection by showing that emotional skills are critical to the successful performance of individuals at the executive level. Further, the more someone progresses through the organizational hierarchy, the more important emotional skills become in their success.<sup>3-4</sup>

EI can impact leadership ability in a number of ways. A leader's ability to be empathic and realistic, to solve problems effectively, and to be confident has been linked to higher profit earnings.<sup>5</sup> More importantly, EI is a key skill employees ask for, as seen in Figure 4. In addition, a leader's EI can alter the workplace norms in an organization by creating a high-performance work culture that leads to increased financial performance.



Organization-wide integration of EI can increase leadership development effectiveness by 25%.<sup>1</sup> This gap between integrating and not integrating EI highlights the importance and impact of EI on leadership development. Research also consistently confirms the link between higher EI and improved leadership. As a coach, incorporating EI as a coaching objective and effectively using an EI assessment (such as our own EQ-i 2.0®) can result in a 36% and 26% increase in EI performance in an organization, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

## Securing executive buy-in

While all of this information helps us understand what we need to do to develop talent in an organization, the quantitative value we bring to organizations is constantly challenged, even when there is no denying the personal impact we have on an individual's ability to lead oneself and others. In fact, our research shows that the top challenge facing leadership development professionals today is gaining buy-in and executive support for their development initiatives.<sup>1</sup>

Although we recognize that numbers don't tell the whole story, they can certainly help pave the road towards executive buy-in and winning that next coaching or consulting project! Here is one statistic that may help the next time you are faced with defending the investment required for your services: in our research we saw that organizations that spend a significant portion of their training budgets on developing leaders are 12% more likely to increase revenue than those that spend less. And the most effective ways to invest that budget? We saw emotional intelligence (EI) assessments, executive coaching, global assignments, and formal mentoring programs float to the very top of the effectiveness chart.

What tools do you use for developing leaders? Question and evaluate their effectiveness at a behavioral and business level, so you are well-armed with evidence when making your business case to potential clients.

While it is important to recognize that there are many factors that can impact revenue growth, one of our landmark findings indicates that EI assessments may be among these factors. We found that organizations that take the steps to measure and track EI are 16% more likely to report positive revenue growth than organizations that value emotional intelligence but don't measure it. This finding can greatly help the coach or consultant trying to establish a business case for integrating EI assessments into their toolkit.

Organizations, leaders, and professionals who work at making people better need to re-evaluate the role emotional intelligence plays in leadership development, particularly if it is something they have yet to add to their repertoire. For those who have been using EI in their practice for a long time, consider the value of measuring it. From our research, it seems from both the perspective of the individual and the organization that the most powerful ROI comes from using EI assessments. EI assessments establish a baseline against which coaches can measure their client's behaviors, and they can be that factor which separates high-performing organizations from the rest of the pack.

*This article was first published as a series with Choice, the magazine of professional coaching. [www.choice-online.com](http://www.choice-online.com)*

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### About the author

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A leading publisher of scientifically validated assessments for more than 30 years, Multi-Health Systems Inc. (MHS) serves clients in educational, clinical, corporate, public safety, government, military, pharmaceutical, and research settings. MHS has grown to become an international company with products sold in more than 75 countries and translated into over 50 languages. MHS is dedicated to strong product growth, an optimal user experience, and being digitally and globally driven.

The Talent Assessment Research and Development team at Multi-Health Systems™ (MHS™) is responsible for developing, supporting, and updating the *EQ-i 2.0*® and *EQ360*®, the *MSCEIT*™, and the *Pearman Personality Integrator*™. The team also supports the *Risk Type Compass*™ and the *Entrepreneur Edge*™.

# End-to-end processes

Complete the journey from feedback to behaviour change

Ruth Gibson

18% of companies currently use personality assessments in the hiring process, and this number is growing at a rate of 10-15% a year.<sup>1</sup> Psychometric testing is now used by over 80% of the Fortune 500 companies in the USA and over 75% of the Times Top 100 companies in the UK.<sup>2</sup> The popular use of psychometrics in these highly successful organisations is a testament to their effectiveness. But the process shouldn't end there.

When individuals and organisations undergo an assessment process, they generally expect some form of individual or group change as an outcome. However, change is far harder to accomplish than we might imagine, no matter how enthusiastic we are to make change. Whilst gaining valid and reliable data with assessments is undeniably important, and facilitating awareness via feedback or coaching provides an important foundation for change efforts, these are only first steps, and alone may not result in a lasting change. The journey to successfully make and sustain a change in behaviour is much longer—but it doesn't have to be much harder, if we know which steps to take.

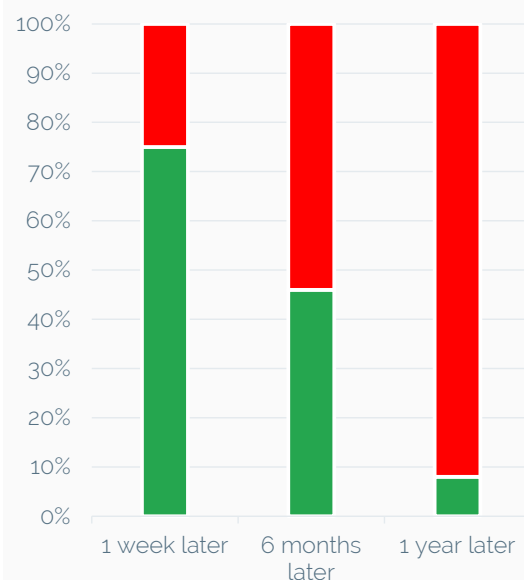
## Change is hard!

New Year's resolutions are a common example which clearly demonstrate the stark gap between best intentions and actual change. According to a US resolution study, only 8% of people report successfully achieving their resolutions, while 24% say they fail their resolution each year.<sup>3</sup>

Consider the following in regards to other commonly resolved behaviour changes:

- 95% of those who lose weight gain it all back within 2 years<sup>4</sup>
- Only 13-14% of people who quit smoking are still abstinent 6 to 12 months after quitting<sup>5</sup>
- 90% of those treated to quit alcohol have a drink within 3 months; 50%

### Resolutions maintained after New Year's Eve





return to pre-treatment levels within a year<sup>6</sup>

In addition to this evidence that changing ingrained behaviours is just plain difficult, people tend to have unrealistic expectations of how quickly they can make a change, and give up far too soon as a result of their disappointment.

On average, it takes 66 days of practice before a new behaviour becomes automatic. However, it can take anywhere between 18-254 days depending on the complexity of the behaviour, the person involved, and the circumstances.<sup>7</sup> You must adjust expectations for a much longer term commitment. On the bright side, research shows that despite our fears, making occasional mistakes does not automatically lead to ultimate failure - as long as an individual continues to work towards change after a setback, their progress will not be seriously affected by the odd slip.

