

Coaching with Distinctive Human Strengths for Intentional Change

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This paper describes and asserts the positive influence of coaching with distinctive human strengths for the intentional change of the coachee. Intentional Change Theory is introduced as the conceptual backdrop to discuss human strengths and to contrast two approaches to connect the real self and the ideal self. The Balanced Attributes Model (BAM) and Distinctive Strengths Model (DSM) represent different assumptions, values, and perspectives on intentional change. I use the DSM as the foundation for three examples of how a coach could work with coachees to pursue their respective intentional change.

Coaching is a very popular form of consulting (Arnaud, 2003). The practice of coaching has grown significantly since the mid-1990's (Segers et al., 2015). The intent of this paper is to describe and assert the positive influence of coaching with distinctive human strengths for the intentional change of the coachee. First, I discuss Intentional Change Theory (ICT) (Boyatzis, 2008) and its role in facilitating personal change desired by the coachee. It is also introduced as the conceptual backdrop to discuss human strengths. Next, I define strengths and discuss strengths versus gaps to demonstrate two approaches that a coach and coachee can follow. Subsequently, two pathways, the Balanced Attributes Model and the Distinctive Strengths Model, to connect the real self and the ideal self are articulated. How a coachee can source strengths is explained. The Distinctive Strengths Model provides the foundation for some practical approaches to coaching for intentional change.

INTENTIONAL CHANGE THEORY

Intentional change theory suggests that individuals make a conscious and voluntary choice to move toward their ideal self as an object of change (Carr, 2004; Robbins et al., 1999). Boyatzis' ICT (Boyatzis, 2008) involves transitioning among five discoveries. A "discovery" occurs when coachees learn something new about themselves that is inconsistent with their current self-understanding. In effect, it is a surprise that comes with a sense of urgency for its resolution (Boyatzis, 2001). ICT is an iterative model that begins with the first discovery by identifying the individual's ideal self or an image of the person one wants to be which emanates from one's dreams, aspirations, and highest personal hopes for the future.

Intentional change theory presumes that personal change and learning results from rectifying the inconsistency between the ideal self (who the coachee wants to be) and the real self (who the coachee is). In the second discovery, the real self consists of the coachee's strengths where the coachee is in harmony with his or her ideal self, and gaps, where there is inconsistency with the ideal self. The first part of discovery two represents the emphasis that I place on the strengths part of the real self as the facilitator of the transition between the real and ideal selves over the gaps part of the ICT model. Research suggests

that we enjoy ourselves more when we focus on those attributes most characteristic of our ideal self (Seligman, 2004).

Locke and Latham's research (1990) supports the forward motion that results from setting goals. Findings in educational psychology research (Dweck, 1989) which are also supported in organizational behavior studies (Brett & VandeWalle, 1999; VandeWalle et al., 1999), suggest that goal orientation comes in two varieties. Seijts and colleagues (Seijts et al., 2004, p. 229) state "A learning goal shifts attention to the strategies or procedures and away from task outcome achievement" whereas a performance goal fixes one's concentration on the outcome. Extending this research, discovery three is about putting one's personal change agenda in writing in the form of a learning plan with learning goals.

Discovery four involves experimenting with and practicing new behaviors, thoughts, and feelings to the point of mastery so that old habits are broken and new neural pathways are strengthened (Bennett-Goleman, 2001). So, for coachees, this means trying out new initiatives in different contexts such as in project meetings, presentations, or other venues of group interaction for the purpose of pursuing their self-ascribed ideal self. However, the focus of a coachee's learning goals is not on the change itself. Instead, the emphasis is on how coachees can move closer to their preferred future by enacting learning goals in the contexts of their daily lives (Rhee, 1997).

The fifth discovery may occur at any and all points in the coachee's journey of personal change as it concerns developing trusting relationships that make change possible. Trusting relationships help, support, and encourage each step in the ICT process. This discovery suggests that coachees really need coaches to help them discover their ideal self, identify their strengths and gaps, develop a learning agenda, and experiment and practice new behaviors. Coaches can help to raise the level of self-awareness for coachees following the ICT process by providing feedback, affirmation, and information to monitor progress on their goals provided that sufficient psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999) exists in the coaching relationship. Dutton and Heaphy (2003) found that interpersonal connections such as those in coaching relationships can leave a positive imprint on the participating individuals that is enduring and meaningful to their growth and development.

