

Applied Positive Psychology

Professor Dilwar Hussain

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati

Week 5

Lecture 14: Gallup's Strengths Finder: Concepts, Theories and Interventions

I welcome you all to Module 5 of the course titled Applied Positive Psychology. So, this module 5 is about psychological strengths and assets. So this is the second lecture of this module, and overall this is lecture number 14. Now, in this lecture, we will have two parts. Part one will discuss Gallup Strengths Finder, and part two will be about another strength perspective. The lecture has been divided into two parts to make each lecture shorter. So today, we will talk about Lecture 14, part 1.

Part 1 is about the Gallup Strengths Finder, which is another strength perspective on how to understand psychological strengths. We will discuss some of the concepts and associated ideas related to this particular perspective, and some applied perspectives regarding this. So, let me start with a brief recap of the last lecture, which is lecture number thirteen, in which we talked about character strengths.

That was the first lecture of this module. There, we talked about the meaning of character strengths and why they are important, and in that context, we discussed something called the VIA classification of character strengths and virtues, where we elaborately discussed the different classification systems and how we can classify human character strengths into different categories, and what comes under each of these categories. So, that is what we discussed in the last lecture. We also discussed how character strengths are linked to happiness and well-being. At the end, we talked about how we can cultivate character strengths and also discussed the applied aspects of character strengths.

So today we will be talking about the first part of this lecture, which will focus on Gallup's Strengths Finder, also known as the Clifton Strengths Finder. So let us start today's lecture. Now Gallup's Strengths Finder, which is also called Clifton Strengths Finder, is a perspective developed in the year 2001 by two research scientists named Clifton and Anderson, from the Gallup's organization. So, that is why this whole perspective is also called a Clifton Strengths Finder.

By interviewing thousands of top performers across the globe, they attempted to understand what makes people excel in what they do. The objective of their entire research project was

to understand what makes people excel in their chosen endeavors. Why do some people perform very well? So, that is what they were trying to understand. What are the characteristics of high-performing people, particularly in the corporate sector? So, they try to understand this question by interviewing thousands of top performers across the globe, in different sectors of professions. So, out of this exercise, they came up with the 34 most prevalent talent strengths displayed specifically in the work setting.

So, if you look at this whole perspective, this is more in the context of a work setting. This whole strength perspective, called Gallup's Strength Finder, is more relevant in the work context. The earlier concept that we discussed, character strength, is more of a general moral perspective. The Gallup's Strength Finder is relevant in the work context, in which strengths are important as it is more related to performance in the work situation. So, out of this exercise, they came up with the 34 most prevalent talents and strengths that are relevant in the context of performance, specifically in the work setting.

So they have conceptualized strength in different ways than the VIA classification. So, their perspective is different from the VIA classification that we discussed in the last lecture. Let us see how they differ. Now they use two terms: one is called talent, and the other is called strength. So, this is one of the major distinctions they made in the whole perspective.

So, according to Clifton and Anderson, the basis of strength is talent. They said strength comes from the talent of individuals. Now, what is a talent? Talent is a naturally occurring pattern of thoughts, feelings, or behaviors that can be productively applied to multiple areas. It's a capacity to do something. So what they are saying is that talent is a naturally occurring pattern.

So, they are saying talent is mostly natural, inborn capacities that people have, which can reflect in thoughts, feelings, and behavior. So, when you are able to use those natural capacities productively in certain areas, that becomes your talent. This is basically what can be said in a very general sense, as a capacity to do something. So, if you have certain capacities that are more inborn in nature, they can be called your talent. Now, strength, on the other hand, is the ability to provide a consistently high level of performance in a given activity.

So, when you are able to use that talent and perform consistently, then it becomes a strength. Talent in itself may not lead you to a high-performance situation. You are only a talent; it becomes a strength only when you are able to consistently use that talent in particular areas of activity. The strengths are produced when talents are refined through knowledge and skills. That means a talent becomes a strength when the talents are refined.

How are they refined? They are refined in knowledge and skills. So, if you gain and acquire knowledge about it, and if you develop skills related to the talent, then it becomes your strength, and you are able to consistently use it. They further said that talents are like rough diamonds and strengths are like polished diamonds. So, talents are raw things that we have, which may be certain inborn capacities, but they become strengths when you are able to polish them, refine them with knowledge and skills, and use them again and again. For example, the ability to make instant connections with people can be a talent.

Some people are good at making connections with people. This could be a natural talent that they have. But, this can become a strength only when you have the ability to consistently build a network of supporters who are prepared to help you. So, when you are able to use this talent consistently to build a network of people who can support you in certain directions in your life, then you are using that talent productively and consistently in a particular area, and then this talent becomes your strength. Your ability to connect with people may not be a strength if you are not able to utilize it properly in the right direction.