## Create a safety net

Change plans are far more likely to succeed if you lay a support system in place to help sustain efforts throughout the change period. Behaviour change research has presented four key points that can make a great difference in change success rates.

## Focus on implementation

It is more important to focus on how to implement goals than the goals themselves. While intentions play a key role in generating goal topics and timelines for achievement, their overall impact on behaviour change has proven to be modest, and goal intentions alone may not always result in successful maintenance of behaviour over time.<sup>8,9</sup> Meanwhile, over a decade of research and nearly a hundred studies have shown that implementation intentions double a person's likelihood of achieving their goals.

Therefore, when planning a change, you should identify:

- When there will be opportunities to practice the new behaviour
- Where the opportunity will come about
- How behaviour will change when these opportunities come about

## Use ranged goals

People engage in change behaviours more often when they set a low-high ('ranged') goal than when they set a single-number ('static') goal.<sup>10</sup> They are more likely to give up on static goals, which are in essence a compromise between what they find achievable and challenging. Using a ranged goal instead allows them to take it easy and still make progress at difficult times, but encourages them to achieve more when they're up for the challenge.

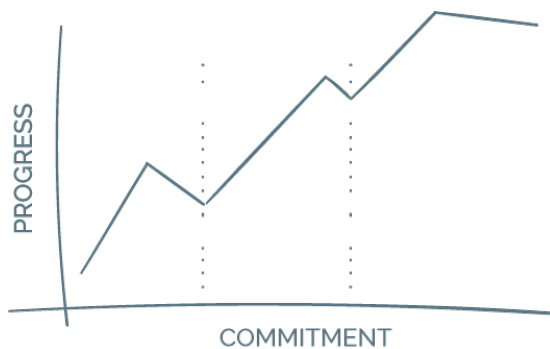


## Keep a record and share goals

Recording goals is a simple tip with a large impact on the chance of successful goal achievement. People who document their targets, actions, and progress are significantly more likely to achieve their goals. Those that share their documented goals and progress with supportive listeners increase their success rates even more, which provides extra incentive for introducing a manager, coach, or goal mentor to the process. In fact, people who write their goals, share their commitment with others, and send weekly progress reports are 33% more successful in reaching their goals than those who do not write their goals or share intent and progress.<sup>11</sup>

Making a goal public is another great way to reinforce accountability and garner support, but proceed with caution, as it will also mean that any lack of progress is transparent.

## Understand 'commitment' vs 'progress'



The primary purpose of giving feedback is to facilitate the motivation of the person receiving the feedback towards achieving their goals. However, knowing what type of feedback will engage and energise the individual at various points can be tricky.

Research suggests that in order to determine what type of feedback would be most effective, you should first establish whether the individual is likely to assess

their level of commitment or rate of progress.

**Commitment** here refers to continued effort over time, whereas **progress** refers to accomplished work towards a goal.

Reinforcing commitment makes people more likely to continue improving in future, whereas rewarding them for perceived progress may actually make them lazier. If someone fails to complete a task, focus on the fact that they still want to make a change – they just need to work a little harder.<sup>12</sup>

## Conclusion

Change is proven difficult to accomplish, and requires significant commitment. Objective assessment data and facilitated feedback create a strong foundation for change efforts to launch from, but individuals need a strong support network throughout the change process in order to accomplish their goals. Designing an informed change plan can make a large difference in your rates of success.

In this age of technology, we have developed automated systems to assist in the behaviour change process, making it easier for people to set goals and practice plans, actions, involve others such as coaches and goal mentors in the process, and track progress. Propel is one example of such systems, designed to complement an assessment and translate its report data into actionable goals and sustained change.<sup>13</sup>

Following assessments and feedback with an intelligent change plan or goal setting platform fills the support gap between awareness and action, creating a seamless end-to-end process towards successful change.

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### About the author

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As Business Psychologist and Product Manager at Synermetric Ltd, Ruth Gibson uses her passion for psychology, assessments, and people development to curate a powerful and complementary range of psychometric assessments and tools. She develops Synermetric's relationships with leading authors, and provides clients with training and advice on how to utilise their tools for optimum effect.

Ms Gibson has a BSc in Psychology and MSc in Occupational Psychology, and has previously worked for consultancies in human capital and talent management as well as resourcing. She is a member of the British Psychological Society, and is certified in Test User Ability (formerly level A) and Test User Personality (formerly level B). She is also a trained practitioner of numerous assessments and tools.

# Mapping informal employee networks to drive change

An organizational network perspective

András Vicsek

Imagine you are attending a football game in a large stadium. Suddenly a human wave forms; people stand up, raise their arms, and yell excitedly with the crowd. Amazing feeling, isn't it?

Now, in this mass process, where do you see yourself? Are you an initiator of the wave that passes on the craze, a participant who follows the others, or a quiet outsider only watching others participate?

These same questions also apply to the everyday operations of any organization. Where there are people, there are social networks with a constant flow of information, knowledge, news, and gossip. But who are the key hubs that start and pass them on? Who are the local leaders, followers, and passive bystanders? Who's connected to whom, and how?

Every company has its own unique relationship patterns and networks with a few individuals sitting at the heart of the influence. They are the people who connect business units or products and affect attitudes and behaviors. However, these employees may not necessarily be in formal leadership positions. Knowing how to identify those individuals who possess genuine influence is the key to maximizing any organization's performance via human relationships.

Organizational network analysis (ONA) allows companies to leverage these principles of influence by mapping social patterns within the organization and finding their most influential employees. ONA provides a multi-focused picture of the intellectual capital of an organization to support strategy execution, as well as achieve culture transformation, better communication flows, and improved decision-making, knowledge sharing, and group dynamics.

Organizational network analysis uses a questionnaire-based methodology rooted in network science, in which every employee of a company is interviewed with questions such as: Whom do you communicate with the most to get your job done? Whom do you informally discuss organizational changes with the most? Which colleague best represents the core values of the organization? Employees provide answers by selecting the names of the appropriate coworkers or business units. This allows for proper visualization of the interconnections revealed within the company, and the creation of the so-called informal organizational chart. The end result is a network map that illustrates exactly how information flows through these embedded human networks and highlights where certain interventions might be necessary or desirable.

## New change agents revealed

Who influences you the most? A peer with whom you work on a day-to-day basis (and whose opinion you respect and friendship you value), or a superior you often do not see for days at a time? The answer for most of us is both. We can never ignore that our manager maintains some degree of control over our destiny. However, it is also clear that accessible and valued colleagues have a considerable effect on our beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.