HUMAN STRENGTHS

Some researchers suggest that it is very difficult to define human strengths as the term often relates to optimal functioning which is not necessarily known through experience in contrast to that which is implied by achieving a "normal" state (Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2003a). Other researchers suggest many personal qualities can be considered a strength under certain conditions (Saleebey, 2002). Meanwhile, some researchers have created a debate about whether human strength involves individual-level traits such as optimism, self-efficacy, and resilience (Staudinger & Pasupathi, 2000) or whether a process-oriented approach should be taken to understanding human strengths (Mischel & Mendoza-Denton, 2003). However, researchers have taken a step forward to create a classification system of 24 character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Carr (2004) provides a useful framework of these diverse strengths that encompasses historical, contextual, and personal strengths which can be brought to bear on opportunities and challenges to create positive outcomes. I view the first two categories of strengths as perhaps outside the domain of dyadic coaching relationships given that they address an individual's early secure attachment and positive school placement as historical strengths and one's current family functioning and romantic relationships as contextual strengths. However, it is the personal or human strengths that I believe can be used to facilitate a successful coaching relationship for intentional change. These include capacities such as character strengths documented in Peterson and Seligman's (2004) work, emotional intelligence as popularized by Goleman (1995), Frederickson's (2001) research on positive emotions and the broaden and build theory, and Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy or the confidence that one can change behavior to reach a desired goal.

Strengths represent one's higher functioning attributes, skills, abilities, and behavioral characteristics that lead to outstanding performance. The dictionary provides an inclusive definition of strength as,

“Capacity or potential for effective action: a show of strength” (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 1992). It is important to note that I am not referring to just positive reframing where one year of college becomes thirteen years of education. In fact, one study found no significant differences in attitudes and intentions between those individuals receiving positively and negatively framed educational dietary messages (van Assema et al., 2001). Instead, I am referring to real human strengths such as those mentioned above in Carr’s (2004) framework that researchers are trying to understand better.

HUMAN STRENGTHS VERSUS GAPS

In the traditional "test-and-tell" approaches to coaching (Kilburg, 1996), coaches could make three false assumptions about the intentional change process. First, coaches could believe that their coachees’ strong points do not require further attention and therefore ignore them (Drucker, 1999). By doing so, coaches would take a minimum requirement or sufficiency stance rather than an optimization perspective. This approach parallels the emphasis on just “coping” in social work literature (Rapp, 1998). Second, coaches may encourage coachees to use their strengths only to “fix” a weakness or fill a performance gap. However, in organizational scholarship, continuums are recognized for domains such as effectiveness which ranges from ineffective to excellence where being effective is only the normal or midpoint state (Cameron, 2003; Cameron, 2008). Third, coaches could believe a short-termed and non-specific or generic oriented approach to coaching is preferred to a personal agenda linked to the coachee’s ideal self, career vision, or desire to make a personal contribution. This problem-centric approach to personal growth and well-being is usually ineffective, frustrating, and not sustained.

Coaches need to reconceptualize coachees’ strengths as integral to the development of those vital competencies coachees are most in need of improvement. This is a contrarian and an appreciative approach (Cooperrider, 1986) that considers something works in every human system. Coachees need to believe that they have the resources within them to meet whatever challenges that lay before them and to hold as beautiful those highpoints of their life and their contribution to them. In fact, research from Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) provides a legitimacy for studying human strengths and directions for future research (Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2003b). When coaches invest in the strengths of coachees in this way, greater employee engagement (Clifton & Harter, 2003) and a sense of meaningfulness at work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003) can result.

Researchers have called for more investigation into human strengths (Sleek, 1998; Snyder et al., 2010) and attempted to integrate human strengths into the mission of psychological research (Seligman, 1998). Social work research has made progress in studying the application of strengths to case management with people suffering from severe and persistent mental illness. Rapp (1998) reports lower hospitalization, more goal-setting, and greater overall physical and mental health among clients in six studies where clients applied their strengths to their severe mental illness. Extensive study and application of the strengths consisting of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998) has demonstrated great opportunities for leadership development (Boyatzis et al., 2013; Goleman et al., 2002; Jack et al., 2013). The experience of positive emotions broadens people's momentary thought-action repertoires and in turn serves to build their enduring personal resources which buffer resilient people against depression and fuel thriving in the aftermath of crises (Fredrickson et al., 2003). Further, by using strengths, individuals are more apt to feel good about themselves (Seligman, 2004). Studies have shown much greater productivity in organizations where employees have the opportunity each day to work with their distinctive strengths versus the productivity in typical organizations where employees do not have this opportunity (Clifton & Harter, 2003).

