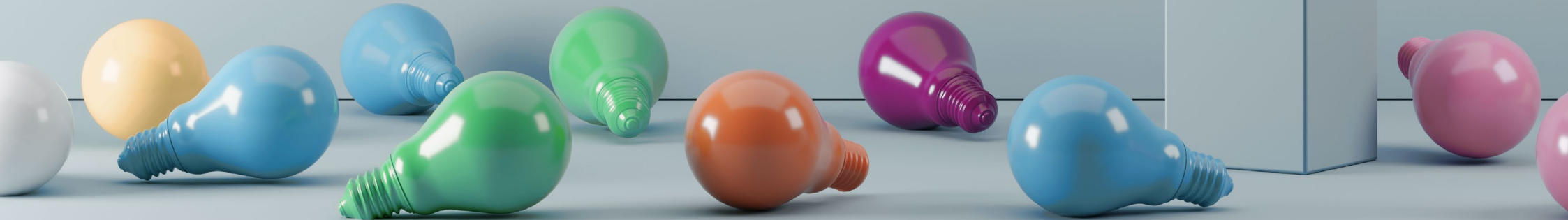


Authentic Leadership, the strengths way →





Leaders who know how to bring out strengths in others – to develop and stretch those strengths.

This ebook is for authentic leaders and for those leaders who aspire to be.

What can historic studies of leadership tell us about the modern world?

There are plenty of different theories of effective leadership. There is the 'great man' theory that great leaders are born and not made (and that great leaders are exclusively men...thankfully, this theory is no longer in favour).

Then there are trait theories – these propose that there are certain qualities which leaders must have if they are to be effective....but trait theories don't focus on context, wouldn't that affect leadership effectiveness?

Step up contingency and situational theories, which do focus on context as an important determinant of success. And what of transformational leadership theories, where the leader

focuses on higher purpose and help people do their very best work by fulfilling their individual potential?

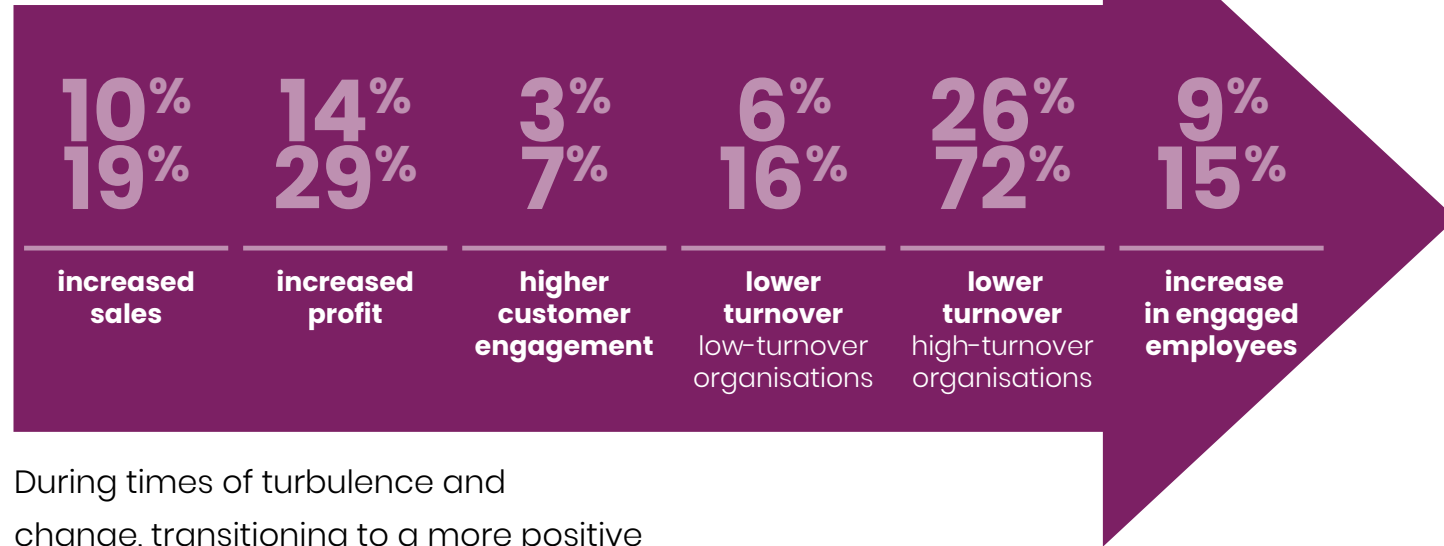
In summary, there are many leadership theories. Most of them (although not all) have a dash of truth about them. So how can the strengths approach add value here? How can it help you to lead more truthfully, more effectively and more authentically?

What do employees today need, want and expect?

Evidence is becoming increasingly compelling. That building and leading organisations where people are psychologically safe, valued, understood and where their talents and strengths are put to the very best use, leads to the most positive organizational outcomes.

Research findings from Rigoni and Asplund (2016) show that (based on

data from 1.2 million employees in 22 organisations and 45 countries) that 90% of organisations using such an approach reported:



During times of turbulence and change, transitioning to a more positive approach to leadership can feel risky – the default setting for many leaders when the pressure is on is to revert to behaviours which control employees rather than encouraging their creativity and individuality.

And yet it is those organisations who have started to adopt strengths-based principles who are now reaping the rewards.

It would be easy to say that creating a strengths-based organisation is easy to do. It is not. We are talking here about swimming against the strong currents of 'negativity bias' that permeate through all areas of our lives. And doing it consistently from this point forward.

That's hard.

But once some basic elements are in place, and these elements will need to be supported and reinforced by leaders, a more positive, open, innovative and resilient culture can start to develop.

And that endeavour takes authentic leaders. Leaders who understand their strengths and talents. Who have crafted their careers around them. Leaders who know their risks – strengths prone to going too far and areas that drain them – and who have methods to limit those risks.

Leaders who know how to bring out strengths in others – to develop and stretch those strengths.

This ebook is for authentic leaders and for those leaders who aspire to be.



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MEETING ROOM

Building a strengths-based organisation – what does it mean in practice? →



What are the elements that make up a strengths-based organisation and how can you start to build them in your organisation?

Start with your organisation's purpose

Organisations with a clear, compelling purpose find it easier to recruit and retain people. Particularly those who personally relate to that purpose. Organisations need to work to specify their 'reason for being', the value the organisation will deliver to customers/

end users and how it will behave in the world.

Being clear on your purpose and on how people are contributing to that purpose helps employees to see how they can make a real difference. Provided they feel valued and empowered to contribute their strengths, ideas and views in working towards this purpose.

Encourage people to deliver in areas of strength

In strengths-based organisations, leaders encourage employees to discover and use their natural strengths (as we define strengths, these are the 'underlying qualities that energise you and you are great at or have potential to be great at') to achieve their objectives.

Employees are not expected to be well-rounded, but rather to grow and excel in areas of their greatest strength.

They are also encouraged to call on colleagues for help in areas where they are drained or feel less competent. In itself, creating the conditions for collaboration and complementary partnering.

Where employees are falling short in delivering on their objectives, they are encouraged to draw on their strengths to achieve those objectives. Also ensuring awareness of their weaker areas so that these don't get in the way of them delivering their best work.

Where necessary, these weaker areas can also be developed...up to the point where they have reached an acceptable level.

People in strengths-based organisations are trained in company processes and in the technical skills required for their roles. But more than that, they are encouraged to go beyond their role descriptions and contribute to areas that energise them.