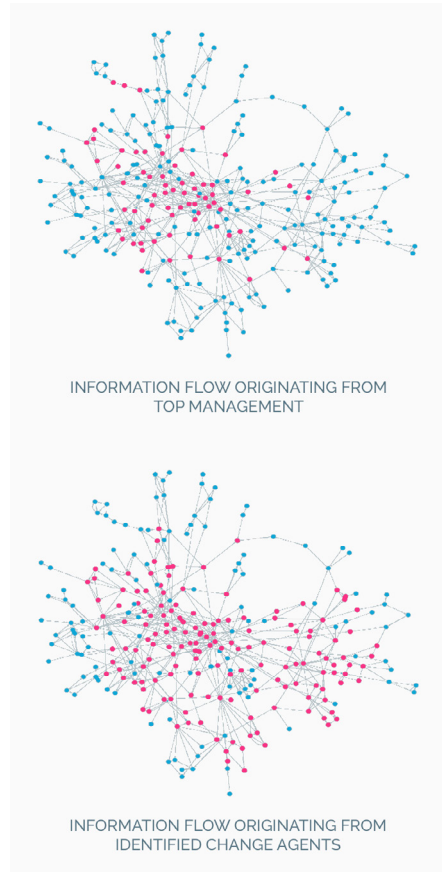
Formal leaders as well as people who are influential within the organization's informal network are crucial to organizational change and must be on board and engaged in any change program to signal its strategic importance and increase its visibility. Key opinion leaders, be they formal or informal, have a more widespread access to personal and professional networks within the organization, and can reach significantly more employees than top management. These key opinion leaders can act as change agents, supporting the company's vision, strategy and culture.

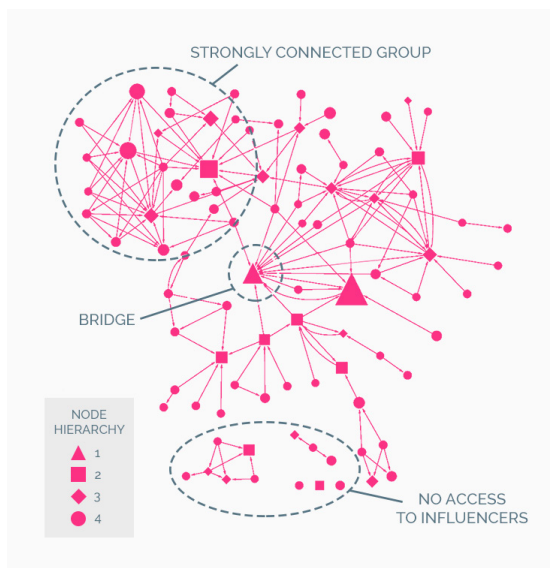
Generally speaking, business leaders seldom consider informal employee networks when deciding who should be involved in the design or implementation of a new change initiative. Instead, they tend to select popular employees only, or those with whom they have frequent contact. As a result, project teams wind up filled with employees who are committed to the interests and perspectives of only one unit, function, or location, when they should be staffed with people who have ties across the whole organization. Identifying the real influential and respected people in the organization will help to organically use human resources to build and support sustainable change programs.

## Key influencers identified

Organizational network analysis allows organizations to call for an innovative election process of peer-nominated change agents, who are motivated to accelerate the organization's change initiatives. All employees can give their opinion on who in the organization has certain change capabilities and is well connected to colleagues. A network map reveals these change agents and their personal and professional influence within their working environment.

In this change-related network, the size of the nodes indicates the level of influence employees have within the community, by reflecting the number of nominations they received from their colleagues. The larger the node, the more nominations on change communication that person received.





The shape of the nodes represents the hierarchy level within the organization (1= top management, 2= middle management, 3= team leaders, 4= employees).

It is easy to identify the key positions of change agents in this particular business area, as well as the different network structures that reveal important actionable insights, such as close-knit groups, employees acting as sole connections between certain subgroups (bridges), or communities with no access to influencers.

Understanding who these key influencers are, how they typically communicate about change initiatives, and where they are located enables the organization to

identify the core mechanisms to build support for its change programs.


## Communication and collaboration networks visualized

Successful change programs depend critically on how things are communicated throughout the organization, from planning to evaluating results. Personal and organizational adaptability and resilience to change are directly affected by the efficiency of the information flow. Deficient communication undermines change initiatives from the core. A lack of transparency in communication weakens trust, untimely communication challenges coordination, not involving certain employee groups in initiatives demoralizes them, and overburdening capable employees just because they obtain certain positions creates frustration.

Given these diverse challenges, it is essential to understand how effective and efficient communication practices are within the organization. It also enables the improvement and optimization of the underlying structures that support successful long-term change programs.

Organizational network analysis visualizes formal, informal, and specifically change-related communication patterns within the employee networks of an organization. Formal communication refers to daily information exchange, feedback, and cooperation on getting the job done. Informal communication refers to personal relations developed over time among employees and reflects personal values on which employees form support groups. Change communication refers to information about organizational changes that employees are able to spread and access through both formal and informal channels.

At various levels, be it business units, locations, or departments, communication network maps equip organizations with the necessary insights to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of their existing communication patterns. A wide range of questions can be answered through these communication networks, such as: Are there units that do not formally communicate changes with each other? Do various



geographic locations communicate equally? What are the differences and overlaps between formal and informal change communications channels? What is the direction of communication flow (top-down, upward, lateral, or diagonal)? Where should communication be encouraged or improved? Are certain groups of employees poorly connected? Where do rumors exist? Answering these questions arms organizations with the intelligence needed to successfully redesign their communication structure and get better and faster results on change initiatives.

## Conclusion

Agility is the key to success in our accelerated business world. Organizations must respond to new trends as quickly as possible. We must learn how to remain collaborative, flexible, and adaptable to the environment. How? The answer lies in the power of networks.

Think about your organization. Who are the individuals that initiate and support changes? Does the internal communication structure support effective distribution of information on change initiatives? Organizational network analysis identifies these individuals and communication patterns and thereby allows organizations to create response strategies for greater efficiency and employee satisfaction.

### About the author

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András Vicsek is an organisational psychologist, consultant, and trainer specialising in social and organisational network analysis, and a frequent speaker at international industry events. Mr Viscsek is a co-founder of Maven7, a company which incorporates social network analysis and data mining into organisational analytic solutions. Within Maven7, he is responsible for research and development of all products, services, and related certificate trainings.

Mr Viscsek is also the developer of OrgMapper, a web-based social network analysis tool for consultants. He frequently holds OrgMapper Organizational Network Analysis certification trainings for organizational development practitioners from various regions of the world. Before founding Maven7 with his partners, he gained vast experience as the head of several HR-focus international research projects regarding work stress, motivation, loyalty and employer branding.



# Sales people

Born or made?

Ian Price

Dependent as companies are for top-line growth on the selection, assessment and development of their sales people, they naturally invest a good deal of time, budget and mental energy in the process. Many of our clients consider the churn of sales people – and the consequent distraction of replacing them – to be a major inhibitor of overall success. Most use a combination of interviews and psychometric instruments in the recruitment process and yet ceaselessly confront hiring misfires. How, they ask us, did the accomplished candidate that oozed self-belief at interview – and had excellent references – change overnight into a nervous wreck that simply couldn't sell?

