



Be a Project MOTIVATOR



Unlock the **Secrets of Strengths-Based**
Project Management

Ruth Pearce, PMP, JD

Praise for *Be a Project Motivator*

“Ruth is among the best project managers I’ve had the privilege of working with in my twenty-five years in business. She is able to take a seed, a mere idea, and cultivate it into a fully flourishing plant, a successful project. And all this with generosity, humor, and sensitivity.”

—**Tal Ben-Shahar, bestselling author of *Happier* and founder of the Happiness Studies Academy**

“In her book, *Be a Project Motivator*, Ruth Pearce has created a toolbox that should be on every businessperson’s and entrepreneur’s shelf. Throughout the book, Pearce integrates the most important rule of cultural awareness—the platinum rule of mutual respect. With this book on your desk or in your bag, we can have a little bit of Ruth Pearce and her fabulous coaching and persistent positive guidance with us whenever we need her!”

—**Gwendolyn VanSant, CEO and Founding Director, BRIDGE, and Equity and Inclusion Team Lead, Imagine Philanthropy**

“Ruth Pearce has written one of the must-read primers for project managers that will soon become an industry staple. She provides you with her lessons learned from thirty years of project management work on high-profile and complex projects.”

—**John Garahan, Vice President, Global Delivery, Broadridge Financial Solutions**

“Enliven and optimize your project management! Read this book to get Ruth Pearce’s special magic dust culled from her deep experience mixed with the newest scientific discoveries on human motivation and engagement.”

—**Neal H. Mayerson, PhD, founder and Chairman, VIA Institute on Character**

“The age-old dilemma of responsibility without authority makes it a challenge for project managers to effectively engage and motivate people. The insights in the book are ideal for those wanting to capitalize on their strengths while being aware of and improving their areas for development. If you are serious about your impact and success as a project manager, this is a must-read.”

—**Cathy Liska, CEO, Center for Coaching Certification**

“Ruth’s extensive research from the fields of positive psychology and neuroscience are easily woven into a classic workplace example that we can relate to and learn from. The “Making It Stick” and “Strategies for Success” sections in each chapter are helpful and a great review. The timetable at the end of the book is an excellent tool to get started in developing one’s skills as a successful and sought-after project manager so that you ‘can pull greatness from your team.’”

—**Patrice Palmer, MEd, MA, CPP, owner of Happiness @ Work**

“Having walked the path of global project team management, I can say that this guidebook would have helped me be more effective and enjoyable—this is a must-read for anyone in a similar role.”

—**Gary Keil, PhD, RPh, cofounder of Growth Leaders Network**

“I saw myself in Ruth’s examples repeatedly. This book is so very relatable to the teams I work with every day! This book puts a new spin on antiquated ways of thinking. It provides great tips that are practical and can be implemented right away.”

—**Chorobis Drakes, PMP, member of Southern New England Chapter, Project Management Institute**

“Ruth’s book, *Be a Project Motivator*, chronicles how to engage project team members and stakeholders. The PM transforms her 100-strong team from being tired and dispirited to being motivated, engaged, and committed to succeed! Any PM will enjoy reading the book and also benefit from reading it.”

—**Peter Lyons, CORE02 Technical Product Manager, UniCredit Services**

“Ruth Pearce’s book is an excellent, well-researched tool kit for successful project management. Leveraging your character strengths to turn potential team collisions into collaborations—this book is a must-read!”

—**Fatima Doman, bestselling author of *Authentic Strengths* and *True You! Authentic Strengths for Kids***

“Ruth Pearce takes the best and most pertinent research findings from positive psychology and weaves real-life stories into applied lessons that everyone can learn and benefit from. Her passion for connecting people with systems that change and enhance their lives sparkles on every page and makes this a must-have read for anyone who wants to be masterful in project and people management.”

—**Caroline Adams Miller, MAPP, bestselling author of *Creating Your Best Life, Getting Grit, and My Name Is Caroline***

**Be a Project
MOTIVATOR**



Be a Project MOTIVATOR

**Unlock the Secrets
of Strengths-Based
Project Management**



Ruth Pearce, PMP, JD



BK

Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Be a Project Motivator

Copyright © 2018 by Ruth Pearce

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed "Attention: Permissions Coordinator," at the address below.



Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

1333 Broadway, Suite 1000

Oakland, CA 94612-1921

Tel: (510) 817-2277, Fax: (510) 817-2278

BK

www.bkconnection.com

Ordering information for print editions

Quantity sales. Special discounts are available on quantity purchases by corporations, associations, and others. For details, contact the "Special Sales Department" at the Berrett-Koehler address above.

Individual sales. Berrett-Koehler publications are available through most bookstores. They can also be ordered directly from Berrett-Koehler: Tel: (800) 929-2929; Fax: (802) 864-7626; www.bkconnection.com

Orders for college textbook/course adoption use. Please contact Berrett-Koehler: Tel: (800) 929-2929; Fax: (802) 864-7626.

Distributed to the U.S. trade and internationally by Penguin Random House Publisher Services.

Berrett-Koehler and the BK logo are registered trademarks of Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

First Edition

Paperback print edition ISBN 978-1-5230-9579-7

PDF e-book ISBN 978-1-5230-9580-3

IDPF e-book ISBN 978-1-5230-9581-0

Digital audio ISBN 978-1-5230-9583-4

2018-1

Book producer: Westchester Publishing Services

Cover designer: Sue Malikowski, Designleaf Studio

*To Project Managers—
the Carriers of the Project Flame*

*It will take the linking of arms of kindred spirits into an
endless chain of advocates in order to tilt humanity
towards its better nature.*

—Neal Mayerson, chairman, VIA Institute on Character

*And to my US family, Gareth, Ben, Beckie,
Aavia, and Desi: you are my guiding lights.*

*And to my UK family, Jo, Peter, John, Susannah, and Esmé:
the best of Mum and Dad lives on in you.*

Contents

| | | |
|-----------|---|-----|
| | Foreword | ix |
| | Introduction: An Accidental Project Manager | 1 |
| CHAPTER 1 | Project Managers: More Than Just Plate Spinners and Ball Jugglers | 13 |
| CHAPTER 2 | Seeing Is Believing: The Maggie Method | 41 |
| CHAPTER 3 | Influence: The Project Motivator’s Best Friend | 70 |
| CHAPTER 4 | Building a Culture of Appreciation | 93 |
| CHAPTER 5 | Building a Culture of Appreciation for Our Stakeholders and Teams | 119 |
| CHAPTER 6 | When Strengths Go Wrong | 147 |
| CHAPTER 7 | When Other Things Go Wrong | 175 |
| CHAPTER 8 | Completing the Circle to Be a Project Motivator | 193 |
| CHAPTER 9 | Creating the Implementation Plan | 205 |
| | Bibliography | 213 |
| | Acknowledgments | 219 |
| | Index | 223 |
| | About the Author | 231 |

Foreword



More than ever before, project managers rely on the goodwill of others to achieve project success. As project managers, we leverage intangibles like influence, empathy, creativity, and leadership in our quest to enlist stakeholders to help solve real-world problems. We use these intangibles not as optional or nice-to-have features but rather as the essential working capital that we bargain with to get things done.

Over my twenty-year career as a project manager, entrepreneur, and business leader, I have worked with teams around the world to launch new products and deliver complex project outcomes. I have used a variety of approaches to project management—from the most arduous waterfall- and template-laden methodologies to fast-moving, agile, and scrum approaches. More often, I've employed composite approaches—waterfall planning coupled with agile elements for certain work tracks. Looking back, I can see now that these approaches are all simply tools that should be selected and used wisely. But how do we make the right choices for tools when we don't have the right team to use the tools?

As any good carpenter will tell you, the best tools do not build the house. If we gave the world's finest hammers, levels, and saws to an inexperienced and unmotivated team, a poorly built house would be likely to follow. And the inverse is true also—a highly motivated team with poor tools will find a way to deliver a quality product no matter what. Isn't the latter scenario the usual case for projects—a solid team with inadequate resources? Therefore, we must look to our team always, and invest in them, because a well-fortified team does not require one approach or another to succeed—they simply need the right environment to do their best work.

Case in point: The first time I saw Ruth Pearce in action as a project manager was in 2012 on an enterprise-scale business process reengineering project for a government entity. This project was large and unwieldy in every sense—from the constituent groups, which had diametrically opposed viewpoints, to the internal politics that covered the project team like a wet blanket. Hard as we worked, there was this ever-churning bureaucratic machine that could only go so fast and never stopped. This scenario is quite commonplace in large, complex projects, and Ruth was up to the challenge.

It was in this austere setting that I witnessed the magic of strengths-based project management from Ruth. Without any real pronouncements, she went about her work as project manager, gathering stakeholders to create effective coalitions around the various objectives and deliverables that needed to be built. She sought out the best in her team by asking, cajoling, convincing, influencing, empowering, celebrating, and giving the team the gift of her rigor. We all felt that we were in the service of something greater, despite the daily grind.

I see now that Ruth was using strengths-based project management to build a better team so that we could overcome the challenges of that environment. I've since come to understand that

this approach is needed in every project environment—from start-up product development efforts to large-scale complex projects. Since that time, I have come to believe that the only path forward is to engage our teams from their individual strengths. We must become project motivators, or risk project failure.

This book is for anyone looking for a better way to engage teams in project work. So much depends on getting the right people on the bus and building a team container that is strong yet flexible. Strengths-based project management is the pathway to a focused, resilient team.

Ruth is an engaging writer and fun storyteller. She brings a fresh viewpoint to the topic of team development and illustrates how project teams can operate from a strengths-based foundation. As someone seasoned in the use of the VIA character strengths assessment, Ruth delivers the VIA framework in an easy-to-understand way. This is a deeply insightful and rigorously tested assessment that every project manager and team member should take.

This book delivers a practical approach to inculcating positive psychology into the project environment. The book deals with real-world scenarios in which an understanding of strengths can help a team and explores how to use those strengths optimally. This book is really an investment in better projects and better teams. After all, project success demands that we all become project motivators.

Tim Jaques

June 2018

Saratoga Springs, NY

Introduction: An Accidental Project Manager



I never imagined myself growing up to be a project manager. When you think back to friends talking in school about what they dreamed of being when they grew up, do you remember anyone saying, “I want to be a project manager”? Probably not. Pilot, astronaut, doctor, nurse, or teacher, yes. Project manager? No!

When we are young, we don’t understand that to get things done, someone needs to coordinate the effort. Our first experience of a project manager is probably one of our parents. One or both take on the task of juggling the demands of school, work, extracurricular activities, shopping, doctors’ and dentists’ appointments, vacations, and so on. But we don’t really recognize the effort—and skill—that goes into that parental juggling until we are doing it ourselves.

I stumbled into project management quite by accident when the project manager on my project had to go home unexpectedly while we were on an overseas assignment. Rather than bringing someone new to the team, the company asked me to leverage my familiarity and established relationship with the client, my

knowledge of the project, and my general ability to organize things—which might be recognized as prudence in the language of character strengths—to be the project manager.

I loved it! As a project manager, I felt that I had a better handle on all the components of the project—not just my little corner of it—I had more opportunity to interact with a variety of people on the project, and I loved being able to facilitate getting things done. I was hooked, and for the next twenty years I went from project to project. Working in investment banks, software houses, nonprofits, state government, education, and insurance and retirement services, I had found my niche. I am a project manager in mind and spirit.

What Is a Project Manager?

When I told a friend of mine—who I thought knew what I do—that I was writing a book for project managers who want to become project motivators, she asked, “What is a project manager?”

For a moment I was at a loss as to how to answer. I had been ready with an explanation of motivation and its importance. I had my justification ready for why project managers want to be project motivators. But first, I had to go back to square one and answer the questions, “What are you? What do you do?”

My first thought was to reach for the Project Management Institute (PMI) definition: “the person assigned by the performing organization to lead the team that is responsible for achieving the project objectives.”¹ A Google search produced this definition on Wikipedia: “Project managers have the responsibility of the planning, procurement and execution of a project, in any undertaking

1. Project Management Institute, *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide)* (Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute, 2017), 716.

that has a defined scope, defined start and a defined finish; regardless of industry.”² While not inaccurate, this does not come close to highlighting all the facets of being a project manager.

As project managers know, the role is complicated and is becoming more so. If you are not convinced, write down all that a project manager does—it can seem quite overwhelming.

To start with, a project manager has the responsibility of building and maintaining a plan that is achievable and delivers the desired goal. To accomplish that, a project manager organizes the team and stakeholders to meet the project objectives. More than that, a project manager interfaces with various stakeholder groups and the main point of contact on a project. It does not stop there, because a project manager is the main communicator on a project. Some say that the best project managers spend more than 90 percent of their time communicating.³ They represent the customer to the project team and the project team to the customer; they represent the project to senior management and management to the team; they represent their employer or client to vendors and vendors to their employer or client. A project manager is the intermediary between every stakeholder group and all the other stakeholder groups.

For those who like imagery, a project manager is the spider at the center of a delicate web. He or she provides the glue that keeps the project together and the momentum to keep it moving forward. As a colleague of mine described us, project managers are the “keepers of the project flame.”

To achieve all of this, we need to be engaged and motivated, and we need to engage and motivate others. Without personal engagement and motivation, this role is overwhelming and

2. Wikipedia, s.v. “Project Manager,” last modified May 10, 2018, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_manager.

3. Andy Crowe, *Alpha Project Managers: What the Top 2% Know That Everyone Else Does Not* (Kennesaw, GA: Velociteach, 2016), 83.

objectionable. Without the ability to engage and motivate others, we cannot focus on getting things done because we are forever stuck herding unwilling cats in a direction they don't want to go.

I believe that having the skills to engage ourselves and others is not just a nice added value but also essential for us to be effective and to enjoy our role. Being *project motivators* elevates us within the organizations for which we work, and it elevates the organizations themselves.

How Engagement and Motivation Make Things Happen

“OK,” my friend said. “I think I get it now, but what do you mean by motivation?”

Throughout this book, I talk about engagement and motivation. Motivation is the impetus, drive, energy, and enthusiasm that causes someone to take action. Engagement creates that impetus by connecting the individual to the overall goals, helping him or her to feel important to the success of the goals and that the goals themselves have merit. It is the way to hold people's attention and keep them engrossed in the task. As project managers, we want to be project motivators. We want to provide the impetus and the incentive for our team members to take action and make things happen. There is lots of research that shows that lasting motivation does not come from the outside—so how does a project manager become a project motivator? The answer is by building engagement: by focusing on individuals, understanding and appreciating *their* motivation, and stimulating those intrinsic motivators that we each have.

We bring forth the motivation from within. Engaged people are motivated people. Motivated people are energized people. Energized people make things happen.

What Is Strengths-Based Project Management?

After my friend confirmed she had a better understanding of project managers and she felt comfortable with the explanations of motivation and engagement, she asked, “So, what is strengths-based project management?” I was really excited by that question because at the heart of this book is the topic of character strengths and how they help us to see possibility. But before we dive into character strengths, there are some guiding principles that will help us on our way. Most important is the power of influence, the ways in which we can engage our teams through our actions, our behavior, our language, and our attitudes. Two ways we can exert influence and achieve the greatest benefit are by modeling a growth or learning mind-set—something that, as you will see later, we are well equipped to do using our high hope and love of learning—and by building appreciation. And this is where the concept of character strengths comes in. Originally conceived, researched, and developed by Martin Seligman and Christopher Peterson, the concept of character strengths helps us to recognize, appreciate, and cultivate the things that are best in ourselves and others. Focusing on these twenty-four strengths in the teams I have worked with has transformed relationships, increased innovation, and changed culture. Seeing strengths and leveraging them has built engagement and created sustainable, energizing motivation.

Most of us—after all, it *is* human nature—spend a disproportionate amount of time worrying about and trying to capture and reverse negatives rather than identifying and capitalizing on positives. This evolutionary style, known as negativity bias, is natural and sometimes hard to resist, and yet research shows that focusing on negatives narrows our gaze and our thinking, and that focusing on positives makes us more creative, more open to

other positive ideas and experiences, and more likely to innovate and solve problems.⁴

In strengths-based project management, the goal is to reverse this natural trend and to build on the science of character strengths, as well as other tools from positive psychology and organizational development, to bring a strengths perspective to the role of project manager, and to elevate project managers to be project motivators. The magic starts when you work on understanding and applying your own strengths. Once you can do that, you can develop your team to incorporate this same strengths-based perspective to engage more, create more, and enjoy work more—to be motivated. And you can do this even if all you have is your shining personality and your influence but no direct authority. And don't worry: you will not ignore problems, weaknesses, or deficits. You will learn to take a new approach to solving them, an approach that research is showing is more effective in every sphere of life. As we proceed through the book, I will be pointing out examples of character strengths along the way, and you will see how the level of engagement and motivation rises. Look for these strengths in the book, because being a good strengths spotter is one of the keys to success as a project motivator, and you can never start practicing strengths spotting too soon!

The great news is that project managers have some real superpowers. As you will see later, as a group, we have more hope and love of learning than the average person on the street.⁵ With hope comes a drive forward, energy to make things happen, and a belief that they can and will happen. With our love of learning, we

4. B. L. Fredrickson, "The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 359, no. 1449 (2004): 1367–1377.

5. This information is based on my survey of the character strengths of project managers. More research is needed.

are ready to learn what we need to get there. We are not limited to what we know today; we passionately and enthusiastically pursue greater understanding and influence.

Who Are You, My Reader?

As I mentioned, my preliminary research shows that project managers as a group are curious and love to learn. I am writing this book for my tribe—project managers. If you are a project manager, want to be a project manager, have been project managed, or would like to contribute more to your teams, this book is for you!

Project managers live in a sort of twilight world. We don't fit neatly into the category of leaders—yet—and we are not managers in the sense that we don't usually supervise the team we work with. We are of course team members, but our role is to ensure that other team members all deliver what they owe. Some interesting data from Andy Crowe's book *Alpha Project Managers*⁶ reveal that the top project managers and many stakeholders believe that hands-on project managers who also build the product are more useful and effective, and yet we typically don't deliver products ourselves. So, although there may be something to be said for project managers who have a hand in the development of the product, that is not a very common model. Whether you build the product or not, this book is designed to empower you. It will lift you from being a manager of tasks to being a *motivator of people*. Much of what you will learn is from the field of positive psychology—or, as one colleague describes it, the science of peak performance—and specifically from the science of character strengths. The basic premise of this young field is that it is helpful to start not from what ails us but rather from what makes

6. Crowe, *Alpha Project Managers*, 110–113.

us strong and build from there. As I promised earlier—and cannot stress enough—this does not mean that we turn a blind eye to things that are not working, to weaknesses, or to a lack of skills. However, if I ask you to think about the assessments you have received at work, the 360 reviews you have undergone, and the appraisals you have experienced, where has the focus been? Has it been on what you do well and how to develop from there, or has it been on “areas for improvement”? If you answer that it is the former, terrific. This book will help you see the same things in yourself and in others. If you answer, as I expect most of you will, that it is the latter—the deficits—then this book provides a new perspective and will help to restore the balance. Starting from what works helps us to build those strengths and to *lift* our weaknesses; instead of feeling deflated and somewhat overwhelmed, you and your associates will feel more positive and optimistic, even as you tackle a weakness or gap.

The process to become a project motivator is achieved in two ways: first, by providing a broad overview of ways to engage yourself and your teams going forward; second, by imparting an enthusiasm not just for *managing* your projects and organizing tasks and people but also for *leading* the team and pulling greatness out of each and every team member. Seeing colleagues through the lens of character strengths highlights hidden opportunities. Imagine how it would feel if your manager could see you in terms of your strengths, and then think of what effect it will have when you can do that for others. In fact, there is a great deal of research that shows that teams whose strengths are recognized by a manager—and, even better, who have a manager who encourages the use of those strengths—are more engaged, more satisfied with their manager, and much less likely to leave.⁷

7. Gallup, *State of the American Manager*, 2015 report (Washington, DC: Gallup, 2015), <http://www.gallup.com/services/182138/state-american-manager.aspx>.

A word on the “things to look out for” sections: Every course and book these days comes with a set of learning objectives. These are useful guides to let the participant or reader know what to expect and to be able to measure the impact of his or her participation or reading. Experience tells me, though, that what is prescribed at the start of a book is often not what we take away. Factoring in prior experience, personal bias, personal character strengths, and personal effort, it is reasonable to think that I will have some idea of what you will learn from my book, but you may discover other nuggets. Nevertheless, at the start of each chapter I will provide a guide for what to expect and some suggested takeaways. However, you may see other things too, and that is great. I hope if you discover something more, you will let me know! Throughout these chapters there are questions to think about. Questions build a framework for us to identify and acquire valuable information. The sooner we start mining for gold, *your* gold, the better.

In the interests of transparency and where it seems appropriate to do so, I share my answers to the questions and exercises in this book on my website at <http://www.alle4you.com/author-answers>. For some, it may be helpful to see how I tackle the exercises; for others, it may not be helpful at all. It is your choice whether you make use of them.

This Book as a Project Manager’s Basic Tool: A Road Map to Hope

In Chapter 1, I explain why I believe that project managers need to take more ownership of team engagement—including their own engagement. I discuss the concept of the Platinum Rule and explore how project managers view themselves and how others view them.

Chapter 2 tells the start of Maggie's story. Maggie is a project manager like us. The purpose of the story is to show how she works to build an effective and connected team. In this story, you will start to spot the magic!

In Chapter 3, we explore the project manager's best friend—*influence*—what it is, how we get it, and why it is the most important tool we have.

Chapter 4 is where we start to look at how to build appreciation in a team. The focus is on Maggie and her experience and application of character strengths.

In Chapter 5, you will see how Maggie takes character strengths further and starts to build appreciation for and within her team.

Of course, even the most positive thing can have a dark side, and in Chapter 6 we look at the possible downsides of character strengths, the ways that conflicts arise, and how appreciation and character strengths can help us into and out of difficult times.

Chapter 7 looks at other factors that contribute to conflict and tension. I discuss the importance of planning and learning styles and review some considerations for building good communication.

Chapter 8 brings it all together and shows how we can inject our team with energy and enthusiasm—*motivation*—by being strong, brave, hopeful, and curious. At this point you will understand how to be motivated and how to influence those around you to be motivated too. This doesn't just mean you will be a better project manager—you will be having more fun too!

In Chapter 9, you will see Maggie's implementation plan for using all her techniques for herself and her team. If you don't like Maggie's plan, build your own! The key is to have a plan to implement all the things you will learn. Without an implementation plan, this book will just become another interesting read.

I have road tested everything in this book in many different teams and groups. I continue to use all these techniques today

Making It Stick for You

1. How much time do you spend communicating? Keep a journal for a few days to track your communication.
 2. What do you do to influence others?
 3. What are three strategies you already use to be an effective project manager?
-

Strategies for Success

1. **Be hopeful:** Believe that you will make a difference, and look for takeaways that you can apply in your environment.
2. **Be curious:** Observe yourself and others. Ask yourself what is motivating the behavior of the person or people in front of you.
3. **Be strong:** Reflect on your observations to glean insights into the working of your team and to identify actions you can take to build team connection to your goals.
4. **Be brave:** Create small actions that reinforce helpful team behavior.

and, as a lifelong learner, I will continue to build on this foundation. I hope you will find the contents of this book helpful, enjoyable, and inspiring.

As you will gather from the acknowledgments, this book is the product of an amazing team of supporters. Most of all, it is the product of the work, feedback, curiosity, and encouragement of the many teams I have had the privilege to work with and hope to work with in the future. I would have little to share without them! I thank them for letting me keep the project flame for them on this and the many other projects I have worked on.

I will be inviting you to share stories of how this work has helped you. Hearing stories of how *you* apply this work will help others learn more and will help you make this stick. And telling the world that you have this knowledge and skill set can be a great way to let people know that *you* have the capacity to be a “project motivator.”

1

Project Managers: More Than Just Plate Spinners and Ball Jugglers



Project managers can be a big reason for a project's success and a big reason for its failure. It is our choice which we are.

Most of this book is about doing things better. It focuses on building skills, increasing your influence, and making things better for you and those around you. This chapter makes the case for why all these things are important. There are quite a few statistics. Some of them focus on the world at large and

Things to Look Out For

1. Learn how we and our stakeholders view project managers.
2. Understand how fellow project managers perceive engagement and their role and readiness.
3. Appreciate why engagement is important in motivating teams.
4. Find out what strengths project managers already have—and where they need help.

are from organizations such as the Project Management Institute (PMI), Gallup, and the VIA Institute on Character. But a big part of this chapter is about *you*. I asked project managers and their stakeholders what the role of the project manager is. I asked project managers what they have to do with team engagement, how much they know about it, and how much they want to know. And finally, I asked project managers about their strengths—or superpowers—and also about their potential challenges.

Implementing the Platinum Rule—Treating People as They Want to Be Treated

Social intelligence and emotional intelligence are very popular concepts in the workplace these days, and as project managers, we need to use social intelligence at every turn if we are going to be successful.

I, like many of you, was brought up using the Golden Rule to deal with others: treat others as you would want to be treated yourself. This did not seem like such a bad rule until I reached high school and started to mix with people who had very different backgrounds from mine. At that point, I started to realize that many people did not have the same values that I did and did not want the same life I did. As someone who, even then, was incurably curious and had a passion for learning—although not always for school—my values and behaviors were not the same as those of people who valued relationship building, or who focused on their family or church community, or who loved arts and creativity. It was not necessarily in either of our best interests to treat them as I would like to be treated.

Years later, I came across the Platinum Rule, which says that we should treat others as *they* would like to be treated. This seems rational and reasonable, a laudable goal, except then we are pretty

much left on our own to fathom how people want to be treated. Of course, we can always ask, but that is not always practical when we are dealing with dozens or hundreds of people a day in the workplace or we are communicating in an impersonal medium such as email or text.

At the heart of this book is a series of practices that help us to answer the question, How do other people want to be treated? Answering that question will help you build social intelligence and will allow you to develop a greater sense of connection with, and kindness and even love toward, your teams.

In this book, I will share some of the things I have learned and am continuing to learn. My goal is to share with you some empowering and useful tools that have taken me years to discover. They are all simple, effective, and fun. Even if you can only experience and practice them yourself, you will see a benefit—and so will those around you. If you are feeling brave, you can share all the methods from the book with others. And if you are feeling very brave, or you happen to work in a very open, accessible work environment, you can even suggest to your leadership team that these tools and practices be shared more broadly.

With this book you can start to implement the Platinum Rule—and start to treat people the way *they* want to be treated!

When we see people for who they are, and treat them as they want to be treated, they become engaged. When they are engaged, they are motivated. And when they are motivated, they get stuff done.

Why Do Project Managers Need Their Own Book on Engagement?

Regardless of the audience, the basic foundations we need to build engaged, connected, and empowered teams are the same. When we use curiosity to prospect for and leverage strengths,

embody bravery through vulnerability, and model the behavior we want to see, teams flourish.

This may sound hard to do—especially embodying bravery!—but these components integrate naturally and are straightforward to learn and apply. Your skill and comfort level with these concepts will grow over time, but even a little bit of each will make a big difference in your day-to-day experience.

Of course, there are many books out there about engagement, and lots of research that shows the amazing things that can happen when people are engaged. Why do we need a book specifically for project managers?

First, I think project managers are only just starting to understand the importance of engagement in their *own* success. A book specifically targeted at project managers accelerates the learning and understanding.