This builds their self-belief and confidence. That they have the capabilities to succeed and meet their objectives, in a way that works for them. That has a positive knock-on effect for the culture as a whole.

Empower and enable rather than control

People want the latitude to do their jobs their way without micro-management. Albeit with support and help from their manager when needed.

They want the choice as to how the job is performed so they can deal with tasks in a way that suits them best.

Leaders in strengths-based organisations recognise the need to unlock employees' strengths, ideas, and energy to do their best work. These leaders allow people to make important decisions and back them up with support, coaching and guidance to deal with tougher decisions and get

over any roadblocks that may come up.

Leaders in strengths-based organisations adopt a more transparent approach to decision-making. Gaining input from employees, actively asking for suggestions on how work and the workplace might be improved.

Taking comments and recommendations seriously and communicating back any changes made because of staff suggestions. This builds a sense that people's views are heard and appreciated. Having a feeling of confidence that they can build a more positive organisation.

Focus on the positives and understand the negatives

Every leader has the choice to focus on the positives or the negatives in a given situation. The research tells us, and evidence from strengths-based organisations aligns with this, that

adopting a positive perspective when appropriate, creates the conditions for innovation and improved decision-making (in terms of quality and speed).

When leaders make a conscious choice to focus on strengths, successes, opportunities and solutions, they set off a powerful chain reaction of positive emotions and behaviours.

Maintaining a positive mindset doesn't mean leaders should fall into the 'toxic positivity' trap. A positive mindset doesn't imply negative emotions should be dismissed or ignored. It highlights the need to surface those emotions and explore the impact on behaviours and results.

So, in strengths-based organisations, if a leader is upset or angry, they are encouraged to talk about these feelings in an open and constructive way and focus on finding solutions with others' help. This enables them to understand

their negative emotions and respond to them appropriately rather than becoming 'emotionally hijacked.'

Which can create a negative chain reaction. In the worst cases leading to lowered productivity and a sense of helplessness or giving up.

Manage stress and pressure better

So many leaders today are pushing their people towards breaking point. Stress-related physical and psychological illnesses and instances of 'burnout' are on the rise. The cost to both organisations and society are going up and up.

Leaders in strengths-based organisations understand the need to manage stress and pressure – both their own and that of their people. They provide employees with opportunities to rest, reflect and re-energise. Encouraging them to fully disconnect

in evenings, at weekends and when on leave.

They organise work to ensure people are not working flat out continuously. And encourage support networks make sure people have the emotional and practical support they need. These steps help regulate energy.

It facilitates shared learning from different experiences and enable employees to become more resilient.



Your leadership brand – the essential first step towards authentic leadership →



Authentic leadership starts with a lens on you

Our executive coaching often focuses in on leaders' values as the principles they work toward and which others need to understand. We also spend time on the strengths and skills that mark them out as unique. For some leaders, we talk purpose – what difference they want to make and what legacy they want to leave as a leader. And for other leaders, we work on their gravitas – how they can be seen as credible, confident and trustworthy.

Here, I want to introduce you to an essential practical activity which will help shape your communication of what's important to you and how you can make an intentional positive impact as a leader: building your leadership brand.

A leadership brand helps you in several ways...

- To differentiate yourself in competitive internal and external marketplaces
- To increase your visibility in your organisation and make others aware of your value
- To ensure people have a clear sense of who you are and how to work with you
- To become more self-confident and self-motivated as you gain self-awareness and clarity about what you have to offer and how that marks you out as positively different.

Onto the activity.

There are plenty of ways of doing this. My favourite is to use a pyramid – a blank example is shown below.

| 1 Who I am

The base level (Who I am) includes the core values and attitudes that guide your leadership. I recommend [James Clear's list of values](#) as a good basis for inspiring your own values list. Try and

keep it as a relatively short list. Say 7-8 values and do use your own language. Think about the things you truly value and hold dear, the way you feel that the world should be, the behaviours or actions in others that anger you – all of these point to your key values and attitudes.

This is important because everyone's

My Essence

The reason others would want to follow me

.....

The Difference I Wish to Make

The legacy I would ideally like to leave

.....

What I Bring

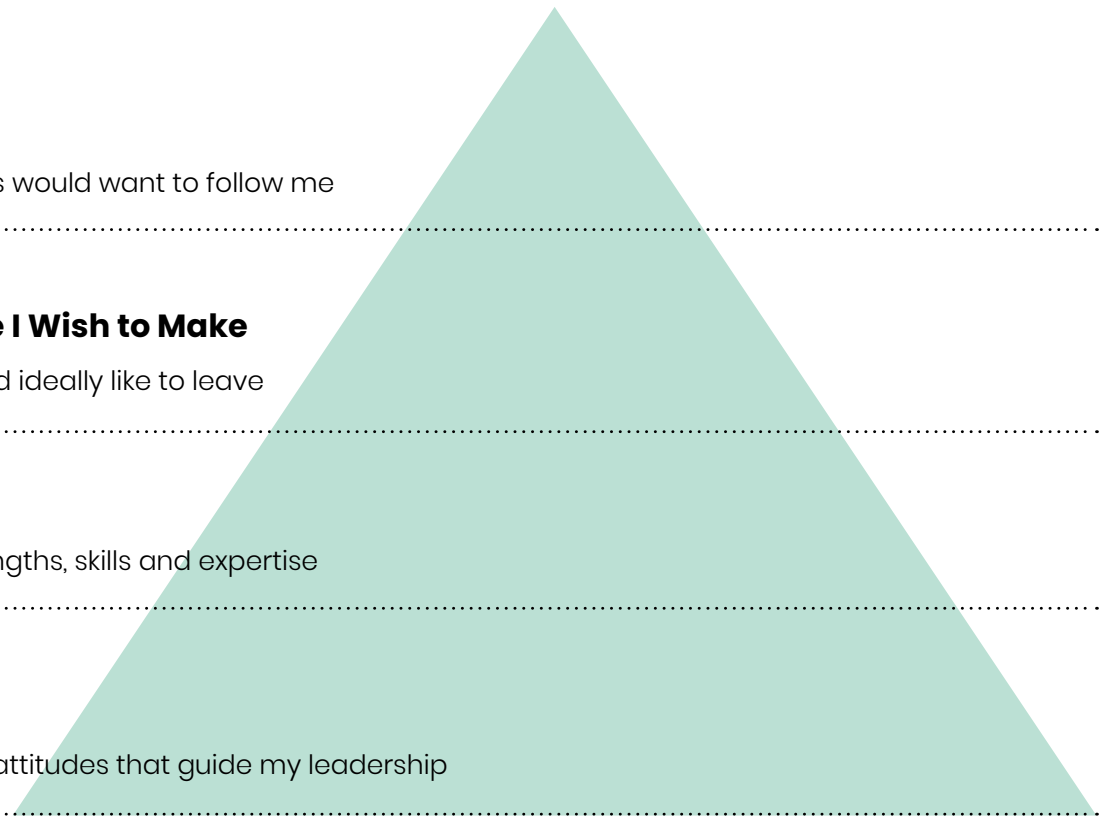
My standout strengths, skills and expertise

.....

Who I Am

Core values and attitudes that guide my leadership

.....



values are different. They come to us from our upbringing and from our experiences through life. We can't assume that anyone else...literally ANYONE else...sees the world in the same way that we do.

