Strengths Use and Self-concordance in Difficult Situations
A pilot study
by Sophie Francis

Key study
Strengths and OVP
People who know and use their strengths are more in touch with their feelings, values and needs, and follow directions that are right for them (Govindji & Linley 2007).

Realise2
Strengths can be measured in terms of performance, use (frequency or infrequency) and energy (Linley 2008).

Research gap
Strengths and OVP in difficult situations
This study.

Self-concordance
Organismic valuing process (OVP)
Self actualisation

Difficult situations
Organismic valuing theory of growth through adversity

Introduction
The concepts of strengths and self-concordance have been correlated theoretically and empirically within positive psychology and coaching psychology literature. Linley and Harrington (2006) argue strengths use is consistent with Roger’s (1963) actualising tendency.

Longitudinal studies of self-concordance established that people tend to adjust and move toward intrinsically motivated and beneficial goals over time (eg Sheldon & Elliot 1999). The organismic valuing process is also linked to theories of growth through adversity (Joseph & Linley 2005). Strengths, self-concordance and growth (PWB) were subsequently empirically correlated by Govindji & Linley (2007).

This research aimed to further confirm the link between strengths use and self-concordance and explore how strengths use and self-concordance play out when overcoming difficult situations.
Method

Quantitative online survey
To confirm previous findings and identify new and preliminary data in contexts of adversity faced by executives, coaches and others.

Materials
Strengths Use Scale and Organismic Valuing Scale (Govindji & Linley 2007).
Situational strengths questionnaire designed for this study (see Appendix):
- Brief reflection: “Think of and briefly write down a situation in the past 6 months when you overcame a difficulty.”
- Six questions “about how you acted and felt in this situation.”
- Rated subjective level of adversity by how much “the situation challenged the way I viewed myself and the world.”

Findings

1 What is the link between strengths use and self-concordance?

Confirmatory data

Analysed by Spearman’s rank correlation of non-parametric data. Two-tailed T-test. Chronbach’s alpha found high internal scale consistency.

Strengths and OVP
Strengths use and self-concordance were significantly and strongly associated in this study. Further evidence that the more people use their strengths, the more they feel in touch with their feelings, needs, values and life direction.

This study
- Working population
  Mean age 42;
  40% executive, senior manager or business owner; 32% in coaching, consulting or training; invited members of EIW client database.
- N=281

Govindji & Linley (2007)
- Working population
  Mean age 23.
- N=214
- .60***
- .68***
How do people use their strengths when overcoming a difficult situation? How self-concordant do they feel afterwards?

Exploratory data

**Difficult situations**

The study found evidence of strengths adaption and the organismic valuing process when overcoming difficult situations, particularly those people perceive challenge self- and world-view. Tentatively suggests people increasingly diversify and draw on lesser used strengths in the most challenging situations.

![Graph showing synergy of strengths use when overcoming higher adversity.](image)

- **Used frequent strengths**
- **Used infrequent strengths**
- **Adapted strengths use**
- **Energised by strengths use**
- **Increased OVP**

**Example situations**

- Client tried to reject product my company produced for them.
- Significant difficulty recruiting to a project.
- Turmoil due to new mgmt, organisation restructure.
- Relocation from senior work position to lesser one.
- Negotiating with wife about time at work.
- Faced with moral conflict.
- Facilitate work activity with workplace resistance.
How do people who use their strengths extensively compare to those who use them less, when overcoming difficult situations?

Adhoc analysis

Correlation analysis of situational strengths items of high v low strengths users (1 STD deviation above and below mean scale scores).

High v low

Some indication very high strengths users (more than low) felt more clear about their life direction after a difficult situation required them to adapt and use infrequent strengths.

Conclusion

Limitations

- Cross-sectional, retrospective, subjective.
- Strengths use and OVP in difficult situations assessed with single items.
- Did not use validated posttraumatic growth measure as study brief, non-clinical.
- Question wording slightly skewed?
- Participants self-selected for interest in strengths; motivation to please organisation?

Interpreting results

Findings should be interpreted in the context of a non-representative sample that displayed high strengths use and self-concordance.

Implications

- Lends weight to contextual, adaptive and evolutionary view of strengths, particularly the potential to grow our strengths in difficult situations, not just achieve growth by using our strengths.
- Study highlights limits of “identify and use more” approaches. To help people overcoming adversity, coaches might guide people to build on what they already do well, spot emerging strengths and reinforce adaptability, so they can accommodate these capacities into a renewed sense of self.
- Different strategies may be needed to help people who already use their strengths a lot (eg experienced executives) continue to grow.
- More research is needed, with robust measures.
References


Acknowledgements

This research was undertaken as part of a Masters of Business Coaching at Sydney Business School, University of Wollongong. Thanks to Dr Grace McCarthy who supervised the project; Dr Gordon Spence (expert advice); Dr Flavia Fayet-Moore (statistical advice); Roxanne Mitchell (survey admin), and all the volunteers who took part.
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Appendix

Strengths use scale (Govindji and Linley 2007)
The following questions* ask you about your strengths, ie the things that you are able to do well or do best.
1. I am regularly able to do what I do best
2. I always play to my strengths
3. I always try to use my strengths
4. I achieve what I want by using my strengths
5. I use my strengths everyday
6. I use my strengths to get what I want out of life
7. My work gives me lots of opportunities to use my strengths
8. My life presents me with lots of different ways to use my strengths
9. Using my strengths comes naturally to me
10. I find it easy to use my strengths in the things I do
11. I am able to use my strengths in lots of different situations
12. Most of my time is spent doing the things that I am good at doing
13. Using my strengths is something I am familiar with
14. I am able to use my strengths in lots of different ways

Organismic valuing scale (Govindji and Linley 2007)
The following questions* ask you about how you feel in your daily life.
1. I know the things that are right for me
2. I get what I need from life
3. The decisions I take are the right ones for me
4. I feel that I am in touch with myself
5. I feel integrated with myself
6. I do the things that are right for me
7. The decisions I make are based on what is right for me
8. I am able to listen to myself

Situational strengths questionnaire (This study)
Think of and briefly write down a situation in the past 6 months when you overcame a difficulty.
The following questions* ask you about how you acted and felt in this situation.
1. The situation required me to use strengths I use frequently
2. The situation required me to use strengths I use infrequently
3. The situation required me to adapt the way I use my strengths
4. I felt energised when I used my strengths in this situation
5. The situation challenged the way I viewed myself and the world
6. Since this experience I feel more like I am following a direction that is right for me

* All questions are responded to using a likert 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”) scale.