Much of the focus in facilitating individual change using the traditional approach has been on reducing gaps or deficits between one’s current and normal levels of performance (Ragins et al., 2000; Russell & Adams, 1997). Working on gaps in this way is characterized by a belief that one should continuously improve oneself as a person is never a finished piece and can always be better. An alternative pathway to change is for one to work on both relevant strengths and gaps but to do it by

working with one's own strengths in pursuit of his or her ideal self. A person should celebrate one's strengths and use them for his or her own benefit as well as the benefit of others. A strengths orientation believes that one can always be great and reflect one's personal best.

Working with one's strengths that are at or above a "tipping point" (Gladwell, 2002; Goleman, 1998) can help an individual develop vital abilities critical in the attainment of their ideal self whereas eliminating gaps reduces variation in one's performance in comparison with others. A tipping point refers to when a certain critical mass has been reached at which time outstanding performance is noted by others in one's referent group (Goleman, 1998). It has parallels in the field of psychophysics where it is called a "just noticeable difference" and is the minimum amount that something must be changed for the difference to be noticeable (Hughes, 2001). In innovation diffusion literature, the parallel is when the rate of diffusion or dissemination of an innovation among adopters suddenly and rapidly accelerates (Rogers, 1995). Accessing our strengths above the tipping point increases the resources that we have to deploy in good and bad times.

Working on gaps is a way to improve and to create value-added performance by addressing things that are falling short. By striving to narrow the gaps one becomes a better and more valuable person to the workplace whereas more frequently and appropriately used strengths can enhance strengths close to the tipping point and make them distinctive to that individual in his or her larger life context of which adding value to the workplace is a part. So, someone working with strengths strives to more consistently use strengths to be the person he or she wants to be. Then the way to be outstanding and to have a satisfying career is to bring more of the best of oneself into the experience and thereby expanding the horizons of personal capacity. Strengths act as resources that can be used in one's individual change journey and in pursuit of one's life goals, aspirations, and dreams. However, because working on gaps is contextual, the way to be accepted is to be more like others and try to meet standardized performance norms.

Making the choice to work with one's strengths assumes that everyone has strengths but their composition and level of demonstration is different for each person. Strengths can be increased by adding more different ones and by developing existing ones so that they are more frequently and appropriately displayed. The assumption when working with gaps is that everyone has gaps but the size of each gap and the number of gaps varies with each person. Gaps can be reduced by lowering one's vision and/or by raising the level of one's weaknesses consistent with Senge's (1990) notion of creative tension.

The alignment of resources, when working on gaps, is to an external or group standard or goal. Likewise, expectations are externally driven. The "renaissance man" with a balanced self as the ideal captures the nature of the gaps approach. This image is of a generalist who can at least do everything at an acceptable level and is a quick learner. Alternatively, when one works with strengths, the person aligns resources to an internal or ideal self and assumes that unique talents shape and form the ideal. As such, one who follows one's strengths is a specialist and does a lot of what he or she does well which leads to sustainable learning.

When working on gaps one assumes that individual strong points do not require further attention and therefore they can be set aside to work on one's weaknesses which are more instrumental to their respective change agenda. In this way, the appropriate level of development requires an understanding of one's context such as the individual's sociodemographic position and therefore also requires altering one's lifestyle to best suit that position. However, coaches are most likely to invite others to work with them in areas reflecting their abilities, energies, and passions than in those domains representing their weaknesses, aversions, and deficits. Why would coaches work with others who not only do not display or only seldom display an important and relevant behavior or characteristic but also show repulsion toward it? Yet this frequently is the domain of our inquiry. We tend to ask for instance "What went wrong?" or "What are the problems with the project?" or "What are the roadblocks or barriers to implementation?" While we do not engage others because of their weaknesses or start projects because of their shortcomings, a gap analysis, as typically deployed in a business strategy context (Wilson, 1998), takes us there by omitting the discovery of what individuals did best and what projects were implemented most effectively.

TWO PATHWAYS TO THE IDEAL SELF

Two models describing alternative ways of connecting the ideal self with the real self are discussed next. As shown in Figure 1, the first illustration is the Balanced Attributes Model (BAM) and the other is the Distinctive Strengths Model (DSM). Each model also reflects the different characteristics of the two ways to facilitate individual change behavior in the context of Intentional Change Theory. The models also represent different assumptions, values, and perspectives on individual change. My intent is to describe and assert the positive influence of coaching with distinctive human strengths for intentional change.