So, think about the people who work for you. Would it help them and you if they knew what you valued? Think of this list as a 'survival guide' or playbook

in working with you. If the people who work for you act in alignment with your values, you're more likely to see them in a positive light.

And if they do something that is out of alignment with your values, they can expect that it won't sit well with you. Very important therefore to capture these as the bedrock foundations of the other brand elements.

| 2 What I bring

Second layer. (What I bring) are your strengths, skills and expertise. If you thought of yourself as a product (I know, slightly strange, but stay with me here) this level would contain your 'features'.

If you've completed Strengthscope®, your Strengthscope Standout 3 strengths sit here.

Along with the areas of skill that you want to bring to your leadership role, whatever they may be...strategic vision, networking and relationships, project management capability, flexibility, critical analysis, whatever your gifts and talents and features are.

If you're not 100% sure, you can always ask for feedback from those who know you well. Where do they see you at your best? What do they see as your greatest leadership strengths and talents?



3 The difference I wish to make

Next layer up. The third layer (The difference I wish to make). If the second layer included your product 'features', this layer includes the 'benefits' of those features.

Think of this level as the difference you want to make and/or the leadership legacy you want to leave. Try and get this down to an inspiring 'statement of intent' around your core purpose.

A couple of examples: 'I create environments where teams thrive and I support each individual to reach their true potential' or 'I build and deliver strategic plans which always create measurable value for my organisation'.

It needs to evoke emotions in you (and possibly others, but mainly you because it is intended to stimulate you towards action) and it should be something that sets you apart as being different.

4 My essence

OK, top and final layer is your essence. When you are at your best and most energised, what is the reason others would follow you? Try and stick to 10 words max, ideally fewer. In fact, the fewer the better.

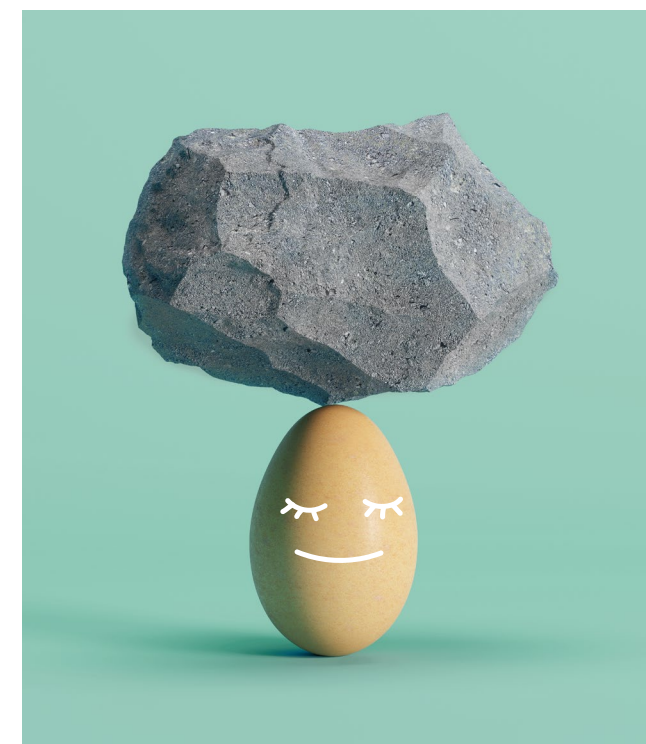
The idea here is to capture a statement that when you say it or others hear it, it will inspire the kind of people who you would want around you to get around you. Think of this as a leadership brand statement or a brand promise if you like.

Practice makes progress

So that's quite a bit of work. It'll take time to hone. Once you're ready, say the words out loud to yourself (particularly those in the top two layers) and test your own reaction.

Does what you have sit right with you? Does it feel like you? Can you 'own' it? Or does it feel awkward?

Does the language not quite work for some reason? Might you just feel embarrassed if you were asked to describe your brand in this way to your team? Then do some more work until it feels right. It will be a mix of the now and the future, of what you have attained already and your aspiration and ambition for your leadership future. But make sure it's sufficiently 'now.' That it represents a reasonably accurate picture of how people will experience you today. They need to be able to



recognise you. But with a future-focused perspective also, so that you have something to move towards with space to grow into.

Your leadership brand communication plan

Once you're happy with your leadership brand. You're going to need a brand communication plan. Here are some reflection questions for you to ask yourself which should help.

→ 1. How close are your stakeholders' perceptions of your current leadership approach to your ideal 'brand'? What do you need to do more of, less of, or differently to close the 'gap'?

These questions are getting you to think about your behaviour and what others see in you day to day that will lead them to conclude that your brand is aligned with the human in front of them. And we all have work to do on that.

Do you need to make your values more visible or talk to more people about

them? Do you need to communicate the value that your strengths and skills and expertise can bring? And to whom? And who knows about the legacy you want to leave right now, and who would you like to know?

→ 2. How will you communicate your brand to colleagues, direct reports and other stakeholders?

Once you've worked out where your gaps are in terms of people's perceptions right now and how you would want 'brand you' to be seen, you can get to work on a comms plan, a brand management plan, that will help you get the right messages to the right people in the right ways.

For example – translating your values into leadership behaviours and behaving consistently with them. Talk to your team about your values maybe at an all-hands meeting, where you ask them to share theirs too or maybe 1:1 with your top team.

What about your legacy and your essence – ideally you would want more senior folk to see and hear this so work on an elevator pitch that you can switch on if you get the opportunity to be in front of your plus ones, plus twos or plus threes.

→ 3. What immediate steps can you take to start communicating and living your brand right now?

Finally, start taking steps today. Small actions can make a big difference. You'll need to make those actions habitual and repeat them consistently over time if you want others to shift their current perceptions or to solidify a view that they may of you already.

Strong personal brands are not built overnight. They take a long time to build. It's worth it though. As all great brands produce strong results in terms of improved demand, perceived value, reputation and results. And for the authentic leader, this is the essential first step.

Managing your strengths in overdrive – the greatest leadership risk of all →

| The risks facing leaders

To be an authentic leader, the strengths way, success doesn't come only from understanding and maximising your most positive qualities. You also need to understand your risk areas and work to manage them. And what is the greatest leadership risk of all? It's not what leaders do badly or don't do at all, despite what you might think. It's not having a lack of skills in certain areas, although of course that can be a problem all of its own. No, the greatest leadership risk of them all is the strength



in overdrive.

So if a strength is a quality that energises us (that we are great at, or have the potential to become great at). A strength in overdrive is what happens when that energy goes haywire and starts to feed on itself.

The leader in overdrive is either unaware of what is happening or the impact that they're having. Or aware but caught in service to an energy monster...the overdrive strength... seemingly unable to escape, with pandemonium (on a grand or smaller scale) happening all around.

Strengths in overdrive and what you can do about them

First things first, let's notice that the term 'strength in overdrive' starts with the word strength. This can be both a shock and a surprise to many leaders when they're introduced to the idea for the first time. Because for most

people, the idea that something they've been acutely aware of for a long time as being a bit of an 'Achilles heel' is actually a strength most of the time is a revelation.

It's also empowering, once you learn how to harness that energy and use it for the good. But first, you need to come to terms with the negative consequences of your strength in overdrive. This is the risks and be clear on the impact they have.

Here's an example taken from our strengths assessment tool Strengthscope® using our strength of Optimism – one of our 24 strengths ([see a brief description of all 24 strengths](#)).