So, whether a talent becomes a strength depends on how you are refining the talent and whether you are able to use it consistently to build something. So, the three terms, namely talent, knowledge, and skills, are kind of connected to one another. So, according to Clifton and Anderson, when we talk about knowledge, we are talking about facts and lessons that we learn, whereas skills are basic abilities that we acquire to perform activities.

So, knowledge is about facts, lessons, or information that we learn. Skills are abilities that we acquire. To perform an activity, we need certain abilities, which are called skills. Talents exist naturally within each of us, as we have already said.

However, skills and knowledge need to be learned or acquired. Skills and knowledge are combined with talent to create strength. So, when the skills and knowledge are combined with talent, it becomes a strength. So that is the idea behind its conceptualization. So, as they have already said, just as rough diamonds are naturally found, talents are also naturally found within a lot of people.

Talents are found naturally, just like rough diamonds. As rough diamonds are refined and polished with blades and other instruments, strengths are produced when talents are refined with knowledge and skill. So just like we need some instruments to refine those rough diamonds, similarly, rough talent or raw talent has to be refined with knowledge and skills to make it a strength, so that you can use it consistently. Just having a talent doesn't give you the necessary ingredients for success in life, because many people waste their talent as they cannot use it properly.

That means they are not able to convert their talents into strengths. So, this is where refinement comes into play. Now there are six principles of human nature and behavior in a strength-based approach from this perspective. So, they have six principles. According to Anderson, there are six principles of human nature and behavior, based on which they developed this whole framework. One is that every human being has a group of talents within them. So, everybody has some kind of talent or some kind of ability. Second is that your greatest talents hold the key to high achievement, success, and progress at the level of personal excellence. So, whatever talents you have, that are greatest and are the best aspects of your abilities. They are the key to your achievement, success and progress in your life, because you can use them to succeed in your life. The third principle is that becoming aware of your talent builds confidence and provides a basis for achievement. The more you become aware of the talents that you have, the more those talents help you build confidence and provide a further basis for achievement in life. The fourth principle is that learning how to develop and apply strength will improve your levels of achievement. So, the more you are able to develop and apply your strengths, the more it will improve your chances of achievement in life.

So, to what extent do you use all these talents and apply them, or apply the strengths? Only when you apply them consistently do they become strengths. This will also be an important determinant of achievement. The fifth principle states that each of your talents can be applied in many areas, including relationships, learning, academics, leadership, service, and careers. So, talent can be applied in all diverse areas. Whatever talents you have can be applied in all the diverse areas of your life, depending on the specific talents you have.

The sixth principle states that as you develop and apply your strengths, your achievements will increase, and you will experience greater and more frequent successes. So basically, they are repeatedly saying from these principles that the basis of strength is talent, and the more you apply them, the more you are able to use them in specific areas of life, the greater the chances of success in those areas. Success increases the chances of success, because the application of strengths and success are very closely connected principles, according to this approach. Now, basically from those principles, they are deriving certain ideas that discuss the benefits of developing strengths and why you need to develop them. So, according to these aspects, Clifton and Anderson said that developing strength will lead to achievements.

It means that more strength will lead to achievements in your life. In whatever dimensions your strengths lie, they lead to a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. The more you use your strength, the more likely you are to experience fulfillment and satisfaction. The use of strength will also enhance the quality of one's life. So overall, the different aspects of

your life will increase in terms of personal satisfaction as well as success, achievement, and so on.

Building strengths will also increase confidence and optimism. As we have already said, the more you use your strengths, the more confident you become, because strengths are things that you are good at, and using them increases confidence. Individuals gain more when they expend effort to build their best talents as compared to when they spend a comparable amount of effort to remediate their weaknesses. So, actually, we achieve more or gain more when we put effort into building strengths and talents compared to just working on or removing the weaknesses. The product of actually removing weaknesses is less compared to when you work towards developing your talents and strengths.

So building strengths is a better approach because strengths automatically flow out of you, and you are more interested in doing them. Weaknesses are something we generally do not feel like acknowledging, or we become defensive about them. We do not get much energy to actually work on them because we are not good at it. So, it is not easy to actually overcome weaknesses. On the other hand, when you want to develop your strength, it is much easier, and it naturally flows out of you.

Now, in Gallup's study of top achievers, they interviewed thousands of top achievers from diverse fields and tried to understand their strengths and talents. So, Clifton and Anderson reported the following main findings of top achievers. From interviewing top achievers, the researchers found certain characteristics of these people.