The road one selects to personal change has two choices. One alternative is to follow a focus on individual gaps, exclusive of strengths, as described in the previous section. The result is a balanced set of strengths and gaps representing an externally or normatively driven ideal self. I call this the Balanced Attributes Model (BAM) of change, as denoted in the first diagram of Figure 1. The BAM works with generic or traditional processes that target all of one's gaps in a direct and tactical way.

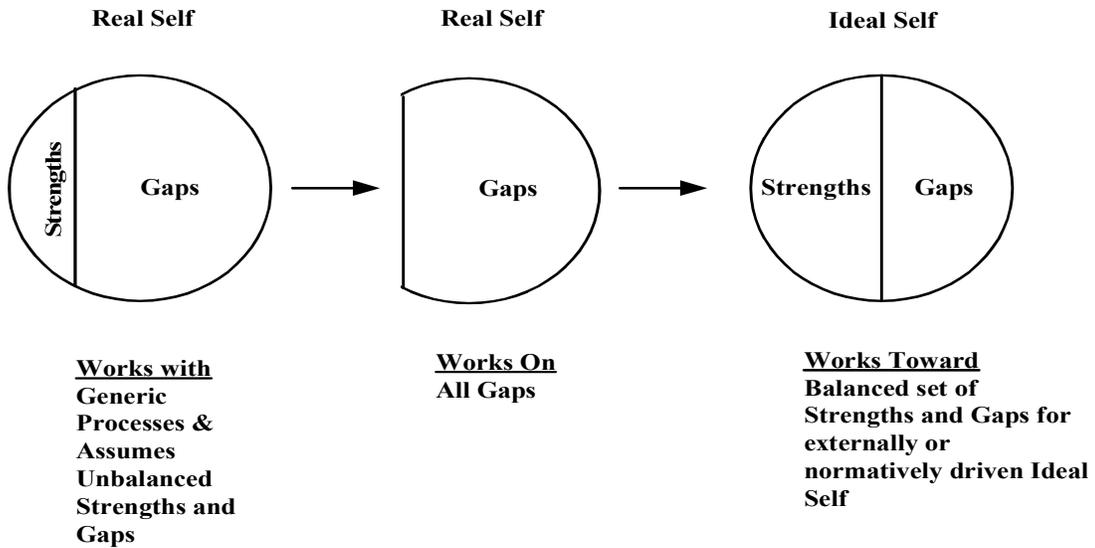
Assumptions with the BAM are that one's strengths and gaps are unbalanced with gaps representing a much larger portion of their personal portfolio of attributes and capabilities, as portrayed in the first part of the BAM diagram. Given that a person's real self is composed of a disproportionate number of gaps, gaps then become the target of development, as shown in the middle section of the diagram. The purpose of working on gaps is to work toward a balanced set of strengths and gaps, as shown in the last part of the BAM diagram. In terms of a coachee's intentional change, this could mean a well-rounded experience in the workplace or the various domains of one's profession.

The BAM facilitates change by exclusively focusing on the person's weaknesses that are below a tipping point. These weaknesses represent one's lowest functioning skills, abilities, behavioral characteristics, and aspects of career satisfaction. The BAM assumes that an individual's strong points do not require further attention and therefore can be ignored. Further, it assumes that working on one's weaknesses is instrumental to his or her career success. Last, the BAM takes a non-specific or generic oriented approach to personal change in preference to a personal agenda linked to one's ideal self. Therefore, gaps or weaknesses are "fixed" in isolation of the ideal self such that efforts are made to raise the individual's level of functioning to a minimum requirement rather than an optimum level.