At its best, Optimism can look like this:

- *You believe that in the vast majority of cases, things will work out for the best*
- *You don't let isolated negative events affect your positive view of the world*
- *You look first for the positive in people,*

plans and projects.

While you may or may not personally have an Optimism strength. You can see that what I've just mentioned are all positive, powerful and helpful attitudes or behaviours that a leader with an Optimism strength can bring to their role, team or organisation.

As with all strengths, Optimism can be a leadership superpower lighting the way through;

- a particularly challenging period for a team,
- providing hope as an outcome,
- giving people something to hold onto,
- to help them keep perspective,
- seeing opportunity in projects where things are getting derailed,
- or looking for learning in failure.

There are so many other positive outcomes besides.

But, in certain circumstances, when Optimism is tipped into overdrive, it can look more like:

→ *Your approach being unrealistically positive, which may be risky if it doesn't take into account possible pitfalls or shortcomings*

→ *Or that you may be perceived by others as unrealistic, non-strategic or 'flaky'.*

→ *And this same pattern appears with all strengths – when triggered, that strength can turn to the dark side, no matter how positively powerful it is when in its productive form.*

So, for example, a leader with Courage as a strength might come across as too outspoken or reckless in situations that need a more cautious and diplomatic approach.

A leader with a Compassion strength might spend so much time and emotional energy helping others that they end up compromising their own productivity and emotional wellbeing.

For a leader to use their strengths

well, they need to develop 'strengths intelligence'. Meaning, they can choose to use their strengths in the right ways, with the right people, at the right time and at the right volume.

A strength in overdrive is most likely to happen as the result of a 'trigger' situation which causes the strength to go too far.

| Overdrive triggers

Most commonly for leaders, triggers of overdrive can be:

1. Stress and pressure

Where the leader just doesn't have the capacity to recognise the consequences of their strength going too far. So they just dial it up even louder to cope.

2. Automatic behaviour

That the leader has learned over the years as a suitable response to certain situations. But they haven't learned

to adapt to the different challenges of leadership. Hence the saying 'what got you here won't necessarily get you there' (horribly misquoted sorry). Meaning, that you shouldn't assume that what you used to do that worked for you will carry on working in the same way as you move forward in your career.

3. People triggers

By people triggers, I mean people that the leader works with who seem to create a trigger response (because of past events or memories). Which in their presence leads to a dialing up of a strength, despite it not working. Before they know it, they're caught in the overdrive trap without an obvious way to get out.

| Managing your greatest risk – some options

So what can leaders do about the arch risk of overdrive in order to get a positive outcome?

Here are some practical suggestions taken from many years of working with the overdrive concept with leaders:

1. Know your strengths, and your risks

You can't develop strengths intelligence and manage your risks if you don't know about them in the first place. Of course, we would recommend Strengthscope to help with this because it is simple, it's accessible and it works but other strengths assessments are, of course, available, yawn.

2. Read your triggers

I've just been talking about triggers ... once you've identified which overdrive risks might be the biggest for you, work out what triggers this. Personally, some of my greatest overdrive risks are Empathy and Collaboration.

To protect a relationship (Collaboration), I'm likely to be too understanding about someone's else's situation or stresses or challenges. Hence I ignore my own

needs, taking too much responsibility for the other person's behaviour.

And what triggers this, is my perception of a threat to the relationship. That's when my Empathy overdrive kicks in. With a little bit of added Critical thinking to really help me understand what

might be going on for the other person. That allows me to forgive them and put all the responsibility on myself.

3. Get feedback and respond to it

I remember once running a workshop with about 20 senior leaders who were using our 360 degree feedback tool,



Strengthscope360™ (does what it says on the tin). Anyway, the selected 360 feedback raters are asked to rate leaders on the extent that strengths are being used effectively or whether they're in overdrive.

This one delegate had had feedback that several of their top ranked strengths were in overdrive, according to the people who had rated them. Their response: 'they're all wrong, they don't

understand me, my strengths aren't in overdrive because they feel fine to me'.

Hmmm. So the moral of the story is, get the feedback, but also do something useful with it in terms of developing your strengths intelligence. All feedback is worth something. It's what you do with it that counts.

4. Dial up to dial down

Fascinatingly, leaders have found, that in order to dial down a strength in overdrive, it's often easier to dial UP another complementary strength.

To keep my Empathy overdrive risk in check, I dial up my Strategic Mindedness strength. This helps me to keep a realistic overall perspective, stay mission-focused and not dive down an Empathy rabbit-hole never to be seen again.

Everyone's different. For each leader, the task is to find an antidote complementary strength or strengths

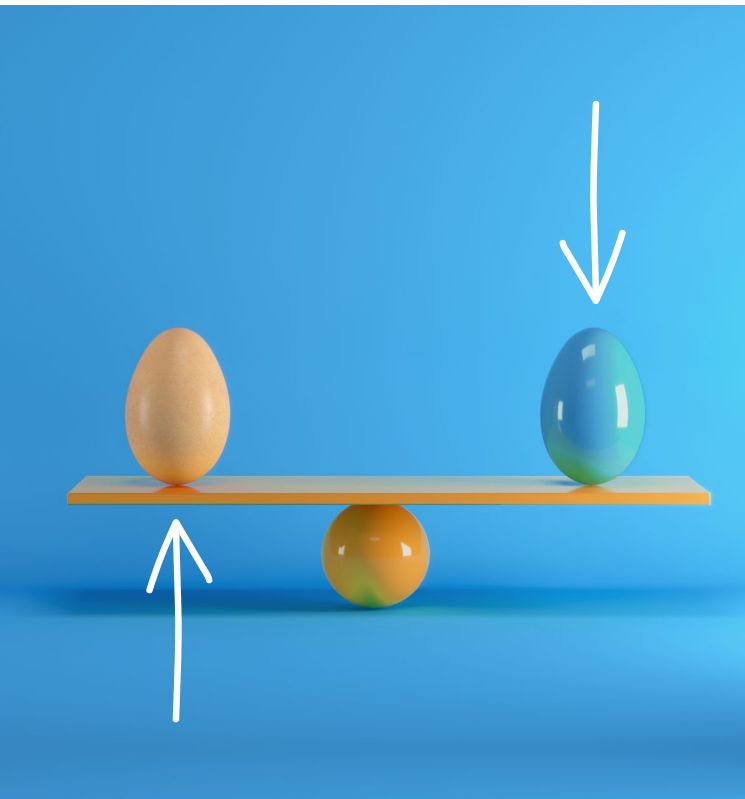
that can keep the overdrive risk at bay. Last thing is...

5. Build new habits

Once you've worked out you have a risk. You can develop new habits to keep the strength in check so it doesn't run away with itself. To keep my Empathy in control, I go to my mantra, 'speak my truth.'

It's a good way to ensure that I remember to do that without worrying that I'm going to wreck a relationship. There's a pretty negligible chance of that happening. If I do damage a relationship, it's important that my voice is heard even if that is a risk.

That's it – your 'How To' guide for finding and thwarting those strength in overdrive leadership risks so that you stay in control and they don't start running the show. Now let's move on to the art of maximising strengths in others.





Maximising the strengths of others

Building on solid foundations of authenticity

By now, you'll have a better handle on the impact you make as a leader: both intentional and unintentional. That gives you a more solid foundation for authentically leading others.

When you watch people who lead and manage others well – people that you come into contact with at work, or that you hear about from others, they'll all be very different people – different values, stories, experiences, attitudes.

Everyone's unique, right?