Second, as a project manager myself, I often find it hard to apply the information provided in books about engagement because they usually start from an assumption of *power and control*—that is to say, authority.

It appears to be much easier for a line manager who does appraisals, conducts performance reviews, and sets bonuses to implement tools and techniques to foster engagement than it is for people who have no such formal influence. Indeed, as in my own case, we are often contractors with no formal standing in the organizational structure. Many of these books have nearly lost me at the introduction because they ask me to work toward a three-day off-site team-building event or they talk about how particular assessments and tools are “inexpensive.” Of course, there are still things to be gleaned from these books, but it takes time and energy—both of which are in short supply in our field! This book is focused on your world and makes no assumption about how much authority you enjoy. It is written for you.

Finally, the sheer volume of management, team engagement, positive psychology, and organizational psychology books is overwhelming. I have spent years reading, studying, and trying out techniques from books, research papers, classes, and conferences to see what works, what people buy into, and what is nice in theory but not very practical in real project management life. I have no doubt that there are other practices that are beneficial. But the techniques I describe in this book are what have worked for me. They are tested and proven!

Collecting Evidence: What Project Managers Contribute

Over the last two years, I have asked lots of people lots of questions about project managers. The first question was, “What do we expect of a project manager?”¹

To find out the answer, I surveyed 266 people—half of them were project managers, and the other half were people who work with project managers.

Overall, there were three major takeaways:

1. Expectations of project managers are high. Of the respondents, 85 percent agreed with the statement, “Project managers are essential to project success.” We believe that project managers are drivers of that success, providing context and purpose, making things happen, and ensuring that team members know who is doing what and when. We assign a great deal of responsibility to project managers.
2. Project managers see themselves more as holders of the big picture, keeping their eye on the goal of the project.

1. A full report of my survey is available here: Ruth Pearce, *The Project Management Effect—2016 Survey* (ALLE, 2017), <http://alle4you.com/Blog/2016-project-manager-effect-survey/>.

Of the project managers I surveyed, 75 percent said they believe they have a good sense of the big picture.

3. I discovered that project managers believe that the biggest disadvantages of having a project manager are micromanagement, bureaucracy, and too many meetings. Yes, even project managers think these are our limitations!
4. Most project managers see themselves as “drivers” of the project.

Drive Matters, but What Does It Mean?

Driving is hard work. Force takes energy. It can be distressing and depressing, and it often results in pushback and resistance.

At its most negative, *drive* implies inescapable force, relentless urging, or coercion into an activity or following a direction. It often implies physical force—such as driving a golf ball or driving a nail into a beam. Overall, though, *drive* implies keeping things in motion.

Is that really what we want to do as project managers? Force team members to perform? Act relentlessly in pursuit of the project goal? Or do we want to activate, inspire, and engage team members in the goal?

Building engagement to motivate people to get the work done is much more gratifying, leads to better relationships, and results in increased personal, team, and organizational satisfaction. Leading from within, and experiencing people moving along with you, is much less exhausting than pushing from behind.

In answer to the statement, “The worst thing about having a project manager is . . . ,” the most common responses were that project managers

micromanage the resources and tasks;
are too structured and rigid;
are too task oriented;
hold too many meetings with the wrong people in the room;
have too little knowledge about the specifics of the program;
and
have too little skill as a project manager or are too junior for
the project at hand.

It seems that we look to project managers to provide context and purpose, understand the big picture, and keep things on track (as opposed to just tracking things!). They are expected to look beyond the individual tasks to the whole and to make things happen.

But if project managers are widely believed to be essential to success, and research shows that engagement is essential to success,² doesn't it follow that project managers need to focus on engagement? Are project managers engaged? Do they know—or want to know—how to engage others?

Collecting Evidence: What Others *Think* about Project Managers

With that same project manager effect survey, I was able to ask the same number of non-project managers what they think.

From this group, there were three major takeaways:

1. Non-project managers agree that project managers are drivers of success, providing context and purpose, making things happen, and ensuring that team members know who is doing what and when. This group also attributed a great deal of responsibility to project managers.

2. For evidence, see later in this chapter.

2. Expectations differ when it comes to the project manager's understanding of the big picture versus his or her focus on the underlying tasks. Whereas project managers see themselves as focused on the big picture, non-project managers see them as more focused on tasks, sometimes to the detriment of the overall project or program.
3. Like project managers, other respondents reported that the biggest disadvantages of having a project manager are micromanagement, bureaucracy, and too many meetings.

Expectations are high, and this raises the question of how many of us are ready to live up to those expectations. As a young project manager, I certainly was unaware of these expectations, and had I known what they were, I would have been ill equipped to meet them. Had I gone looking, I would have been challenged to find resources to help me.

It is good to know that in response to the statement, "Project managers are essential to project success," there was remarkable agreement. The difference between project managers and non-project managers was the degree to which they agreed with the statement. Project managers feel more strongly that they are needed for a project to succeed.

Where expectations do not match, we must consider both the actual performance of project managers in the role *and* the communication that occurs between project managers and their team members. If project managers have a clear understanding of the big picture, for example—and 75 percent of project managers seem to think they do—how is it that only just over 50 percent of non-project managers believe this is the case?

Seeing the big picture and being the single point of contact were considered critical success factors by respondents, but respondents' concern that project managers can get in the way,

possibly hindering progress, is worrying. It presents another opportunity to make things better.

This issue is highlighted in the responses to the statement, “The worst thing about having a project manager is . . . ,” with many respondents citing micromanagement, bureaucracy, too many meetings, and too much structure or rigidity as obstacles to project success. A disappointing half of respondents in both groups seemed to believe that project managers slow down development with too many meetings, which is an indication that project managers may be perceived as brakes and not accelerators on a project.

It is most worrying, to me at least, that project managers seem to share that view.

Collecting Evidence: What Others Say about Project Managers

Looking at some of the comments provided by respondents, we see some interesting feedback.

Common responses to the statement, “The best thing about a project manager is . . . ,” included the following:

Accountability—both having one person who is accountable (the project manager) and having that person make sure that others are held accountable for their part in the project.

Communication—with stakeholders, team members, management, vendors, and other partners. PMI identifies communication as 90 percent of an effective project manager’s function.³

Organization, planning, coordination, and tracking—making sure that people hit deadlines, obstacles are removed, the right resources are available, and everyone has clear roles and responsibilities.

3. Project Management Institute, *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide)* (Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute, 2017), 61.

However, the two most prevalent answers were the following:

having a *single point of contact* for all concerned—the person to go to for information, escalation, clarification, and organization

having someone *drive* the project or program

What You Can Do to Put Your Projects in the “Successful” Category

Failed projects can give a project or program manager a bad rap, but there is more to project management success than project success. For example, a project manager colleague of mine, early in his career, was instrumental in getting a program canceled sooner rather than later, thus saving the organization hundreds of thousands if not millions of dollars. He had to summon up his courage to challenge the previous decisions and make the case for canceling the project.

And there are lots of projects that fail!

In the 2016 Pulse of the Profession Report,⁴ PMI reported that only about half of all projects were completed within budget, only about 60 percent met the original project objectives, and fewer than 50 percent of projects were completed on time. Losses were estimated at \$122 million for every \$1 billion spent. That is 12.2 percent of project budgets!

By 2017, the latest Pulse of the Profession Report⁵ showed that project success rates had improved year over year and that costs

4. Project Management Institute, *The High Cost of Low Performance: How Will You Improve Business Results?*, 2016 Pulse of the Profession Report (Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute, 2016), 5, <http://www.pmi.org/learning/thought-leadership/pulse/pulse-of-the-profession-2016>.

5. Project Management Institute, *Success Rates Rise: Transforming the High Cost of Low Performance*, 2017 Pulse of the Profession Report (Newtown Square, PA:

of failure had been reduced to \$97 million per billion. Hopefully, this is the start of a trend, but project managers can help *ensure* that it is by building engagement, getting our teams behind our projects, and creating environments in which stakeholders are emboldened to speak up when things are going off course, needs have changed, or the project no longer makes sense.

In the 2013 Project Management Talent Gap Report,⁶ PMI forecast that between 2010 and 2020, 15.7 million project management jobs will be created worldwide, with 6.2 million of those in the United States. There will be more of us, and we will be involved in industries and projects that will shape the future. We will interact with a wider variety of team members, doing ever more novel tasks in ever more flexible, diverse, dispersed working environments. Relationship management, influence, and engagement will become more and more important if we, our teams, and our projects are to succeed.

Collecting Evidence: The Project Manager's Perspective on Engagement

To understand how project managers as a group view engagement, I recently conducted an online survey of 138 of them.⁷ Among other questions, the group was asked to select one of nine responses to the prompt, “To me employee engagement means . . .” The answers and response frequencies are listed in Figure 1.1. (Note: Respondents could pick more than one answer.)

As you can see from the table, for this group of project managers, engagement includes ideas such as commitment and

Project Management Institute, 2016), 2, <https://www.pmi.org/learning/thought-leadership/pulse/pulse-of-the-profession-2017>.

6. Project Management Institute, *Project Management between 2010+2020*, 2013 Project Management Talent Gap Report (Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute, 2013), 2, <http://www.pmi.org/-/media/pmi/documents/public/pdf/business-solutions/project-management-skills-gap-report.pdf>.

7. For further information on the survey conducted, please contact the author.

FIGURE 1.1 Project Managers' Views on Engagement

| | |
|---|-----|
| The extent to which an employee feels committed to the mission and vision of the program or project | 92% |
| The degree to which an employee feels recognized for his or her contribution | 86% |
| The level of job satisfaction the employee enjoys | 84% |
| The extent to which an employee feels he or she is playing to his or her strengths | 84% |
| The extent to which the employee feels he or she fits in | 80% |
| The extent to which the employee feels properly compensated for work | 68% |
| The way that project progress is communicated to stakeholders | 62% |
| How willing the employee is to come to project meetings | 58% |
| The length of an employee's contract or employment agreement | 31% |

alignment to organizational goals, sense of recognition and fit, level of job satisfaction, and the extent to which employees feel they are playing to their strengths. To a lesser extent, engagement relates to compensation and to the way that stakeholders are updated about the project.

Gallup tells us that engaged employees “work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organization forward.”⁸ The organization may be the company, school, or any other enterprise we work for, and in my experience, engagement can also be created within the project team, often independent of the culture of the overall organization. I think that is worth repeating: we can build engagement and commitment within a team independent of the corporate culture. However, to do it, we often need to be brave.

The alignment of an employee's values, goals, and aspirations with those of the team and the organization is a direct predictor

8. Gallup, *State of the Global Workplace: Employee Engagement Insights for Business Leaders Worldwide*, 2013 report (Washington, DC: Gallup, 2013), 17.

of happiness, health, and productivity. The benefit to a team or organization is that engaged employees contribute discretionary effort. They make things happen. They are willing to run through walls for each other.

But why do we, as project managers, need to worry about engagement? Why should we seek to build engagement when we, too, need to be engaged and are part of that team? Isn't that somebody else's job?

1. As project managers, we *need* to make sure that things get done. After all, the project manager is the person responsible for accomplishing the project objectives.⁹
2. Research shows that engaged people are motivated to get things done. For example, Gallup reports that engaged employees are 12.5 percent more productive.¹⁰
3. Further, research shows that employee engagement remains low—according to Gallup, only 13 percent of people worldwide and about 30 percent in the United States are actively engaged.¹¹ That means 87 percent of people worldwide (and 70 percent in the United States) are *not* “emotionally committed to the organization and its goals”! Imagine having surgery if only 13 percent of the surgical team is committed to your full recovery, or driving over a bridge that had been built by a construction team on which only 30 percent of the members were committed to building a safe, reliable structure.

9. Project Management Institute, 716.

10. Gallup, *State of the Global Workplace*, 42.

11. Gallup, *State of the Global Workplace*, 7, 83.

4. And what if I were to tell you that you can contribute to your own sense of engagement and that through modeling—also known as the ripple effect—we can build the engagement of others around us? You don't need to wait for somebody else to get this ball rolling. You can do it!

Engagement Is Just the Start

Of course, having an engaged team does not guarantee success. Sometimes surgeries are unsuccessful—the person on the table cannot be saved. Commitment is not enough when skills are lacking. But who is more likely to try to develop the right skills—someone who is clock-watching or complaining at the water cooler, or someone who is engaged and committed to the goals?

Getting the team on board can seem like an impossible task, and we may fall back on the notion that it is somebody else's job—particularly when we do not have line management responsibility. It is easy to see our role as tracking tasks and progress, reporting and tracking against budgets, and seeking out the people with the right technical skills. It is just as easy to decide that engagement is not in our sphere of control, that it resides with management, the organization, or Human Resources—in other words, somebody else, somebody who should be engaging us.

Based on experience and evidence, I contend that *we*, the project managers, need to inspire our teams, help them realize their potential, and work on reaching ours. I believe we are in a unique position to do so because we lead an initiative, something defined and relatively time constrained, and precisely *because* we are outside the day-to-day line management framework, with its performance appraisals and career structure. We can plan not only the milestones, tasks, and communications, and how we manage risk and change, but also how we engage ourselves and our team members. We can plan how to integrate new individuals

into the team and how to keep existing team members energized and connected to the program. We can plan how to alleviate stress. We can plan how to help team members value growth and be their best selves.

The beauty is that in the process, we can have more fun and be more successful as project and program managers.

As part of the same survey, I asked project managers more about engagement.

Nearly 90 percent of them agreed that employee engagement is part of their role.

While some believed that they were somewhat skilled in engaging the team, *70 percent wanted to feel more engaged themselves.*

Over 80 percent would like to learn more about how to engage themselves and others.

Sadly, only 36 percent of respondents felt that project management training courses tell us what we need to know to engage team members successfully.

The Magic of Engagement

As Gallup says, engaged employees have passion, feel connection and create drive.¹² In the 2013 *State of the Global Workplace* report, Gallup researchers report that worldwide only 13 percent of the workforce is engaged.

Worse than that, 24 percent are actively *disengaged*, which means they can be disruptive, may take more days away from the office, and are likely to negatively influence the opinions of those who are not engaged, which accounts for 63 percent of the workforce.¹³

Actively disengaged employees, to quote Gallup, “aren’t just unhappy at work; they’re busy acting out their unhappiness.

12. Gallup, 17.

13. Gallup, 12.

Every day, these workers undermine what their engaged coworkers accomplish.”¹⁴ These measures vary between countries, but at an overall level, this means that actively disengaged employees outnumber engaged employees two to one.

In my experience, actively disengaged people ripple through teams. Their negativity, complaining, naysaying, and general gloom rub off and can bring down the mood—and productivity—of a whole team. When people are feeling disconnected and disengaged, they inadvertently start to infect others around them. Negativity sweeps through the team like a plague! I have seen hopeful, optimistic teams decimated in this way. As you will see later, this often has to do with strengths that are being undervalued and overused. What they are working on does not feel aligned with their values and inner motivation. Even our most negative people have strengths to bring to a team.

And when you see those statistics, they tell you something, right?

Your teams are probably having their share of disengagement. Disengaged employees work somewhere!

And what about you? Are *you* engaged?

The biggest influence on the level of engagement has been found to be managers—the people who drive and direct our work. In fact, managers—and we project managers are, among other things, managers—account for 70 percent of the variance in engagement experienced by employees.¹⁵ Managers who help employees to identify their strengths and to use them in the workplace are more successful. Managers who focus on cultivating employees’ strengths rather than dwelling on weaknesses

14. Gallup, 17.

15. Brandon Rigoni and Jim Asplund, “Strengths-Based Employee Development: The Business Results,” Gallup, July 7, 2016, <http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/193499/strengths-based-employee-developmentbusiness-results.aspx>.

have more engaged teams, with 67 percent of employees reporting high engagement when the manager focuses on strengths. Employees who understand and use character strengths at work are *eighteen* times more likely to be flourishing.¹⁶ Good managers are motivators. Unskilled managers are a drag on a team.

But the good news is that we can all learn to be better and to cultivate strengths in ourselves and in our teams. We can contribute to the improving trend in project outcomes.

Where Engagement Comes From: Introducing Character Strengths

Some of the earliest research in the field of positive psychology was into the concept of character strengths. Character strengths are universally recognized and cross-cultural, and they are at our cores. We all have multiple character strengths—some that we use all the time and that feel natural, easy, and energizing, and others that we use more selectively, based on our situation. For most of us, there are some character strengths that are not easy to engage and that take work. For example, most people struggle to engage self-regulation.

Research by Gallup and the nonprofit VIA Institute on Character has shown that character strengths are a fast way to engagement. People who know, understand, and apply their strengths are more engaged, more likely to see their work as a calling, and more likely to give discretionary effort. Those who work for managers who focus on employees' strengths, and highlight and cultivate them, are not only more likely to be engaged but also less likely to leave.

16. L. C. Hone, A. Jarden, S. Duncan, and G. M. Schofield, "Flourishing in New Zealand Workers: Associations with Lifestyle Behaviors, Physical Health, Psychosocial, and Work-Related Indicators," *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 57, no. 9 (2015): 973–983.

There are many ways to explore character strengths, but one of the simplest and most accessible is the assessment that is offered by the VIA Institute on Character. Throughout the book, I reference this assessment because it is so readily available and accessible, but you could start with any of the strengths tools that are available.

But what strengths do project managers have? Is there a project manager recipe?

Project Manager Character Strengths

To explore the question of whether project managers share some strengths more than others, I asked over one hundred project managers to take a character strengths survey and share their results with me. Here I share the results of the survey. In later chapters, I will explore the implications of the results.

I discovered that honesty, fairness or kindness, curiosity, and love of learning are very common in project manager profiles. Humility, self-regulation, and spirituality typically show up at or near the bottom of the ranking. Teamwork and leadership are generally in the middle—readily available but not go-to strengths for most project managers. At first glance this seems to imply something about project managers and the character strengths that they are most likely to manifest. We might think that if we see such a combination of character strengths in an individual, we can expect that person to choose project management. It could even suggest that we should recommend project management as a career path to such individuals.

Strengths That Make Project Managers Special

But if we were to draw that conclusion, we would be wrong. When we compare project manager profiles with the average profile in the United States, for example—which has honesty, fairness, love

of learning, and curiosity as top four strengths—we see that our project managers are pretty typical of the US population at large. Research confirms that these strengths are those that typically show up in the workplace. The same is true of the bottom strengths for project managers. Just as with our project managers, spirituality, self-regulation, and humility show up in the bottom five strengths for people in the United States, and with very few exceptions, this is consistent across the world for self-regulation and humility (modesty), and even for spirituality; only 25 percent of countries rank this strength higher than in the bottom five. At second glance, then, project managers don't seem very different from the average person.

However, as I dug deeper, there did appear to be two superstrengths that show up higher in a project manager's profile on average than they do in the population at large.¹⁷ At this stage of the research, I have not analyzed the strengths in terms of which ones the *best* project managers have; that is the subject of a future study. For now, we are only focused on which strengths tend to show up more—and less—in project managers than in the population at large.

Superpower 1: Hope

The first superpower is the character strength of *hope*. Hope is expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it, believing that the future is something that can be controlled.¹⁸ Hope—that is, expecting a positive outcome that can be controlled by the team—would seem to be an essential characteristic

17. At this early stage of the research, I took any difference that was equal to or greater than one corrected standard deviation to be significant. As long as this is a normal distribution, then 95 percent of project managers can be expected to lie within two standard deviations of the mean.

18. Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

in a project team, and all the better if it can be instilled by the project manager.

Hope is not wishing or just being optimistic. It is an active strength—it is the combination of having a goal, seeing a pathway to achieve the goal, and taking action (also known as agency) to follow the path and make the goal happen.¹⁹

On average, very few countries (15 percent) rank hope higher than my sample of project managers did.²⁰

Superpower 2: Love of Learning

The other strength that shows up as a superstrength is *love of learning*. Only 3 percent of countries rank love of learning higher than we project managers do! In my sample, project managers ranked love of learning third, which makes it a signature strength. By comparison, in the United States, love of learning is, on average, ranked twelfth.²¹ One thing to note is that although, on average, love of learning ranks very high for project managers, the scores for love of learning show much more variation between individual project managers than do the hope scores.²²

Love of learning is “mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one’s own or formally; obviously related to the strength of curiosity but goes beyond it to describe

19. S. J. Lopez, *Making Hope Happen: Create the Future You Want for Yourself and Others* (New York: Atria Paperback, 2014).

20. Robert E. McGrath, “Character Strengths in 75 Nations: An Update,” *Journal of Positive Psychology* 10, no. 1 (2015): 41–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.888580>.

21. In the future, I hope to do more research, with a larger sample, into the hypothesis that hope, love of learning, and possibly appreciation of beauty and prudence are related to the selection of project manager as a job.

22. For those of you who are familiar with statistical analysis, hope has a corrected standard deviation of 6.3, and love of learning has a standard deviation of 7.5.

the tendency to add systematically to what one knows.”²³ Is this a strength you recognize in yourself? Our love of learning helps us as a group to make transitions between projects and teams. It may well be that the best project managers have a level of insider knowledge (discussed in Chapter 3), but love of learning makes it possible to develop that insider knowledge.

Situational Strengths—or More Superpowers?

In the middle of the strengths spectrum, there are two more strengths that are ranked differently by project managers than by the general population.

Superpower 3: Prudence

The first of these is prudence, which project managers ranked seventeenth, compared to the United States, which ranks it twenty-second. While this may look like an insignificant ranking difference, only 8 percent of countries rank prudence higher than we project managers do on average! It appears that prudence may be a project manager superpower too. I cannot think of a better strength to counterbalance hope. Incorporating far-sighted planning, as well as short-term, goal-oriented planning, prudence implies caution and consideration.

Superpower 4: Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence

Another high-ranking strength for project managers is appreciation of beauty and excellence, which project managers ranked tenth. In the United States, appreciation is ranked fifteenth. Out of the seventy-five countries surveyed, only 24 percent ranked appreciation higher on average than our project managers did. What special value does appreciation have for project managers? As

23. VIA Institute on Character, “Love of Learning,” accessed June 7, 2018, <http://www.viacharacter.org/www/Character-Strengths/Love-of-Learning>.

you will see in Chapter 4, it can help us to build team appreciation and recognition—both areas that project managers highlighted in their responses on engagement. In my experience, people with appreciation of beauty and excellence high in their character strengths profile are more comfortable calling out achievement and offering recognition to colleagues.

Strengths Opportunities for Project Managers

The final consideration is whether there are any strengths that we use less of than the population at large. The most significant outcome is that we rank social intelligence nineteenth, whereas in the United States social intelligence is ranked tenth on average. Worldwide, only 7 percent of countries rank social intelligence eighteenth or lower, and none rank it lower than nineteenth.

Opportunity 1: Social Intelligence (Applying the Platinum Rule)

The key concepts of social intelligence are social awareness—that is, what we sense about others—and social facility, which is what we do with that awareness. Social intelligence helps us interact effectively with others, understanding what motivates them and how they feel. Doesn't this sound a lot like the Platinum Rule?

Having lower social intelligence than average may present challenges in some of the most critical aspects of project management—effective communication and team building. How do we communicate effectively and build a team if we are not sensitive to how team members feel and think?

In the book *Alpha Project Managers*,²⁴ Andy Crowe identifies communication as a key differentiator in the best project managers, and yet even the best project managers are not as good as they think they are, according to the feedback of stakeholders.

24. Andy Crowe, *Alpha Project Managers: What the Top 2% Know That Everyone Else Does Not* (Kennesaw, GA: Velociteach, 2016), 83, 85.

If project managers as a group were able to communicate more effectively, this would be a significant factor in improving project outcomes. Stakeholders would better understand the true state of the project, project managers and their teams would receive more helpful input and feedback, and problems would be identified and tackled earlier, when they are less costly to address.

Opportunity 2: Perspective

The other lower strength that may be significant is that project managers rank perspective fourteenth on average, compared to the US average of ninth.²⁵ Only ten countries (13 percent) rank perspective—which includes having a sense of the big picture, a trait identified as important for project managers to have—lower than fourteenth.

The core elements of perspective are the following:

- a high level of knowledge;
- the capacity to give advice; and
- the ability to recognize and weigh multiple factors before making a decision.

People with perspective are often described as seeing the big picture. In my survey of the project manager effect, seeing the big picture was one of the most often cited critical functions of a project manager.

If we are lower in perspective than those around us and the world at large, what does that mean? One challenge is that we may not be able to effectively fulfill the role of focusing on the big picture. We may overestimate the importance of small obstacles

25. As with the more highly ranked strengths, I would like to perform more research on a larger sample to determine whether this difference indicates a significant difference between project managers and the population as a whole.

or get lost in the detail and forget to take a step back to evaluate where a project stands.

One of the goals of this book is to help build social intelligence and perspective by creating a culture of appreciation and fostering a growth mind-set. Help is on the way!

If a Strengths Focus Is Key, Where Is the Training We Need?

I consider PMI, the largest professional organization of project managers in the world, to be the benchmark of the standards of the profession today. PMI and project managers as a profession acknowledge the importance of relationship management, engagement, and influence. But how much weight and support do we give to these concepts? How can we, as project managers, learn these new skills?

In the current edition of PMI's *Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge*,²⁶ the project manager's guide to applying project management standards, tools, and techniques, there are over seven hundred pages²⁷ of explanation of what a project manager needs to do to run a project successfully. According to PMI, "The project manager is successful when the project objectives have been achieved. Another aspect of success is stakeholder satisfaction. The project manager should address stakeholder needs, concerns and expectations to satisfy relevant stakeholders."²⁸

In the heart of the guide, there is one page²⁹ about the necessary interpersonal skills of the project manager, as well as a new section on politics, power, and getting things done. The guide highlights that the best project managers are those who focus on relationship management and communication,³⁰ and that the

26. Project Management Institute, *PMBOK Guide*.

27. Increased from 413 pages in the previous edition.

28. Project Management Institute, *PMBOK Guide*, 552.

29. Project Management Institute, 61.

30. Project Management Institute, 57.

top project managers spend about 90 percent of their time on a project communicating.³¹

Within the accompanying Standard for Project Management,³² there is a list of eleven components of interpersonal skills. Each one is explained briefly within the standard. These are as follows:

1. Leadership
2. Team building
3. Motivation
4. Communication
5. Influencing
6. Decision making
7. Political and cultural awareness
8. Negotiation
9. Trust building
10. Conflict management
11. Coaching

These are all certainly critical interpersonal skills—for project managers and team members alike—but nowhere in the standard is there any guidance on how to develop those skills, what they look like when they are executed well, and what to do if you don't have them. To be fair, PMI is an accreditation and professional networking body, not an educational organization; but in the accreditation process, how much is the capacity of the project manager to weave together a project team assessed?

The new talent triangle, introduced in 2014, also places much more emphasis on leadership; however, we are still left to develop the skills ourselves, and we receive little guidance on how to learn to lead. Where do we go to learn those skills? How do we become

31. This statistic is taken from Crowe, *Alpha Project Managers*, 83.

32. Project Management Institute, *PMBOK Guide*, 539–635.

good leaders, coaches and mentors, influencers, and team builders?

Happily, as the respect and need for project managers have grown, the number of educational opportunities, including master's programs, has increased. These programs in project management, at some great schools, still focus on the technicalities of the field.