What makes a great sales person? Is it really all about a genetic hand dealt at birth? If so, how can we identify such people? And if not, how can people acquire the skills and behaviours of high performance sales people?

When we ask sales directors what they look for in potential recruits, they place a lot of emphasis on the rapport established during the process of interviewing. After all, the argument runs, sales today is not about closing techniques but rather about empathy. This person needs to be able to establish great relationships with our customers. But if this is the case, why is it that so many pleasant, affable, 'natural' sales people perform brilliantly at interview but disastrously in their role? While building rapport is important, research from CEB in the US tells us that if sales people are defined by their emphasis on building relationships, they are unlikely to be high performers.<sup>1</sup> Why? Because this emphasis means that they tend to yield rather than challenge the customer or take control of the sale.

**If sales people are defined by their emphasis on building relationships, they are unlikely to be high performers.**

We see sales recruiters frequently put candidates through psychometric profiling tests that measure dimensions of personality originally conceived by Carl Jung. When asked what they look for in potential sales people, recruiters frequently cite extraversion. Surely, high performing sales people need to be outgoing types if they're going to put themselves out there and establish a rapport with the customer, don't they? The evidence suggests otherwise. Research by Adam Grant at the University of Pennsylvania examined a team of sales agents and mapped their individual sales performance against their position on the introversion-extroversion scale.<sup>2</sup> The results



were surprising - high extroverts performed just as poorly as high introverts. Why? Because high extroverts are poor listeners, often talking over the customer.

So are there tests that predict high performance in sales? The answer is yes, but oddly, they are little used. For example, Martin Seligman's research focuses on 'optimism'; in this context optimism defines how we explain events to ourselves.<sup>3</sup>

For sales people, this is particularly important in the context of negative events. If we explain negative events to ourselves as either personal ('I'm not cut out for this') or permanent ('Nobody's ever going to buy this product'), then those sentiments become self-fulfilling. Sales people with a pessimistic explanatory style often fall into avoidant mode, finding anything they can to soak up their time rather than expose themselves to more negativity; a phenomenon sometimes called 'Busy Fool Syndrome'. Seligman took a team of rejects from the selection process of the Metropolitan Life insurance company and tested them for optimism. Those with the highest levels were put to work at the company - in spite of their initial rejection - where they went on to outperform the successful candidates by a significant margin and also had lower churn rates.

**Science suggests that someone with a high pre-existing level of optimism and grit will perform well in sales.**

Secondly, we can examine 'grit' as developed by Angela Lee Duckworth.<sup>4</sup> Grit refers to the determination to succeed and push for long-term goals. Duckworth's study of sales people in a vacation ownership corporation showed that those who scored higher on grit were less likely to quit and earned higher commissions.

This science suggests that someone with a high pre-existing level of optimism and grit will perform well in sales. These are what we sometimes call 'natural' sales people, those with an impermeably thick skin that persist regardless of the amount of rejection or adversity they experience. So do existing psychometric tests measure optimism and grit? Seligman and his colleague Peter Schulman designed the Attributional Styles Questionnaire, but it appears to be rarely used in sales recruitment. Proxy concepts such as 'cognitive hardness' or 'mental toughness' are clearly closely related, but research into their effectiveness at predicting sales performance has yet to take place.

The good news is that this can be developed. Whether you call it optimism, grit, mental toughness, or cognitive hardness, everybody can grow in this area with the right development interventions, so long as you have what Carol Dweck refers to as a 'growth mindset' rather than a fixed one. While training and development interventions for sales people tend to revolve around sales skills and techniques, our experience is that most sales people know their way around these but simply don't consistently put them into practice. Why not? Because they have not been trained in the cognitive skills of trying things outside their comfort zone and persisting in the face of adversity.

If you want your sales people to become 'challengers', they will need to develop sufficient levels of confidence and assertiveness in order to challenge the customer, deliver business insights, and take control of the sale. Many sales directors question the idea of investing in developing confidence in their sales people. After all, shouldn't sales people have confidence already? In fact, confidence is highly contextual, which

explains that sales person who can sell themselves brilliantly at interview and negotiate a terrific package but flounders when trying to sell a new product or solution. Even experienced sales people need to develop a confident underlying mindset.

There is substantial research that suggests that training in sales skills and techniques often fails to deliver a change in behaviour. We liken it to giving a patient a cough sweet rather than addressing the lung infection causing the cough. Our recent project with an experienced team of senior account directors for a global software company introduced them to the basics of neuroscience and psychology over a series of workshops and coaching sessions. With a basic understanding of emotional wiring, the participants became better placed to manage the impact of setbacks and retain their persistence towards achieving their goals. The result was a twenty percent increase in pipeline coverage over three months, accompanied by a reduction in staff churn from one in five team members leaving over a year to zero.

Whether with teams of desk agents selling transactional products or with senior sales people selling complex solutions, we have accumulated real evidence that developing the mindset of sales people through a combination of workshops and coaching really does lift performance. It is not an overnight shift, but psychology and neuroscience are beginning to illuminate the 'black art' of sales performance.

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## About the author



Ian Price, author of *The Activity Illusion* and CEO-turned-business-psychologist, is an expert in the psychology and neuroscience of selling. Mr Price has an MSc in Organisational Behaviour and is a member of the Association of Business Psychologists. In March 2015 he became an Honorary Fellow of the Association of Professional Sales, contributing to its Special Interest Group on sales behaviours.

Mr Price is a co-founder of Sales-Mind, a sales team development consultancy that has delivered workshops and coaching to sales teams across a range of industries and geographies since 2012. Their clients include PWC, BT, BP, De Vere Venues, and CA Technologies.



# Team alignment and performance

Data talks

Dr Tom Janz

Aligning management teams around competitive brand strategy forms the dominant mantra from business schools and high-priced consultants alike. Most sell strategy alignment workshops on the theory that strong alignment is a good thing.<sup>1</sup> But is it really?

## They say it, but what does the data say?

On the personality front, received wisdom differs. Personality should align with competitive strategy overall, but any one team needs complementary personalities. For example, if an innovation team leader leans strongly to the creative side, some members should be detail-oriented executors.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, if the team leader for a production team leans strongly on process compliance, at least some members should have the creative gene to avoid following the tried-and-true over a cliff.

Put another way, diversity advocates decry the group-think of cloned teams, where everyone looks, thinks, and acts the same. Does that imply that the more personality diversity, the better?

## Team alignment and performance

To test the notion that alignment between the team head and team members on their strategic priorities and personality factors had an impact performance, we at PeopleAssessments.com performed an experiment. We measured strategy and personality for a population of 82 senior managers from a progressive, mid-tier bank in the Middle East using two different psychometric assessments, and then compared the results with the team's overall performance to find whether there was a correlation.