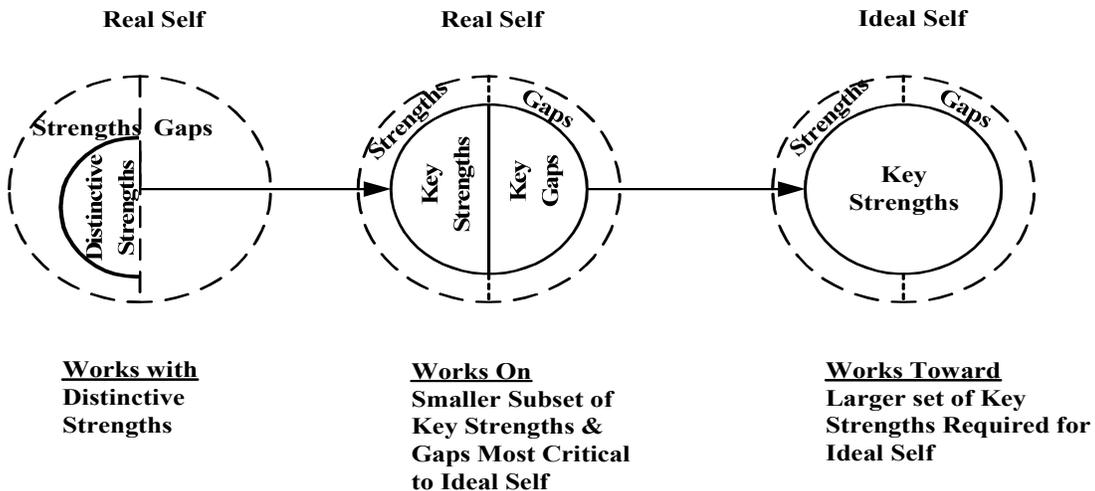
In contrast to the BAM, the Distinctive Strengths Model (DSM) of change, as shown in the second diagram of Figure 1, works on a smaller subset of "Key Strengths" and "Key Gaps" that are most critical to the development of the ideal self. They are those strengths and gaps which we have determined to be most impactful for our future success. The DSM only works with the distinctive strengths part of the real self, as reflected in the first part of the diagram. Distinctive strengths are the strengths most frequently and consistently displayed by an individual. The middle of the DSM model symbolizes the "construction zone" and represents personal characteristics that are regularly demonstrated (key strengths) but require an even higher level of performance than is currently shown and therefore may include attributes at and just above the tipping point and characteristics that are not frequently displayed or below the tipping point (key gaps) but instrumental to the attainment of one's ideal self. The ideal self in this model, as illustrated in the last part of Figure 1, is a larger set of key strengths.

FIGURE 1
TWO MODELS FOR CONNECTING THE IDEAL SELF WITH THE REAL SELF

Balanced Attributes Model (BAM)



Distinctive Strengths Model (DSM)



The DSM assumes that distinctive strengths exist as the highest-level subset of all strengths and that these distinctive strengths can be used to work on both strengths and gaps of the real self that are integral to the development of the ideal self. The DSM involves assessing the person's ideal self (what the person wants out of life and work, the kind of person he or she wants to be) and their real self (how the person currently relates to others), and the comparison of the ideal and real self. It also includes articulation of the person's: (a) distinctive strengths (those where the ideal and real self are in synchrony and the person demonstrates them frequently); (b) strengths (those where the ideal and real self are close or in synchrony but not shown as often); and gaps (those where the ideal and real self are currently distant from each other).

COACHING WITH DISTINCTIVE HUMAN STRENGTHS

Each of us has different strengths. However, we mistakenly believe that we know what our strengths are and that others have the same strengths as we do (Drucker, 1999). It is time to bring our strengths out of the shadows and into the foreground of the coaching relationship. We need to elevate our existing strengths and our capacity to change by using them. What I am suggesting is working with our personal best on those areas most important to our ideal self whether they are strengths or gaps. This approach answers the question “How will we connect our real and ideal selves?”

The DSM points toward an ideal self that is individual-specific and self-identified whereas the BAM suggests an implicit norm for the ideal self that is context sensitive and other imposed. While the DSM sees the real self comprising a reservoir of strengths with growing possibilities, the BAM envisions creative tension between real and ideal selves. Finally, a learning plan for growth and personal change is created under the DSM whereas as performance plan is outlined to overcome deficits under the BAM.

By primarily concentrating developmental efforts on weaknesses and short-term performance gaps disconnected from individual long-term purpose, individual change research and practice may have limited its capacity to effect personal change. Coaching with distinctive human strengths expands opportunities for growth, reduces resistance to personal change, and increases the likelihood of improved individual development and intentional change. I suggest that coachees who achieved intentional change used their distinctive strengths to do so.

SOURCING STRENGTHS

Human capacity is based on strength. Such capacities can be identified by an individual as a self-reflective agent of change (Caprara & Cervone, 2003). Sourcing “Distinctive Strengths” can come from the feedback of a self-report instrument such as the “Values in Action (VIA) Signature Strengths Survey” (Seligman, 2002) grounded in positive psychology research (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), or the “StrengthsFinder Survey” (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001) derived from the research of the Gallup organization (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). Alternatively, identification of distinctive strengths can also come from those in one’s communities of interest with such exercises as the multi-source feedback assessment or more commonly referred to as 360-degree feedback (Tornow et al., 1998). An example of the multisource feedback assessment is the “Emotional and Social Competence Inventory (ESCI)” and the “Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI)” (Boyatzis et al., 2002) based on emotional competency research (Boyatzis, 1982; Goleman, 1995, 1998; Goleman et al., 2002). Reports from these individual and multisource instruments contain numerical and narrative data to guide participants in the identification of their strengths.