A quick check of the curricula for some of the top schools reveals that a typical master's program in project management entails thirty credits (although some schools look for forty-five to forty-eight) and that typically there are just *three* credits allotted to core classes such as Communication and Collaboration or Leadership and Teamwork. In other words, project management skills related to relationship building and communication are only 10 percent of the curriculum. This is despite the research showing that the most effective project managers are those who spend 90 percent of their time engaged in communication, and the top 2 percent are those who focus on relationships and communication.³³

I believe that those who invest in a master's program expect to go on to lead larger, more complex projects, where the eleven components of interpersonal skills can be expected to be even more critical, and yet here the training is least developed and mostly elective.

As your own experience likely confirms, there is ample evidence that a large proportion of projects are at best disappointing, and at worst a drain on resources that might have been better used elsewhere. We can never get back those hours or dollars that are spent on projects that are canceled or that overrun. If those failures are used to really learn about what works and what does not, there is value in them, but traditional "lessons learned" reporting

33. Crowe, *Alpha Project Managers*, 83.

is backward looking and not forward looking. Rarely have I seen an organization or project management office take a forward look to anticipate how to change the process in future projects to avoid the mistakes of the past. In the best cases, we learn from those mistakes and select and run better projects in the future, but all too often we don't learn the best lessons and are doomed to repeat the same mistakes on another project.

All too often, projects are, in the words of Shirley Bassey, Welsh singer, "just a little bit of history repeating!"³⁴

Looking at the broader question of team member well-being, engagement, and commitment, the studies highlight that employees remain disengaged and disconnected from their roles, colleagues, and work life. Many of our team members appear to be putting in the bare minimum to make it through the work-day. Others are actively interfering with our progress.

Despite all the depressing statistics, the news is good.

- People believe project managers are necessary.
- Project managers believe engagement is important and that they have a role in building it.
- Project managers are ready to learn more.
- There are some simple steps to building engagement for anyone who wants to learn, practice, and apply the techniques.
- Project managers already have some superpowers to assist them.
- Engaged employees are motivated employees, and motivated employees get stuff done!

34. "History Repeating," featuring Shirley Bassey, by Alex Gifford, on Propellerheads, *History Repeating*, Wall of Sound WALLT036, 1997, 33 1/3 rpm.

Making It Stick for You

1. How does your organization view the role of the project manager?
 2. What do you believe your role is in building engagement?
 3. How engaged are you?
 4. What strengths do you already have?
 5. What do you want to learn about now?
-

Strategies for Success

1. **Be hopeful:** You will be the type of project manager who builds great teams.
2. **Be strong:** How can you leverage your strengths for the benefit of the team?
3. **Be brave:** Try new things to help the team bond and grow.
4. **Be curious:** What questions will you ask to find out what your team wants and needs?

That is because engagement applies to you as much as any other employee. In fact, in project teams, I contend that team engagement and motivation start with project manager engagement and motivation.

It starts with you!

2

Seeing Is Believing: The Maggie Method

**Be hopeful. Be strong. Be brave.
Be curious.**



The story that follows is based on a compilation of my experiences on multiple projects and teams. Several times in my career, I have joined projects already in progress as the project manager. In my experience, this is particularly challenging, and that is the perspective that I am bringing to my team story. However, all the approaches and practices are just as effective if you are fortunate enough to be able to build the team from scratch. As anyone who is a fan of a certain popular,

Things to Look Out For

1. Understand the power of hope.
2. Learn how mind-set and character strengths affect the progress of the team.
3. Discover ways a project manager can really open up a team with vulnerability and openness, and understand that vulnerability is not weakness.
4. Discover opportunities on the teams you work with or may work with in the future.

long-running television show will probably recognize, the names have been changed.

It is worth noting that I was not a line manager in any of the projects or teams that are the sources of this story. My responsibility was *only* for the project. I was not formally involved in performance reviews—although I was often asked informally to provide feedback—and I had no management responsibility for the team members with whom I worked. Over the years, I have worked hard to discover what worked, and I believe that I have succeeded.

Similarly, in this story, our project manager, Maggie, is not a line manager—she does not have authority to direct the activities of the people on her team. She can only influence.

At the end of this chapter, you will be starting to understand what helps to win over a team. You will notice Maggie playing to strengths, being brave and bold, approaching things with a curious and learning mentality—also known as a growth mindset—and, above all, expressing appreciation. As you read about Maggie, you will see that her positivity is not easy and it is not always natural; it takes hard work and planning. To bring positivity and motivation to a room and to a team requires a strategy. This book shows you how to build that strategy.

The Project Manager's Strengths—Hope, Influence, and Love of Learning

All Maggie had was the extent to which she could win hearts and minds. It was not easy. Often, she had to step *far* out of her comfort zone. To be able to do the things she did, she had to acquire new tools and learn new techniques and then be willing to try them out. She had to be willing to fail. She approached each challenge with a sense of hope and a belief that she and the team had what it takes to make things work.

And you can do it too! You can use these tools, you can experiment with your team, and you can be the catalyst for great teams in the future.

Maggie Meets the Team

One of the hardest things to do as a project manager is to join an existing team. Walking into a group that is already formed and has developed its own working patterns and communication can feel very isolating. To make that first step into a room full of people who are strangers to you and are familiar to each other takes some nerve. When we treat that first encounter as an exploration, we are brave and vulnerable, and it can be the beginning of a great experience. Here is Maggie's story.

Bravery

Maggie stood for a moment outside the room, closed her eyes, and adopted the superwoman power pose.¹ She was long past caring who saw her in the hall. She had prepared a presentation for the group and felt that she was as ready as she could be for this first encounter. The presentation was very structured and detailed. She had laid out the tasks ahead and a detailed plan of what she considered the next steps to be. Maggie had worked on the presentation with the previous project manager, Richard.

Appreciation and Hope

Maggie had a vision of how the team would be in the future: Her team would be a cohesive unit that was mutually supportive and

1. This is based on research into body posture by Amy Cuddy that shows that when we adopt powerful poses, we get a boost in confidence and are more likely to achieve our goals. To find out more, see Amy Joy Casselberry Cuddy, *Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges*, large-print edition (New York: Little, Brown and Company/Hachette, 2015).

very productive. The team members would have clear, well-communicated goals; meet all their obligations; and manage their day-to-day activities with little intervention from her and the other project managers. This team would be what is known as a “self-managing team.”² It would move away from a model in which tasks are assigned from on high, purely according to existing skill sets and assigned roles. The new model would be one of encouraging the team to recognize and play to strengths.

Calling Strengths Forth

Maggie thought about which strengths would be most useful to her at this initial meeting. Hope was essential. Without the belief that this team was full of possibility, that they could complete the project, there was no point in her being there! Bravery was there—as it usually is for her—and fairness. She thought she couldn’t really go wrong with kindness. After all, as the Dalai Lama said, “If you must choose between being right and being kind, choose to be kind for then you will always be right.”

Humor might come in handy too—but she would have to get the lay of the land before she started cracking jokes. (Maggie was acutely aware that she sometimes tries to joke her way out of situations, and it does not always work as intended!) Maggie also thought about how sometimes fairness could get her stuck in a sort of limbo, causing her to find it hard to make a decision and move on. She would have to look out for that and bring in some judgment, leadership, and perspective to help keep her moving forward.

2. Lynne MacDonald, “What Is a Self-Managed Team?,” Chron.com, *Houston Chronicle*, March 28, 2018, <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/selfmanaged-team-18236.html>. A self-managing team is defined as a “group of employees that’s responsible and accountable for all or most aspects of producing a product or delivering a service.”

Finally, she thought gratitude would be useful. She would be grateful for any small sign of trust, belief, or willingness to try.

Social Intelligence

Just before Maggie stepped into the room—she wasn't sure afterward if she had even seen the group sitting together yet—she decided to dispense with her presentation. The team needed to get to know the person, not another plan. And if her overall plan was to engage the team, take their input, and develop them into a self-managing team, it did not make sense to start off with her personal vision. The team needed to build a shared vision—together. Besides, over the course of the previous few months, they had seen enough plans—and swim lanes, Gantt charts, RASCI charts, and task lists—to last anyone several lifetimes.

With her strengths primed, her breathing calmed, and her presentation in her mental trash can, Maggie walked into the room and looked around. The room was full of chairs that the attendees had arranged haphazardly. Not knowing the team, she could not tell if there was significance to the arrangement, but later she found out that people had huddled together in cliques and functional groups. Business analysts sat with business analysts. Developers sat with developers. Project managers sat with project managers.

The faces looked glum. Maggie's heart sank a little. She was glad that she had left the presentation in her bag! The incumbent program manager, Richard, was the one who had suggested that she do a presentation. Come to think of it, he had pretty much told her what to present! Without further ado, and practically no context, he introduced Maggie and explained that she would be taking over the program in two weeks, as he was moving on to new things. He told the group that he would be working with her during those two weeks to ensure a smooth transition,

asked if there were any questions, and, seeing no interest at all, swiftly left the room, muttering something about it being better to do this without him.

Maggie looked around again. Only a couple of people were looking directly at her. Most were doodling or making notes or just staring at their laps.

Growth Mind-Set and a Dash of Zest

Maggie took a deep breath and smiled. This was going to be harder than she had thought. *I love a challenge! Nothing worth doing is ever easy!* she thought to herself. She walked to the middle of the room, waited for some quiet, and then said breezily, “Good morning. My name is Maggie, and I am delighted to be the new program manager.” She thought a few people shuffled in their seats when she said “new.” She saw people slowly rearranging their chairs to look into the center of the room where she was standing.

Honesty and Judgment

Jackson looked up and caught her eye. Without saying anything, she smiled and raised her eyebrows, inviting him to say what was on his mind. He sighed and said, “Nothing against you—we don’t even know you—but you are the fourth program manager we have had in nineteen months. It seems as though we just get them trained up, and then they move on.”

There were many people nodding.

Meredith then said, “And this is not the whole team. We have at least as many people on the team who work remotely. We have four other locations. Most of our team is in London or Saint Petersburg, and we have more in Hyderabad. No one ever seems to think about them.”

Maggie made a note that the team needed a way to connect more effectively with the rest of their colleagues.

She looked around the rest of the group, hoping that someone else would have something to say. Miranda spoke next. “Do you even know anything about our program?” she asked. “Or are you another one of these people who thinks that project management is universal and that you don’t need to know about the business, the technology, or the environment?”

Now everyone was looking at Maggie suspiciously. She was sure she heard a collective sigh.

Before she could say anything, a voice said, “Let’s at least give her a chance. I want to hear what she has to say.”

Growth Mind-Set, Self-Regulation, and Perseverance

It was Maggie’s turn to speak. She was nervous, but she was determined. And she believed she could learn what she needed to know, if only they would help her.

“I admit that I don’t know anything about implementing on-line banking systems, although I am a frequent user of them!” They groaned a collective groan of frustration; it probably was a little soon for humor! Maggie thought she noticed a couple of people turn in their seats to face more toward the door. “But I do know IT, and I promise you three things.”

Commitment and Teamwork

“First, I will work as hard as I know how to understand what you are doing, why you are doing it, what is working, and what is getting in your way.

“Second, my role as a program manager is just that—a role. It is not a status. My job is to understand the program, provide a single point of contact for stakeholders—which includes you—and management, keep the communications clear and accurate, clear obstacles, get you the right support and resources, and, most important, ensure that you can put your best foot forward each and every day.

“Third, I promise that we will have some fun. This is hard work and takes every ounce of your concentration and expertise, so it is important that we let off steam, refresh our brains, and stay healthy. And that is not just a promise to those of you who are here; it is something I want to make happen for the entire team, wherever they are.”

At this last comment, Owen laughed. A few others joined him. “Stay healthy?” he scoffed. “We work in a confined space and every germ gets spread around. I had more illnesses last winter than I did when my kids were in grade school!” Some of his colleagues nodded. “And goodness knows we cannot stay home when we are sick! There is too much work to do.”

Prudence and Honesty

Maggie made another note about the workspace, and that she needed to encourage people to stay home when they were sick!

In that moment, Maggie admitted to herself that she was feeling overwhelmed. There was a strong feeling of both exasperation and resignation in the room. She could see that the team members had little faith that this would be any different, or that she would be able to help them. At that moment, she did not have the first idea what to do. But the team was talking to her, which was a good start.

Making Progress, One Step at a Time

When we are working toward a goal it can feel as though it is impossible to make progress. All we see are roadblocks and obstacles and it can feel as though we are just not equipped to achieve the goal. These are the times when we benefit from remembering two things. Rome was not built in a day and, more important, it matters less what we know now; it matters more how open we are to learn and grow.

Growth Mind-Set, Social Intelligence, and Judgment

Maggie was feeling a little tense, so she paused to remind herself that she did not know what to do *yet*. No one would be able to walk into this group of unhappy and disillusioned people and immediately make things OK. It would take time. She was not an expert at online banking systems, and these people did not know her, nor she them. She had not been with the organization very long. There were many opportunities for the whole team to get better as they moved forward. She was reasonably sure there were opportunities to build on things that were already working. And she was reasonably sure the team members had all experienced things in the past that could help them on this program.

For now, she just had to continue to establish that it was worth giving her a shot!

Maggie changed tack.

Appreciative Inquiry

“So, what is working on the program?” she asked as straightforwardly as she could. She did not want any hint of sarcasm in her voice. Maggie had heard all the stories about how the program was struggling and the team was disillusioned.

There was silence.

“C’mon,” she said. “There must be something. Even if it is only that it is easy to get a parking space, or the office is convenient to home! Personally, I think this is the best cafeteria of anywhere I have worked.”

There were a few laughs.

Prudence

Alex spoke up. “I think we have a good handle on the design for the online banking systems. The team spent a lot of time working it out and sanity testing it.”

There were murmurs of agreement.

Appreciation of Excellence

“We have really skilled people on the program who are committed to the goals and to each other. Everyone goes above and beyond to make this work, not just here but in the other locations as well,” volunteered Miranda.

Teamwork and Perspective

“I think we work well together. We have each other’s backs. Sometimes it feels as though we are the only people who really know the inner workings of the overall program. Everyone else sees just their little bit—the system they are interfacing—but we see the whole,” said April.

“Of course, no one asks us for our insights, though!” grumbled Ben.

“The fact that we have five locations is really good too. We can hand off the work at the end of the day and our teammates keep things moving. It is very helpful when there is some bug fixing to do, or some root cause analysis. We have established good ways to hand off, too, with shared online tools.” This comment came from Cristina, the design lead.

“I just wish we could actually connect with the rest of the team better,” said Mark.

Social Proof and Liking (Influence)

The group gained momentum—and enthusiasm for the conversation.

The comments came thick and fast. Just having one person offer something up had been enough to get things rolling—that, and Maggie’s willingness to just let them speak. Maggie had trouble keeping up with her note taking. She wished she had brought a tape recorder—but then realized that would have been a bit intrusive in a first meeting. She also made a conscious deci-

sion not to pick up on any of the comments or provide feedback. She did not want to pounce on something and stop other people from joining in.

After about twenty minutes, the group seemed to be winding down naturally, and Maggie was about to move on to another question.

Creativity, Zest, and Social Intelligence

“We have good candy,” Lexi said. “Perhaps we should have some now!”

The team agreed to take a break, and after some discussion, it was decided to reconvene the next day. Everyone agreed that they would take some time to think more about what is working and would come back prepared for more exploration and some planning. They reluctantly agreed to keep an open mind and give their new project manager a chance—even though their recent experiences had been so disheartening.

Perseverance and Hope

As the others were leaving the room, Cristina approached Maggie and said, “If you would like to put aside some time, I would be happy to walk you through what we are doing.”

Maggie was encouraged by her attitude, and then Cristina added, “Unless you think you don’t need to know about online banking systems.” There it was again, the lack of trust. Maggie reminded herself once again that Rome was not built in a day, and mentally added perseverance to the list of strengths she would need to cultivate. The team needed time to learn about her as much as she needed time to learn about them. She would focus on small wins and let the big wins follow in time.

Maggie thanked Cristina and said that she didn’t believe that she could possibly take in all that she would need to know in one

session. She asked if the two of them could meet regularly. “Until you are up to speed?” Cristina asked.

“I was thinking until the program is over. You are the lead designer; you have a good view of what is happening across the program. If I am going to smooth the way for the team and preempt challenges, I need to know what the team needs.”

Cristina’s face held no discernible expression, but she said she would be happy to set up a regular check-in. “Is it like a status meeting?” she asked.

“It is a meeting where you can bring me anything—accomplishments, opportunities, problems. We can have it on the calendar but only use it if one of us thinks it is beneficial. Bring others if that seems useful. I don’t want to pile on meetings. Of course, you are free to grab me anytime you need me, as is everyone else.”

Judgment and Teamwork

“And to get me up to speed, who else do you think I should sit down with? Should I arrange to sit down with everyone?”

Cristina looked astonished. “Everyone?” she asked. “You mean all of us here?”

“And at the other locations too,” Maggie answered.

“That’s a lot of people,” Cristina observed.

“Yes, but if I am going to find out what works, what doesn’t, what we can change, and what we can’t—if I am going to understand what it is like to work on this team—I need to *know* the team,” Maggie replied. “All of them.”

Cristina laughed. “I don’t think *I* know all of them,” she said. “But I guess maybe I should. Maybe we can meet with them together, the two of us.” She paused. “On second thought, they will probably speak more openly if you meet them on your own.”

Cristina left to get coffee. As she walked away, she turned back and said, “Save yourself some time. No point in looking for a

transition from Richard—he doesn't have the first idea what we do, and he is on vacation starting tomorrow!"

Love of Learning and Love

Between meetings, Maggie took stock of what she had learned. This cohesive self-managing team was a long way from fruition! The only source of unity seemed to be the shared sense of dismay and frustration. Self-management would be a dream as long as there was so much push from outside the team and so little autonomy and control over the team environment and its destiny. However, the team members were still there, they were in the room with Maggie, and they were still willing to engage. There was a lot they could do with what they had. They also had received a program manager who loves a challenge, does not mind taking on and shaking up the established ways of doing things, and *loves* supporting teams!

She also noted that being patient and allowing the conversation to flow was working well. Focusing on things that already work—even if they are not directly related to the project—had opened up the conversation. She also recognized that being brave by being vulnerable had brought some sighs of frustration, but it also seemed to have built some trust. A little, at least!

Going Broad and Deep

The next day, the team was back in its huddle. Maggie looked around the room again. Everyone was now crammed around a conference table that had appeared from nowhere. There seemed to be more people than before. There were way too many people for the size of the room, and Maggie wanted to get people up and moving.

"Hey, is there somewhere we could work where there is more space and no conference table?" she asked.

Creativity and Self-Regulation

“Sure. We could go back to our work area. We can move the tables out of the way and use the whiteboards.” Cristina was already up and out of her seat, leading the way.

As they went into the workroom, a large, open-plan area with numerous tables, partitions, and whiteboards, Maggie spotted antiseptic wipes on the tables—to counter the merry-go-round of illnesses, she assumed—a large bucket of candy, and a printer in the middle of the room. Yes, it was right in the *middle* of the room, plugged into a floor socket. Teammates were edging past it to get to their seats. She also noticed that there was nothing on the plain walls, no personal items on the tables, and yet everything seemed cluttered.

Maggie saw some people sitting in the corner who had not been in the conference room the previous day. She asked who they were.

“Oh, that is the hardware team. They are doing an upgrade on the test server. Richard said they could meet you some other time,” said Meredith.

Spirituality and Relationship Management

Maggie walked over to the group in the corner and introduced herself. She could see them looking across to the rest of their team, trying to get a read on just how much of a waste of time the meeting had been.

“Our introductory working session isn’t over,” Maggie said. “We came back here to get out of the conference room. We would love it if you would join us. We have been discussing what works on the program—and how annoying it is to have to keep training program managers!” She thought she noticed a glimmer of a smile, but as soon as she noticed it, it disappeared.

Maggie continued, “Here is the list of things I noted during the team discussion yesterday,” and read out the following items:

- good cafeteria
- easy access to parking
- good team connection—we have each other’s backs
- an effective way of moving work from location to location—following the sun
- good overview of the entire program, including insights into how the other systems work
- close to where many of us live
- colocation of the team members in their respective locations helps communication and speeds up the design and development
- high level of skill on the team, in all roles
- willingness to try new things
- the team members have a good sense of humor
- the work is intellectually challenging, and we like a challenge
- we are always learning something new

Maggie was about to continue, when Derek, the technical lead on the hardware team, said, “But we are just the hardware team; you won’t want to hear from us.”

She paused. “Are you part of the online banking systems team?” Maggie asked.

“Yes,” he said hesitantly. He was about to continue, but Maggie decided to cut him off.

“Do you work with this group of people”—she waved her hand around the room—“every day?”

“Yes.”

“Do you support the members of the team who work in the other locations?”

“Yes,” he replied, “which is difficult because of the time difference.”

Humor and Teamwork

“Then if you have the time, we would love you all to join us. The fun is just starting.” She smiled.

He looked puzzled, and she could not tell if he was annoyed, but he told the rest of his team to come to the middle of the room. They made a big show of having to get up from their desks and shuffled slowly into the middle.

“OK,” Maggie said. “We need to get these things that are working up on the whiteboard over there. Who is going to get them all down?”

No one moved.

“Believe me,” she laughed. “You don’t want me writing on the boards. Even I cannot read my writing.”

Leadership

Owen and Lexi stepped forward and took the marker pens. People started calling out reminders of what they had discussed the previous day.

The first two things up on the board were a good cafeteria and easy access to parking, the same things she had jotted down. Maggie had made some friends!

Self-Regulation and Teamwork

Once everyone felt that they had all the good points down, and they had successfully resisted the urge to dig into what didn’t work, the group paused and took stock of their work. A couple

of people took photos. The group agreed to send the photos to the overseas team members and ask them for their input to expand the list.

“Next,” Maggie said, “let’s explore what things could look like in the future. Let’s imagine that everything is done the way we want it to be. What would that look like?”

Appreciative Inquiry—Cultivating Creativity

Again, there were some incredulous expressions, but Derek’s team members were whispering and pushing him forward. He stepped toward the center, saying, “We would have one more member of the team, and we would work shifts, so we can support everyone effectively worldwide. Right now, we use an on-call system, but we really need to be able to support everyone in each time zone during their work hours.”

“So the vision is to provide round-the-clock, live coverage?” Maggie prompted.

“Oh, and software releases would only happen once a month instead of once a week. They should be coordinated across all the projects and programs,” said an unfamiliar voice.

“That would be great!” said Cristina. “Our developers never get very far into their development work before a new release comes from one of the other systems, and all the mappings change. If we could impose a monthly release cycle, I am sure it would slow some groups down, but we would have more stability.”

“So the vision is to have close alignment with the other programs and an across-the-board, more controlled release process?” Maggie asked.

Another new voice entered the discussion. “We would have more interaction with the business. It feels as though we are in the engine room of a ship. We are too sooty and grubby for the

passengers to see us. But if we could talk to them directly, we would have a better understanding of what they need this system to do, because we can make the ship's passage pretty rough when we want to!"

"So, the vision is . . ." Maggie's voice trailed off, inviting them to fill in the gap.

"To have closer alignment and interaction with the business and the customers that they serve," said Jackson.

"We would be hand in glove with our business partners. We would always be learning from them, deepening our understanding of what their customers need and what the priorities are. We would be receiving frequent feedback on our work so far," said Addison, who had not spoken until now. Several people in the room expressed appreciation for this suggestion.

"Yes. We could probably prioritize the components better too." Maggie was not sure who was speaking, and she was happy that more of the team members were jumping into the conversation.

Another new voice continued, "As we are the *online banking systems* team and we're building the application that the clients actually interact with, we would be in all the design meetings for the other systems. Every decision they make impacts our design. And we often have a good handle on ways they can make changes that have the least downstream impact. They don't realize how broad and deep our knowledge of all the input and output systems actually is. Someone changes a feed in the front office and our flow breaks. Or someone changes a procedure in the back office and we don't get the right data to process things like customer balances and interest properly."

"So . . ." Maggie stopped.

"That comes back to being more closely aligned with both the other teams *and* the business," said Addison.

Zest

“Our vision is to be more integrated with the whole!” Addison added with enthusiasm. The comments came quickly, and Maggie had a hard time keeping track of who was speaking. She made a note that she wanted to follow up with Cristina to find out who had been so engaged in the meeting. It seemed as though everyone was participating now.

“Half the time I don’t think they even know we exist!”

“We could brand ourselves. We could make people more aware of what we know, what we do, and what we contribute!”

“Yes. We need more people to understand what we do!”

“We would have a better understanding of where we are going with this program. We would have more access to the main technical sponsor. We want to challenge some of his design ideas. And we would have more access to the business and maybe with the customers themselves. Maybe we could have focus groups of customers who can beta test our development.”

“Most of our employees are customers of the bank. We could have some of them test for us, and it would help them become more familiar with the system before they have to support their customers using it.”

“We would have time to get our work done uninterrupted.”

“We would have some space away from the open-plan area to get work done.”

“No speakerphone calls in the open-plan area!”

“We would meet with our remote team members more often.”

“We would do more fun things! We would laugh more!”

“We would involve everyone in the planning of the project. Not just the project managers and the lead designers.”

“Planning would roll through the team, moving from high-level planning to detailed planning to validation of the plan.”

“We would develop more tailored communications based on different stakeholder groups. No more ‘one size fits all’ communications.”

“I would be less stressed.”

The barrage of ideas and voices trailed off. By this time, it was late in the afternoon, and the team decided to wrap up for the day.

In the course of this discussion, Maggie had seen many character strengths come to the surface. In particular, she saw zest—which was a nice surprise on the second day!—creativity, hope, fairness, prudence, social intelligence, humor, and honesty, just to name a few.

And after just a couple of meetings, the team had a vision.

The Team Vision

Our team is working with a tightly knit group of representatives from the other technical teams and the business, pooling our talent, knowledge, and experience. We take input from and give input to all the other aspects of the overall program—technical and business teams alike. We work hand in glove with stakeholders, customers, and other teams.

We are recognized and appreciated, and our advice is sought after.

We have control over our day-to-day existence, taking better care of ourselves, and creating a work environment that helps us to get work done.

We know and play to our strengths and seek out our most knowledgeable and experienced colleagues—both formally and informally—to help us move things forward effectively. We consult openly with others to get to the right solutions. We are not con-

strained by formal titles, roles, or positions but rather base assignments on talent and motivation.

Influence, Teamwork, and Relationship Management

To support this vision, the team wanted to leverage the expertise within the entire team and the other teams around them. They also wanted to build on the particular interests and passions of the individual team members. The group wanted to maintain the close team environment and even wanted to keep the open-plan space, with some concessions to allow for heads-down work and quiet time, as well as secluded spaces for those who needed to take a break from the open plan or who were feeling under the weather.

As they were putting the room back to normal, a few people came up to Maggie and asked if they could meet with her. A team member whose name she did not know yet suggested making the whiteboard a calendar. Maggie would put up the times she was available to meet, and they would pick their slots.

The information exchange had begun, and some trust had started to build.

Maggie left the room feeling that they had made good progress. She heard some laughter as she started to walk to her car.

Ben, who was the main liaison between the team members at other sites, jogged down the long hall to catch up to Maggie at the elevators and asked if she wanted to set up time to Skype with the other team members.

Planning, Fairness, and Teamwork

Maggie had a road map for integrating herself into the bigger team. She would meet with *everyone*—as far as possible, one on

one—for thirty-minute discussions. Anyone not comfortable with meeting one on one was welcome to team up with one or two others. It was their choice. The meetings would follow the same pattern of questions:

1. What works now?
2. If the program and team were as good as they could be, what would we be doing?
3. What steps can we take to move toward that ideal state?
4. What would you like to contribute to make things happen?