### Measuring strategy

To measure the team's strategies, we used the Competitive Strategy Profiler — a short assessment of the priority placed on four fundamental approaches to winning in the marketplace. The four fundamental types of competitive strategy arose from a combination of Porter's (1980) *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors*, and Jan Carlzon's (1987) book *Moments of Truth*, the story of how he restructured SAS to lift its competitive position in the airline industry.<sup>3,4</sup> These four fundamental types identify four primary ways that corporations win customers in a competitive marketplace.

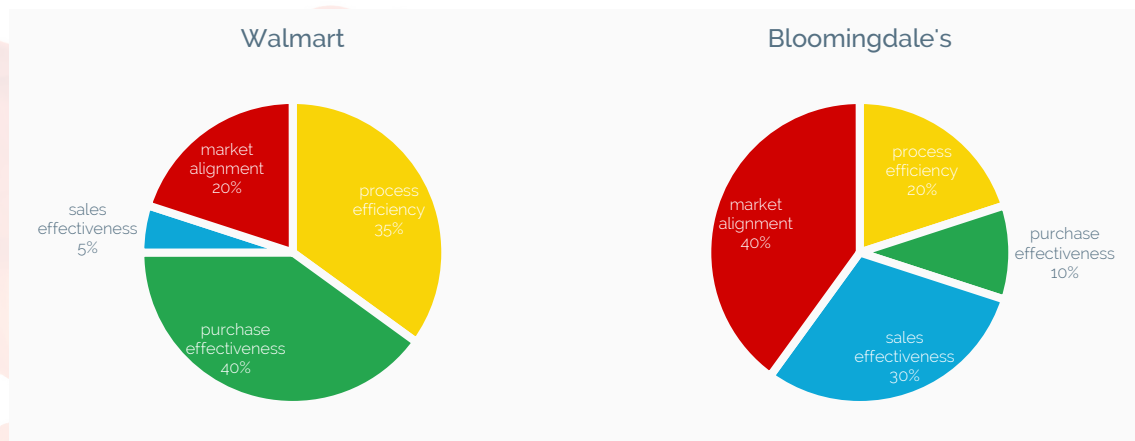
Competitors can win customers by providing:

- **Better offerings ("market alignment"):** Products or services that are more powerful, accurate, novel, durable, or beautiful than available alternatives;
- **Better sales experiences ("sales effectiveness"):** Sales professionals that are more credible, skillful, knowledgeable, attractive, or pleasing; offerings that are available and easy to buy; package deals or buying incentives that increase perceived value;
- **More efficiency ("process efficiency"):** Competitors who transform inputs and resources into goods and services with greater efficiency can offer lower prices;
- **More prudence ("purchase effectiveness"):** Competitors who negotiate better prices for their inputs and resources can offer lower prices.

Figure 1: Human competence implications for four strategic priorities



As an example, compare how two brands would likely differ on the four primary strategic priorities, based on personal experience and public data.



Walmart, famous for its "Always low prices" tagline, has a well-earned reputation for leaning heavily on its suppliers to keep costs down. It was also the first large discount retail chain to implement electronic register tapes that closed the loop on purchases and inventory daily, rather than quarterly or annually. They don't pay much for greeters and their stores can look crowded or shabby at times, but they do offer low prices.

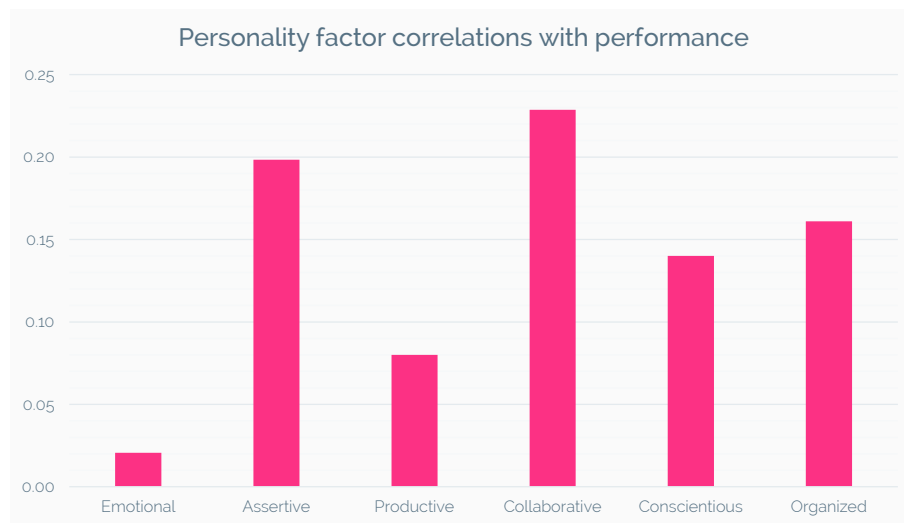
By contrast, Bloomingdale's focuses on mid-to-high-end products offered in stylish boutique "stores within a store." They clearly emphasize their buying experience and offerings.

This is not to say that Walmart doesn't care about their sales experience or that Bloomingdale's doesn't care about efficiency. However, their priorities for winning customers could not be more different.

## Measuring personality

We measured the team's personalities using the WorkSTYLE Profiler, which maps scores on six dimensions of work-related personality to nine predictive personality types.<sup>5</sup>

The following graph shows the names of the factors and their correlation with the team's performance ratings over three years.



## Calculating alignment vs performance

We then calculated the sums of the absolute differences between the team head and each team member for nine teams from the population of eighty-two senior managers.

I expected that the greater the average head-to-member distance for a team, the worse that team's average performance score would be on the last three years of performance ratings for team members.

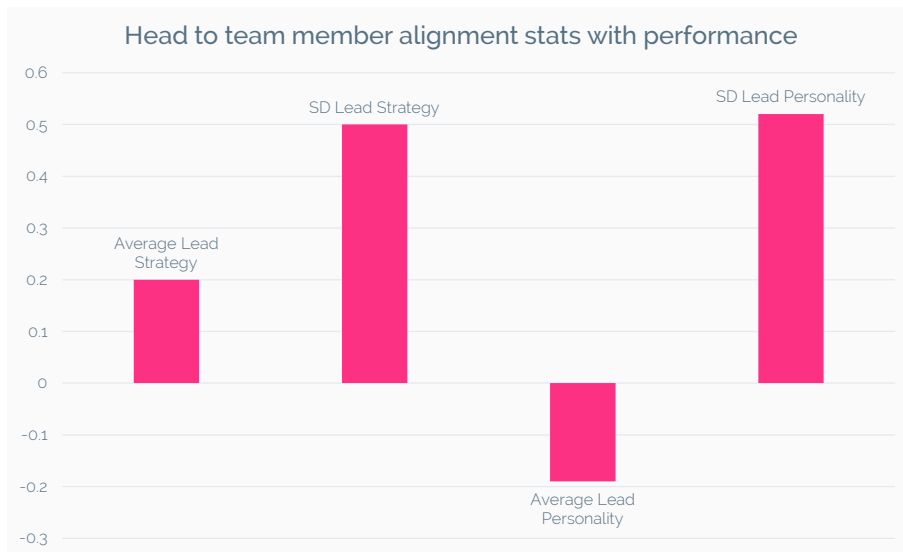
**But I was wrong.**

It was the SD (standard deviation—the variation among team members' measured alignment) that correlated most with job performance.