But in terms of some of the behaviours of the very best leaders and managers – there is some commonality. And one of the things that the best leaders and managers have in common is;

- That they are able to identify areas of natural strength for people,
- Hold them accountable in these areas,
- And encourage them to stretch those areas out of their comfort zones.

So that their people can take their performance and contribution to the next level. Which would make those leaders strengths maximisers.

Maximising strengths in others

There's a good book on this, it's called, 'Multipliers – how the best leaders make everyone smarter,' by Liz Wiseman. And some of the approaches you will see here definitely relate to some of the

wisdom in that book.

So four points on maximising other people's strengths:

1. Get good at strength spotting
2. Find ways that people can stretch those strengths
3. Create the conditions for ownership
4. Remember your role.

Strength spotting

So first up, strength spotting in others is a skill to master if you want to be a truly effective leader.

What I mean is, learning how to spot others at their best, when they are 'in the zone.' Or as Psychologist and positive psych guru Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi put it, 'in flow'.

Being in flow is when the difficulty of a task at hand is matched perfectly by the skill level of the person doing it. The thing with most people is that they're

not great at knowing their own strength areas – what they're good at, or have the potential to be good at, and that also energises and motivates them. We can all get better at spotting when this might be happening for someone else.

Tips here, are to look for people's energy changing. Typically, their focus will increase, their skills on show will be higher than 'normal' (and probably other people's) and they will deliver a better and faster result than they would in usual circumstances.

Once you've seen a moment, or a few moments like this. Be prepared to give that feedback to the person you've observed in flow and to get curious.

Ask them what was happening for them, how much they enjoyed the activity, what strengths they felt might be in play and how aware they were of their changed state.

Find ways that people can stretch their strengths

Next, in collaboration with the person, work to come up with creative ways that they can use these strengths beyond the norm. In other words, outside their 'comfort zone' if you like. This may include particular projects, tasks or activities available in their team, in others' teams or departments, or even separate from work.

It's important to remember that in order for a strength to be outside someone's comfort zone, and into the 'stretch' or development zone, it does need to feel a little less under control, a little more risky and perhaps more challenging.

So be prepared to help the person you're working with to consider the resources they may need to make the project a success. Which people and other resources will they need to support them to avoid the stretch zone activity shifting into the panic

zone. Where they may no longer feel sufficiently in control and the chance of failure becomes too high.

While we're talking about strengths here, which are things we typically naturally use well. Stretching a strength can feel unnatural initially. Because people are often so wired towards using their strengths in the same ways over and over again, keeping them at the outer reaches of their comfort zone, but always in control.

Taking a risk and stretching performance to the next level takes a growth mindset approach (Carol Dweck writes brilliantly on this by the way). Rather than the fixed mindset. We see in people who put in a solid performance time and again and get the appreciation for it, but who are unwilling to step it up for fear of failure. It's really important to get this right, that you're both honest with each other – what are you noticing, how is it feeling

for them, and so on.

Create the conditions for ownership and accountability

Be sure you're creating the conditions for ownership and accountability. If someone has a natural strength that you can see potential in, particularly if they are prepared to stretch themselves in this area, then they need to be held accountable for delivering that higher level of performance that you have agreed with them.

So as well as staying close enough to ensure that they don't tip into the panic zone. It's also important as a leader that you delegate well – brief clearly, agree check-in points, give early feedback against your expectations, and stick with it until the end. But, make sure that the person you're working with doesn't feel that you're in control or that you will step in and 'save' them if things go wrong, that's not the idea here.

Your role as the authentic leader

Based on the learnings from earlier in this book, now is the time to apply your understanding of your own responsibilities, strengths and watchouts as a leader.

I've talked about the need to provide support, encouragement and also to ensure that the person is held accountable and responsible for their own performance. More generally, to manage strengths well, you need to be prepared to call out people not using strengths or when they are well out of their comfort zones.

As an example, Marc Randolph, CEO of Netflix when it was a start-up in 1998, based the business on mail order DVD rentals. Marc had a wealth of strengths for this, in particular, Initiative and Results focus – he's action focused and gets stuff started. However, less than 2 years after the

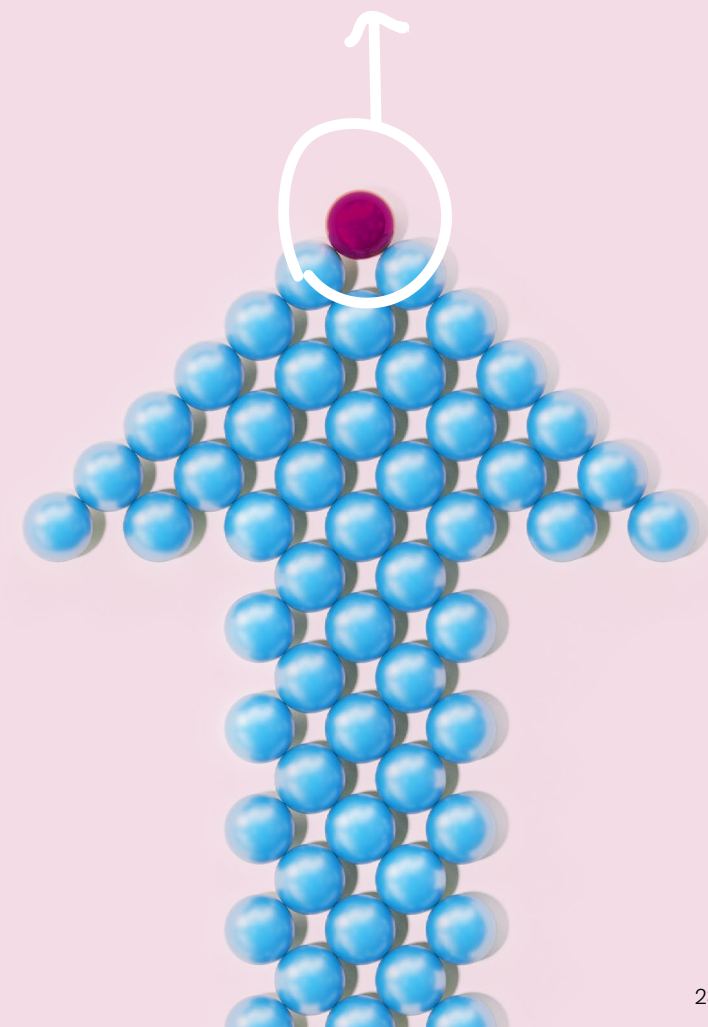
business began, Netflix's biggest investor, Reed Hastings, grew concerned about Marc's lack of Strategic thinking and Decisiveness (in particular making tough decisions). Areas in which Reed himself naturally excelled. So Reed took over the business in 1999.