Making Hope Happen: Building Belief That We Can Get There from Here

As she was driving home, Maggie remembered being on a bus as a child with her grandmother and someone asking her directions to a location in town. Maggie didn't remember the details—she was only about five—but she did remember her grandmother's answer: "Oh, no, you can't get there from here." At the time she assumed Grandma knew what she was talking about. But as an adult, Maggie realized that Grandma just did not know the route to get there from where they were. It could not be possible that there was a part of town that was totally inaccessible! It is common for people to believe that things are fixed—intelligence, ability, and personality, for example. Part of Maggie's job on this program was to show that the team could make the changes they were visualizing. They might not happen all at once, but as a group the team could make progress toward their vision. They could learn and grow.

Planning and Social Intelligence

Within a few days of the first meetings, the team implemented a daily working session of the project managers that reported to Maggie. For the first time in the program's history, they included not only the designated project managers but also the testing manager, the test data manager, the business process change manager, and the resource manager. Anyone who was considered in some way a project manager was included in the working session, regardless of title.

The purpose of the meeting was to do a brief review of the status on that day. They covered big accomplishments, slippages, and obstacles and worked out action plans. They highlighted anything that should be brought to the attention of senior management—good or bad—as well as anything that might move into that category later.

Zest and Energy

The rest of the meeting, which was only thirty minutes, was dedicated to planning *fun!* This did not come naturally at first, and one colleague said, “This is hard work—we don't expect to have fun!”

Within a few days, and after consulting with the overseas team members, this small group had implemented twice-weekly stand-up meetings and monthly video meetings with colleagues at the other locations. These video meetings were often technically challenged, but the intent was there and was appreciated. The local team enjoyed seeing their colleagues in the other locations and putting faces to the names. Feedback from the team overseas was that they felt more included and more “seen” by the team members in the head office. The team regularly introduced new team members and shared updates on personal triumphs—a new baby, a wedding, a promotion, a first marathon run, a graduation, and so on.

Appreciation, Kindness, and Love

As Maggie continued to meet with as many people as possible, she found that in every person she met, she saw glimmers of what made him or her extraordinary. Maggie longed for a way to make those special characteristics visible to the entire team. As the days wore on, she was really liking her team. They were dedicated, smart, and creative. They were fun and loyal. They were thoughtful, methodical, and kind. And above all, they had hope! Maggie saw a great sense of camaraderie, a willingness to partner up to get things done, and a commitment to the goal of the program.

But they were also drained from so many months of struggling under the weight of constantly moving goalposts, and from always finding out information thirdhand. One person told Maggie a story about how they had worked on some new functionality and delivered it, only to find out that it had been descoped two weeks prior!

The project manager group discussed the low energy levels at their daily meeting and agreed they needed to lighten the collective mood. Something Maggie had adopted on the first day was having an inspirational quote in her email signature. The groups decided to piggyback on that idea and sent out an invitation for team members to share their favorite quotes. They received a wide range of suggestions, some well known and some new. Maggie started changing the quote in her email every two to three days, using each team member's suggested quote in turn.

In the daily project manager meeting, the group worked out some activities and social events that would get the team working together. One of the project managers suggested a team-building exercise for the local team with spaghetti and marshmallows, which he would coordinate and run. It was a fun—if messy—event!

Recognizing that it would be hard to do the same exercise in the other locations, Maggie asked her colleagues to come up

with something they could do. One group had a dinner, another organized a cricket match, and another created a quiz. Everyone shared photos! Owen offered to come up with some brainteasers and other games for the team to do in the stand-up meetings. Those could then be shared with the rest of the team via email.

Zest

Ben, quite unexpectedly, suggested that all the team members come up with a joke to share.

Appreciation

Cristina suggested implementing a peer employee recognition scheme. The suggestion was that in the twice-weekly stand-up meetings and monthly video meetings, colleagues would share the names of people who had gone above and beyond the call of duty. The nominations would be sent by email to Maggie, and once a week she would share the names by email.

Note: A wrinkle that Maggie had not expected was that some of the team members felt that calling people out was unfair to others. Culturally, it was felt to be divisive, particularly if there was any reward associated with it. After some discussion, the team agreed to give the process a try and then take feedback to see if the process should change or be eliminated. One factor that seemed to relieve some concerns was that this was a peer recognition scheme. Maggie was *collecting* the nominations, but she was not selecting the recipients, nor were their line managers.

It worked out for the online banking systems team, but this was a good reminder to consider whether people from different

backgrounds will respond positively to the same recognition scheme. It is essential to get input from the team and to make sure that so-called incentive schemes are really an incentive. Not all solutions fit with all people, cultures, and customs.

Note: Another wrinkle was that some of the jokes proposed were not ones that could be shared with a wider audience. Not every initiative works as expected or as hoped!

Going Broader

While winning over the team was really important to Maggie, she knew she had to expand her sphere of influence to include people outside her team. She needed to take some of the team members' suggestions and start weaving them into the conversations with the rest of the stakeholders and other team managers. Having gone deep with the team, she now needed to use her same approach to go broad. She needed to take her team along with her.

Teamwork and Implementation

Maggie wanted to start tackling some of the meatier topics with other teams and with management. The topic of managing code releases across the programs came up again and again. One of the complaints was that the head office controlled the schedule and often implemented changes with little or no notice in the United States. The head office also had the power to reschedule the team's releases. Maggie agreed with the team, after much consultation, that this should be the first item on her change agenda.

Her team had given her a clear picture of what release management would look like. They had even proposed the appoint-

ment of an independent release manager who would be objective about the needs of the various programs and locations.

They started to work together on producing the business case for why this made sense—why something that would initially look inconvenient and possibly cumbersome to others was really a benefit for the global program. It was going to be a tough sell and would take some time.

Influencing and Relationship Management

Other teams argued that their entire program would have to be replanned if they could not get weekly code releases. The head office was quick to push back but, surprisingly, did appreciate the suggestion of a global release manager. They even suggested someone to take it on. To allay the fears of the other teams and locations, Maggie asked if they were getting what they needed from the weekly code releases now, and some conceded that they primarily needed them because that was an assumption on which their original project plan was based, but that the reality was that weekly releases were not giving them the changes they needed. Maggie, her project managers, and the other team leads had cross-program working sessions in which each team presented their solution. After many days of behind-the-scenes discussions and limited progress, Maggie decided that she had to take a stand. She approached the main naysayer, Finn, and walked him through a week in the life of her team. (Yes, she had quickly become painfully aware of what a week in the life of her team felt like!)

Influencing

He was astonished. Maggie described to him how her team was living in a sort of *Groundhog Day* life of working on the development and then receiving amended upstream code that required them to modify everything they had built up until that point. They never moved forward and they never got into any other areas

Making It Stick for You

1. What were the key contributors to success in the story?
 2. What do you recognize in the story? What do you already do?
 3. What practices did you read about that you think you could implement right away in a project you currently work on or are about to work on?
 4. What practices would you *add* to this story to make it even better?
-

Strategies for Success

1. **Be hopeful:** What did you observe from the story that will help your team in their daily interactions?
2. **Be strong:** From your observations of your team, determine an action you will take to build on helpful team behavior.
3. **Be brave:** What is one tough conversation you will have to benefit the team?
4. **Be curious:** Choose one person on the team whom you will meet with to find out more about his or her perspective.

of functionality, or to look at other systems interfaces, because one or two of the interfaces were constantly changing. Stakeholders were dissatisfied because they were not seeing new functionality being delivered in the online system and were still doing things manually that were supposed to have been automated months prior.

Maggie's colleagues upstream had no idea of the impact their changes had been making. She also asked Finn what his own team's experience was like. At the end of the day, all the teams

were really one team working toward a common goal of successfully integrated banking systems that support the customer. He shared that they felt as though they were in the dark when it came to what the online banking team needed from them.

Teamwork

With this new understanding, the teams immediately started working on an approach not only to control the releases but also to collaborate on the design and implementation of changes.

Maggie noticed that, in management meetings, more and more people were saying, “Don’t forget to include the online banking systems team,” or “Will that impact the online banking systems team?”

Maggie and the team had their first wins together! And they had taken some big steps toward their vision.

3

Influence: The Project Motivator's Best Friend



Influence is not all we have; it is all we need.

Authority or Influence—Where Is the Power?

Many project managers face a challenge when trying to steer a team to accomplish set goals or behave in a desired way. Not having direct line management responsibility, they are left with what can seem to be an uncertain tool—personal influence. When I talk to project managers about the techniques offered in this book, they often assume that they will not be able to accomplish much because they don't have the authority to impose the taking of assessments, or the resources to purchase the latest team-building tool. One project manager said to me, "This all sounds

Things to Look Out For

1. Understand influence and the ripple effect.
2. Explain the concept of fixed and growth mind-sets.
3. Understand the impact of your influence and each mind-set on project success.
4. Understand the fundamentals of appreciative inquiry.

great, but it won't work for me." When I asked why he said that, he replied, "Because I don't get to tell people what to do." Once he read the book, he said he could see that the magic is that you don't need—and maybe don't want—to tell people what to do! What we need is influence, not power.

When we exercise power and tell team members what action to take, we don't engage their commitment. When we leave the room—or the project—their drive leaves with us. On the other hand, when we *influence* someone to do something, we are connecting to feelings and beliefs that are important to them and we are engaging their personal commitment and motivation. That commitment may be to us, because they like and admire us; it may be to other team members, because they feel part of a larger group with a shared purpose; or it may be to the end result, because they believe the end result is worthwhile and aligns with their values and they feel justified in putting their weight behind it. When we step away, that commitment and motivation remain, and they will tend to keep the momentum going.

Most of us are familiar with the concept of the ripple effect—the unintentional spreading of an idea, belief, or practice. But the wonderful thing about the ripple effect is that once you know about it, it does not have to be unintentional. The ripple effect works in advertising, a field not known for being unintentional; it works in politics, a field that leaves little to chance; and it works in the workplace.

The ripple effect is also sometimes referred to as modeling. Parents model the behavior that they want their children to copy—and they sometimes inadvertently model the behavior they don't want copied. We learn by example and show each other what behavior is expected in each environment.

With this in mind, if *you* do things to the best of your ability, with engagement, enthusiasm, and commitment, what impact

does that have on those around you? If you are able to observe and acknowledge the strengths and values of each team member, how will that ripple through the team? How will team members feel? What will they be willing to do? How will they understand what is expected of them? How much influence will you have?

In the story in Chapter 2, Maggie's engagement, attention to the task at hand, and determination to open up the conversation influenced the group. It started small, with the unknown voice wanting to "at least give her a chance" and with Lexi and Owen supporting her in pulling the positives together, and built from there.

How far does the ripple spread? If your project or program can make changes, even in isolation, that affects your personal experience and the experience of those you work with directly, and those changes, in turn, affect the people that they interact with every day.

There are countless research studies showing that we absorb mood and attitude from those around us. Human beings are social animals, designed to sense and pick up on—and of course transmit—emotions, moods, and attitudes.¹

In the paper "Lessons for an Accidental Profession," Jeffrey K. Pinto and Om P. Kharbanda say in point eight of their Vital Dozen, "Enthusiasm and despair are both infectious."²

Wayne Baker, in his article in the *Harvard Business Review*, says that "we catch energy through our interactions with people."³

1. Sourya Acharya and Samarth Shukla, "Mirror Neurons: Enigma of the Metaphysical Modular Brain," *Journal of Natural Science, Biology, and Medicine* 3, no. 2 (2012): 118–124, PubMed Central.

2. Jeffrey K. Pinto and Om P. Kharbanda, "Lessons for an Accidental Profession," *Business Horizons* 38, no. 2 (1995): 41–50, 43.

3. Wayne Baker, "The More You Energize Your Coworkers, the Better Everyone Performs," *Harvard Business Review*, September 15, 2016, <http://hbr.org/2016/09/the-energy-you-give-off-at-work-matters>.

The ripple effect—or influence—is one of our most powerful tools as project motivators. It is not something we just have to make do with or fall back on because we don't have authority and power. Influence, and our ability to build it, is our best friend. And it is more powerful, longer lasting, and more sustainable than authority!

Maggie's capacity to model positive behavior, ripple it out through the team, and influence their behavior and experience appears throughout Chapter 2. The purpose of this book is to help you understand how you can do the same with your teams.

Building Your Ripple

When I started my professional career, I saw people who seemed to have natural presence or gravitas. They could influence decisions in a few minutes. They could get people motivated and mobilized to do anything. For a long time, I thought that you either had that presence innately or you didn't.

Often charming, but always to the point and effective in their communication, they seemed to be able to say the right thing at the right time to get people on board with their thinking. I am sure you have seen the same thing in people you work with. Maybe you *are* one of those people. These influential people had what looked from the outside to be a natural connection to the people around them. I could see it in the way people nodded when they spoke, and the way people stepped up when they asked for help.

Over the years, through speaking with these people directly, I have come to realize that although some people may have a natural talent for winning hearts and minds, the most influential people work at it. And, surprisingly, at first their focus is less on themselves and their message and more on others and aligning the message with what is important to the audience. And

this brings us back to the Platinum Rule. The most influential people focus on treating others the way they want to be treated.

How do these influencers find out what is important to the audience—or, in our case, the team? They pay attention, they are brave, they are vulnerable, they are curious, and they look for and acknowledge the things that are important about and for the other person. And they model the behavior that they want to see.

One of *my* biggest influences in this area is the work by Robert Cialdini.⁴ When I first saw his six pillars of persuasion, I gained a new appreciation and understanding of how our influence powers our role. But I also started to think about how challenged we may be to build influence effectively. At the start of a project, I believe it makes sense to spend a significant amount of time building relationships, establishing trust, and creating a sphere of influence that goes beyond the immediate team. How do we do that?

Cialdini identifies six ways that we gain influence. I list them here in what I believe to be the order of usefulness for project managers: liking, social proof, commitment and consistency, scarcity, reciprocation, and authority. I believe the first three or four are the most useful and accessible to us, especially at the start of a project. And I would add one more to the top of the list: modeling. I say more about modeling throughout the rest of this chapter, but when people see us behaving in a way that is consistent with our values and that seems to give us a sense of satisfaction and engagement, they want some too!

Modeling: We act to show those around us how engaging the project can be.

Liking: Look for one or two allies on the team who seem to be well liked and respected by their colleagues, and build bonds

4. Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2007).

with them. This is a great way to prioritize building influence while still managing other tasks.

Social proof: Similar to liking, this entails having enough people modeling the behavior you are looking for that others want to join in. You will see this demonstrated throughout the story.

Commitment and consistency: This is a favorite of mine for explaining why projects that are wildly off track don't get canceled. Essentially, this says, "I have committed, I believe in the choice, and I will act in accordance with that choice." When you are prioritizing building influence over other activities and uses of your limited time, consider that once you have established your influence, it is not so hard to maintain it.

Scarcity: "There isn't much of it—I should grab it while I can!" This is not something that jumps out as an opportunity for project motivators. However, one of the experiences I have had is that when you are building an appreciative, motivated team, it is often outside the norm for an organization and scarcity *does* come into play.

Reciprocation: "I will do something for you because you did something for me." This is hard to accomplish at the start of a project, as you may not have much in your tool bag to exchange. However, as your project progresses, this can become a very useful form of influence.

Authority: "People who are more powerful than I am are telling me to do it, so I should do it." This is an effect that we often feel we cannot achieve because we are lacking in power. However, as we gain credibility and show consistency and trustworthiness, our authority will build—not the kind of authority that comes from hierarchy and title, but rather the kind that grows from belief in us as people and managers.

One thing Maggie had become acutely aware of in her time as a project manager was that her team members generally paid back what she gave them. When she trusted them, they learned

to trust her. But when she was suspicious, negative, or demoralized, her team was too. And not just of her but of each other as well. When she respected the team members, they showed her respect too. And when she showed disrespect for others, her team did too. When she saw and acknowledged the value of people around her, they responded in kind. But when she focused on deficits, things that weren't done the way she would like, and failings, the people around her did too. They started to complain about others, believe that nothing good would happen, and assume that others would not deliver. She had also learned that when she won over one person, other people followed. In Chapter 2, Lexi was the first person to warm up to Maggie, and once she did, others jumped right in. This is what I call second-order ripple!

You have the power to inject the team with energy, enthusiasm, and commitment.

Or you can do nothing and leave energy, enthusiasm, and commitment—yours and theirs—to chance. Worse, without a strategy to exert a positive influence, you may even infect the team with disengagement, sapping their energy and rippling out a lack of enthusiasm and commitment.

It is your choice!

Knowing What to Model for the Biggest Ripple

Most of us agree that projects are about change. Some projects, such as running a conference, may not at first glance seem to be about change, but the purpose of a conference is usually to raise and change awareness of something. It might be to introduce a subject, such as positive psychology or project management, to a wider audience, or it might be to increase the awareness of best practices for a group of professionals. Either way, it is intended to change perception, awareness, and learning. Every day, repeated processes are not projects.

Change is hard. It often arouses suspicion and skepticism, it is stressful, and it often leads people—those from whom we most need help and support—to worry about their personal future. How many of us, as project managers, have heard comments such as, “This will never work—*they* [whoever *they* may be] have tried something like this before and it made things worse”? Or, when we are faced with an obstacle and ask whether there is a new or different way to approach something, we are told, “It has been done like this for as long as I can remember because this is the way it works best.” Or, when we ask why something is done a certain way, we get the answer, “Because it has always been done that way.”

Expectations are often fixed and hard to shift.

Once the project is under way and that initial inertia has been overcome, the drag of fixed expectations does not end. The first time users are involved in testing and something does not work as expected, they may say, “You see—it does not work! This is going to make my job so much harder.”

When testing is over and the new system, processes, or tools have been implemented and there is a failure of some sort, nay-sayers are quick to reiterate that they told everyone it would not work, that the old way was the best way, and that things will never be the same, as good, or as effective.

This is a fixed mind-set at work. It is not surprising, and it is very common, but it also makes projects much harder than they need to be.

How can we be project motivators and change that? We can model an expectation that change and growth are possible!

Project Managers—Specialists or Generalists?

There is a school of thought that holds that a good project manager can manage any kind of project. The theory appears to be that project management skills are transferable and that the context of the project is not important. For some project managers

working in organizations that subscribe to this view, this makes the world seem like a wide-open and exciting place. For others, it seems to suggest that project managers are close to automatons who don't require specialized knowledge and are not good for anything other than box checking and clipboard waving. The other school of thought is that the generalist theory just is not true and that to be an effective project manager, we need inside knowledge—an understanding of the industry or function that we are project managing.

I admit that, for many years, I was squarely in the second camp, believing that to be effective, we needed inside knowledge. I described myself as a financial services project manager. When asked about other types of projects, I would shrug and say something to the effect that the field was not *my* field and I could not do it. When I thought of project managing something other than a financial services project, I pictured not living up to my high standards, being criticized by team members, being criticized by management, and not performing at my best. I did not picture growing into a new role, learning new things, working hard to overcome challenges, and enjoying personal and professional growth and satisfaction. I was just like those people who are resistant to change. I had a fixed mind-set.

When I saw project management roles in other sectors, such as education, retail, or construction, I ruled them out as possibilities. One time I did consider a project management role at an educational institution, and although project management experience was the number one required skill, I believed that the other required skills ruled me out—I don't have a PhD or research experience. I did not apply. Six months later, the role was being reposted because they had not found a candidate with "suitable experience." I don't know which part of the required experience the candidates had lacked, but it is possible that I could have sold myself as a project manager for that role.

The reality is that to call myself a financial services project manager—as though all financial services projects were the same—was naïve. In my time in financial services, I project managed a variety of projects, including the following:

1. A back-office system pilot site project (my project management baptism by fire)
2. A trading system development project
3. A back-office system conversion and integration during a bank merger
4. Multiple key hardware and software upgrades
5. Multiple securities trading system implementation projects
6. Multiple regulatory reporting projects
7. A worldwide systems integration testing program
8. A data warehouse development project

These projects involved everyone from traders to accounting, payment and settlement teams to compliance. No two projects were alike. There was some overlap in terms of jargon, but when I factor in the realization that two institutions were German, one was French, another was Swiss, and yet another was British, and that the staff were in Canada, the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, France, and India, it becomes clear that I was kidding myself when I thought that these projects were a “type.” Nevertheless, this was my belief, and on the

whole the people around me felt the same: the project manager needed to be a field specialist.

Now, after all my years of project managing, I have altered my perspective. I believe good project management takes three factors. It takes (1) a good project manager with (2) a belief that we can learn what we need to and a willingness to do so and (3) a good understanding of both his or her own personal values and motivations and those of the team. With these attributes, any competent project manager can successfully manage any kind of project. It may not always start out pretty, and we will stumble without the support of the team, but we can *learn* to manage any project.

What if you are hiring a project manager? Maybe you, too, believe that good project managers can learn to manage any project, but why wouldn't you look for someone with domain knowledge? In Chapter 1, I shared the Project Management Institute's projections for growth in projects and project management—the sheer number of project managers that will be needed over the coming years will make it increasingly difficult to find domain experts. Also, the pace of change means that projects are looking less and less alike—even my financial services projects were different every time. And finally, leveraging the learning mind-sets of project managers means that you will get more out of your project managers. They will be leveraging their ability to dig into something new. They will approach projects with an open mind and a higher expectation of what is possible. They will tackle your project with a growth mind-set.

On Your Mark, Get Set, Grow

As I mentioned earlier, I believe that a growth mind-set is a key component in being an adaptable and effective project motiva-

tor. But in my opinion, it goes further than that. We need to not only cultivate that mind-set in ourselves but also model it to our team and help them develop that same sense that we can all improve. In my experience, when team members have a growth mind-set, they become more curious and are less likely to lay blame. They focus more on how to get there from here and less on who got us here in the first place.

In projects today, with the focus on the triple constraints of time, money, and scope, it is easy for us to develop a “prevention mind-set.” We become afraid of failure and averse to criticism. And rather than look for the most inventive solutions, we focus on choosing paths that minimize the risk of failure and negative feedback—also known as criticism. It is not unreasonable that we should have this mind-set. Organizational culture can leave us concerned that if we are criticized, we may miss out on a promotion or bonus or, worse, lose our jobs. But what exists at the overall organizational level need not be reflected in our own teams. We can create an environment that is psychologically safe, invites experimentation, and accepts the risk of potential failure.

Be Creative and Persevere—Working in a Failure-Intolerant Environment

When I discuss the concept of the growth mind-set in groups, I am often told that there are certain environments where failure and experimentation are just not acceptable—for example, if you work at NASA or in a hospital. While I understand the sentiment—after all, lives are at stake—I still contend that a tolerance for failure is a necessity. There are two simple reasons for this: failures happen, and without experimentation there is no progress. Sadly, NASA has had significant failures (the space

shuttle *Challenger*) and many near misses (Apollo 13). Patients in hospitals die from causes that are preventable. In fact, in the United States alone, it is estimated that there are over 250,000 preventable deaths in hospitals each year.⁵

And experimentation?

Without experimentation, there would be no space flight and much of our modern-day medicine would not exist!

It is the environments that accept the fact that failures occur and then put processes in place to encourage the reporting of, analysis of, and adaptation to failure that are the safest and most innovative.

For example, a hospital in New Jersey implemented a process that required medical staff not only to report errors but also to report near misses.⁶ A near miss can be a positive experience, because medical staff have prevented an adverse outcome, but it is also an opportunity to learn—what steps can be taken to ensure that the hospital never gets that close to a failure again? How was failure averted, and what can be learned for the future? Analyzing near misses can help to reduce the likelihood of a full-blown error.

Those of us who suffer from a fixed mind-set—and we all do sometimes, in some contexts—are denying the realities that failure happens and that with failure comes the possibility of positive change. If we can be curious about what there is to be learned from a failure, we can not only prevent it in the future but also possibly create a broader positive impact with more benefits than we can at first imagine. It ripples!

5. Sonya Collins, “BMJ Analysis Calls Medical Errors Third Leading Cause of Death, Shines New Light on Ongoing Problem,” *Pharmacy Today* 22, no. 7 (2016): 36–37, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ptdy.2016.06.022>.

6. “Medical Errors: Focusing More on What and Why, Less on Who,” *Journal of Oncology Practice* 3, no. 2 (2007): 66–70, <https://doi.org/10.1200/jop.0723501>.

The Link to Creativity and Engagement

When team members feel safe, they also become more experimental. They are better able to work together and develop creative solutions to problems.⁷ When we experience fear and anxiety, our focus narrows, our ability to reason diminishes, and our vision narrows; negative environments stultify creativity and make it less likely that our team members will band together to create a brain wave. When the environment we work in values the characteristics of the fixed mind-set, we feel less safe and less engaged.

When we are encouraged to be more experimental; when vulnerability to, and acceptance of, failure is seen as a route to learning and improvement; when challenges are met with enthusiasm and we all believe that we can grow and improve, there is a positive upward spiral, the positive emotions ripple, and we are able to broaden our perspective and build new solutions and create new ideas. Positivity leads to a sense of connection and commitment, and this is the very essence of engagement.

There are other factors we could explore here, such as our natural negativity bias—our tendency to give more weight to bad news and negative experiences than to positive ones—and our natural confirmation bias—our tendency to give more weight to data and evidence that support our current point of view than to data and evidence that contradict that view.

Both biases make sense—negativity bias made our ancestors less likely to get eaten by wild animals, and confirmation bias helps us efficiently sift through the barrage of information and data that is flowing our way every minute of every day.

A growth mind-set can help us to avoid the stumbling blocks of these natural thinking styles. The capacity to see failure

7. Barbara L. Fredrickson, *Positivity* (New York: Three Rivers, 2009).

and criticism as an opportunity to learn, for example, makes us more open to data that contradict our current view. Valuing effort and practice as positives helps to overcome the sense that we will never be good enough. We no longer see being turned down for a promotion or rejected by an employer as the end of the road.

Project Motivators with a Growth Mind-Set Get Better and Better—and So Do Those around Them!

Twenty-five years of experience has shown me that although there may be some fields for which I am not such a good fit, in general, all I have to do in order to deliver on my promise to be an effective project motivator is *learn* and *grow*. When I first managed a conference, for example, I had to believe that although I did not know all the ins and outs of event planning, I could learn them well enough and fast enough to be effective and support the goal of creating a great event. Then began the learning. Although at a high level the services I could offer looked pretty much the same as they would in any project, the specifics of planning an event were *very* different from those of implementing software at an international investment bank. I needed to believe that I could learn and grow. I needed to believe, “I don’t know yet, but I can learn.”

And the research backs me up. It shows that people who believe that abilities are fixed want to avoid failure and are more likely to give up when they hit an obstacle; they are more likely to blame others when things don’t work out and to measure success by results, such as grades and titles.

People with a growth mind-set, believing that they can learn and grow, are more likely to push past obstacles, measure success by progress, and take responsibility for their

actions and outcomes.⁸ And the good news is that the research also shows that we are *all* capable of both mind-sets, and we can change!

When we start out in life, we have a growth mind-set. If you don't believe me, think about life as a toddler—we try walking and fall, but we keep getting up and trying again until we get it right. Fortunately, in walking, we don't measure ourselves by our first attempt. The same goes for talking. If we were measured by our first wobbly steps or mispronounced words, none of us would be able to walk and talk. You would not be able to read this book even if I could write it!