Finally, an approach based solely on narrative data drawn from previous life experiences allows individuals to capture accounts of their “personal best” through an exercise called the “Reflected Best Self” (Roberts et al., 2005). The resulting strengths inventory from any of these instruments and one’s subsequent selection of those strengths most characteristic of the individual is applied to the learning agenda of the individual seeking his or her ideal self. Coaching can help coachees integrate the results of these instruments into the context of their intentional change.

Identifying “Key Strengths” can come from discussions with coaches, conducting career interviews with individuals working in the job or industry that is desirous to the coachee, and through personal reflection of the coachee’s own experiences. There are two important components to key strengths. First, they must be absolutely critical to the success of the incumbent performing that role. Second, they must be strengths on which the individual is willing to work. Boyatzis (2001) has found that adults learn what they want to learn and they change themselves as opposed to having others change them.

This is what makes the Distinctive Strengths Model strategic. It is an approach that is integral by its very design to the personal needs and success of the coachee. It is not a generic catchall prescription of books to read, videos to watch, and practices to perform. While these are helpful in the same way a poor fitting suit of clothes still covers your body. Both provide some coverage and warmth but you are unlikely

to wear them for long because of discomfort caused by the poor fit. To be a sustainable initiative in personal change, the intervention must fit into the lifestyle and structure of the person's personal system of daily living (Rhee, 1997).

So how do we use our strengths in a meaningful and in a very personally strategic way? How can strengths help us with where we want to go in life, relationship, and at work? How can we use the results from individual and multisource feedback assessments to effectively develop our strengths? What is not needed is another tool to find our highpoint capabilities but rather a way to use these distinctive strengths constructively to develop those areas that we want to develop and which are also the most meaningful to our future. What follows are three examples of how a coach could work with coachees to employ the Distinctive Strengths Model in practice. The examples are based on using the coachees' distinctive strengths as determined from one of the aforementioned tools to develop their key strengths.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

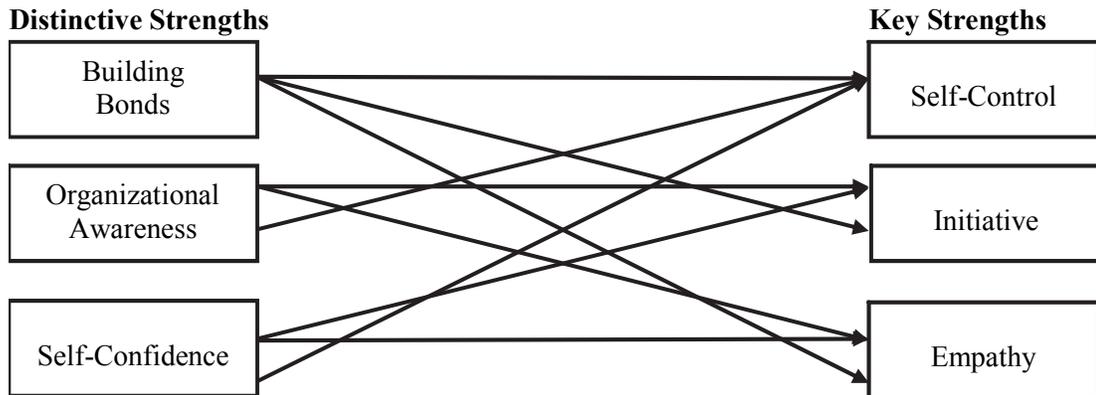
During a coaching session, a coachee can be asked to identify his or her three distinctive strengths and three key strengths for success that he or she would like to further develop. Keeping the selection to three of each type of strength makes the process more manageable but is only offered here for illustration. An example of the selection results using the Emotional Competence Inventory (Boyatzis et al., 2002) for three coachees follows next. Maria, a CEO in the health care industry, is depicted in Figure 2.