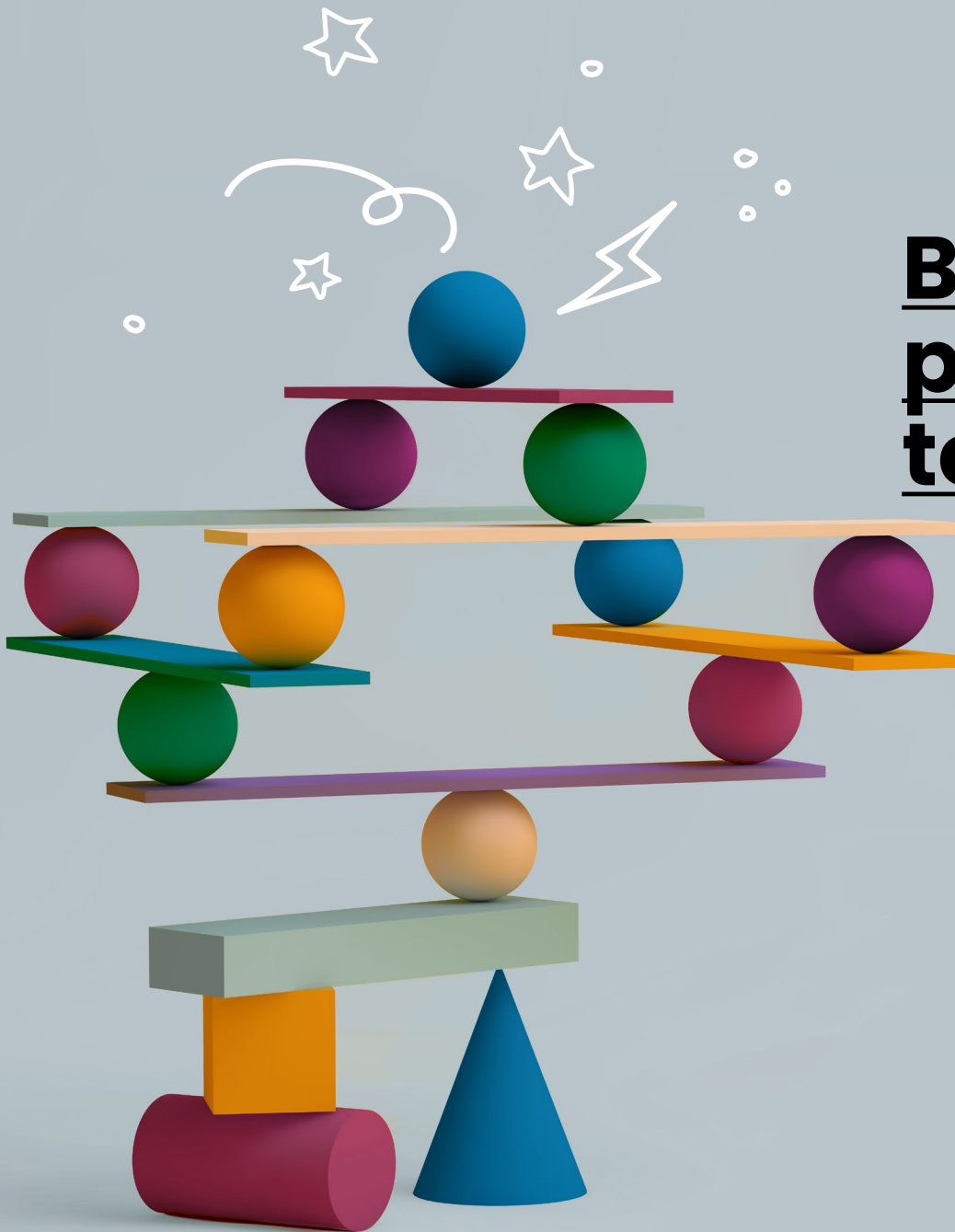
Reed Hastings remains CEO today. You know how valuable Netflix has become. Marc went on to create start-up after start-up, where his strengths could be stretched time after time in new and exciting directions. So be prepared to strength spot, but also to spot draining areas for people and call that out.

My final point is all important, what you're doing here is creating geniuses. Which means, de facto, you won't be the genius...at least not in the area where you're stretching others' strengths.

So be prepared to deal with people rapidly outthinking and outperforming you. After all, that's your aim. But know

that sometimes that can feel a little like you're making yourself less essential and more redundant. That should be ok, as long as you have a plan to deal with your own reactions to that to move yourself and your career forward.





Building peak performing teams

The art of building peak performing teams, authentically

Wherever your team are located right now – remotely or physically, some together, some apart, research shows us that when people play to their strengths, they are more likely to perform well.

The business case for bringing strengths into everyday management performance conversations with employees include:

→ Higher levels of well-being, motivation and self-confidence at the individual level

→ More effective teamworking, problem-solving and improved relationships at the team level

→ Focusing on strengths during performance management conversations has a significant impact on employee performance, improving performance by over 36% on average.

If you haven't done it already, step zero is to complete your own strengths assessment and understand your own strengths before all else. Followed by asking your direct reports to complete theirs. There are then five more steps to building peak performing teams, authentically:

Step 1: What do their strengths mean to them?

Discuss what each of their top strengths means to your direct report. Understand why each is important to them and how

it energises them. In short, ask them to tell their 'strengths story'.

You'll be amazed on the individual stories you hear. You'll learn how each member of your team uses and combines their strengths to get the best from themselves and their work. And they may be unaware quite how valuable these strengths and strength combinations are.

Step 2: How are they using their strengths and how could they use them more?

Next, ask them to talk about how they have used their strengths, could use their strengths even more and what benefit that would bring to the team and to the organisation.

This is a general question designed to stimulate some thinking around how someone's strengths may have more value than they thought in their current context. So be encouraging and offer

your own views. In fact, tell your direct report which of their strengths you have seen and what value you feel each has brought.

Step 3: Don't forget overdrive risks

Another important area to consider is overdrive risks. These risks typically show up for people under pressure, when stressed, or maybe when they are super 'in flow' and get a bit carried away in the moment.

The net result of a strength in overdrive can vary. But almost always the consequences don't match the intention. Such as overwhelming someone else with the strength on display, or leading an audience to have a reaction which wasn't what was meant.

My Leading strength in overdrive might look like me 'taking over'. Or my Collaboration strength in overdrive

might look like me abdicating responsibility and not taking ownership for something.

The next element of your conversation, consider your direct report's overdrive risks. Which risks have you seen? Which are your direct report aware of? How do you both feel this could affect their performance? Then move on to working up some strategies to limit these risks.

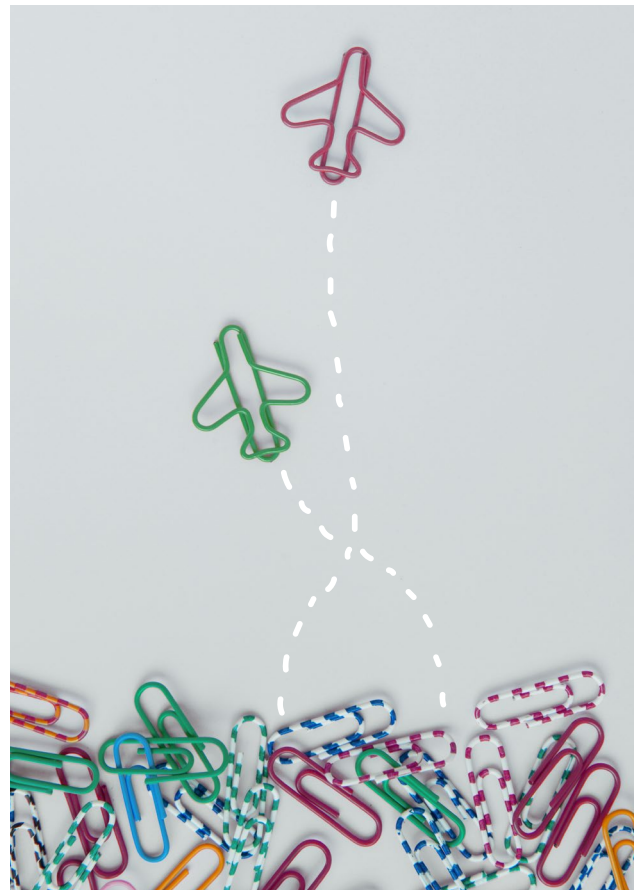
Step 4: Pointing strengths towards goals

The next area to explore. How your direct report can use their strengths to achieve their current goals.