If you have ever said, "I cannot do anything about that—that is just the way I am," you were displaying a fixed mind-set. It may just have been in that moment, or in that context, but it was a fixed mind-set.

If you have ever said, "That was not my best work, but I know what I need to do to be better next time," you were displaying a growth mind-set.

Some things we can be sure of during a project are (1) we will encounter obstacles, (2) things will go wrong, (3) we will need to know who did what to get where we are, and (4) we will need others to step up to get things done. We will need them to take responsibility.

Who do we want on our project—someone who will push past obstacles, or someone who will throw in the towel in the belief that he or she just doesn't have—and cannot get—what it takes? Do we need people who take responsibility for their actions and mistakes, or someone who blames others? And who do *we* want to be?

8. C. S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (New York: Random House, 2006).

One way to cultivate your own growth mind-set is to think back on challenges that you have overcome. Consider how you did so. Did you give up at the first hurdle, or plow on? Did you go it alone, struggling and struggling, or did you enlist the help of others? Did you magically find the right way to overcome the obstacle, or did you use trial and error, learning from mistakes and failures and then having another go?

Maggie has a story about a time when she used her growth mind-set.

Maggie started to notice that in some meetings the same voices always spoke up, and the same voices remained quiet. When she invited the quieter people to contribute, Maggie felt that there was reluctance and some tension. It was not that they had nothing to say; it was that they were hesitant to say it. She was not sure whether she was the inhibiting factor or whether something else was at play. She tried speaking with people one-on-one after the meetings. She invited the quieter people to speak. She asked probing questions. Nothing seemed to make a difference. She thought that maybe she was wrong and couldn't do anything to change things. But she was convinced that anything can change and be made better.

In one meeting where the same people seemed to be going through the same process of not really addressing their issues, Maggie decided to throw something new into the mix, something she had seen work previously in mediation: she decided to take a chance on some humor. Maggie reached into a large shopping bag and produced her bag of finger puppets. She had picked them up from a toy store that was going out of business.

"It seems as though there is an elephant in the room that no one wants to name. Would these help?" she asked. She put the puppets out on a table and picked up one for herself. It was soft and furry. She started to stroke it.

Everyone looked astonished.

“How would that help?” asked Owen, somewhat annoyed.

Other team members were trying to stifle a laugh. Maggie thought she heard one person whisper, “She’s a little weird!” She was actually relieved that they did not say something more derogatory!

“Well, research shows that blood pressure and stress are reduced when we stroke pets. I don’t think I can bring my dog into the building, as much as I would like to, but maybe these would be a good stand-in.” Maggie continued stroking the puppet on her finger.

“And,” she said, continuing with the theme, “they are great for getting a message across!” Maggie put a puppet on her other hand. Using the elephant on her right hand, she started nodding it to the giraffe on her left and said, “And another thing: stop taking my resources for your project!”

“It’s working for me,” she said, and put the second puppet back on the desk.

Cristina was scowling at her, but Lexi came to Maggie’s rescue, selecting a puppet and slipping it onto her finger. As she talked about other things we should do, she faced the puppet toward the crowd. Midsentence, she paused and said, “You know, this feels nice. I like having a puppet to speak for me!”

Note: Lexi often came to Maggie’s rescue when the team thought what she was doing was uncomfortable or just plain odd. Lexi was well liked by the team, and they usually followed her lead. It is great to find your champions on the team early and to work with them!

The puppets made the rounds. Suddenly, Alex picked up a panda puppet, jammed it onto his finger, and faced it toward

Cristina. He blurted out, “Sometimes it seems as though there is just no room for anyone’s ideas except yours!”

Cristina looked shocked, and Maggie was uncertain what would happen next. Cristina grabbed another puppet, put it on her finger, and started addressing Alex’s panda with her donkey. They started having a heated exchange, and Maggie wondered if she should intervene, but before she could even decide what to do, they had calmed down and were working out a better way to communicate ideas from the team to Cristina. (See Chapter 6.) The puppets sat back down on the table.

Others in the room expressed approval of the puppets and asked if they could keep them at hand. Owen—always concerned about the spread of germs—asked how they would keep them clean, and Maggie agreed to take them home and wash them every weekend. From then on, Maggie often saw team members using the puppets to explain things. One team member did an entire whiteboard presentation using a finger-puppet dog. He said it helped him get over his presentation anxiety!

Of course, not everyone appreciated the puppets, but for some people they proved really helpful. Similarly, not everyone reading this book will feel confident enough to use something like the puppets in meetings, but you can find other creative ways to address conflict in your team, especially if you think about what you have seen work in the past.

Another approach is to invite everyone to write down their concerns on pieces of paper, fold them up, and throw them into a bowl. One by one, the anonymous concerns are read out by one person and discussed. Another technique that Maggie used on another project was to make one sheet on the information wall a “comments and concerns” sheet. People would put sticky notes on the sheet, and the notes would be addressed in the next meeting.

Making It Stick for You

1. How do you influence people? What is your ripple effect?
 2. When have you spread positive emotion to people around you? How did that happen?
 3. How and when have you spread negative emotion?
 4. When have you had an opportunity to try something new and interesting to you and turned it down, saying, “That is just not something I am good at,” or “I have never been any good at that type of thing”? What are some steps you could have taken with a growth mind-set to *learn*?
 5. Think of a time you faced a challenge head-on, even though initially you felt you were not smart enough or skilled enough to do it. How did you push past your reluctance to try?
 6. Think of a time that you failed at something you tried. What did you learn from that experience?
-

A growth mind-set takes work! Sometimes it requires being brave and determined. But people with growth mind-sets believe they can go a long way with focus and hard work.

What do you believe?

What We Appreciate Appreciates!

The idea of coming at things from the vantage point of what works—a process that underpins this book—was first shared in 2005.⁹ The practice known as appreciative inquiry does not look to fix problems by dwelling on gaps and deficits but rather looks

9. David L. Cooperrider and Diana Kaplin Whitney, *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2005).

to build on positives. By starting with what works well, we can build engagement and enthusiasm, and this, in turn, helps us to be more creative and innovative. We don't ignore problems and issues; we build from a strong starting point instead of tearing things down.

The key focus of appreciative inquiry is the “generative” thinking that takes place in the exploration of what works. The result is transformation through both new ideas and new actions. Much of positive psychology has shown how starting from a positive perspective opens up the imagination, opens us to new ideas, and stimulates creativity.¹⁰ Appreciative inquiry is a structured approach to achieving that end goal of new ideas and new actions. By adopting this idea of building on the positive and reaching for change, you can transform your own experience and the experience of your teams.

The approach combines the ideas of appreciating—or valuing and recognizing—the good things in a person or system and inquiring in an open and interested way in order to expand from that starting point and create growth. To me, this is mining for gold—not focusing on the rock and mud that may surround the nuggets, which can be cleaned up later.

Throughout this book, we are starting with the things that work, recognizing them, and valuing them. And nowhere do we focus this positive attention more than on the team members and stakeholders on our projects. This is not to suggest that there is no value in, or need for, problem solving. This approach exists alongside other approaches. However, there are some great benefits to taking a strengths-focused, “what works” approach. It stimulates the brain to increase openness and creativity, and it helps people to feel worthwhile and therefore motivated to take new steps.

10. G. R. Bush, “Appreciative Inquiry Is Not (Just) about the Positive,” *OD Practitioner* 39, no. 4 (2007): 30–35.

Strategies for Success

1. Be hopeful: Choose your language and behaviors to build hope in the team by your example.
2. Be strong: Think about one strength you can use to help your team.
3. Be brave: Model positive team behavior, even when it is hard to do or you get pushback from colleagues.
4. Be curious: Listen to the language you use around team members. What does it convey? Listen for the language of a fixed mind-set in others and ask what learning or tools are needed to make a change.
5. Model the language and behavior you want from others.

If you are not convinced, maybe this will help. In your role as a project manager, have you or someone you work with used a SWOT analysis? A SWOT analysis looks at a situation and considers the following:

What are our *strengths*?

What are our *weaknesses*?

What *opportunities* do we have?

What *threats* are we facing?

Superficially, we believe we spend the same amount of time on the positives—strengths and opportunities—and on the negatives—weaknesses and threats.

In my personal experience, the focus tends to be on the negatives. Strengths are glossed over, and the meeting quickly starts to focus on what is wrong, the things at which we are failing. This focus on the negative is the natural phenomenon that I have already mentioned that has helped us to survive. However, this negative focus serves us less well when we need to be creative and

open to new ideas. To survive, we need an awareness of negative circumstances, but to *thrive*, we need to build on the positive.

What is your experience, especially in the workplace?

I believe the key form of appreciation and appreciative inquiry in teams is when we focus on the values and drivers of our team members and stakeholders. To truly see them is to truly appreciate them. Understanding what they feel is important; seeing who they are at their core and the strengths that they draw on naturally; and identifying how we can best engage them and engage with them and how we can treat them in a way that brings out the best in them are all ways of making the application of the Platinum Rule practical.

And modeling appreciation is key to being a project motivator. This is the focus of the next few chapters. When you show appreciation, others show it too! This is more of your influence at work.

4

Building a Culture of Appreciation

It is not just whether we appreciate those around us; it is whether we demonstrate our appreciation.



The Heart of Engagement: Appreciation

I first mentioned character strengths¹ in the introduction. They are my go-to tools for building a sense of appreciation and inclusion in a team. A project manager asked me why I focus on character strengths rather than one of the other personality tools

Things to Look Out For

1. Understand what character strengths are and why they matter.
2. Recognize your character strengths.
3. Spot strengths in others.
4. Understand how our character strengths combinations support the work we do.

1. Before we delve into character strengths—the understanding of which I consider to be the core of being a project motivator—I encourage you to take the VIA Character Strengths Survey. It is free and takes about twenty minutes to complete. The link is here: <http://projectmotivator.pro.viasurvey.org>.

available. The reason is that an understanding of character strengths provides project managers with a straightforward, accessible way to first be engaged and then to engage the team. They have been described as the backbone of positive psychology. There are twenty-four strengths. They are all positive, we all have all of them to some degree, they have been researched in multiple contexts, and they are evidence based. They help everyone feel good about themselves and those around them, and they help us to be inclusive, to see each other as whole people, and to appreciate both our similarities *and* our differences.

According to research, workers who are aware of their character strengths are 9.5 times more likely to be flourishing.² Those who are aware *and* use their strengths at work are 18.5 times more likely to be flourishing! Those who use their character strengths have a greater sense of well-being.³ But maybe most significant of all is that research shows that it is manager support of employee strengths that predicts increased use of strengths and thus engagement.⁴

That means us!

We can influence our team to enhance their use of strengths, to feel more engaged, and to feel good. And in the process, we develop our team members and create a greater leadership role for ourselves. Character strengths showed up throughout the story in Chapter 2. This chapter will demonstrate them further and

2. L. C. Hone, A. Jarden, S. Duncan, and G. M. Schofield, "Flourishing in New Zealand Workers: Associations with Lifestyle Behaviors, Physical Health, Psychosocial, and Work-Related Indicators," *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 57, no. 9 (2015): 973–983.

3. H. Littman-Ovadia and M. Steger, "Character Strengths and Well-Being among Volunteers and Employees: Toward an Integrative Model," *Journal of Positive Psychology* 5, no. 6 (2010): 419–430.

4. S. Lavy, H. Littman-Ovadia, and M. Boiman-Meshita, "The Wind beneath My Wings: The Role of Social Support in Enhancing the Use of Strengths at Work," *Journal of Career Assessment* 25, no. 4 (2017): 703–714.

will show you how you can start to appreciate your own strengths and how to spot the strengths of others.

Building Appreciation

The daily project manager meeting had become well established. Regular attendees were April; Mark, a fairly new project manager; Jackson, one of the longer-serving project managers; Cristina, the design lead; Ben, the manager of the quality assurance team; and of course Maggie. One of the topics that came up a lot was how to appreciate others and how to express that appreciation. The team had already implemented a recognition scheme to recognize those who accomplished extraordinary feats on the project. But the project managers were interested in increasing the sense of understanding and appreciation between and among the team members. Maggie was very excited to hear this. She immediately thought of the research on character strengths, but before introducing the topic, she asked to hear more from the group.

April asked, “Maggie, how have you worked on team appreciation in the past? Are we talking about team-building exercises or something more substantial?”

Before Maggie could answer, the group started discussing the intention and agreed that they wanted something that the team could use every day rather than something they just did once and forgot about. They also wanted a way to include the whole team, wherever they were located.

Mark said, “Well, I love surveys and personality assessments. It would be great to be able to offer the team some sort of assessment. It would be something of real value. We could all take it and share the results somehow. But I guess it would be difficult to get any budget for that, and people may not like the idea of taking it just because we say so!”

Jackson commented, “I love assessments too, but they do tend to be expensive, and for some of them you need some sort of certification to be able to use them.”

Ben asked, “Maggie, do you have a suggestion for us? It seems as though you might have done stuff like this before.”

Again, Maggie felt a surge of excitement, partly because she had a suggestion but also because she was starting to feel that she was developing some influence over the group.

“I have used a character strengths assessment in the past,” she answered. “There is one that I love to use from the VIA Institute on Character, but there are other tools.”

“Why do you like that one?” Jackson inquired.

“Well,” said Maggie, “there are a few reasons that I like the survey. I like that it is evidence and research based; it is online, so the entire team can use it wherever they are; it is quick to use and pretty easy to understand, and we don’t need anyone to get certified or trained; it has a completely positive focus—it looks for what is working and not things that we need to fix; it is in multiple languages, which has been important for every team I work on; it is cross-cultural and universal—it does not feel as though it has a US bias; and the basic assessment is *free!*”

Maggie went on to explain how she had used character strengths in the past, and how she practices spotting them in everyone as much as she can every day. There were a few nods of understanding from the group. Cristina, who had been quiet up to this point, said, “I am not sure how receptive the team will be to the idea of an assessment, but if that is one of the tools you have been using to get this team engaged and energized again, I would like at least to know more about it.”

Ben added, “Yeah, I am not sure about bringing in something for the entire team. Why would they want to do it?”

Maggie was thoughtful. She had met with skepticism previously, especially when working with teams who were feeling un-

derappreciated and overworked already. And some people are pretty skeptical about assessments in general, possibly because many of them seem to be focused on “areas for development” and identifying weaknesses.

“Well,” she said, “in my experience, it makes a difference if even a few people know about character strengths. How about we take it and look over the results and see what we learn? If we as a group decide that it is not going to work with the team, we can look for something else to try.”

After some further discussion, the group agreed that they would take the assessment over the coming few days and share what they had learned early the following week. Maggie offered that if the group was willing to share their results, she would pull them together so they could see them in a chart.

Experiencing Appreciation Firsthand through Character Strengths

After everyone had taken the assessment, they shared their top strengths—known as signature strengths—with Maggie. They agreed to start with the top five, as these were likely to be both core to the individual and easily recognizable to others.

The results of their assessments are shown in Figure 4.1. As always, this example is a combination of the results from multiple teams.

Figure 4.2 groups the twenty-four character strengths by classifications called virtues. Each virtue has a number of strengths aligned with it. Using those strengths engages the virtue in question. This was part of the original character strengths research.⁵ And as they make logical groupings, I have included them here.

5. Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 33–39.

FIGURE 4.1 Examples of Team Character Strengths

| Name | Strength 1 | Strength 2 | Strength 3 | Strength 4 | Strength 5 |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Cristina | Judgment | Creativity | Kindness | Curiosity | Zest |
| Mark | Leadership | Hope | Perseverance | Love of learning | Social intelligence |
| Jackson | Curiosity | Love | Prudence | Judgment | Spirituality |
| April | Appreciation | Bravery | Curiosity | Fairness | Gratitude |
| Maggie | Fairness | Gratitude | Hope | Love of learning | Judgment |
| Ben | Hope | Prudence | Love of learning | Teamwork | Honesty |

For simplicity, Maggie used them and counted how many people in the project manager group had each strength as a signature strength.

When the group reconvened, Maggie shared the two charts and invited comment.

Cristina said that she liked that the assessment was online, quick, and easy to take and that the results were in plain language. She said, “I did not feel as though I need any special knowledge to make sense of the results, as I have with some other assessments in the past.”

Ben laughed. “Prudence and teamwork [he was the one who suggested that everyone share jokes] are no surprise, but I would not have expected hope to be near the top,” he said.

Cristina immediately said, “Are you kidding? You are one of the most hopeful people I know. There have been lots of times when I have just wanted to throw in the towel, and you have made me feel that we can make things happen!”

FIGURE 4.2 VIA Virtues and Character Strengths Definitions

| Virtues and Character Strengths | |
|--|--------------------|
| Virtue of Wisdom (strengths that help you gather and use knowledge) | # of people |
| Creativity: Original and adaptive, show ingenuity, see and do things in different ways | 1 |
| Curiosity: Interested, seek novelty, appreciate exploration, open to experience | 3 |
| Judgment: Critical in your thinking, think through all sides, don't jump to conclusions | 3 |
| Love of learning: Interested in mastering new skills and information, systematically adding to knowledge | 3 |
| Perspective: Wise, provide wise counsel, take the big-picture view | |
| Virtue of Courage (strengths that help you exercise your will and face adversity) | |
| Bravery: Show valor, don't shrink from threat or challenge, face fears, speak up for what's right | 1 |
| Perseverance: Persistent, industrious, finish what you start, overcome obstacles | 1 |
| Honesty: Authentic, true to yourself, sincere, show integrity | 1 |
| Zest: Vital, enthusiastic for life, vigorous, energetic, do things wholeheartedly | 1 |
| Virtue of Humanity (strengths that help you in one-on-one relationships) | |
| Love: Both loving and loved, value close relations with others, show genuine warmth | 1 |
| Kindness: Generous, nurturing, caring, compassionate, altruistic, do for others | 1 |
| Social intelligence: Emotionally intelligent, aware of the motives and feelings of self and others, know what makes other people tick | 1 |

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from previous page)

Virtue of Justice
(strengths that help you in community or group situations)

- Teamwork:** A good citizen, socially responsible, loyal, contribute to group efforts **1**
- Fairness:** Adhere to principles of justice, don't let feelings bias decisions, offer equal opportunity to all **2**
- Leadership:** Organize groups to get things done, positively guide others **1**
-

Virtue of Temperance
(strengths that help you manage habits)

- Forgiveness:** Merciful, accepting of others' shortcomings, give people a second chance, let go of hurt when wronged
- Humility:** Modest, let your accomplishments speak for themselves
- Prudence:** Careful about your choices, cautious, don't take undue risks **2**
- Self-regulation:** Self-controlled; disciplined; able to manage impulses, emotions, and vices
-

Virtue of Transcendence
(strengths that help you connect outside yourself)

- Appreciation of beauty and excellence:** Experience awe and wonder for beauty, admire skills and excellence in others, elevated by moral beauty **1**
- Gratitude:** Thankful for the good in life, express thanks, feel blessed **2**
- Hope:** Optimistic, positive and future minded, expect the best and work to achieve it **3**
- Humor:** Playful, bring smiles to others, lighthearted, see the lighter side
- Spirituality/sense of meaning:** Connected with the sacred, identify purpose and meaning in life, see value in religiousness and faith **1**
-

Source: From unpublished book, © 2018 with permission from VIA Institute on Character.

Ben beamed with delight and muttered a shy “Thank you.”

Maggie gave some basic guidance on how to use the results. “First, remember we all have all twenty-four strengths. And there is a reason I have only included the top five for each person. Research shows that we benefit just as much if not more from working with our top strengths rather than by focusing on our bottom strengths. These top strengths are generally the ones that come most naturally to us, and we use them in all situations. I asked for five, but you might have more or fewer true ‘signature strengths,’ as they are called. As we move forward with this for the rest of the team—if we decide we want to—I think asking everyone to share their top five is something we can work with and make stick.”

Maggie then invited more feedback and questions.

Cristina said, “I like the assessment. I admit that when I got my list, the first place I looked was the bottom. I don’t mind sharing that my bottom strengths were self-regulation, spirituality, and humility.”

“Actually,” said Maggie, “that is pretty common. There are a couple of research studies that have looked at the assessments that have been taken across the world, and they have found that country by country, self-regulation and spirituality are typically ranked lower than twentieth! There is no need to feel bad.”

Cristina looked relieved, and then Mark and Ben confirmed that they felt better too, as the same strengths were low down in their rankings. Jackson was excited to discover that his high ranking of spirituality was unusual.

“I think of it as connection to everyone and everything,” he said. “It is not really a religious thing for me. I think that is why this idea of getting the team to feel more connected and appreciated appeals to me so much. It is a sense of shared purpose and meaning.”

April asked what was next.

Maggie had some suggestions. She explained that the first thing she had done with character strengths was to really take note of her own and to practice applying them. She showed the team a strengths practice that she had used on that very first day. Really it was just a process of going through all twenty-four strengths at the start of the day and planning how to use them. At the end of the day, she would review all twenty-four strengths and think about how she—and others—had used them.

She shared the example from the morning of that first introductory meeting.

Appreciation: Focusing on the potential of every person on the team; mining for their gold and appreciating every discovery

Bravery: Speaking up on behalf of the team; being vulnerable and asking others on the team for help rather than acting as though she knows everything

Creativity: Being open to suggestions from others; allowing the ideas to flow and grow and not pouncing on the first idea suggested

Curiosity: Wanting to know more about the project and the people on the team

Fairness: Treating every person as adding value to the team; recognizing that seniority is not a measure of the value of someone's idea

Forgiveness: Not focusing on the fact that Richard had thrown her in at the deep end and left her to sink or swim

Gratitude: Being thankful for every baby step along the way to collaboration and team success

Honesty: Using this with her bravery to be vulnerable and open

Hope: Keeping the belief that the team will prevail and modeling that belief

Humility: Accepting and welcoming the fact that the best ideas will be from other people

Humor: Not taking everything seriously; looking for opportunities to be playful

Judgment: Balancing the need for humility and leadership; seeking and weighing evidence before reaching a conclusion

Kindness: In conjunction with fairness, supporting the team members in getting what they need to be successful—in all aspects of their life; seeing the whole person and not just the “work person”

Leadership: Organizing people and keep them moving forward; balancing this with humility and a willingness to hang back; using judgment to get that balance right

Love: Forming some close mutual relationships to lean on

Love of learning: Seeing everything as a learning opportunity, even when things go wrong

Perseverance: Using this with bravery to keep going with her approach to the team even when the going was tough

Perspective: Keeping an eye on the big-picture goals of the project even as she was digging into the details with the team; relating each detail back to the big picture

Prudence: Having a plan or strategy for engaging the team, not just walking into the room and hoping for the best; combining this with creativity in order to stay adaptable and not be wedded to a particular approach (like the presentation that she had prepared!)

Self-regulation: Taking things slowly, standing back and observing, and resisting the urge to jump in too quickly; resisting the urge to justify or self-promote and instead being vulnerable and honest

Social intelligence: Paying attention to the cues and signals from others to ensure they feel noticed and included; accepting their suggestions and ideas openly

Spirituality: Being connected to the team and building a community by seeing the whole

Teamwork: Going broad and looking beyond the official team—including the janitor, the cook, and the security guard; going deep by getting to know each team member individually

Zest: Doing everything with enthusiasm and energy!

Maggie also shared some of the research that shows that paying attention to your top strengths and thoughtfully applying them each day is a great way to feel energized and engaged. Maggie also suggested that she start strengths spotting for this small group and, more important, that they start doing it too.

Mark looked concerned. “I would be afraid to call out someone else’s strengths. What if I get it wrong? They might be insulted or think I am stupid.”

Maggie nodded. “I know what you mean,” she said. “I felt that way to start with, but I have found that it is hard to get it wrong, and it is nearly impossible to insult someone! Because we don’t really use strengths one at a time—we are always using several—anything you spot is likely to be there somewhere. And because they are all positive, no one is going to be offended by having one pointed out. Take a look at the list and see if there is a strength you would rather not have.”

There were head shakes of no from everyone.

“Do you want to try an example, Mark?” she asked.

Mark said, “OK, why not?”

“OK,” said Maggie. “Why don’t you tell us a story of when you were at your best, and we will see what strengths we spot. Is that OK?”

“I suppose so,” Mark said hesitantly.

“There’s one,” cried Maggie. “You are a little uncomfortable with my suggestion, but you are going to try it anyway. That’s bravery!”

Mark smiled. “Bravery isn’t anywhere near the top for me. But you are right, it feels good to have that recognized as bravery. OK, I will tell a story of me at my best.”

Maggie looked at the others and said, “Take the list you have and, as Mark tells his story, see which strengths you spot. Here are some highlighters so that you can mark them on the sheet.”

“This was from last summer,” Mark started. “Some friends and I wanted to go on a trip together to Yosemite. We needed to confirm dates, determine who was going, and get prices for the flights, car rental, accommodations, and so on. Everyone assumed I would just take care of putting it all together because I am a project manager. Instead, I got everyone on a call, I got the group to list all the tasks that we needed to accomplish, we agreed on who would take each task and when they would get back to the group with the information, and we fixed a date for a call when we would make the final decisions. I agreed to set up some automatic reminders to help people remember what they were supposed to be doing, and I said I would pull together interim updates and send them out by email to the entire group. We arranged the final call well ahead of time. On the appointed day, we all got together, and everyone had their tasks completed, which was a great surprise. We had fun putting it all together, and it was exciting and energizing to have the trip on the calendar. One of my friends mentioned he was short of money until payday, so I volunteered to make the bookings with my credit card and have everyone pay me back. I got all their details and booked the flights, hotel, rental car, and so on based on the information we had discussed on the phone. As a surprise for the guys, I arranged a two-day mountain-bike tour on my own dime. We are all active and sporty, so I thought it would be fun. The trip included one night staying in yurts. We had a great time. Five days exploring and hanging out.” As he finished the story, he was smiling at the memory.

“OK,” said Maggie. “What did everyone hear?”

There was a pause while the others perused their lists.

“I will go first,” said Jackson. “I heard leadership—he got everyone organized to do their part—and teamwork—he got them to work on it together and not just offload on him. Oh, and I heard creativity—that idea of staying in yurts was great. I don’t know what one is, but just being able to say that you stayed in one is enough for me!”

“I heard kindness—lending everyone the money to book the tickets, arranging the surprise excursion for everyone, knowing they like exercise and adventure,” said April.

“I heard bravery again,” said Cristina. “I am not staying in a glorified tent with a bunch of guys, that is for sure!” Everyone laughed.

“Seriously, though,” she added, “I heard love—is it OK to say that at work? Or is that a bit weird? He clearly loves his time with his friends. And I heard judgment from the whole group to get the information together and make joint decisions about the arrangements. And, as Jackson said, that took teamwork too.”

Maggie paused them there and asked Mark what he thought. “Did they spot strengths that you don’t have?” she asked.

Mark looked thoughtful for a moment and then answered, “They saw strengths that I don’t *think* I have. But when I hear them called out and I am shown examples, I have to admit it sounds plausible.”

“And how did it feel?” asked Maggie.

“Oh, it felt good!” exclaimed Mark. “I felt like people were really seeing me and appreciating the thought and effort that I put into making this trip great for me and my friends.”

“What about Cristina’s comment about love? People often struggle with the idea of expressing love outside family.”

“It felt good,” Mark replied. “I do love my friends. They are really important to me, and I value the time I get to spend with

them. Obviously, it is not the same as loving my girlfriend, or my mom, but it still felt good when Cristina said she heard love in the story.”