Following the Distinctive Strengths Model, a coach could ask Maria how she could use the distinctive strengths that she has in one or more of building bonds, organizational awareness, and self-confidence to develop one or more of self-control, initiative, and empathy strengths. For instance, to build bonds one needs to cultivate and maintain a network of strong mutual relationships. The coach needs to determine how Maria can use her network of relationships to improve self-control, initiative, and or empathy. For example, she could ask someone from her network to help her monitor high stress or trigger points and give her feedback as to how she handled them.

Another question for the coachee is how to use her high level organizational awareness skills that require her to read key relationships and understand workplace politics to grow more empathy in herself. The coachee could ask herself what she does now to maintain her organizational awareness strength. For example, does she regularly contact key people to stay on top of current work issues and read related materials? If so, Maria could take this same approach to develop more empathy by regularly contacting others to understand and learn their perspectives. How can she use her organizational awareness to identify opportunities for demonstrating more initiative?

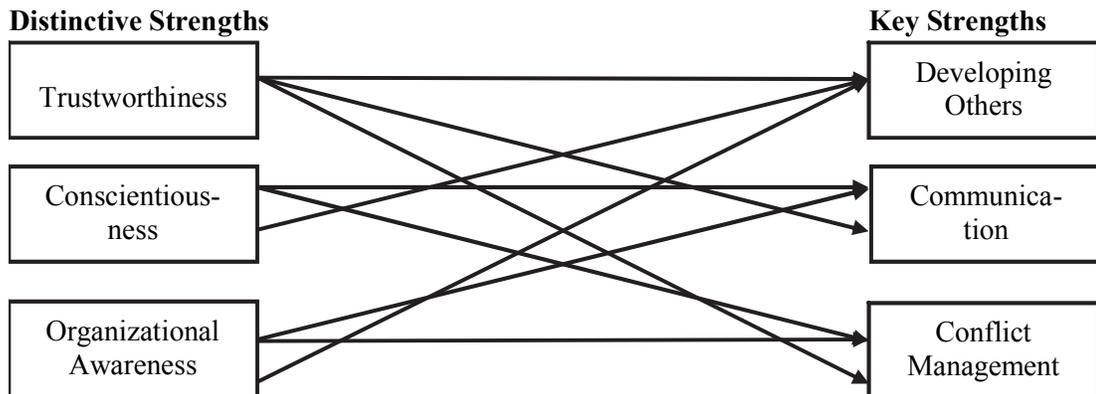
A high level of self-confidence requires decisiveness and an ability to stand out in a group or create a "presence." How does she use this skill to demonstrate more initiative? Can she use her presence as a leader to model more empathic behavior?

FIGURE 2
EXAMPLE # 1 – MARIA - CEO, HEALTH CARE INDUSTRY



Now we turn to the strengths of another individual, Enrique who is a VP of special projects in the consulting industry, as shown in Figure 3. The coach could ask Enrique how he may use the distinctive strengths that he has in one or more of trustworthiness, conscientiousness, and organizational awareness, to build one or more of developing others, communication, and conflict management. For instance, to create a high level of trustworthiness one acts on values despite pressure to do otherwise and publicly admits to mistakes. So, the coach could ask Enrique how he may use his trustworthiness strength to improve his developing others, communication, and/or conflict management strengths. For example, he could be a role model for the ethical conduct that he would like to see developed in others. Then the coach could ask Enrique how he can encourage others to be transparent and willing to admit mistakes.

FIGURE 3
EXAMPLE # 2 – ENRIQUE - VP SPECIAL PROGRAMS, CONSULTING INDUSTRY



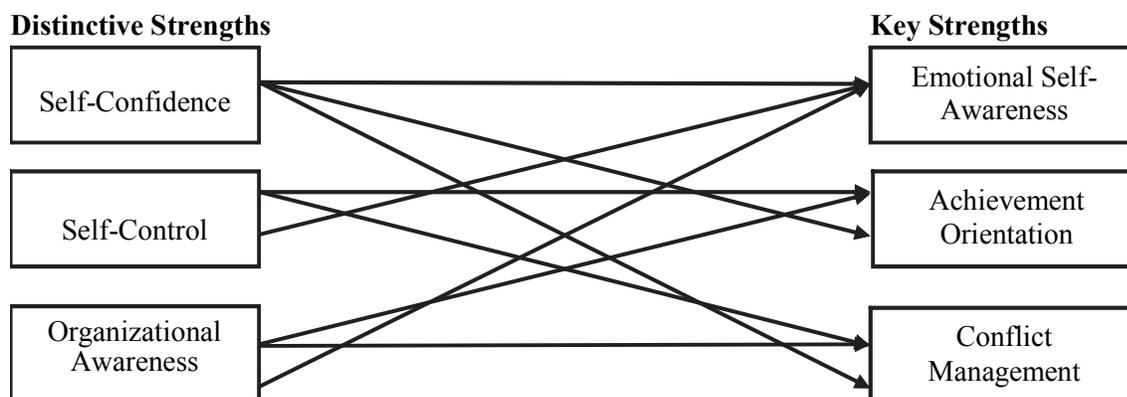
People who are conscientious meet commitments and keep promises. They work in a careful and organized manner, paying attention to detail, following through on commitments and promises, and building trust through their reliability. Enrique' coach could ask him how accessing these dimensions of conscientiousness would help Enrique's communication ability. Is there an upcoming speaking opportunity that she can highly organize well in advance of the event? Can Enrique create a checklist to help prepare himself?