The first finding is that top achievers who fully recognize their talents and build on them to develop strengths. Thus, one important characteristic they found consistently among these people is that top achievers always recognize what kind of talent they have, and they don't stop there. They develop those talents into their strengths by refining their talents and applying them consistently in their work settings. The second important finding was that top achievers apply their greatest talents or strengths in roles that best suit them, because if you have strengths in certain areas and you work in other areas, it will not be a match.

So, the researchers found that top achievers use their greatest talents or strengths in the roles that best suit them. They align their strengths with the nature of work. So, that is why their strength matches the work setting and the nature of work. So, because of this match, they are able to achieve success in their work setting. For achievement, it is necessary to apply one's talents and strengths in roles and tasks that are best suited for those talents.

If you have talent and strength in one particular area but are working in something else, obviously it will not be a match. You will not be able to use the strength that you have in

those areas because the nature of the work is very different. So, that is why top achievers generally have a match between their strengths and talents and the kind of work they do. So, a proper fit between the talent and the task is essential. This is another important finding that they reported.

The third finding is that top achievers invent ways to apply their greatest talents in their achievement tasks. So, they not only convert their talent into strength, but they also use their strength and apply it, and invent newer ways to apply their talents. So, they will find new ways to use their talent in different ways, not just the typical ways that are required, but they will always find newer ways to use them. So, this also expands their horizons of achievement.

So it is essential to consciously invent newer ways to apply talents in various tasks one performs in a role and position for greater achievement. So, these are some of the important findings they summarize from the whole study of interviewing thousands of top achievers. Now, let us look at the categories of strength that they reported from that study. So, just like the earlier character strength classification where there were six virtues, and then there were specific character strengths which we discussed in the last lecture, here also they found four broader themes, and each theme has specific strengths.

In total, there are 34 strengths or talents, which are mostly relevant in the context of work. So, the context of this perspective is mostly work-related. So, according to the StrengthsFinder perspective, there are four important dimensions of strengths, and each of these dimensions has many further specific strengths.

In total, there are 34 strengths. So, the four dimensions in this classification are: first, executing; second, influencing; third, relationship building; and fourth, strategic thinking. Let us see what comes under each of these dimensions. Now, executing is the first category of strength, under which there are specific strengths. So, executing is about strengths or talents related to implementing a solution.

How do you make things happen? So, the ability to execute or implement a solution, as well as how to make things happen, is related to execution ability or strengths in execution. This has many specific other strengths that are connected to this particular strength, a broader theme of strength. It includes things like achievement, the pursuit of goals, productivity, and satisfaction from accomplishment. It includes things like arrangement, organization, coordination, and identifying the right combination of people and resources.

All these things can be connected to executing. It may also include things like belief, having deeply held values, ideas, and finding meaning in life. It may also involve things like

consistency, which means equality, fairness, and guardianship of right and wrong. Deliberation, good decision-making, carefulness, and consideration of all options. Discipline, organization, good timekeeping, order, and structure. Focus, determining priorities, finding direction, efficiency, responsibility, a person who can be counted on, commitments, honesty, loyalty, restoration, recognition of problems, and the ability to fix them, and so on. So, these are some of the broader work-related strengths and associated strengths connected to the broader theme of strength called executing.

Next is influencing, under which there are some specific strengths. So influencing is about taking charge, speaking up, and convincing others.

It is more related to leadership qualities and other factors. The extent to which you take charge, speak, and convince other people is also a very important characteristic in leadership roles, particularly at higher levels of the workplace context. This may include specific strengths related to activation, meaning the energy to get things going and done, making things happen by turning thoughts into action. Command is the ability to deal with conflict and crisis.

The capacity to be in charge and make decisions. Communication is very important for influencing people because they get influenced when you are able to talk properly, convince them, and use your language effectively. So, communication is very important. The ability to explain things, provide clarification in your explanation, and be good when talking and presenting, all these skills are very important in influencing people. Competition, hard work to excel, achievement, and desire to win can also be related to this theme. Maximization and enhancement of personnel and group excellence is also a part of this theme. You are able to maximize your performance and that of the group, and so on. Self-assurance means self-confidence, independence in thinking, and significance is connected to things like high motivation for recognition, hard work, and the desire to make a big impact. The last one is 'Woo', which is related to quickly connecting with people, forming groups, and relationships. These are some of the specific strengths related to the broader theme of influencing.