## What does this mean?

The average level of alignment between the team's head and the team's members doesn't have such a huge impact on team member performance. On the chart below, the bars labeled "Average Lead Strategy" and "Average Lead Personality" denote small correlations with team member performance in the .2 range. The small effect that shows up suggests that it's better to align around strategy and not so good to align around personality.

The big impact on performance occurs in teams where some members are highly aligned with the team head and some are really not. On the chart, the "SD Lead Strategy" and "SD Lead Personality" bars show substantial correlations, both positive, in the .5 range.



## The bottom line

To a modest extent, it's better to have teams with more alignment around strategy and some diversity around personality. However, when forming teams, avoiding teams with high variance between the team lead and team members on either personality or strategy would be a good thing.

When strong strategic variance is found, efforts to achieve greater alignment would likely pay off well. When strong variance in personalities is found, re-shuffling the players among teams to reduce team variance makes more sense. There is not much profit in trying to shape personality later in life. Shaping strategic priorities is a much better bet.

Grasping why it's so important to **measure versus merely opine** forms the most valuable lesson here.

I would still be happily ignorant on the importance of scanning for teams with high lead-to-member variance had I not measured competitive strategic priorities and key personality factors. The difference between what we think and what we know can also be the difference between profit and loss, failure and survival.

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#### About the author

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Dr Tom Janz is Chief Scientist for PeopleAssessments.com. He has a PhD in Industrial Psychology and began his career with academic positions at a number of universities. He has since held science and leadership positions at Personnel Decisions International, Guru Worldwide Inc, Unicru, Batrus Hollweg International, and Lominger International. Dr Janz has a long-held belief in the value of online interview decision support technology, and now pursues his dream of offering valid, affordable online tests and interviews via PeopleAssessments.com.

Dr Janz has published several articles and book chapters on topics ranging from expectancy theory to motivational culture to selection utility, and is the co-author of *Behaviour Description Interviewing: New, Accurate, Cost Effective*.



# Are we doing enough to develop career competency?

Dr Helen Watts

How can you make sure that the graduates you employ are 'career competent'? Are they prepared for your workplace when they arrive? How can you develop their competency?

People often take the concept of career competency to mean career skills, which can cause problems for employers trying to determine the fit of potential hires. For example, we often read about the importance of problem solving skills, interpersonal skills, critical thinking skills, and the like in reference to career success. However, is it just these skills that make someone competent in their career?

Skills define specific learning activities, and they range widely in terms of complexity (e.g. mopping the floor vs performing brain surgery). Skills are one of three facets that make up a competency, along with knowledge and abilities.<sup>1</sup> Competencies provide the missing piece of the puzzle by translating skills into on-the-job behaviours that demonstrate ability to perform job requirements competently.


Perhaps a better framework for understanding career competency is to focus on broader competencies rather than specific skills. For example, the Career Competency Indicator (CCI) is based on seven underpinning competencies: goal setting and career planning, self-knowledge, job performance, career-related skills, knowledge of (office) politics, career guidance and networking, and feedback seeking and self-presentation.<sup>2,3</sup>

Broadly, these competencies cover different areas of knowledge relating to 'knowing whom', 'knowing why', and 'knowing how', and therefore represent career competency at a more fundamental level. Surely we want our graduates to know how to deal with office politics? To know with whom to network and from whom to seek guidance? To know why something they did worked or didn't work?

## Are graduates promoting, and being recruited for, the right competencies?

According to popular graduate recruitment website Prospects.ac.uk, there are five key competencies sought after by employers: good communication, effective leadership and management, planning and research, teamwork and interpersonal, and self-management.<sup>4</sup> However, whilst these competencies might get a graduate through the door and enable them to perform their job day-to-day, they arguably do not prepare a graduate for a longer-term successful career.

Good communication skills need to be combined with knowing whom to approach; successful leadership and management relies on knowledge of the political context in



an organisation. Self-management is more than just developing priorities and having good time management—it should also include the ability to critically reflect on why and how things work out the way they do. Employers should be seeking, and graduates should be promoting, broader definitions of these competencies.

## Are universities developing the right competencies?

Graduates can only promote competencies they have developed, which places responsibility on universities to develop the right skills within the degrees they offer. It has long been debated whether universities provide students with the necessary skills and competencies to be able to successfully fulfil the requirements of graduate jobs, and complaints are often raised about graduates' deficiencies in key work competencies and skills.

**Employers should be seeking, and graduates should be promoting, broader definitions of career competencies.**

In 2006, Gillinson and O'Leary found that 54% of recruiters considered it increasingly difficult to find graduates with 'the right skills'.<sup>5</sup> More recently, according to a longitudinal Futuretrack study, approximately three-quarters of graduates thought they possessed all the skills employers were looking for when job-hunting, but just over three fifths of employed graduates believed they were using these skills in their jobs.<sup>6</sup>

The study focused on seven key skills, and the match between how well universities had developed those skills versus how often jobs utilised them. When analysing the matches, spoken communication and teamwork skills were used more in jobs, but had been developed less in universities. Broadly, it did seem that there was sufficient development of skill (proportional to job demand) in written communication, numerical analysis, and entrepreneurial skills. There was an over-development of skills in research and presentation. However, this again assumes that these skills are sufficient for a sustainable graduate career path.

## How effectively do businesses support career management?

Even if graduates do have the right skills and competencies to begin a successful career, we must next consider how their employer can further manage and develop their career competency. According to the CIPD, employees quite often only informally engage in career management. Also, whilst line managers are best suited to deliver career guidance, it is often felt that they do not have sufficient support and training to be able to deliver effective guidance. Further, it seems that the most commonly offered types of career support are focused around achieving promotions or improving current job roles. But what about the support needed for longer-term career success or developing competencies needed for future job roles? These types of support are not as frequently offered.<sup>7</sup>

In general, whilst career management is often considered to be within the hands of the individual it seems that recruiters, universities, and organisations all have a role to play in ensuring graduates have not only employability opportunities but opportunities

to develop successful careers. However, if the focus remains primarily on the development of day-to-day skills as opposed to more fundamental development of career competencies, we are less likely to see graduates achieving successful and sustainable careers.

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### About the author

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Dr Helen Watts is a Senior Lecturer in Marketing at Worcester Business School with expertise in consumer psychology. She holds a PhD in Customer Retention and is a registered Occupational Psychologist and is a qualified psychometrician (Level A & B Occupational Testing), with experience in using personality, ability and motivation/preference tools.