The small group discussed what they wanted to do next with character strengths. They decided that they would make an effort to spot each other’s strengths throughout the day, and at the daily meeting the group would take a few minutes to provide feedback.

April and Ben said they wanted to try using the full list of strengths each day and think about how to use them. Ben said he meditates each morning, and he would make that part of the meditation.

Cristina said she was rather taken with her top strengths. They felt very authentic, so she was going to focus on using them in as many different ways as she could. Jackson and Mark agreed that they wanted to do the same thing.

As the meeting ended, there was a buzz. Maggie was pleased! She felt proud of the work they had done and the energy that they seemed to feel.

Some Character Strengths Guidelines

Although I have tried many team-building tools and techniques with my teams over the years, character strengths is the tool that created the greatest return on investment. Even before I dared to ask my own teams to take the assessment, I found that understanding my own character strengths was enormously useful and, as I developed my strengths-spotting skills, I could call attention to the strengths of team members and even management. When we identify the strengths of others, they feel seen and appreciated, and you can see a little sparkle in their eye.

By using our knowledge of character strengths, we create more effective collaborations within a team, and we can avoid unhelpful conflict and defuse previously difficult situations. We can

draw on character strengths when we need them to accelerate problem solving or ensure that testing was thorough and complete. Just being aware of character strengths helps a team see each other as special individuals and not just as functional roles within the team. Character strengths are safe, fun, and informative, and there is no magic combination that is better than any other.

Understanding Character Strengths

The list, reproduced again for convenience here, shows the full family of character strengths grouped together in six overarching virtues.

Virtue of Wisdom

(strengths that help you gather and use knowledge)

Creativity: Original and adaptive, show ingenuity, see and do things in different ways

Curiosity: Interested, seek novelty, appreciate exploration, open to experience

Judgment: Critical in your thinking, think through all sides, don't jump to conclusions

Love of learning: Interested in mastering new skills and information, systematically adding to knowledge

Perspective: Wise, provide wise counsel, take the big-picture view

Virtue of Courage

(strengths that help you exercise your will and face adversity)

Bravery: Show valor, don't shrink from threat or challenge, face fears, speak up for what's right

Perseverance: Persistent, industrious, finish what you start, overcome obstacles

Honesty: Authentic, true to yourself, sincere, show integrity

Zest: Vital, enthusiastic for life, vigorous, energetic, do things wholeheartedly

Virtue of Humanity

(strengths that help you in one-on-one relationships)

Love: Both loving and loved, value close relations with others, show genuine warmth

Kindness: Generous, nurturing, caring, compassionate, altruistic, do for others

Social intelligence: Emotionally intelligent, aware of the motives and feelings of self and others, know what makes other people tick

Virtue of Justice

(strengths that help you in community or group situations)

Teamwork: A good citizen, socially responsible, loyal, contribute to group efforts

Fairness: Adhere to principles of justice, don't let feelings bias decisions, offer equal opportunity to all

Leadership: Organize groups to get things done, positively guide others

Virtue of Temperance

(strengths that help you manage habits)

Forgiveness: Merciful, accepting of others' shortcomings, give people a second chance, let go of hurt when wronged

Humility: Modest, let your accomplishments speak for themselves

Prudence: Careful about your choices, cautious, don't take undue risks

Self-regulation: Self-controlled; disciplined; able to manage impulses, emotions, and vices

Virtue of Transcendence**(strengths that help you connect outside of yourself)****Appreciation of beauty and excellence:** Experience awe and wonder for beauty, admire skills and excellence in others, elevated by moral beauty**Gratitude:** Thankful for the good in life, express thanks, feel blessed**Hope:** Optimistic, positive and future minded, expect the best and work to achieve it**Humor:** Playful, bring smiles to others, lighthearted, see the lighter side**Spirituality/sense of meaning:** Connected with the sacred, identify purpose and meaning in life, see value in religiousness and faith

Character strengths have several characteristics that I believe are invaluable in teams:

- Character strengths celebrate a wide range of active values.
- Character strengths celebrate our differences, as well as our similarities.
- Character strengths transcend culture, religion, and language. In fact, character strengths awareness helps to create a team culture.
- Character strengths are focused on what we have to offer and not on what we need to fix.
- Character strengths help us to know and understand each other better, to live and work better together. They help create our team culture.
- Character strengths power up our talents and skills.

I won't take up too much space here going into the history of VIA character strengths.⁶ Suffice to say, Martin Seligman, in his role as president of the American Psychological Association, brought attention to the idea of studying what is right in people and not just what is wrong. Inspired to get involved in building the foundations of the field, the Mayerson Foundation commissioned Seligman⁷ and Peterson in the early 2000s to investigate the concept of character strengths. These two psychologists, along with fifty-five other experts in their fields, explored and evaluated various traits that were universally recognized and valued—that is, not just valued by one religion or culture—could not be broken down into component traits or strengths, and are concepts that show up in our societal heroes, reinforcing the sense that they are recognized and universal.

Applying Character Strengths in Everyday Life

It is tempting when we see the rankings to focus on the lesser strengths. Cristina demonstrated this tendency earlier in the chapter—the ones at the bottom of the list. We, in the United States at least, live in a deficit culture, and we naturally gravitate to those bottom ones, although I hope that as project managers we can start to change that. As you will see even more clearly in the next chapter, even a small dose of some strengths goes a long way. Just as a pinch of salt is needed in a cake, a pinch of a lower strength can be effective when we need it.

6. You can find out much more at <http://www.viacharacter.org> or in Seligman and Peterson, *Character Strengths and Virtues*.

7. Seligman is known for his work on learned helplessness and, more recently, learned optimism. He has authored several books, most recently contributing to the book *Homo Prospectus*, coauthored with Peter Railton, Roy F. Baumeister, and Chandra Sripada (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). He is widely considered to be the founding father of positive psychology, which found its footing when Seligman was the president of the American Psychological Association.

Building Your Awareness

Generally, there are three stages to leveraging character strengths. The first stage is simply to be aware of your own strengths. This means understanding which ones are the most significant to you, which ones come into play based on the situation you are in, and which ones are more of a stretch for you. Once you have your strengths assessment, keep it handy, practice looking out for your top strengths throughout the day, and notice when and where they show up. Our top strengths—usually but not always the top five to seven—are known as signature strengths. These are your go-to strengths. These are the ones that make you feel energized, engaged, and effective.

Don't be surprised if you have a negative first reaction to the top strengths or if you think that they are incorrect. Although the assessment could get it wrong from time to time, there are often other explanations for feeling disconnected from the strengths at the top of your list.

First, we are sometimes disappointed. Having read the descriptions of all twenty-four character strengths, we may hope we are zesty or have high social intelligence. Instead we find we have prudence, judgment, love of learning, and kindness at the top of our list, and we are a little crestfallen. For those of you who have those top strengths, be proud and happy. They are great strengths!

This is the time to remind ourselves that we all have all the strengths, at least to some extent; there are no “bad” character strengths to have; and we can learn to cultivate strengths if we really want more of one or another. When Lexi took her character strengths assessment, she was shocked to discover that love was low on her list and that her top strengths were what she considered to be “very practical” strengths such as judgment, perseverance, and bravery. Initially she argued with the results, saying love should have been at the top. Maggie and she discussed her

dismay, and she agreed to keep her list of top strengths handy and see which strengths showed up throughout the day. She went away and reevaluated over the course of a few days. When she came back, she said she had been watching herself at work and had come to realize that she is quite guarded with the people around her. She recognized that even though she understands the value of having a strong network of friends and family, she has not invested in building that network at work. She also recognized that when there is something practical to be done, she is often the one to step forward and take it on and that she feels good doing that. Remember when she and Owen picked up the pens to get the list of positives on the whiteboard in Chapter 2? She also consulted with family, who confirmed that they saw her top strengths clearly in everything that she does. Armed with this new sense of self-awareness, she decided to pay more attention to building connections and to boost her strength of love. She said, laughing, “I will *persevere* until the strength of love is more accessible to me.” She illustrated how it is possible to use a signature strength to boost a lesser strength.

Another reason we may not recognize our top strengths is because they are so natural to us that we don’t think of them as being strengths at all. We may assume that everyone has them and experiences life through the same lens. Miranda was surprised to see appreciation of beauty and excellence as her top strength. Even more shocking to her was the idea that not everyone experiences the sunset, the full moon, the changing of the seasons, a beautiful fresh salad, or the performance of a virtuoso musician with the same sense of awe that she feels.

April, too, had appreciation of beauty and excellence near the top of her list, and she recalled a day when she was out walking with a friend. She said to her friend (for whom appreciation of beauty and excellence was ranked seventeenth), “Isn’t this view

amazing?” with wonder in her eyes. The friend turned to her and said, “Not really—it is just trees.”

A third thing to consider is that we sometimes have preconceptions of how a strength will show up. Taking the strength of appreciation of beauty and excellence again, the examples are often related to nature or art and music, but it can just as easily be demonstrated by appreciating an invention, or the skill that a craftsman shows in constructing a house, or the dedication of a nurse to his patients. If one of your strengths surprises you, think about how the application of that strength for you may differ from common parlance.

Bravery, for example, is a strength that surprises people because they have not performed acts of public bravery such as rescuing someone from a burning building. And yet if they have social anxiety and stand up and speak anyway, then they are being brave; if they are afraid of spiders but rush to the aid of a loved one who is more terrified than they are, they are being brave.⁸

Exploring Your Strengths

The next stage is to explore strengths. This is about connecting this list of character strengths to the way that you act, interact, and experience life.

As mentioned earlier, we customarily describe the strengths in our profile that we pull on every day as signature strengths. We usually use these strengths without regard to context, and they feel natural, easy, and energizing.

The next group of strengths, our phasic or situational strengths, are those that we don't go to naturally in every circumstance but that show up when we need them. In certain circum-

8. For a very readable discussion of the topic of bravery, check out Robert Biswas-Diener, *The Courage Quotient: How Science Can Make You Braver* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012).

stances, these strengths may come very naturally. Context has a much greater relevance with these strengths. Even a strength that is very near the bottom of the ranking can be a phasic strength. A great example is our old friend self-regulation. For most people, this strength appears very low in the ranking, but when we need it—on the day when we don't want to get out of bed but we must; when we want a glass of wine but we are the designated driver; when we want to slump in front of a movie on television but it is parents' night at school—we pull on this strength to get the job done.

Before continuing, here are a couple of quick reminders.

First, and I cannot emphasize this enough, we *all* have *all* the character strengths to a greater or lesser degree. Even your lowest strength shows up sometimes and can even feel good.

Second, all the character strengths are positive. There is no ideal profile, no special combination that is better than any other. Unlike a cake, which requires specific ingredients, the potluck of character strengths means that we can mix the ingredients any way we like and, if we use our character strengths thoughtfully, still come out with the cake that we want!

As you look through your own assessment, what things strike you about the profile? Do you recognize the top-listed strengths as those that you use every day? Are there others that you feel are go-to strengths—that feel natural and make you feel good?

If you can, make a list of the strengths that you consider to be your signature strengths, and make a note of how you use them daily. Another fun activity is to ask others who see you often what strengths they see every day. In this informal 360, see if they spot the same strengths that you see, and then compare both lists to your assessment.

Consider someone whom you admire and think about what strengths you can see in him or her. Are they the same strengths

you have, or do you admire the person because he or she seems to display strengths that are harder for you to use?

It is not uncommon for those who take the assessment to initially dismiss one or two of their top strengths as “not them.” This is usually because they use these strengths so automatically that they are virtually unaware of them. A great way to search for your signature strengths is to think through your day and write down some thoughts about your activities and interactions with others. Then read back over your notes and see what strengths you spot that seem to come up time and again, and in different contexts—home and work, when busy and when relaxing, when working and when playing, when doing something mundane, and when you are really focused on an activity.

One that comes up for me all the time is curiosity. It does not matter where I am or what I am doing, I am always curious! Once, I woke up in the middle of surgery on my foot. Rather than freaking out, my first question was, “What are you doing now?” and my second question was, “Can I watch?” The surgeon was not as calm as I was!

His prudence—which was pushing him to sedate me again quickly—was, however, balanced with judgment and kindness, and he assessed the situation and did indeed let me watch.

Going Further with Character Strengths

Further exploration of character strengths helps them go from being theoretical to being something that you can conjure up and apply as you need to.

A great way to think about how your strengths come into play is to think about times you have been at your best. Journaling about those times and then reviewing your notes to spot the strengths that came up is very helpful. Another option is to tell stories with others and spot strengths in them. As you start to

Making It Stick for You

1. Keep a note of the strengths you notice yourself using during the day.
 2. Watch your team members, friends, and family. See what strengths they have.
 3. Ask those who know you what strengths they see. It can be fun—and useful—to create an informal 360 assessment. Give out the list to several people and see what strengths they see in you, then compare their list with your own self-assessment.
-

Strategies for Success

1. **Be hopeful:** Think about how you want to use strengths each day and then make a note of the effect of your choices.
2. **Be strong:** Know your own strengths well.
3. **Be brave:** Take note of the strengths of others and then share your observations. No one ever says they don't want a strength that someone else sees.
4. **Be curious:** Take note of the effect of sharing your observations and then look for different ways to engage with others about their strengths.

recognize strengths in the stories other people tell, you will get more comfortable noticing your own strengths. And you can do this anywhere. It can be a great way to stay focused in a meeting. Make a note of the strengths you hear and, after the meeting, be brave and approach someone to express your appreciation. See what response you get!

Exploring strengths is also a great thing to do with family or friends. Carefully listen to the language people use to describe

their thinking and their actions and then see how the strengths appear.

Building Your Strengths

Are there strengths that you would like to try on for size and cultivate? You can do that too! We will go into more detail in the next chapter, but there are ways you can build your character strengths regardless of where they are in your ranking. What are your greatest strengths as a project manager? In Chapter 1, I highlighted the prevalence of hope and love of learning, as well as prudence and appreciation, but there is no prescription for a set of character strengths that makes a project manager. In the next chapter, we explore this question further and consider other ways we can use character strengths knowledge to understand ourselves and our teams.

5

Building a Culture of Appreciation for Our Stakeholders and Teams



Seeing strengths in others is often easier than seeing them in ourselves.

Project Management and Leadership

One of the beauties of working with character strengths is that people start to spot them everywhere. After an initial conversation about them and an introduction to the basic concepts, it is easy for anyone to start applying them. Usually, it does not take much for someone who knows about his or her own strengths to start seeing and acknowledging strengths in others. There is an immediate uptick in positivity and sense of connection.

Things to Look Out For

1. Understand how practicing spotting character strengths helps project managers become more engaged.
2. Learn how character strengths apply at work—happiness strengths, performance strengths, character strengths, and team roles.
3. Discover ways to engage the whole team in knowing, appreciating, and applying character strengths.

Maggie's team had that experience. A few days after the meeting in Chapter 4, the feedback on strengths was positive. Cristina, Mark, and Jackson reported back on their experience of using signature strengths with such enthusiasm that the discussion turned to what personal strengths mean and how to interpret their top strengths. They were particularly interested, as project managers, to focus on how to use the strengths to get things done!

To start off the discussion, Maggie asked the group what they thought were the traits of a good leader. Maggie had been told before joining the team that April was a good leader and that she seemed to have a natural talent for getting people organized and energized about achieving project goals. Before the meeting, in one of their one-on-ones, Maggie had asked whether April would be willing to share her profile with the small group so they could do a strengths application exercise. April had willingly agreed. If she hadn't, Maggie was planning to use her own profile, but she was thrilled when April said yes because it made it much more relatable to the group.

The group came up with the following list:

- Leaders build *trust* and they delegate.
- They take notice of the small details; they pay *attention*.
- They feel and show *respect*—and not just for the most senior person but for everyone.
- They don't believe they are the smartest person in the room—they take input from others and *learn*.
- They see team members as whole people and not just resources to get the work done; they are *kind*.
- They are *honest*.

- They are energizing and *engaging*.
- They are *hopeful* and optimistic.
- They have vision and pull others into that vision; they are *inspiring*.

Are there other qualities that you believe are essential in an effective leader?

Note: Many people have become team and project leaders and managers because they were good at something technical and someone asked them to step up and take on a leadership role. Or, like me, they were in the right place at the right time and were asked to jump in. Often, they feel underprepared and, even more often, unqualified. “I am not a leader” is a frequent lament. Their concern is understandable, as Gallup research¹ shows that the most common reason we leave an organization is our manager!

Leadership in the context of character strengths is defined as “encouraging a group to get things done and preserving harmony within the group by making everyone feel included. Organizing activities and ensuring that they happen.”² When someone who has been put in a management or leadership position sees leadership somewhere in the middle or even toward the bottom of his or her profile, the person feels vindicated. “There! You see? I am not a leader. The strength of leadership is only number twelve

1. Gallup, *State of the American Manager*, 2015 report (Washington, DC: Gallup, 2015), <http://www.gallup.com/services/182138/state-american-manager.aspx>.

2. <https://www.viacharacter.org/www/Character-Strengths/Leadership>.

[or eighteen or twenty or any other number] for me.”
Sometimes they tell me they are in the wrong job.

After the group had discussed the traits of a leader, April volunteered to let the group use her profile to work with. She had been recognized by senior management, team members, outside stakeholders, and partners as someone who can lead a project *and* engage a team. She always insisted she was “just doing her job,” but her leadership skills had gotten her noticed.

These are April’s top six strengths:

1. Appreciation of beauty and excellence
2. Bravery
3. Curiosity
4. Fairness
5. Gratitude
6. Humor

April revealed that her strength of leadership ranked twelfth.³ For April, leadership is considered a situational strength—one that shows up when needed but is not always energizing, nor always very easy to use. And yet, even absent leadership as a top strength, this is the profile of someone who is thought by everyone to be a leader.

The group considered how her profile relates to the qualities that they had identified as being part of being a good leader. The group looked puzzled and acknowledged that they could not immediately see how these strengths make a leader. Maggie asked the group to discuss what they see in April that makes them de-

3. That is slightly lower than the average for the population at large, which ranks it eleventh. Robert E. McGrath, “Character Strengths in 75 Nations: An Update,” *Journal of Positive Psychology* 10, no. 1 (2015): 41–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.888580>.

scribe her as a leader. They listed recognition of the contributions of others and being willing to call them out. Mark said that April makes people feel that their contribution is valued and that she is thankful to them for doing their job. Ben mentioned that April is not shy when it comes to challenging someone on the team or outside the team. She is willing to have difficult conversations when they are needed. Jackson stressed that April is inclusive and does not act as though she has all the answers. She solicits the ideas and input of the rest of the team— whoever they may be. Cristina mentioned that she found April to be really evenhanded in her dealings with everyone. “She does not play favorites or treat some people as better than others,” Cristina said.

While the conversation was going on, April was busy scribbling. “I’ve got it!” she said excitedly. She put this grid in the middle of the table (Figure 5.1).

“I see it!” she said. “I can see how my strengths help me to do the things that leaders have to do!”

The rest of the group leaned forward to look more closely.

Maggie explained that this is not to say that April does not draw on her leadership strength from time to time when needed. As we saw from Mark’s story earlier, people call on *all* their strengths from time to time—not just their top strengths. But in an average day, April will gravitate to her top strengths to get the job done. When Maggie asked her how she feels about being in a leadership position, she answered, “I have never considered it a leadership position, whatever others may say! I am honored to be able to be in my role so that others can get their work done. I believe that it is up to me to get whatever the team needs to be its best and to achieve great results.” Not only was she able to be effective as a leader, she enjoyed the role. And yet, she did not see herself as a leader, and the strength of leadership was not a top strength.

FIGURE 5.1 Leader Strength Mapping

| Strength | Description | April's explanation |
|--|---|---|
| Appreciation of beauty and excellence | Notices and appreciates beauty, excellence, and skilled performance in all domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience | Recognizing and showing appreciation for the strengths and contribution of others; appreciating steps toward the bigger vision, even when they are small |
| Bravery | Does not shrink from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; speaks up for what is right even if there is opposition; acts on convictions | Having difficult conversations when necessary; not afraid to admit when she doesn't know the answer |
| Curiosity | Interested in learning more about anything and everything; always asking questions; finds all subjects fascinating; likes exploration and discovery | Inviting input from others; being open to ideas that others bring to the table; always seeking more information; paying attention to small details; curious about how to make the vision come to fruition |
| Fairness | Treating people fairly is an abiding principle; does not let personal feelings bias decisions about others; gives everyone a chance | Showing respect and appreciation for everyone; not concerned with rank or position |
| Gratitude | Aware of the good things that happen and never takes them for granted; always takes the time to express thanks | Offering appropriate recognition; enthusiastic about new opportunities; making people feel part of the solution |
| Humor | Likes to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people is important; tries to see the light side of all situations | Lightening the mood in tough times; encouraging relaxation and play; creating energy and engagement |

Note: What we see with character strengths over and over again is that there is no magic recipe. Used thoughtfully and intentionally, character strengths position us to do whatever we want—or need—to do. Of course, talents, skills, training, and experience all add to our character strengths to position us for the things we take on; but at the character strength level, we are not pigeonholed or categorized by our strengths.

Now it is your turn! Take a look at the profile in Figure 5.2 (also the real profile of a person in a project leadership position). How might these character strengths be used in a leadership role?

Next Steps with Character Strengths:

The Story Continues

“OK,” said Cristina, “what do we do with this next?”

“Yes,” said Jackson, “how do we use this with the whole team?”

Everyone turned expectantly toward Maggie.

“Well, there are a few options,” Maggie replied. “We can keep practicing with the strengths spotting ourselves and start sharing what we see with our colleagues and then see how they respond. If we model seeing and acknowledging strengths, other people are likely to follow suit.”

“I like that,” said Mark. “Actually, I have a story from the other day that I feel should help me spot strengths, but I couldn’t make them out. Can I share it?” He looked at Cristina and said, “Cristina has said she is OK with my sharing it. Right, Cristina?”

Cristina nodded a little reluctantly.

Jackson said, “Go on! I am dying to hear the story. It sounds interesting!”

Mark started telling his story. “As you know, our team has been hitting some real obstacles with our next deliverable.

FIGURE 5.2 Leader Strengths Mapping Practice

| Strength | Description | Leader's explanation |
|------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| Perseverance | Works hard to finish whatever has been started; no matter the project, gets it out the door in timely fashion; does not get distracted when working; takes satisfaction in completing tasks | |
| Self-regulation | Consciously regulates feelings and actions; a disciplined person; in control of appetites and emotions | |
| Honesty | A straightforward person, not only by speaking the truth but also by living life in a genuine, authentic way; down-to-earth and without pretense; a "real" person | |
| Hope | Expects the best in the future and works to achieve it; believes that the future is something that we can control | |
| Love | Values close relations with others, those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated | |
| Teamwork | Excels as a member of a group; a loyal and dedicated teammate; always does his or her share; works hard for the success of a group | |

Essentially, the approach and time frame we were working with have proved unrealistic. The rest of my team approached me the other day a little nervously. They are kind of used to me leading the way and looking on the bright side. I could see that no one wanted to be the one to tell me the bad news!

“The team laid everything out. We kicked the tires of the analysis, just to make sure that we were not missing anything. I said, ‘Well, it’s just not going to work the way we planned it.’

“No one seemed to want to say anything, but then one person—I don’t want to put anyone on the spot, so I’ll call him John—said, ‘What, no “happy-go-lucky, we can make it happen” response?’ The whole team laughed nervously and then stared at me.

“I wanted to jump in with suggestions. But, thinking about my strengths of love of learning and social intelligence that we discussed last week, I deliberately asked a question instead. ‘Can we make it work?’

“John looked me in the eye and replied, ‘No.’”

Maggie interrupted and said, “You mentioned that everyone seemed nervous and yet ‘John’ spoke up. Do you think he used any character strengths there?”

Cristina jumped in and said, “Sounds pretty brave to me!”

Mark laughed. “Oh yes, I suppose it was brave! I was thinking it was judgment—he sort of weighed things up and decided it was better to speak up.”

“Sounds like both to me!” said Maggie. “I think we have discussed how strengths usually travel together. What happened next?”

“Yes,” continued Mark, “I looked around the group and asked, ‘What further analysis do we want to do? What else can we do? Are we giving up too easily? What have we missed?’

“There was another pause, and then one person said, ‘We did our best. It just won’t work the way we planned it.’ They all nodded.

“So, what do you think we need to do next?” I asked. “What other options are available?” I really felt good about using my strengths and letting the team work this out.

“Someone—you may be able to guess who that is [Cristina fidgeted in her chair but smiled]—stepped forward. ‘I have an idea,’ she said. ‘It won’t meet the committed timeline, but I think it will work. I just need some help to make sure I’ve thought of everything.’”

“Well, you know me!” said Cristina. “Creativity girl! That is a top strength of mine, you know!”

Everyone laughed. Mark continued, “Then the team gathered around a whiteboard and started problem solving. That’s when Maggie arrived. I can’t explain what happened next. I have never seen anything like it. Normally I would think that I have to lead the activity, but they just ran with it themselves.”

Maggie stepped in. “Oh, it was a great example of strengths coming to the fore. I remember I saw humor as the group came together and had a few laughs to get started. Several of them expressed curiosity about the problem and what options there were to solve it. I was really impressed by their humility and judgment—no one assumed his or her own idea was the best or the only idea. Everyone listened closely to each other’s ideas. Owen really demonstrated his leadership in getting everyone organized and moving forward. Of course, the entire group showed tremendous teamwork by working together to develop a joint solution. You already had bravery and creativity. And you did a great job, Mark, with self-regulation and social intelligence by taking the step back and letting them get on with it.”

Mark look pleased. “And hope,” he added. “I really was optimistic that they would figure something out.”

Mark continued. “Each team member contributed—both to the technical solution and in the way the team worked together to leverage strengths. I even think I saw self-regulation come into

play during the discussion as frustrations rose. Catherine really stepped up there. Prudence—that was Owen—ensured that no question was left unasked, that no proposal would be made until the team was confident. I could feel the energy levels rising, and then the solution came into focus. At that point, I walked away and left them to get on with it.”

“And what happened in the end?” asked Maggie.

“Oh, about an hour later, the team came to me and laid out the new plan,” answered Mark. “I was so pleased and impressed. It was elegant and well thought out; all it needed was additional time for implementation. I felt good. That is *my* job, right? I will use my leadership and perseverance to get us what we need. The team was so positive about the new plan that some of them had already decided to work on it over the weekend so we would lose as little time as possible.

“By the way, Maggie, we need to talk about the deadline . . .”

Mark stopped talking and looked around the room. There was a brief pause, and then the others started talking about situations they had been in over the last few days in which they felt they had started to really notice the strengths of the people around them and they had been able to target their own strengths.

Ben turned to Maggie and asked, “If you don’t mind my asking, what did Owen’s prudence look like? He has always just seemed like an anxious guy to me. Isn’t he the one who told you on the first day that everyone is always getting sick, Maggie?”

Maggie looked at Mark and said, “What do you think, Mark?”

He thought for a moment. “Well, Owen was very methodical, and he was the one taking notes. He made sure that he got all the ideas down, and then he ran through them all with everyone so that they could evaluate them one by one. He reminded everyone that they could not afford to take a chance on getting things wrong again. When everyone thought they had a good plan, he asked some questions to challenge the thinking. Someone else—I

think it was Callie—was a big factor in weighing the pros and cons. I suppose that would be . . .” He paused for a moment, thinking. “Judgment?” he said tentatively. “Anyway, at the end, they had a good plan clearly laid out that I could understand. It was Owen who got it to the point that they could share it with me.”