Relationship building is the third theme, and the specific strengths or talents related to this theme are shown here. So, relationship building is about building and nurturing strong relationships. Your ability to build and nurture falls under this theme. Relationship building doesn't end with building relationships, but one must also nurture and maintain those relationships. So, that's called relationship-building. Relationship building may include strengths related to specific qualities such as adaptability, which involves modifying oneself depending on the demands of the environment, adjustment, flexibility, and the ability to adapt to different situations. It includes things like making changes according to the demands of the environment, adjustments, flexibility in approach, and so on.

Next strength is connectedness. It includes things like connecting ideas or events into a meaningful whole. It evaluates if you can connect things to the broader goals of the organization setting or if you can connect small things into broader missions. This ability also helps you to connect with people and lead them. Next is development, which includes things like seeing potential in others and assisting them with their development. So, relationship building also includes your ability to see potential in other people and help them excel in those potentials and bring out those potentials.

Next comes empathy. Empathy includes understanding and sensing the feelings of others and forming supportive relationships. One of the important aspects of relationship-building is empathy, which is your ability to understand others' perspectives. That is very important. The more you understand what other people want and how they look at the world, the better you will be able to connect with them, understand their perspective, and get along with others.

For relationship building, empathy is very important. The next strength is harmony, which includes things like the ability to find things in common, seek areas of agreement, and avoid conflicts. So, the more harmonious orientation you have, the more likely you are to lead groups and people, and work in group settings harmoniously and collectively while avoiding conflicts. Another aspect is the strength of inclusion, which involves helping others to be unified, effective, and accepting of others. The more you have the capacity to include, the more you have to accept differences and include people. Then comes individualization, which includes things like seeing others as individuals and recognizing their talents, focusing on how different people work together productively, and so on. Individualization is about looking at each individual as a unique person, giving due respect in terms of their abilities, recognizing their talents, and focusing on how all these people can come together and work productively. That's called individualization. Then comes positivity. It includes things like enthusiasm, optimism, excitement, stimulation of others, and so forth. Relationship building also needs a lot of positivity to maintain, which includes things like enthusiasm, optimism, excitement, and so on.

The last one is relationship, which means forming close interpersonal relationships. The last one is called strategic thinking. This is also an important strength theme related to the workplace. Strategic thinking is about thinking and analyzing information and situations. It is the ability to think, analyze information and situations, and use them strategically for the benefit of your organization and workplace.

It may include a lot of other strengths and talents. Some of these are analytical thinking, which includes things like understanding causes and effects, critical thinking, and so on.

So, the analytical aspect is about understanding cause and effect, and critical thinking is about critically analyzing different aspects and using them in the right context. Then comes context, which includes things like seeing historical patterns and perspectives. So, seeing context means you have to understand not just what you are doing, but the context of what you are doing.

This involves recognizing patterns, using historical patterns. Then comes the futuristic strength. It includes things like focusing on the future, seeing possibilities, and organizing others. Futuristic thinking is also very important.

To make a strategy, you have to think about the future, not just the present context. It involves evaluating the future impact of your decisions. Then comes ideation; it includes things like creativity, originality, new ideas, and concepts. So, ideation is more about creativity, bringing new things, originality, and so on. This strength is very important in the workplace.

Then comes input, which is about active knowledge, acquisition, and curiosity. Input is about your curiosity, seeking more knowledge and information so that you can act better or more efficiently. Then comes intellection, which includes things like multiple directions of thinking, intellectual discussions, and solutions. It is about intellectually stimulating yourself and participating in intellectual discussions and solutions. The next strength is learning, which is about enjoying the learning process, focusing on improvement, and so on.

The last one is strategy, which is about seeing pros and cons and the whole picture, generating an appropriate plan of action. So, these are some of the strengths that are related to strategic thinking. So, in total, if you combine all four themes and the different strengths associated with each of these things, there will be 34 strengths that are relevant in the workplace context. So, this is the entire classification system.

Then the more important applied question is how to develop those strengths. These strengths are important, can be developed, and are relevant in the workplace performance context. So, how can we develop them? So, Clifton and Anderson actually provided specific strategies for developing these strengths. The first important thing to develop one's strengths is to know your talent.

So, that is something very important. You cannot develop a strength without knowing the talents related to it. So, talent is something that is already within you. You have to recognize that it is there; then only can you build it. So, that recognition is the first step.

So, to know your talent and develop strength, we first need to identify what our greatest

talent is. How can we identify that? Talents can be identified by different patterns within each of us, such as spontaneous reactions, yearnings, rapid learning, and satisfaction. So basically, these are some of the indicators to identify one's talent. So, these are some of the indicators. What are those indicators? Number one is a spontaneous reaction. What is a spontaneous reaction? These are like subconscious spontaneous reactions to a given situation.