Ask which strength(s) they can use to address their current challenges and which risks might show up for them. Identify strategies with them to maximise their strengths and minimise their risks.

As an example.

I might have a project to deliver that is running behind schedule. It involves some suppliers who aren't meeting expectations. Maybe I can use my Leading strength to get the project team aligned around the goal. Use my Courage strength to give some clear feedback to the suppliers. Then lean on my Results focus strength to get the project over the line.



Regarding overdrive. I'll need to avoid my Courage strength going too far and demoralising the suppliers. I'll need to keep checking in with the team that they are still with me, rather than letting my Results focus and Leading run away with me.

You see the approach: your strengths become your 'go to' tools. Enables you to get things done, giving you confidence that you can get there.

Step 5: Keep talking strengths

The last point is all-important. Keep up the strengths talk.

Once you have started a strengths dialogue, it's important that this continues. Speak each week or at least each fortnight with your direct report. Check in on what value they have delivered using their strengths to address their current goals or challenges. Ask what has been

successful for them as regards strategies for managing risks. Make it part of your normal day to day check-in conversations.

Important tips for performance conversations the strengths way

Now to recap on a few tips to get the best from each strengths conversation with your directs...

Bring a positive mind-set: using Strengthscope® in day-to-day conversations with your team works best when you bring in a positive mind-set. Look for positive aspects of behaviour and performance to identify where someone is most engaged, energised and effective, so you can build on that base.

Remember that strengths aren't skills: strengths represent those aspects of work that energise someone the most.

It usually indicates where they might be the most effective in their role and career, or have the potential to be. People can become more skilled in using their strengths, but skills alone may not indicate where someone is most energised, or has the greatest potential.

Do remember that strengths in overdrive may be a risk: people are often unaware of their strengths being overused in certain contexts. The negative consequences of this can present a risk to them, their role and, potentially to the organisation.

Know your own strengths and risks: before you speak to your direct reports about their strengths, make sure you understand the strengths that you can bring to each conversation. Knowing can be helpful and watching out for those which may have a tendency to go into overdrive. Plan to bring your best self to the

conversation. Your Empathy or Developing others strengths might be particularly useful if used well in a strengths conversation.

For example. Your Results focus or Decisiveness strengths may reduce your effectiveness if they tip into overdrive.

Have strengths conversations: know the strengths of each member of your team. Encourage them to use those strengths when working on tasks, projects or when under pressure. Know the risk areas of each of your team members.

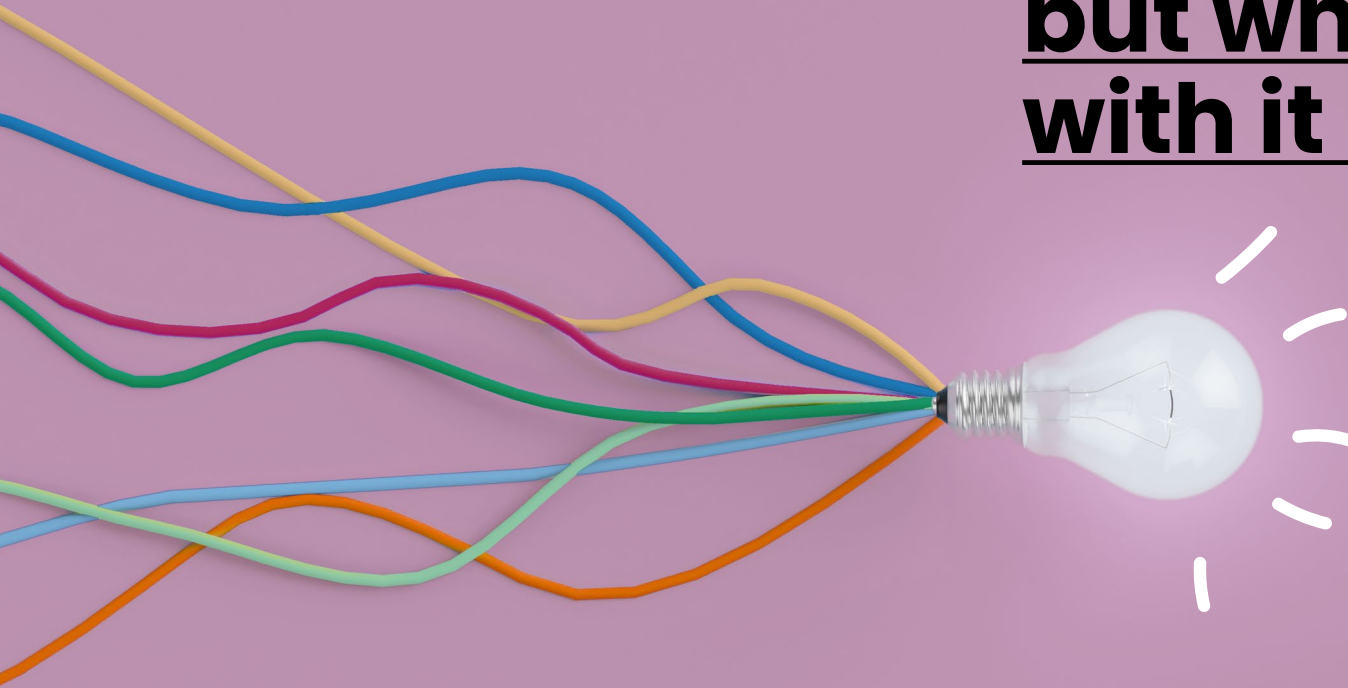
These risks may show up when they're under additional pressure or in new circumstances. Particularly drainers, where they don't have energy or strength. And strength in overdrive risks, where they may start overdoing strengths as that can lead to exhaustion, if you miss it.

Authentic leadership through strengths: it matters not what you have but what you do with it

In conclusion – to be an authentic leader...be yourself, more, with skill

Well, our research suggests that successful leaders have very different personalities and qualities they draw on in order to achieve results.

It seems that leaders are not well-rounded people. Nor do they possess the same qualities and competencies. Despite organisational life being dominated by competency-based approaches for the last couple of



decades, whose aim is definitely to create roundedness and not spikiness.

Not so long ago, Strengthscope commissioned a study by an independent psychometrics expert to examine findings from our StrengthscopeLeader™ data. This including exploring whether leaders possess similar or different strengths.

A sample of 866 UK and international leaders from different sectors and leadership levels was included in the study. And what we found was interesting. Very interesting...

1. Effective leaders do have different strengths

We define strengths as underlying qualities that energise us and that we are really good at, or have the potential to become really good at. Strengthscope® (the only strengths assessment to have achieved the globally recognised standard of

registered test status with the British Psychological Society) measures 24 work-related strengths across four key areas.

1. Emotional
2. Relational
3. Execution
4. Thinking

Our findings show that there is no one definitive set of strengths. Or one 'best way' they use to achieve their results. Leaders have different strengths that they apply to find their own pathways to success.