“Wouldn’t it be great if the entire team knew about strengths?” asked Cristina. “How do you think it would be if we asked the whole team to do the assessment? Do you think they would take it? I would love to know what strengths we have in the team. I wonder which ones show up most? And I wonder if any don’t show up much at all? I would think that in a large team all the strengths will show up as top strengths in someone, but who knows?”

Maggie was pleased to see that they were enthusiastic. They were already over their allotted time for the meeting. She asked if they wanted to continue or save it until tomorrow.

“Well, I would like us to at least decide on a next step,” said Mark.

“I just want to say how much I appreciate all this feedback and discussion,” said April. It has really helped me to get a better understanding of what strengths look like in the real world!”

“Well, how about next time we discuss the research about character strengths and the way they get used in teams? Maybe that will help us to decide what to do with this next and specifically how to introduce strengths to the team,” suggested Maggie.

Everyone agreed that they would plan for the next day’s meeting to be an hour so they would have enough time to explore the options for next steps.

Character Strengths in Teams

In the next meeting, Maggie introduced three topics related to teams and character strengths, all based on research.

“I have always liked that character strengths are well researched—especially in the workplace—and are evidence based. They are not just one person’s idea of what makes us special or what makes us tick.”

Maggie explained some of the benefits of using character strengths in the workplace:

1. Using our highest (signature) strengths at work helps us to be more aligned with organizational needs and makes us more productive and effective.⁴
 - a. Use of signature strengths is associated with higher performance.
 - b. Signature strengths use is associated with organizational citizenship behavior.
 - c. Additionally, signature strengths use tends to reduce the counterproductive work behavior that otherwise occurs.
2. Using happiness strengths—curiosity, gratitude, hope, love, and zest—builds engagement and increases well-being and job satisfaction.⁵
3. There is some early research showing that satisfaction with certain roles in a team is related to character strengths use.⁶

4. Hadassah Littman-Ovadia, Shiri Lavy, and Maayan Boiman-Meshita, “When Theory and Research Collide: Examining Correlates of Signature Strengths Use at Work,” *Journal of Happiness Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2 (2017): 527–548, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-016-9739-8>.

5. Littman-Ovadia, Lavy, and Boiman-Meshita.

6. Willibald Ruch, Fabian Gander, Tracey Platt, and Jennifer Hofmann, “Team Roles: Their Relationships to Character Strengths and Job Satisfaction,” *Journal of Positive Psychology*, published ahead of print, November 14, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1257051>.

Jackson and April immediately started asking questions. Mark started thinking about how they could use the information with the team. Ben asked lots of questions about how the group could realistically incorporate this into the team as a whole.

Maggie pointed out that this little group of project managers had a high concentration of the happiness strengths (hope: three people; zest: one person; love: one person; gratitude: two people; curiosity: three people). Everyone nodded, and April asked what they could do with that knowledge.

Surprisingly, Ben jumped in and said, “Well, Mark used curiosity with his team by asking questions. He showed it and they responded. I guess if we as a group really think about how to use these strengths every day, we will benefit, and maybe we will influence others to use them too. Then we will *all* be more engaged and feel a greater sense of meaning in work!”

“That’s great. Thank you, Ben,” said Maggie. “What else?”

Cristina chimed in. “It feels to me as though we really want to get the team to know about strengths. Why don’t we tell them we took the assessment and ask them to take it too? We can take a chance, I think. Maybe they say yes—I think we have a lot of people high in curiosity and love of learning out there! If they don’t, well . . . then we have to get creative!”

Mark supported her idea. “If we explain that you know about this stuff, Maggie, and that we have tried it and like it, *and* that knowing their top strengths will help them feel and do better at work, why would they say no?”

Maggie said she would draft an email to the team around the world asking them to join in. The group would review it the next day.

“What about this stuff about roles, Maggie?” asked Jackson.

“The research has only just begun, but the hypothesis is that there are seven core roles in a team and that character strengths

have a part in why people are in the roles they are in and the level of job satisfaction they feel in relation to those roles,” explained Maggie.

“How can they compare roles across teams?” asked Cristina. “The roles on an IT team like ours are a lot different from those on a medical team or a construction team.”

“They are not functional roles,” explained Maggie. “The list is Idea Creator, Information Gatherer, Decision Maker, Influencer, Implementer, Relationship Manager, and Energizer.”⁷ Maggie counted off on her fingers as she listed the seven roles. “Each role is what it sounds like, and while it seems that all our character strengths are related to the roles we play in a team, some strengths are more strongly related than others. For example, it is no surprise that an Idea Creator is likely to be high in creativity; a Decision Maker is likely to have high leadership and bravery; and an Influencer is likely to feel more energized if he or she is high in hope, social intelligence, or teamwork.

“It works the other way too. If someone is assigned to an Information Gatherer role, he or she is likely to be more energized in that role by cultivating self-regulation, prudence, teamwork, humility, or judgment, even if those are not the person’s top strengths. All the team roles seem to be highly correlated to zest and hope.”

“We are off to a good start in this group,” laughed Jackson. “We should be able to turn our hand to any of the roles!”

“And if hope and zest help us with any of the roles,” said April, “then we can help build those in the team. It sort of goes hand in hand with focusing on those happiness strengths you mentioned earlier.”

“So, if we had the entire team take the assessment, would we be able to see who should be doing what?” asked Mark.

FIGURE 5.3 Team Role Definitions

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Idea Creators | enjoy generating ideas to solve problems and facilitate growth. They innovate, reframe, renew, revolutionize. Whether dealing with simple daily issues or big strategic challenges, the “idea creators” are essential to the future of any business. |
| Information Gatherers | enjoy learning about best practices, new market trends, vendors, competitors, market forces, and finance. They like sharing what they learn in writing or presentations. |
| Decision Makers | are energized by analyzing information from various perspectives, weighing evidence, applying logic, and choosing a fruitful course of action. |
| Implementers | execute decisions. They are the “doers,” the ones who manufacture, market, sell, and deliver. Those who get things done are the backbone of every organization. |
| Influencers | are full of hope and enthusiasm, relishing the challenge of convincing others. They are essential to weather opposition and rejection as they continuously work to persuade customers, bankers, investors, and shareholders that the enterprise has value. |
| Energizers | are naturally dynamic. They’re like power plants, humming briskly through obstacles, rarely burning out, quarter to quarter and year to year. They infect others with the energy and enthusiasm to persevere. |
| Relationship Managers | are especially well suited to build networks of people, resolve conflicts, and motivate and encourage people. They are good listeners with caring hearts, sympathetic ears, and practical advice. Such relationship-managers are essential to any business. |

© Copyright 2004–2018, VIA Institute on Character. All rights reserved. Used with permission. www.viacharacter.org. Reprinted from the VIA Institute on Character, Employee Role Matching Report.

“It doesn’t really work like that,” answered Maggie. As she spoke, she handed out the chart shown in Figure 5.3.

“Here are the descriptions of the roles. For now, as this is new, we don’t have an easily accessible way to measure the fit of someone to each role. And it is not as simple as just looking at a profile, seeing what the top strengths are, and making a determination of the best role fit! But I find it helps me to really pay attention to the way people behave and look at whether they seem to gravitate to a particular role within the team. And it helps us to see that people are sometimes forced into performing roles that are not that energizing for them. Using the role descriptions and working with the team on character strengths, we can give some thought to how engaged they are in their roles. Does that sound OK?”

Ben chipped in, “It seems as though it’s just another perspective on the whole character strengths approach. Some strengths are associated more with happiness, some are associated with higher performance or job satisfaction. These are all ways that we can have conversations with our colleagues about who they are and what their strengths mean.”

Cristina smiled and started speaking. “This makes me think of something that happened the other day with Lexi. She is really busy working on analyzing some options for fixing a problem we have with one of the interface designs. She overheard me saying that we need to create a presentation to show to the other teams to get them on board with our new release management approach. She volunteered to help us with the presentation in her spare time. I was grateful for the help—she is so energetic and knows how to get people to support new ideas—so I said yes. She, Miranda, and I worked on the presentation, and she really helped us to put something simple and persuasive together. But within a couple of days, I noticed that she was behind on the analysis and was spending all her time on the presentation.

It ended up being a great presentation, but now we have to catch up on our problem solving!

“As I look at this chart, would she be a natural Influencer and maybe an Energizer, and when she is doing the analysis, perhaps it is more the information-gathering and decision-making roles that she does not feel so comfortable with?”

Maggie answered, “That could well be.”

Ben said, “Well, we cannot always be doing the things that make us feel our best. She needs to get us that analysis!”

Mark added, “I guess this might be one of the reasons that tasks go off track and get delivered late—people are working in a role that does not feel like a great fit, so it takes extra effort to get the work done.”

“Hmm, that is actually useful to know,” said April. “If we can spot when someone is feeling de-energized and unenthusiastic, we can help the person focus his or her strengths and see the job at hand as important.”

“And, if we cultivate those happiness strengths, we should all be working more effectively! Cristina, Jackson, and I can certainly get our curiosity going!”

“OK,” said Mark, “what are our next steps? Are we going to ask the entire team to take the assessment?”

“Yes, that is the plan,” answered Maggie. “We will put together an email and get this going.”

Introducing Character Strengths to the Team

A few days later, Maggie had drafted an email inviting the whole team to take the character strengths assessment, and the team had reviewed it and was excited to move forward. The initial group was hopeful that the rest of the team would take to character strengths as much as they had, and they could not wait to learn more about their colleagues.

Maggie included a brief overview of what character strengths are, as well as the list of strengths grouped by virtues. Each of the small-group members included a sentence or two about what they liked about character strengths and why they would like the team to participate. Here are some examples of what they wrote.

Mark: “I was skeptical at first that an assessment could really be that helpful. Maggie asked me to try this out, to keep an open mind, and I did it to be supportive of her. Now we have taken it, and we have explored our strengths as a group, I feel I have a greater appreciation of my colleagues.”

April: “I was able to appreciate why I like my role so much: I get to leverage the best qualities of all my colleagues.”

Ben: “This really is a straightforward but meaningful way to get to know each other and to play to strengths—literally. And it is fun!”

Cristina: “I was curious to see what my strengths would look like and whether I would agree with what the assessment said. Now I am really curious to see what strengths we have in the team!”

The email went out with a link to the assessment. Within two days, over forty people had taken it. A few days later, twice that number had taken it. The question was how to collect the results without putting people on the spot or making them feel uncomfortable.

The small group met again to strategize. They decided to create grids containing the twenty-four strengths on flip charts and then give each team member five sticky notes. Each person would go up to the sheets at some time during the day and stick a note in the box for each of his or her top five strengths, and then Maggie and April would pull all the results together. They were able to get a lead person from each of the overseas locations to do the same. The overseas leads sent the results to Maggie, and she put

FIGURE 5.4 Team Character Strengths Counts

| Strength | Count | Strength | Count | Strength | Count |
|------------------|--------------|---------------------------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Creativity | 23 | Curiosity | 17 | Judgment | 11 |
| Love of learning | 12 | Perspective | 6 | Bravery | 12 |
| Perseverance | 26 | Honesty | 33 | Zest | 7 |
| Love | 31 | Kindness | 29 | Social intelligence | 12 |
| Teamwork | 30 | Fairness | 30 | Leadership | 18 |
| Forgiveness | 4 | Humility | 6 | Prudence | 13 |
| Self-regulation | 8 | Appreciation of beauty and excellence | 17 | Gratitude | 7 |
| Hope | 18 | Humor | 17 | Spirituality | 11 |

them together with the local team's strengths and came up with the grid shown in Figure 5.4.

The grid was created by counting up to the top five strengths of each person who wanted to share his or her results.

Maggie and the small group met to discuss what they wanted to do with this information next.

After some discussion, the group decided to make the topic of the next stand-up meeting the results of the survey of assessments. Ben suggested that they come up with a set of questions to help guide the discussion.

They agreed on the following five questions:

1. What do you think of this profile?
2. What stands out?

3. What works?
4. What do you want to change?
5. What next?

Maggie was going to walk everyone through the strengths and answer questions. “Feel free to chip in with ideas,” Maggie said. “You are all getting really good with this, and you have lots to share with the team.”

The next morning, the grid with the results was pinned up on the wall. The local team gathered for the stand-up, and Maggie stepped forward.

“Thank you all for taking the character strengths assessment and for sharing your results. We really appreciate your teamwork and your bravery! Today we are going to explore the results. I think you will find it pretty interesting. Looking at the grid, what stands out to you?”

There was a long pause, and then Lexi stepped forward. “We are a little low on forgiveness!” she commented. The others laughed.

“But we are high in honesty!” said Owen. “We aren’t shy about saying what we think or letting someone know when he or she messes up, but we don’t forgive each other easily.”

“Yes, I have noticed that sometimes we get hung up on whose fault it is instead of letting a mistake go and focusing on the solution,” said Miranda. There were some nods of appreciation.

Maggie stepped forward again to explain that we all have all the strengths, that they are all available to us. She also explained a little about signature strengths and why the grid only captured the top five for each person. She shared that typically we have four to seven signature strengths. They feel natural, energizing,

and easy to use, and they tend to show up in most things we do. Our next ten to fifteen strengths don't come as naturally to us and tend to be more context specific. Some may show up more at home, such as love or kindness, and others may show up more at work, such as prudence, teamwork, or leadership. Finally, we have lesser strengths, which are the ones that are hardest to call on and feel the least like us. Maggie emphasized again that we *all* have *all* the strengths, and she encouraged people to focus on what they can do with their top strengths rather than focusing on their lesser strengths and what is "wrong with them."

At this point, Arizona spoke up. One of the designers, Arizona had been quiet in most of the larger meetings, but she and Maggie had had a great conversation about how to make the design process more robust and more fun.

"My lowest strength is humility," she said. "And I am absolutely fine with that! I know my stuff, and I own it. I stand by what I say and do. Some people may think I am arrogant, but I think humility is overrated! And it's not that I don't appreciate the input and perspectives of other people; I gather information (I am high in judgment, by the way), I make an assessment, and I believe in my ability to get it right!"

The entire group laughed. Owen said, "No surprise there, Arizona!"

"So, getting back to our forgiveness, even though we don't score high in it on the team, that does not mean we are not forgiving, right?" asked Lexi.

"That's right," said Maggie. "We all have the capacity to use and show forgiveness; it is just that for most of us, it is not a go-to strength. It is not what makes us 'us'! What else do you see?"

"Well, look at those scores in honesty, teamwork, fairness, and kindness. We have lots of people who have top strengths that sound pretty good," said Callie.

“And love,” said Owen. “That seems like an odd strength for the workplace.”

At this point Jackson stepped in. “That’s actually one of my top strengths,” he said. “I have learned that it means that I value close relationships. In my case, I think it shows up in the fact that I see this team as my extended family. I don’t just want to interact with you in a purely professional, ‘let’s get the job’ done way. That was why I was excited to learn about character strengths and to share them with the team.”

Jackson looked at Maggie and asked, “Is it OK if I ask a different question from the ones we had on our list?” Maggie smiled and nodded.

“There are thirty other people on the team who have love as one of their top strengths. How do you think it shows up at work? I know some of them are in the other offices, but I assume I am not the only one here.” Jackson looked a little uncomfortable and stepped back to the side of the room.

A couple of other people raised their hands.

“I have love as a top strength,” said George. “I agree—this team feels a lot like family. That is what makes it easy to come to work when things are stressful. I feel a sense of connection to my colleagues and I value our interactions.”

“Yeah, that sounds about right,” said Miranda.

“What works?” asked Maggie, relieving Jackson from having to continue the questions.

“I think it all works,” answered Teddy, another new voice in the conversation. Maggie was excited to see how the topic of character strengths had more people engaged in the exchange. “We share a lot of great strengths, such as teamwork, love, kindness, and honesty. That feels almost as though we are speaking a shared language. And then we have strengths that are rarer in the group,” Teddy continued. “That gives each of us a special role, a way we can contribute that maybe others would find harder to do.”

“That is great, thank you, Teddy,” said Maggie. “So, what do you want to change?” she asked.

“I would like to see more focus on gratitude. That is very important to me.” Preston was speaking now and was looking very earnest. “It sometimes feels as though people don’t appreciate the good things.”

Maggie interjected, “What is a good balance of strengths for the team? And for each individual?”

Preston continued, “I was wondering about that. Should we all be aiming to make all our strengths equal and near the top?”

“Oh no!” exclaimed Arizona. “I don’t think that makes sense at all. I don’t think I will ever want to get my humility up to a top strength. And I am pretty happy with my level of self-regulation. It is not high, but I think I have enough for what I need. I get up in the morning and come to work every day, I eat sensibly, and I do things that I don’t always want to do—I don’t think I need to build up that strength, even though it is pretty low in my ranking.”

“That’s a great point,” said Maggie. “We are not all motivated by the same strengths. And, Preston, that may be why you feel frustrated that people don’t seem grateful enough. Showing gratitude is something that is important and motivating to you but may not feel as special or motivating to other people. Does that make sense?”

“I find it with fairness,” added April. “If I think someone is being unfair, it makes me mad, almost to the point that I start being unfair myself! I just cannot see how people can be unfair, but you are saying that is just my perspective and that fairness may not be that important to someone else? Maybe I annoy them because they feel very strongly about teamwork and I don’t value that as much?”

“Yes,” said Maggie. “Those are great examples, April.”

“Thank you, April, that helps a lot,” said Preston. “What’s next?” he asked.

“Well, there are a lot of things we can do with character strengths if you would all like to know more,” answered Maggie. “We can send out some things to try with your character strengths on your own, and there are some things we can do together as a group, but only if you want to! It is up to you how much, or how little, we work with character strengths.”

The group continued to discuss the options and agreed that they would like to continue working with strengths. They also agreed that they would stick the grid up on the wall to remind each other of the strengths in the room.

Ben also asked Maggie to meet with the overseas leads on a videoconference to explore how to have the same discussion with those teams too.

Building Strengths Awareness in the Team

The team spent the next two meetings spotting and acknowledging each other’s strengths. April made sure there were plenty of copies of the strengths sheet around the room. Some people downloaded a strengths sheet to keep on their smartphones. The project managers reviewed progress and were very happy with how the team had embraced character strengths. Mark reported hearing people in planning meetings discussing how they were going to leverage the character strengths of each team member in whatever they were planning.

Maggie distributed some materials on how to engage strengths through movies and activities. The stand-up meetings started to include a strengths review. The monthly video meetings with the rest of the team incorporated strengths appreciation too.

Maggie, April, Ben, and Jackson worked together to create a weekly newsletter with some tips on how to spot a strength and

how to cultivate it. Each week they reviewed one strength. One of the tools they shared was the character strengths “meditation”—thinking about each strength in turn and how to use it during the day.

Led by Maggie, the project manager team focused on cultivating the happiness strengths in the whole team—they created fun things to do (zest), they worked on setting goals and realistic plans to achieve them (hope), the whole team started to ask more questions and get more input from others (curiosity), and Preston started to make a point of encouraging people to share what they were grateful for. Gratitude was a top strength for him, and he loved cultivating it as one of the happiness strengths in everyone else. He introduced the “Monday Morning Appreciation,” where the entire team went around and fist-bumped or shook hands and thanked each other for coming in to work together for another week.

Taking Strengths to *Your* Team

As you can see, character strengths can really gather momentum. Just being aware of them can make a difference in how team members interact. I have heard other people report this. And when we mindfully consider the strengths and, as you will see later, the learning and planning styles of our team members, stakeholders, and sponsors, the sense of appreciation builds up. And when people feel seen and appreciated, they are more likely to put in additional effort, the positive environment enhances creativity and problem solving, individuals feel safe, and experimentation can begin.

Note: One person I know expressed “assessment fatigue” and said that she did not think that her team would be responsive to taking the assessment. Instead, she found that

Making It Stick for You

1. Look out for the character strengths of your colleagues and team members, and tell them what you see.
 2. Give the list of strengths to a colleague, and ask him or her to spot strengths in the team. Compare notes and see what you learn.
 3. Spot strengths when you are watching a movie or television or reading a book. Do your favorite characters have similar strengths? Are their strengths similar to yours, or are they ones that you don't use so much?
-

Strategies for Success

1. **Be hopeful:** In a meeting, make a note of the character strengths that you see, and make a special effort to show your appreciation.
2. **Be strong:** Choose one of the happiness strengths—curiosity, gratitude, hope, love, or zest—and use it around your colleagues each day for a week. Make a note of any changes that you experience.
3. **Be brave:** Share the list of character strengths with a colleague, and explore some ways you can use character strengths with others.
4. **Be curious:** Ask others what they think about character strengths.

team members loved it and could immediately start working with character strengths after only a brief introduction at a lunch and learn. What was especially gratifying to her was that more-junior staff could appreciate the strengths and really liked them. It did not feel like an activity that is reserved for management or executive leadership.

Can Strengths Go Wrong?

Before you draw the conclusion that this whole transition went swimmingly for Maggie and the team, I would like to address the topic of conflict management. Even with all the enthusiasm, growing optimism, and confidence, there were clashes of personality and strengths. Maggie was aware that some people felt confident to share their opinion, but others always seemed to hold back. She would go out of her way to solicit input from the quieter team members, but she still sensed reluctance. She was confident they had ideas to offer, but something was getting in the way. She wanted to find out what—or who—it was. In one of the project manager meetings, Maggie decided to bring up the topic to the others.

“Hey, guys,” she said in one of their daily meetings, “have you been noticing times when character strengths may seem to get in the way?”

Cristina jumped on the question. “Yes, I think I have,” she answered. “I have been meaning to ask you how we can use character strengths in relation to conflicts and arguments in the team. Things have been going well and this is great, but not everything in the team is a bed of roses!”

6

When Strengths Go Wrong

Too much of anything, even a good thing, can become a bad thing.



At the end of the last chapter, things were going well, but Maggie and Cristina were starting to notice that everything was not always going as smoothly as they hoped.

In this chapter, we will take a look at the ways that character strengths can go wrong. Conflicts can even be exacerbated by character strengths. As positive and helpful as they are, they can be used in ways that are not appropriate or are insensitive to others. First we will explore the inappropriate use of character strengths, and then we will examine what happens when strengths collide. Both of these concerns—ensuring that an

Things to Look Out For

1. Recognize ways in which strengths can become a hindrance.
2. Spot strengths that are being over- and underused.
3. Understand how context may lead to inappropriate use of strengths.
4. Identify strategies for adjusting strengths use.
5. Identify the situations in which strengths collisions are most likely to happen on your team.

individual's strength does not become overbearing, and defusing the conflicts that may arise when the strengths of individuals clash—are critical for teams and project managers.

And there are other things at play too. In Chapter 7 we will look at how, when we take into account the way people process information, how they plan, and how they communicate, challenges can easily arise.

We will start with a brief look at when character strengths are under- or overused and also when they collide.

Insensitive or unbalanced use of character strengths is a critical concern for teams and project managers alike. Ensuring that an individual's strength does not become overbearing can be the difference between an OK team and a great team.

Social Intelligence: The Elusive Project Motivator Strength

Maggie first took her character strengths assessment during a course. When she received her results, she was surprised to find that social intelligence was pretty far down in her strengths ranking at number seventeen. She was surprised because she had always believed she was pretty good at reading others, and in other assessments she often scored high in empathy. She also believes that understanding others, reading cues, and hearing the hidden message are critical to managing a project successfully. Her ranking is not quite as low as that of our cohort of project managers in general (where it is nineteenth; see Chapter 1), but it is below the ranking in the population generally.

When things are going well, that lower ranking may not mean too much, and as it was a middle strength, Maggie was probably able to draw on it when she really needed to. But when the level of stress on a project is high, the low ranking of that strength

may have made it more difficult for Maggie to identify causes and tackle them.

Some Strengths Good, More Strengths Better?

One of the things that Maggie and her project managers noticed was that some people wanted to focus on the bottom of their strengths list. Although a few people—such as Arizona—were just as happy with the strengths at the bottom of their list as with their signature strengths, others started to ask a great deal about the concept of weaknesses. Most people on the team seemed to assume that the lower strengths and weaknesses are one and the same. This is not surprising. In the United States, especially, the focus is on fixing deficits, closing gaps, and identifying weaknesses. It can seem counterintuitive to start from what we do best in order to get better.

It is important to emphasize that a low-ranked strength is not an absent strength and not a weakness. Oftentimes, the most important consideration is that a weakness is really the inappropriate use of a strength. This may be general under- or overuse of a particular strength or strengths or it can be situational.

One of the team—Andrew—told Maggie that he does not have any teamwork. It was his lowest-ranked strength, and he just could not see how he ever used teamwork for anything. He read the strength description to Maggie—“You excel as a member of a group. You are a loyal and dedicated teammate, you always do your share, and you work hard for the success of your group”—and then he declared, “That just is not me!”

At first Maggie was a little at a loss, but then she started to ask questions about his day-to-day life, and the topic of his children came up. He described how he often sits with his children and helps with their homework, particularly explaining math and how it works. As he continued to speak, Maggie could

see the light bulb going off. He said, “Well, there is a case of me showing my teamwork!” He almost looked relieved.

As they continued the discussion, Andrew realized that he might be underusing this strength at work. He reported that although a lot of his work was solo work—he was part of the quality assurance team working for Ben—he did need to interact with others. He tended to avoid meetings where people gave updates on their work, and he was aware that this was frustrating to many of his colleagues. He decided that he should work on his teamwork a little and make an effort to be a team player at least part of the time. Having the model in his mind of how he teams up with his children—and how good it feels—was helpful, as it gave him an idea of how to work with his professional colleagues in a more collegiate way.

Neal Mayerson, chairman of the VIA Institute on Character, said in a discussion by phone, “Even a teaspoon of the right strength can be enough to make a difference. The trick is to find the right balance of *your* ingredients to be *your* best.”

Maggie also made an effort to remind the team that, although in focusing on character strengths we are focusing on what works, this is not because we don’t care about weaknesses, gaps, and challenges or do not believe they are worth addressing. It’s that we are more likely to find solutions to problems when we have a positive mind-set; we are more open to new ideas when we are experiencing positive emotions. This suggests that we will have more success at identifying strategies to tackle weaknesses—and our colleagues will be more open to suggestions—if we start from a positive outlook.

When Strengths Overuse or Underuse Gets in the Way of the Team

Even more common than underuse is the phenomenon of overuse. Any strength taken too far can become a drag on the team.

For example, so-called healthy curiosity can seem like the Spanish Inquisition to someone who is quiet and shy and does not like to be asked a lot of questions! Like anything else, too much of a good thing can be a *bad* thing.

At the next daily meeting, Maggie suggested that the group explore the topic. By this time Ben, Cristina, Mark, April, and Jackson were much more aware of their own character strengths and had been practicing spotting the character strengths of others, whether they be family, friends, colleagues, or characters in movies and books. Maggie offered this example to get the ball rolling.