So many times, we learn that we have certain talents based on how we react to different situations in life. Sometimes, very spontaneously and subconsciously, we react to a given situation and realize that we are good at these things. So, let us say somebody just sits and starts drawing something; then they realize that they can draw, they can understand the whole painting process very easily, and spontaneously.

Therefore, naturally, from the spontaneous reaction in some situations of their lives, they can understand that they have certain talents for this particular task or things. So, our reaction patterns in life give an indication of what we are good at and what we are not good at.

Then come yearnings. These are like passions for certain activities and hobbies. If you are very passionate about something, then this is also a reflection that you have talents related to those things, because passion develops when you have certain strengths and talents or are good at something. So, passion is also an indicator of your talent. Rapid learning is an area that also reflects talent.

If you are able to learn something very quickly, it's an indication that you have a talent in that area. So, if a student can learn a particular subject very quickly and understand all the intricacies of that subject, it means he has talent in those areas. Let's say that in mathematics, some people learn math very quickly. So, that means they have a talent for those areas. So rapid learning could be an indicator of talent.

Then, satisfaction and enjoyment of activities also reflect a possible talent in an area. When you find a lot of satisfaction in doing something or some kind of activities, and you enjoy doing them, it reflects that you have talent in those areas. Because you will only enjoy something when you are good at it. When there is an intrinsic motivation to do something, then people enjoy those things and find satisfaction. These are some of the indicators by which we can understand whether we have certain talents based on all these behavioral patterns.

So, this is how we can recognize talents. So, recognition is very important. Other ways of recognizing involve the use of structured questionnaires. For example, a StrengthsFinder

questionnaire. One can use that questionnaire and reflect on the items, and then the scores will give you an idea to identify your strengths or talents. We can also understand or identify talents through self-reflection on our thoughts and behavior, which can provide insight. Therefore, sometimes by reflecting on ourselves and observing patterns, we can gain certain indications of our talents in specific areas. Therefore, this is one important step to develop our strengths: first, we need to identify or know what talents we have.

Second, to develop strength, you must value your talent and assume responsibility for using it in strength development. Many people have many talents, but they don't value them.

They don't recognize their importance. So, then those are like wasted talents. So, to build strength out of talent, one has to value those talents and assume responsibility for using them, as well as using them more consistently. So, until you give value to a talent, it cannot become a strength.

So, one needs to invest time and energy resources for developing strength. Strengths will not develop automatically. Strengths will develop only if you value your talent. If you don't give value, obviously, your talent will be wasted and will not become your strength. The three important factors in developing strength are that talents are most powerful when inspired by personal missions.

When you use your talent for a personal mission, it becomes very strong and quickly gets converted into strengths. So, the use of talents is directed towards a mission; whatever you want for a certain purpose in life, the purpose and meaning of your life will energize those talents and motivate you to develop and refine those talents into strengths. When you work in a mission-oriented way and see a certain purpose and meaning in doing something, and these are backed by your talents, they will quickly be converted into strength because you will be highly energized by the mission you have to fulfill. So, without a mission and purpose in life, one may not have enough motivation to develop those talents into strengths. So, if you develop certain missions around your talent, it is more likely to be converted into strengths.

Four healthy, caring relationships facilitate the development of strength. So, our connection with other people around us in our lives can also facilitate whether talent becomes strength or not. How can that happen? For example, having a few healthy, positive, and empowering relationships facilitates the development of strengths. So, other people can contribute to the development of strengths or to converting talent into strengths in our lives. This may inspire the development of more strengths. You are more likely to talk about your talents when you have supportive people around you. If you have certain talents and strengths, you'll have more chances to express them, talk about them, and get feedback on them.

You can express and talk about your experiences and plan to develop those things, and others can also give you feedback, receive feedback, and work together to form an expectation about talents, where to apply them, and how to develop them. So, in all these processes, other people's support can also help you a lot in terms of giving you feedback on whether you are doing right or not. Expressing your doubts or talking about it can facilitate developing talents into strengths.

Fifth, reliving your successes helps you develop strengths. What that means is success generally comes with the use of our talents; therefore, utilizing them—visiting them again and again- helps you recognize your talents and gives you confidence in using and building them.

The last one is to practice your talent. So, there is no alternative to practice when we want to develop strengths. The more you use them and practice them, the more they will develop. So, there is no alternative to practice and hard work in this direction. So, these are some of the things that are related to Gallup Strengths Finder, which is also called Clifton Strengths Finder.

So we have discussed this classification system and how we can develop it. So with this, I will stop here. So this is the first part of the lecture. We will be talking about another strength perspective in the next part of this lecture. So, with this, I will stop here. Thank you.