Further, the coach could ask how Enrique could use his high level organizational awareness skills that require his to read key relationships and understand workplace politics to manage conflict better. He can ask himself what he does now to maintain his organizational awareness strength. For example, does he

regularly contact key people to stay on top of current work issues and read related materials? Then the coach could ask Enrique to take this same approach to understand and learn about conflicting perspectives. Enrique should also consider how he could use his organizational awareness to be more engaging in his communications. Would articulating the political forces, history, and reasons for workplace issues and the organization's culture help to create such engagement?

The distinctive and key strengths of Carlos, a VP of quality management in the manufacturing industry, are shown in Figure 4. Carlos' coach could ask him how he could use the distinctive strengths that he has in one or more of self-confidence, self-control, and organizational awareness, to build one or more of emotional self-awareness, achievement orientation, and conflict management. For instance, people who have a high level of self-confidence can face failure or rejection and still act productively. They do not let problems sit, but confront them head-on. They do not back down just because they are challenged, but are willing to give and take for a better overall result. So, how can Carlos use his self-confidence competency to improve his emotional self-awareness, achievement orientation, and/or conflict management strengths? For example, he could use his decisiveness and feeling of capability to meet and surpass goals. Another question for the coach to ask Carlos is how he could use his ability to create a "presence" to demonstrate more of an achievement orientation.

FIGURE 4
EXAMPLE # 3 – CARLOS - VP QUALITY MANAGEMENT, MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY



People who have a high level of self-control can maintain performance under stressful or hostile conditions. They tend to avoid certain behaviors and remain "cool under pressure." So, Carlos should consider how he could use this competency to improve his conflict management ability. For instance, he can focus on the issues at hand and leave personal matters aside. Then Carlos needs to consider the best way to use his "coolness" to help air disagreements and communicate the positions of those involved.

How can Carlos use his high level organizational awareness skills that require him to read key relationships and understand workplace politics to manage conflict better? He should ask himself what he does now to maintain his organizational awareness strength. For example, does he regularly contact key people to stay on top of current work issues and read related materials? If so, can he take this same approach to understand and learn about conflicting perspectives. What would happen if Carlos uses these same skills and applied them inward for introspection to examine his own emotions? He could set-up an agreement with himself to check-in as to what he is feeling during a contentious meeting for example. It is possible that Carlos could keep a journal where he writes down his behaviors and his feelings when facing stressful situations on a daily basis. People who have a high level of the emotional self-awareness strength know the internal meters and subtle signals that tell them what they are feeling, and use them as an ongoing guide to how they are doing. They can articulate those feelings, as well as demonstrate social appropriateness in expressing them.

As Maria, Enrique, and Carlos review the foregoing with their respective coaches and move forward to establish a learning plan, they should each ask themselves, "What workplace opportunities regularly present themselves to me where I can practice my key strengths that I want to develop?" In answering this question it is important to select contextually appropriate and psychologically safe (Edmondson, 1999) environments to experiment with and practice these key strengths.

CONCLUSION

My intent in this paper was to describe and assert the positive influence of coaching with distinctive human strengths for the coachee's intentional change. Intentional Change Theory was introduced to contrast two approaches to connect the real self and the ideal self. The paper outlined theoretical support for using one's distinctive strengths to create intentional change and provides practical applications of how this can be accomplished by coaches who work with their coachees. The Distinctive Strengths Model (DSM) offered some helpful approaches to utilizing one's personal best when planning one's career. Three examples were provided of how a coach could work with coachees to employ the DSM in practice. Coaches can help coachees identify and work with their distinctive strengths to create intentional change.

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