Dr Watts has worked as an associate for various regional consultancies, helping clients to improve their business processes in relation to psychometric testing, selection and assessment, talent management, learning and development, outplacement, and research. Dr Watts research interests include consumer loyalty and retention, service quality, customer value, brand association, personality and identification, social identification and anxiety, involvement, services marketing and management.



# Harnessing strengths for maximum performance

Trudy Bailey

## Overview

Are you looking to provide more motivation in people's career paths? Do you want to support others to find that perfect job or recognise what drives them to succeed? Then discover strengths!

In this article we will look at why strengths are important to individuals, teams, and organisations. We will consider the benefits of a strengths-based approach to development and the ways you can measure for strengths. Finally, we will look at the risks of using strengths.

## The Benefits of Strengths

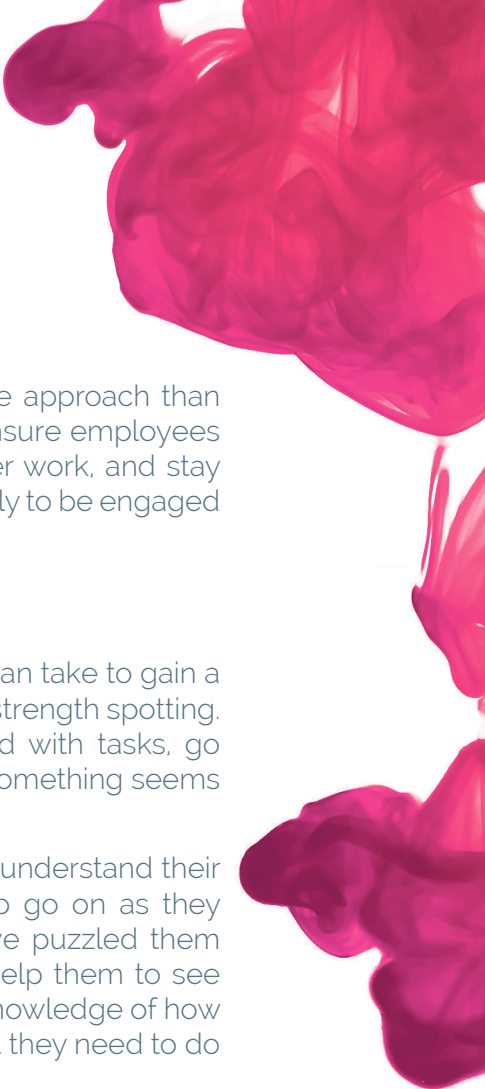
On an individual level there are many personal benefits to using our strengths. We are happier, more confident, have higher self-esteem, experience less stress, are more resilient, and achieve our goals more effectively.

People are sometimes humble about their strengths, but from the moment they can recognise and articulate them, you can help bring them to life and the upward spiral of strengths begins. Individuals begin to understand their strengths in context, share them, use them more often, and develop them; all resulting in better performance, increased confidence, and the ability and permission to further utilise them.

## The Business Case

The benefits don't just stop at the individual level. Adoption of strengths-based approaches throughout an organisation encourages management practices that deliver positive outcomes for both organisations and the individuals within them. Research tells us that using strengths in organisations can result in:<sup>1</sup>

- increased productivity and goal attainment
- effective talent management
- improved relationships and communication
- increased engagement and well-being
- improved delegation
- increased creativity
- enhanced role clarity



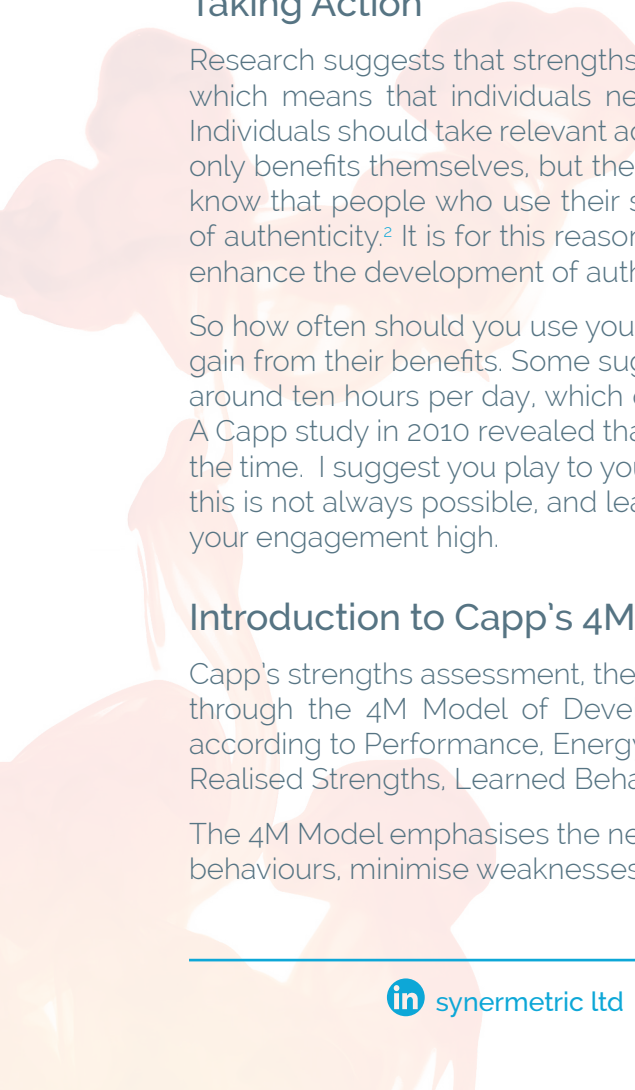
We know that building employees' strengths is a far more effective approach than fixing their weaknesses.<sup>2,3</sup> Adopting a strengths-based culture will ensure employees learn their roles more quickly, produce more and significantly better work, and stay with their company longer, as well as making them six times more likely to be engaged at work.

## Measuring for Strengths

There are online strengths assessments that individuals and teams can take to gain a self-reported understanding of their strengths, or you can engage in strength spotting. Learn to recognise when individuals are learning quickly, engaged with tasks, go above and beyond, and are enthusiastic to offer their time, or when something seems to come really naturally to them.

Practically nothing is more rewarding for me than helping a team to understand their patterns and how they impact performance. You see the lightbulb go on as they recognise their strengths and weaknesses; situations that may have puzzled them before now make sense. Enabling discussions and actions which help them to see ways forward on the basis of their strengths leaves individuals with knowledge of how they can contribute to their team, and teams with knowledge of what they need to do to ensure future success.

## Taking Action



Research suggests that strengths are people's greatest area of growth and potential, which means that individuals need to take personal ownership of their strengths. Individuals should take relevant action to ensure their strengths journey is one that not only benefits themselves, but their team members and organisation as well. We also know that people who use their strengths more effectively experience higher levels of authenticity.<sup>2</sup> It is for this reason that we believe that identification of strengths can enhance the development of authentic leadership.

