

Choice Theory Explains Research Results!

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Management and quality guru Peter Drucker said that, “Most people think they know what they are good at. They are usually wrong...And yet, a person can perform only from strength.”

That statement is backed up by research from the Gallup Organization and published in Strength Finders 2.0. The data (ten million people over ten years) shows that building on one’s talents produces better results than focusing on weaknesses.

Rath (2008, p. i) writes, “We had discovered that people have several times more potential for growth when they invest energy in developing their strengths instead of correcting their deficiencies.”

The Gallup studies(Rath, 2007, p. iii) also found that people who do have the opportunity to focus on their strengths every day are six times more likely to be engaged in their jobs and more than three times as likely to report having an excellent quality of life in general.

The research from three Gallup studies and published in Vital Friends (2004), Strengths Finder 2.0 (2007) and First, Break All the Rules (1999) supports Choice Theory concepts, and leadership.

Leadership

Buckingham and Coffman (1999, p. 32) offer the following insight from their research, “We had discovered that the manager – not pay, benefits, perks, or a charismatic corporate leader - was the critical player in the workplace. The manager was the key. It tells us that people leave managers, not companies.”

In the 1990’s, I wrote that Boss Management and Lead Management are not opposites. The opposite of Boss Management is Lassaiz-Faire Management. A Lassaiz-Faire Manager takes a hands-off approach, rarely offers help, suggestions or encouragement, and lets the workers do everything on their own. There is little, if any, feedback and data collection or measurement of progress is left up to the workers.

Consider the following data (Rath, 2007, p. iv).

If you manager primarily:	The chances of your being actively disengaged are:
Ignores you	40%
Focuses on Your weaknesses	22%
Focuses on your strengths	1%

As you can see from these results, having a manager who ignores you is even more detrimental than having a manager who primarily focuses on your weaknesses.

Additionally, Rath (2006) provides other feedback from workers in his book *Vital Friends*. “Just 17% of employees report that their manager has made “an investment in our relationship” in the past three months”, which implies that there are more Lassaiz-Faire Managers than one would think.

The Focus of Great Managers

Successful managers are able to create an environment where each employee can positively rate the answers to each of these six questions:

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?
5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?

All of the data from the three studies is consistent with Choice Theory®. All workers have a *Quality World Pictures* of being successful at what they do. They usually include a sense of belonging with other workers, a positive, respectful relationship with the manager, to choose areas in which to continue to build skills and to have, at minimum, enjoyment at work. This, of course, translates to a ‘need satisfying’ work experience.

When managers can create a work environment that allows people to work with their talents, be successful and get-a-long, their own ratings, and personal satisfaction are also high.

The Role of Perceptions

The Gallup Organization identified 34 distinct talents (Rath, 2007, p. i). As previously stated, talents are unique to each individual. They determine to some degree how we see the world, process information and determine what situations we are comfortable in and which ones we aren't. This point is also consistent with Choice Theory and the *Perceived World*.

Based on the research, all of these studies challenge conventional wisdom and teaching. The message is always to “overcome your weaknesses”. Yet, in many cases this is not possible.

A clarification of definitions will help clarify this point.

Skills are the how-to's of a role. They are capabilities that can be transferred from one person to another.

Knowledge is simply “what you are aware of.” There are two kinds of knowledge: factual knowledge – things you know; and experiential knowledge – understandings you have picked up along the way.

The power of knowledge and skill is that they are transferable from one person to another. Their limitation is that they are often situation specific - faced with an unexpected scenario, they may lose much of their power.

Talents cannot be taught. The power of talent is that it is transferable from situation to situation.

Rath (2007) concludes, “When we’re able to put most of our energy into developing our natural talents, extraordinary room for growth exists. So, a revision to the “You-can-be-anything-you-want-to-be” maxim might be more accurate: You **cannot** be anything you want to be – but you **can** be a lot more of who you already are.” (p. 9)

An Additional Thought for Parents and Educators Reflection

The following point that Rath (2007) is making is NOT that students can’t learn to increase knowledge and skills. However he does make a cogent argument for developing and focusing on talents.

What’s even more disheartening is the way our fixation on deficits affects young people in the home and classroom. In every culture we have studied, the overwhelming majority of parents (77% in the United States) think that a student’s *lowest* grades deserve the most time and attention. Parents and teachers reward excellence with apathy instead of investing more time in the areas where the child has the most potential for greatness.(p. 7)

References:

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