The most commonly reported strengths for the highest performing (measured in terms of 1-10 ratings of effectiveness by peers, direct reports and seniors) group were as follows:

- **Leading:** Taking responsibility for influencing and motivating others to contribute to the goals and success of the team and organisation
- **Collaboration:** Working cooperatively

with others to overcome conflict and build towards a common goal

→ **Decisiveness:** Making quick, confident, and clear decisions, even when faced with limited information.

But...and it's a big but...differences between the frequencies of these strengths in the top performing group versus the overall sample were too small to be of any statistical significance.

And what that means in plain English, is that highly effective leaders tend to use a whole range of different strengths to meet their goals.

2. Effective leaders use their strengths more effectively, whatever those strengths may be

Our research found that higher performing leaders use their strengths more effectively than lower performers, as judged by the people they work

most closely with. They don't try to be something they are not by trying to be equally effective across too many strength areas.

3. Some leadership drainers are more common than others

The most common 'drainers' (i.e. those areas that sucked away energy from our leadership sample and which may point towards weaker areas performance-wise) for leaders in our sample were:

→ **Detail orientation:** Paying attention to detail in order to produce high quality output, no matter what the pressures

→ **Emotional control:** Awareness of your emotional 'triggers' and how to control these to ensure you remain calm and productive

→ **Relationship building:** Taking steps to build networks of contacts and act as a 'hub' between people you know.

Around 30% of the sample reported Detail orientation as a drainer and this is even more common among high performers. Our experience suggests that leaders are often not energised by detail and checking the quality of work.

Of course, leaders cannot ignore this risk to performance if it's possible that it might cause them to derail.

So there are (at least) two options here:

1. To ensure you have people in your team who are detail oriented to ensure this aspect of the work isn't neglected.
2. Consciously develop detail-orientation skills to limit major risks to your success.

4. High performing leaders are more effective across all four of StrengthscopeLeader™ leadership habits

As well as using their strengths effectively, the highest performing

leaders learn to effectively apply the four StrengthscopeLeader™ leadership habits – Sharing Vision, Sparking Engagement, Skilfully Executing, and Sustaining Progress (below).



Setting a clear, shared vision of success for the organization



Empowering, inspiring and developing people



Setting stretching performance expectations, reviewing progress and to ensure delivery of planned outcomes



Recognizing achievement and encouraging continuous improvement and experimentation

They learn to formulate and communicate a compelling vision, engage their people with that vision through effective communication, ensure effective implementation of the business plan and build a culture of success and sustainable progress.

These leadership habits can be learned by any leader through on-the job experience, coaching, co-worker feedback, support and training programmes.

5. Higher performers in the sample were rated significantly higher across all four leadership habit areas

Our research found that the most effective leaders were those who were able to:

→ Promote an open and respectful work environment where people can freely express their views and ideas (Sparking

Engagement)

→ Ensure a strong customer/service-based strategy that builds trust and loyalty (Sharing Vision)

→ Encourage people to be open to change and develop their capabilities to meet future requirements (Sustaining Progress)

The most important area, the leader respecting people and giving them the

space and freedom to voice their ideas and perspectives.

In our experience, many leaders find this challenging to do. Either because they're too one-directional in their communication and don't actively listen and/or because the organisation's culture and top leadership style doesn't encourage inclusivity or an open, honest discussion.



6. Many leaders still find it challenging to deal with poor performers

The lowest rated leadership habit across the entire sample was:

→ Takes decisive action to deal with performance shortfalls and unproductive behaviour (Skilfully Executing)

The fact that this item was the lowest rated suggests that leaders still struggle to deal with underperformance in an appropriate and timely way. More effort required in this area from leaders and from organisations to provide the right support for managers to learn these skills.

7. Creating a highly motivating culture is a strong predictor of leadership effectiveness

The ability to create a positive and highly motivating work environment

was the most important predictor of overall leadership effectiveness. As rated by their co-workers in the research.

The second most important predictor was reliable delivery of planned business results.

This finding suggests that in order to achieve strong results, leaders should ensure they invest time and energy in creating an engaging and positive work culture. The kind where people feel motivated and supported to use their strengths and do their best work.

In conclusion – authentic leadership, the strengths way is real and it has real-world consequences

Our research provides several indicators as to how leaders and organisations can become more effective:

1. Know your strengths and use them

well

2. Get real and be creative in managing your risk areas

3. Behaviour matters – work to develop positive leadership habits to be a high performer

4. Learn how to deal decisively with poor performance

5. Focus on creating a positive, open, trusting culture.

Follow the five tips above and you'll be well on your way to becoming an authentic leader that others will choose to be led by.

Good luck on your journey to creating a strengths-based culture and leaving a positive legacy that will last and that will pay forward many times over.

Dr Paul Brewerton, 2021

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24 Strengths →



Courage:

You take on challenges and face risks by standing up for what you believe



Emotional control:

You are aware of your emotional 'triggers' and how to control these to ensure you remain calm and productive



Enthusiasm:

You demonstrate passion and energy when communicating goals, beliefs, interests or ideas you feel strongly about



Optimism:

You remain positive and upbeat about the future and your ability to influence it to your advantage



Resilience:

You deal effectively with setbacks and enjoy overcoming difficult challenges



Self-confidence:

You have a strong belief in yourself and your abilities to accomplish tasks and goals



Collaboration:

You work cooperatively with others to overcome conflict and build towards a common goal



Compassion:

You demonstrate a deep and genuine concern for the well-being and welfare of others



Developing others:

You promote other people's learning and development to help them achieve their goals and fulfil their potential



Empathy:

You readily identify with other people's situations and can see things clearly from their perspective



Leading:

You take responsibility for influencing and motivating others to contribute to the goals and success of their team and organization



Persuasiveness:

You are able to win agreement and support for a position or desired outcome



Relationship building:

You take steps to build networks of contacts and act as a 'hub' between people that you know



Decisiveness:

You make quick, confident, and clear decisions, even when faced with limited information



Efficiency:

You take a well-ordered and methodical approach to tasks to achieve planned outcomes



Flexibility:

You remain adaptable and flexible in the face of unfamiliar or changing situations



Initiative:

You take independent action to make things happen and achieve goals



Results focus:

You maintain a strong sense of focus on results, driving tasks and projects to completion



Self-improvement:

You draw on a wide range of people and resources in the pursuit of self-development and learning



Common sense:

You make pragmatic judgments based on practical thinking and previous experience



Creativity:

You generate new ideas and original solutions to move things forward



Critical thinking:

You approach problems and arguments by breaking them down systematically and evaluating them objectively



Detail orientation:

You pay attention to detail in order to produce high quality output, no matter what the pressures



Strategic mindedness:

You focus on the future and take a strategic perspective on issues and challenges

Strengthscope
Leader™

Take the first step to authentic leadership →

Leadership development with StrengthscopeLeader™

Authentic leaders achieve greater impact than those trying to fit a stereotype of a leader. Reveal leadership authenticity and drive performance by maximising strengths and leader habits. StrengthscopeLeader™ report is a dedicated strengths-based 360 leadership profiler.

When to use StrengthscopeLeader™ report

Regardless of role title or tenure this report is great for leaders to gain the skills and strengths to work towards their goals. If your organisation has a leadership programme including future leaders, high potential leaders and senior executives this is perfect for you.

Let's get in touch

Strengthscope
Confidential

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Leader™



**The journey through Strengthscope.
We are with you all the way!**



Get in touch

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At Strengthscope we believe that more people across the world should feel able to bring their most authentic and inspired selves to work and to life, every day.

We reveal people's unique strengths to help build more diverse, empowered, resilient and agile organisations.