So how often should you use your strengths? The more we utilise them, the more we gain from their benefits. Some suggest that individuals should engage their strengths around ten hours per day, which only one in four people in the US currently achieve. A Capp study in 2010 revealed that highly engaged people use their strengths 70% of the time. I suggest you play to your strengths at every opportunity, but recognise that this is not always possible, and learn to moderate other tasks and behaviours to keep your engagement high.

## Introduction to Capp's 4M Model of Development

Capp's strengths assessment, the R2 Strengths Profiler, looks at developing strengths through the 4M Model of Development (see Figure 1). It measures 60 strengths according to Performance, Energy, and Use, and divides the data into four quadrants: Realised Strengths, Learned Behaviours, Weaknesses, and Unrealised Strengths.

The 4M Model emphasises the need to marshal realised strengths, moderate learned behaviours, minimise weaknesses, and maximise unrealised strengths.

Whether you are looking to change career, develop your team's skills, or enhance your leadership capabilities, you need to know where to focus your energy to ensure you reach your goals. This model gives individuals a framework to guide them in which action to take in each of the quadrants. This ensures we continue to develop our strengths to an outstanding level, and recognise and learn to mitigate our learned behaviours and weaknesses. For some, the concept of not developing weaknesses is still new, so by specifically labelling the action 'minimise' we can support people to move on from these behaviours and build more confidence to develop their strengths.

Figure 1: Table 1: Capp's 4M Model of Development



### Realised Strengths – Marshal to use appropriately in context

Realised strengths are those you recognise and employ habitually – but there can still be surprises insofar as there may be many things we exhibit as strengths, but which we don't automatically recognise and accept as such.<sup>4</sup> By marshalling your realised strengths and aligning them specifically to your goals and objectives, you are more likely to achieve them.<sup>5</sup>

There is consistent and persuasive evidence that when you use your strengths, you feel a sense of energy, engagement, and intrinsic motivation, and you deliver better performance as a result. However, watch out for realised strengths pursued excessively and overplayed, as this tendency could result in these strengths becoming learned behaviours if not correctly marshalled.

### Learned Behaviours – Moderate to avoid burnout

Learned behaviours often surprise people, as they highlight skills that we have learned to do well but do not give us energy. Perhaps we have overplayed them, or never really recognised how much we enjoy the tasks, despite being good at them. These provide us with a timely alert to the possibility of future burnout should we continue to over-exploit specific strengths at the expense of balance. By moderating them, i.e. using them as appropriately as possible but not too often – we lower the risk of feeling drained. We should use learned behaviours as needed, but be careful of overuse.

## Weaknesses – Minimise to avoid risk

We uncover weaknesses so as to understand the negative impact they have on us, and thereby minimise their use. Enabling individuals and teams to take ownership of their weaknesses and to recognise that the focus of their energy needs to be directed towards their strengths will result in further engagement and better performance. Identify one of your strengths which might compensate for that weakness, or work with other people with complementary strengths. You could even learn how to develop your weakness to an acceptable level if you feel it is business-critical.

## Unrealised Strengths – Maximise to achieve your goals

Your unrealised strengths are a goldmine of untapped potential, waiting for an opportune moment when you call them into service.<sup>6</sup> Look at them as a valuable resource in your toolkit to draw upon when needed, or to offset your weaknesses or fill in a gap in your team's overall strengths.

## Risks of strengths approaches

When it comes to the risks to strengths approaches, there are two topics we often discuss: **focus on weaknesses**, and **overplayed strengths**.

To enable success, we need to focus people primarily on developing their individual strengths, rather than develop their identified weaknesses, but for most it doesn't feel like enough to ignore them. The R2 Strengths Profiler reports on weaknesses with the understanding that whilst we need to recognise them to understand the risks they pose, we use our strengths to compensate, and in the worst case work to develop our weaknesses to a manageable level. However, the emphasis should be on awareness and recognition, not development.

As for overplayed strengths, reference the phrase 'what got you here won't get you there'. We need to consider all of our strengths rather than a select few. The 4M Model tells us to marshal our strengths so we draw on them as and when necessary. Ask for feedback from your team members on which strengths they think you would benefit from dialling down in certain situations. Being aware of all our strengths will help us to combine and dynamically use them.

## Conclusion

We know that most of us don't use our strengths enough, but all the evidence suggests we should deploy them whenever possible. The benefits are endless, so focus on which benefits you would like to see in yourself, your coachee, team members, or organisation. Even better, marshal your strengths to focus on the right skills for the specific goal you are working towards. Finally, recognise where you might be overplaying your strengths and draw on other strengths to give yourself (and others) a rest.



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### About the author

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Trudy Bailey leads R2 at Capp & Co, a strengths-based consultancy organisation. She has overall responsibility for the strategic direction, training, and practitioners of the strengths tool. Trudy delivers consultancy expertise on assessment, development and specialises in R2 and female leadership development. She leads the R2 accreditation programmes.

Ms Bailey has worked in assessment and development for fifteen years, specialising in coaching and graduate, team, and leadership development. Her own leading strengths include Mission, Counterpoint, and Humour!



**“Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself.**

**When you become a leader, success is all about growing others.”**

**Jack Welch**



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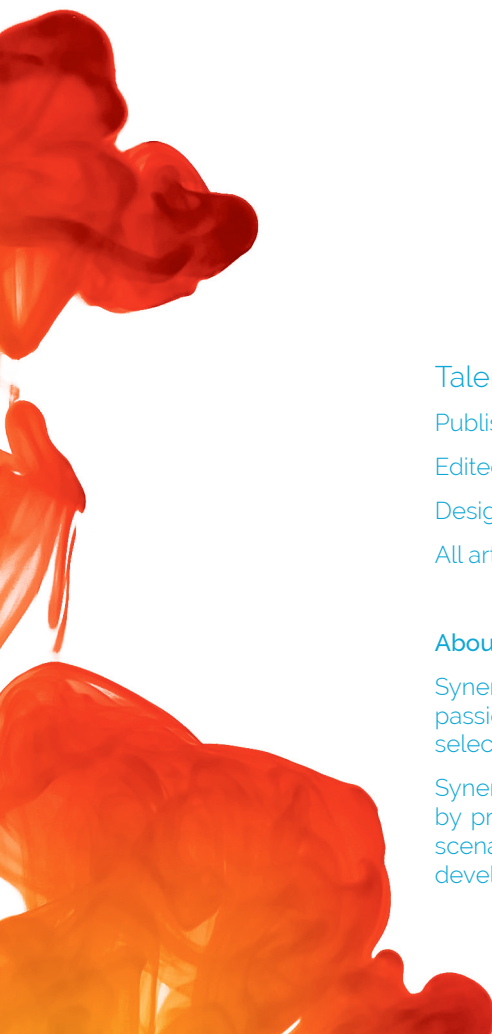
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