The Platinum Rule Revisited: Strengths Overuse and Underuse by Individuals

April reminded the team that her top strength is appreciation of beauty and excellence. “I have discovered that going out in the middle of the day and exploring my surroundings, noticing the amazing architecture in the town where I live, observing nature, and seeing what animals and birds are doing is very beneficial for my mood and energy levels. I come back energized and ready to work on whatever tasks remain for that day. I try to make a point to get outside in the fresh air and to take a look around at lunchtime even if it is only for ten minutes.” She had already shared with the team something that she considered to be an even more interesting discovery: that not everyone sees those things as wonderful and awe inspiring! As she told the team, until she took her VIA character strengths assessment, first, she had never considered that her sense of awe—or appreciation of beauty and excellence—is a distinct and definable strength; and second, she had never considered that it, in combination with her other signature strengths, is special to her.

Remembering the time she had been out with her friend who did not share her sense of awe, April admitted that she will sometimes berate someone for failing to appreciate the things that seem so incredible to her. Remembering that experience with her friend, she looked a little rueful and admitted, “I went on and on about the view and how it is not possible for someone not to see the beauty in it. Now I think that is just not her thing! Wow. That was really unfair!”

Ben jumped in. “I wonder what I would do if you berated me for not seeing the beauty in that view? Or if I thought you were giving too much recognition to individuals in the team for things that are fundamentally their job?” Ben blushed a little, and Maggie wondered whether this was actually a concern for him.

April had noticed too, apparently. “Is that something you think that I do, Ben?” April asked gently. “You can tell me. We put Cristina on the spot the other day; it is OK if it is my turn.”

Maggie noticed that Cristina was nodding in the corner.

Ben took a deep breath and said, “Don’t get me wrong—it is great that you call people’s contributions out, and there is no doubt that the team values the recognition, but if I am honest, it sometimes feels a little over the top.” He muttered, “Sorry,” looking self-conscious.

Maggie jumped in. “When is it appropriate for us to make a special fuss about the work that our colleagues have done?”

April looked thoughtful, and Jackson stepped in. “Well, when you first joined the team, Maggie, things were pretty depressing. It felt as though nothing we were doing was valued. I think it is good that April and others made a special effort to highlight our good work. But now that things are a little smoother and we are all in a better place, maybe it is time to dial it back. We might want to focus on nominations from others and give less weight to our opinion. After all, we don’t always see the people doing the work behind the scenes.”

April perked up. “I can lead the team on that,” she said. “I am more than happy to encourage others to provide the recognition.”

The tension in the room eased. Maggie paused a moment and then thanked April and Ben for being open and brave. She added, “This is what we need to do when we experience overuse—speak up! It is not always easy, but remember that the other person is using a strength that matters to him or her, the person is probably unaware that his or her strengths use is going a little overboard, and if you use your own strengths appropriately, you can help the person be more effective. It does not have to be a criticism, if you keep in mind that we are all trying to help everyone be the best they can be.”

Having broken the ice, Maggie asked the others what happens when they push people with *their* top strengths.

Ben said, “Well, prudence is one of my top strengths, and if I get the sense that someone is not receptive to my checking up and asking questions, I probably go overboard. I probably use prudence even more intensely than I would on an average day.” He looked thoughtful, then said, “I suppose that, taken too far, it may even feel like micromanaging, like I just don’t trust them!”

Jackson chimed in. “Have you spent much time working with Preston? I remember he told us gratitude is a top strength for him. Sometimes, though, I feel that I have offended him by not showing gratitude and giving thanks for him doing what is essentially his job! I like him, and I want to have a good working relationship with him, so I often go out of my way to thank him even if I think I should not have to, but it irritates me.”

Maggie said, “Thanks, Ben and Jackson, for those examples. What options do you have for tackling those situations? Ben, what should people who are on the receiving end of your micromanagement do?”

Ben looked thoughtful. “I think it would help if they—or I—set up specific times or ways that they will update me on progress.

And if I bother them in between, they can just tell me to back off!”

Jackson said that he would have a conversation with Preston about how he notices and appreciates his hard work and explain that sometimes Jackson’s focus needs to be on the work, the tasks at hand, and the timeline, that these are things that are important to him.

Maggie offered the group an exercise to help clarify what under- and overuse of some strengths might look like (Figure 6.1).

She asked, “What happens when these strengths are overused in a team situation? What happens when they are underused? I have also included a couple of strengths combinations, because just as strengths support each other in a good way, sometimes one strength ramps up the inappropriate use of another.”

The group pondered the table and started exploring what misuse of these strengths might look like. After some discussion, they had worked together to fill in the grid (Figure 6.2). And they had considered what strengths and approaches they could use to counter the effect of inappropriate strengths use—particularly overuse.

FIGURE 6.1 Character Strengths Over- and Underuse Examples

| Character strength | Overuse | Underuse | Suggested antidote |
|---|---------|----------|-----------------------|
| Perseverance | | | |
| Honesty | | | |
| Fairness | | | |
| Teamwork | | | |
| Kindness | | | |
| Social intelligence and fairness | | | |
| Perseverance and honesty | | | |

As Maggie looked over the grid, she smiled and said, “This is great. You are really getting the hang of this! And something that jumps right out is that in the antidote column you have multiple ideas. There is always more than one way to tackle a challenge.”

A benefit of understanding the misuse of strengths is not just that we can nip it in the bud but also that we can see others through the use of their strengths. Just as we can appreciate them for bringing their strengths to the fore when we need them, we can reevaluate people who annoy us in the context of their strengths. We can think about the strengths they may be over- or underusing that are contributing to the tension. What hot buttons of ours are they pushing? What strengths are we over- or underusing in that moment?

Learning to Spot Strengths Overuse—and to Fix It

Figure 6.3 presents a couple of examples of situations that are causing friction. Which strengths might be at play, and how might knowing that help to change behavior? Suggested answers are at the end of the chapter, but there is no one right answer. This is situational!

Facing Our Truth: When We as a Leader Are the Cause of a Problem

Maggie’s team had a situation like the first one described in Figure 6.3, and surprisingly, it involved one of the project managers. Cristina was responsible for vetting system design changes. When team members had ideas, they would bring them to her. Maggie started to notice that a lot of the team members, at best, were nervous about bringing ideas forward and, at worst, would just not do so and would instead wait for someone else to “run the gauntlet.” The reason was that Cristina had become

FIGURE 6.2 Overuse and Underuse Analysis

| Character strength | Overuse | Underuse | Project manager's antidote |
|---------------------------|--|--|--|
| Perseverance | Sticking to a plan even when it no longer makes sense; being unwilling to adjust plans and goals. Forgetting to use judgment and prudence to sanity check the situation and ensure that a plan adjustment is not necessary. Not consulting others to gain perspective. | Giving up at the first hurdle. Assuming an idea is not workable because it does not work the first time and looking for a new approach too soon. Forgetting to engage creativity and perspective before giving up. | Provide perspective for the team on what has been learned and the adjustments that make sense. Use leadership to coax people to adjust their own perspectives. Use curiosity to ask probing questions to help team members to reach new conclusions. Get perspective from the input of others. |
| Honesty | Being too blunt and not considering the feelings of others. Forgetting to use social intelligence, kindness, and love when deciding how to deliver a message. | Allowing people to go on believing things that are untrue. Not wanting to give bad news even though it is the truth. Avoiding bringing up issues or obstacles on the project. | Highlight the importance of keeping people aware of what is really happening while remembering to use kindness. Encourage people to deliver facts about a situation and not to point fingers or apportion blame. Encourage people to use a problem solving mind-set based on teamwork. |

Fairness

Putting treating everyone the same above the success of the team and accomplishing goals. Slowing down progress unnecessarily by focusing on fairness over progress. Becoming emotional when others do not put the same emphasis on fairness.

Creating a sense that others' opinions and contributions are not valued, leading people to hold back during difficult conversations or to feel excluded.

Use judgment, social intelligence, and kindness to remind team members to balance fairness against the needs of the project. Provide perspective on striking a balance between fairness and other strengths.

Teamwork

Being unable or unwilling to move forward alone. Requiring the input and support of others for all activities and decisions. Losing self-efficacy.

Becoming a loner and failing to consult and collaborate with others. Producing work in isolation that does not mesh with work being performed by other members of the team. Being disconnected from decisions and changes in the path.

Use leadership to counterbalance teamwork and to encourage an appropriate level of dependence on others. Use honesty to remind people that they need to be able to work in different ways in order to get the job done.

Kindness

Seeming patronizing and disempowering, and perhaps even being interpreted as displaying a lack of trust. May go as far as interfering with the learning and innovation of the team, as the kind team member steps in to prevent failure or take over from others.

Taking other team members for granted and overlooking the work they are performing or the challenges they are facing. Failing to see people as whole people with life demands across multiple domains. Becoming impatient with people who don't seem to be holding up their end.

Use kindness and perspective to remind people to be sensitive to others. Use judgment and social intelligence to develop an appropriate tone for a workplace and team environment.

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from previous page)

| Character strength | Overuse | Underuse | Project manager's antidote |
|---|---|---|--|
| Social intelligence and fairness | Being oversensitive to the feelings and motives of others and unwilling to put own feelings and needs into the mix. Bowing to the needs of others and losing sight of the project goals. Tending to dismiss one's own ideas in favor of the ideas of others, even when the evidence shows that their ideas are unrealistic or unreasonable. | Acting arrogantly, dismissing the views of others, not collaborating or soliciting the input of colleagues. Valuing one's own ideas, values, and opinions to the exclusion of all others. Demonstrating reduced critical thinking, less teamwork, and less kindness. | Use honesty, judgment, and leadership to create an environment of fairness and action, sensitivity and practicality. |
| Perseverance and honesty | Trampling on the feelings of others and failing to notice or even care about the sensibilities of colleagues. Offering opinions on topics that are not appropriate in the workplace or may be too personal. When combined, relentless honesty and perseverance can be hurtful and make the working environment very uncomfortable. | Holding back from sharing an opinion that would be valuable to the group. Avoiding difficult conversations. Being unwilling to raise the alarm when a project or task is going off track. When honesty and perseverance are underused, this may lead to a lack of adaptability and a tendency to keep going down a wrong path. | Offer judgment and social intelligence to help team members understand how to use honesty to best effect. Use honesty and social intelligence to have difficult conversations. |

FIGURE 6.3 Character Strengths Collisions

| Scenario | Strengths/use | Opportunity |
|----------|---------------|-------------|
|----------|---------------|-------------|

A design lead on an IT development project is responsible for reviewing and approving design suggestions made by colleagues. Each time a suggestion is made, he responds by listing all the reasons why that design option will not work. Colleagues start to avoid making suggestions, and creativity in the team starts to dry up.

At team meetings, the team is coming up with lots of ideas of ways to move forward with a marketing campaign. It seems that ideas abound, but at the end of each meeting it is not clear who is going to take the next step or what the next step is going to be. Progress is slow, and deadlines are being missed. When the next meeting rolls around, the team starts the process again, coming up with many more new ideas.

known as Dr. No. When someone has an idea, they are often so enamored of it that they can seem blind to the obstacles and challenges. Cristina seemed almost to delight in bringing them down-to-earth with a bump, always focusing on the reasons why an idea would not and could not work. It was demoralizing for those who wanted to be part of a collaborative problem-solving team.

When the team shared their strengths, something interesting happened. Cristina shared her top five with everyone, and the team discovered that Dr. No's top character strength was judgment. Often, when people see that judgment is one of their top

strengths, they often assume this means they are “judgmental,” which of course has negative connotations. This is not the case. Judgment, in the language of character strengths, is critical thinking—the ability to think things through and examine them from all sides, weighing the evidence. People high in judgment do not jump to conclusions, and they rely only on solid evidence to make decisions. People high in judgment are able to change their mind. They also take input from others.

When Dr. No shared her top strengths, Maggie saw people nodding sagely as they assumed this meant she was judgmental, but Mark read out the description of the strength of judgment and made an interesting observation: Judgment is not about being judgmental, harsh, or critical. It is about weighing evidence and evaluating information from all sides.

Maggie asked, “Now that you know Cristina’s top strength is judgment, how does that help?”

There were blank looks around the room.

As so often happened in these group meetings, Lexi stepped forward. “Well,” she said, “maybe when the team members bring ideas to her that are apparently fully formed and unwaveringly positive, she, looking at things from all sides, feels she must present the counterbalancing view and highlight the potential pitfalls and weaknesses of the suggestion.”

“That makes sense,” said Maggie. “Cristina, not to put you on the spot, but what do you think?”

“That feels right,” Cristina replied. “I don’t want to squash the ideas, and I know that people are working hard to be creative, but sometimes I feel I just have to explain what they may have missed in their reasoning. I want to balance the scales.”

Cristina’s designers were looking a little uncomfortable. She smiled and said, “It is OK! We can work this out. What do we need to do to change the balance? I need your help to get all this design work done! We cannot afford for you to be waiting in the

wings for me to tell you what I want you to do next. Why don't we get together after this stand-up meeting and brainstorm some options? Maggie, could you help us?"

After the meeting, Maggie helped Cristina's team to see that while her judgment had possibly gone into overdrive, her team's judgment had taken a back seat. Everyone could see this had driven teamwork out the window. With this new awareness, her team focused on ways to collaborate more often and earlier in the design process, sharing ideas at the earliest stages. Cristina agreed that she would make a conscious effort to look at pros and cons and present a more balanced assessment of the ideas coming before her. "I will use my self-regulation to rein in my rush to judge and curiosity about the ideas!" she laughed.

Cristina and her team put a weekly design brainstorming session on the calendar, and they used the meeting to collaboratively examine upcoming deliverables and design challenges and work together to create prototypes and test out ideas. The team started creating more prototypes in order to learn more about their ideas—what worked and what didn't—and experimentation, learning, and adaptation became the order of the day.

Strengths Concentrations and the Danger of Groupthink

Another way that inappropriate strengths use may show up is when there is a concentration or dearth of particular character strengths within a team. In the previous chapter, Maggie worked with the team to build their combined strengths profile. Taking the top five strengths for each team member, she accumulated the signature strengths to see what the team looked like.

Note: Another way is to create a list of the strengths with definitions and ask each person to identify his or her top five. Although this is not as accurate as using the online assessment, it is a great way to get people engaged and

start a strengths conversation. It can be combined with informal strengths 360s in which people identify the top strengths that they see in each other. There are many options for consolidating the results and comparing self-perceptions with the perceptions of others.

As you saw in Chapter 5, Maggie's team profile looked like the grid in Figure 6.4.

As you can see from the grid (which lists the top four to five strengths for each member of a team of eighty people), the top strengths in the group are **honesty**, love, **fairness**, teamwork, kindness, and **perseverance**. Only the three bolded strengths are among those that typically show up in the workplace.

The bottom strengths are forgiveness, perspective, gratitude, humility, and zest.

FIGURE 6.4 Team Strengths Profile

| Strength | Count | Strength | Count | Strength | Count |
|------------------|-------|---------------------------------------|-------|---------------------|-------|
| Creativity | 23 | Curiosity | 17 | Judgment | 11 |
| Love of learning | 12 | Perspective | 6 | Bravery | 12 |
| Perseverance | 26 | Honesty | 33 | Zest | 7 |
| Love | 31 | Kindness | 29 | Social intelligence | 12 |
| Teamwork | 30 | Fairness | 30 | Leadership | 18 |
| Forgiveness | 4 | Humility | 6 | Prudence | 13 |
| Self-regulation | 8 | Appreciation of beauty and excellence | 17 | Gratitude | 7 |
| Hope | 18 | Humor | 17 | Spirituality | 11 |

Teams can overuse common strengths—and underuse the ones that are less common—in the same way that individuals can. If many people have the common signature strengths, they can tend to “flock together” and exclude others. They may share a similar way of approaching a problem or task and be less open to the input of others who do not share those strengths.

Modeling inclusion, inviting the perspective of others with a different viewpoint, and encouraging like-minded groups to gather and share evidence to support their perspective are ways to counteract the natural tendency for a team to overuse its most prevalent strengths.

What strengths concentrations do you see on your team? What consequences do you notice?

Exploring the Team’s Heart and Mind through Character Strengths

At the next meeting, Maggie asked the group how they felt things were going with character strengths and in particular around the topic of conflicts.

Cristina said that she was very excited about how things were going with her team. They were really working well together and generating a lot of work.

“It was a little uncomfortable to find that I had been getting in the team’s way, but looking at it from the perspective of strengths really helped. Everyone values critical thinking, so it did not feel as though I was lacking something or that there was a gap; I just needed a little more balance—and so did they. It meant we could fix it together rather than making it all about one person. That felt good, come to think of it!”

Ben asked, “But what about the team as a whole? In that first meeting, someone pointed out that we don’t have many people with a lot of forgiveness or humility . . .”

“And some of us don’t care, apparently,” laughed Jackson, apparently remembering the feedback from Arizona.

“But we do have a lot of honesty, love, kindness, and fairness,” continued Ben, undaunted. “What does that mean for the team?”

Maggie asked, “Well, do you agree with the profile we put together? You have been spotting strengths for a while now. Do you think the profile is accurate?”

“Yes,” answered Mark, leading the way. “It seems spot on! And it feels as though now that the profile is out in the open, people are being more authentic. It is really nice, actually. It is as though we are all getting to be ourselves.”

April nodded. “I totally agree,” she said. “I really feel like the team has come together—and not just here; we are working better with our colleagues overseas too. They seem to feel a greater sense of connection. I suspect a lot of the love and kindness strengths came from our team overseas.”

Maggie said, “One great way to view a team profile is to think about it in two dimensions—heart and mind strengths and intrapersonal and interpersonal strengths.” The team looked a little confused.

Maggie clarified, “It sounds a bit complicated, but it really isn’t. The idea is to look at character strengths in terms of their balance of how much they relate to being with others—that is, interpersonal—and how much they are ‘solo’ strengths—intrapersonal. The other way to look at them is to consider how much they relate to emotions—the heart—or to reasoning—the mind. The relationship of each strength to these dimensions has been well researched. Here is a chart [Figure 6.5]. The shaded items are the most prevalent signature strengths in our team.

“In this case the team has a lot of interpersonal strengths and quite a good balance of heart and mind strengths, which is a great start for a team. I think we already discussed that there is

FIGURE 6.5 Dimensions of Character Strengths

| | Heart/mind | Intrapersonal/interpersonal |
|----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| Wisdom | | |
| Creativity | Heart (slight) | Intrapersonal (strong) |
| Curiosity | Heart | Intrapersonal (strong) |
| Judgment | Mind (very strong) | Intrapersonal |
| Love of learning | Mind (slight) | Intrapersonal (strong) |
| Perspective | Mind | Intrapersonal |
| Courage | | |
| Bravery | Mind (slight) | Intrapersonal |
| Perseverance | Mind (strong) | Interpersonal (slight) |
| Honesty | Mind | Interpersonal |
| Zest | Heart | Intrapersonal |
| Humanity | | |
| Love | Heart (strong) | Interpersonal |
| Kindness | Heart | Interpersonal |
| Social intelligence | Heart | Intrapersonal (slight) |
| Justice | | |
| Teamwork | Heart | Interpersonal (strong) |
| Fairness | Heart (slight) | Interpersonal |
| Leadership | Heart | Interpersonal |
| Temperance | | |
| Forgiveness | Heart | Interpersonal |
| Humility | Mind (strong) | Interpersonal (strong) |
| Prudence | Mind (very strong) | Interpersonal |
| Self-regulation | Mind (strong) | Intrapersonal (slight) |
| Transcendence | | |
| Appreciation | Heart (strong) | Intrapersonal |
| Gratitude | Heart | Interpersonal (slight) |
| Hope | Heart (slight) | Intrapersonal (slight) |
| Humor | Heart (strong) | Interpersonal (slight) |
| Spirituality | Heart | Interpersonal (slight) |

© Copyright 2004–2018, VIA Institute on Character. All rights reserved. Used with permission. www.viacharacter.org. Reprinted from the VIA Institute on Character, VIA Pro and VIA Team Report.

no *good* or *bad* profile and no combination is better than another. And it is not true that an even balance is a desirable thing in a team. But I think that understanding how our strengths come together in a group is very helpful in understanding the dynamics of the team and in determining areas on which to focus to ensure that the team works together effectively.”

The group looked at the chart. A couple of them still looked a little puzzled.

Maggie continued, “In this chart, I have labeled each of the strengths in terms of its balance of heart and mind attributes and its intrapersonal and interpersonal attributes. This is based on statistical analysis of the population at large.¹ The heart/mind dimension measures to what degree each one is related to emotions—for example, love and gratitude—or to intellect—for example, judgment and prudence.

“The intrapersonal/interpersonal dimension measures the extent to which the strength is directed toward others—for example, love and kindness—or independent of others—for example, love of learning or curiosity.

“The balance of strengths within a team is a strong indication of that team’s culture. As you can see from the shading, there is a strong tendency to interpersonal strengths and a relatively even spread of heart/mind strengths.”

April said, “Well, this pattern is really reflected in the highly collaborative and supportive demeanor of the team. I would think that this is a positive for the team, particularly early on when the team is forming bonds and building culture.”

“But there must be some downsides with such a concentration of certain strengths,” said Ben. “How do they get in our way?”

1. VIA Institute on Character, *Pro Team: Sample Report* (2016), <https://www.viacharacter.org/www/Portals/0/Sample%20Team%20Report%202016.pdf>.

Cristina was looking thoughtful. “I guess we could be vulnerable to groupthink,”² she offered.

“What can we do about that?” asked Maggie.

“I can use my judgment,” offered Cristina, smiling.

“What else?” asked Maggie.

Mark said, “I suppose we could prevent this by bringing new people into the team to rebalance the strengths profile, but we cannot exactly vet people by having them take the assessment!”

Maggie said, “I agree—using the assessment to vet people does not feel good. And we are trying to look at our resources through an appreciative lens too. Having a lot of some strengths and not a lot of some others is not a *bad* thing, as long as we look out for the pitfalls of overuse and underuse across the team. What else can we do?”

Jackson spoke up. “Well, in one of our earlier meetings we talked about focusing on cultivating happiness strengths for the team. Why can’t we, or other team members, concentrate on fostering some of our lesser strengths?”

“That is interesting,” said Mark. “We used the top five strengths because that is some sort of benchmark of the number of strengths we usually have as signature strengths, right?”

“Yes, research shows that we have four to seven signature strengths, so five is a good working number for most people,” said Maggie, feeling that Mark was onto something.

“Well, some people have more than five, and the next strength in their list might be something we would like more of. For example, I did not want to mention it in our first meeting when we were talking about our low forgiveness score, but my sixth strength *is* forgiveness. We may have other people who can help

2. Groupthink—a term coined by Irving Janis in 1972—occurs when a team values consensus and harmony over innovation, and decision making is impaired.

with perspective, for example, and I would think that perspective and judgment would really help us to make sure we don't overuse some strengths or make decisions because they feel like a consensus."

The group continued the discussion and discovered that none of them had perspective in their top ten strengths.

"We will have to ask the team for their help!" said April.

They agreed that at the next stand-up they would look again at the concentration of strengths and discuss the need for perspective to keep things balanced and moving in a good direction. The discussion was very successful. No fewer than five people said that perspective was ranked sixth or seventh for them. They all said that they would be happy to offer their perspective whenever it was needed.

Recognizing that as a group they were short of perspective as a strength, the project managers, in turn, committed to asking for other perspectives during meetings, particularly the video meetings with the overseas team.

Maggie and her team were happy. Together, they had come up with a solution to avoid the overuse—and underuse—of some strengths across the whole team.

When Strengths Collide—in the Individual

Another consideration is what happens when our strengths collide. These collisions can happen in the same person when two strengths pull in opposite directions and the person becomes locked in inaction and indecision.

The team discussed this in one of their meetings. Maggie described a situation in which she had experienced her own strengths colliding.

"I experienced this firsthand when I was room moderator for a panel session at a conference. Three of my top strengths are fair-

ness, curiosity, and appreciation of beauty and excellence. The panel members agreed that each person would have ten minutes to speak and then there would be Q&A as a panel at the end. The last speaker happened to be someone very well known in the field, and when his ten-minute slot was nearing its close, it was clear to me that he was not really ready to wrap up. The fairness in me made me determined to keep him to his self-imposed time limit. It was only fair—the other speakers, who were similarly impressive, had stuck to theirs! But my curiosity made me want to hear what he had to share. My appreciation of his skill and knowledge reinforced my desire to hear more. And in the packed room there was definitely a sense from the audience that I should leave well enough alone. It was going to take some bravery to stand up and call time! I called on perspective and judgment to bolster my sense of fairness and decided that this speaker—and all the others—would *always* have more to say, so it was only right to call time. As I made a move to hold up the one-minute warning, the speaker noticed my discomfort and commented that it was time for him to stop. Thank goodness for his social intelligence, and maybe his sense of fairness too!”

Mark said, “I think I notice that with leadership and perseverance. Sometimes I think I need to get the team to change tack and go in a different direction because what we are doing is not producing the results we want. At the same time, it feels like we’re giving up on the original approach. It makes me think of that adage ‘Don’t throw good money after bad.’ It’s as though once I have made a commitment to something, it is hard to let it go.”

Ben added, “Oh yes, I can really see how my hope and prudence conflict. I see paths forward to where we want to get to, and I am hopeful, even excited, that we will get there, and then a little voice in my head says, ‘Not so fast! Are you *sure* you and the team can make this happen?’ Oftentimes it is really helpful because it means I back up the hope with evidence. I check in. Other times,

though, it feels as though I am stuck in a cycle of ‘It is going to be fine—no, it won’t happen’ and I cannot move forward.”

“It sounds a little like analysis paralysis,” commented Cristina. “Remember when we all used to talk about that?”

When Strengths Collide—in the Team

The situations that Maggie and the team were discussing also happen between people. It is not hard to imagine that same situation Maggie described but with the moderator using fairness and judgment to keep things on track and a member of the audience trying to stop her because of his or her curiosity and appreciation.

Knowing and understanding the strengths of our colleagues can be enormously helpful and is often the simplest way to prevent or defuse strengths collisions and conflict. When you can see the best in the people in your team but also recognize how they sometimes over- or underuse their strengths, you have the opportunity to defuse the situation or, even better, prevent conflict from even arising. In Andy Crowe’s book *Alpha Project Managers*,³ stakeholders and project managers alike emphasize that it is the ability to prevent conflict that is most important, not the ability to defuse it when it happens—although that is a useful skill too! We can prevent conflict by knowing the team members well and anticipating where and when these clashes are likely to occur.

In Maggie’s team, one of the team members—Andrew, mentioned earlier because of his lesser strength of teamwork—was very high in humor. And, as we have seen, many of the rest of the team were high in honesty. They seemed to take everything

3. Andy Crowe, *Alpha Project Managers: What the Top 2% Know That Everyone Else Does Not* (Kennesaw, GA: Velociteach, 2016), 119–131.

Making It Stick for You

1. Which strengths do you overuse or underuse as a project manager?
 2. How does that feel to people around you?
 3. Which of your strengths collide?
 4. How do your strengths collide with others?
-

Strategies for Success

1. **Be hopeful:** Model strengths awareness to your team.
2. **Be strong:** Watch out for examples of when you overuse a strength.
3. **Be brave:** When you see strengths overuse, let the person know. People are often unaware.
4. **Be curious:** Explore conflicts between colleagues. Encourage them to see strengths as positive and to identify their own ways to adjust in order to tackle the conflict.

Andrew said at face value, even when it was obvious to everyone else that Andrew was joking. Once the team had shared their character strengths, the high-honesty team members Lexi, Cristina, and Owen started to check in with Andrew before assuming that something he had said was serious, and Andrew made an extra effort to make it clear when he was joking.

But strengths collisions often show up in the moment and may be even more apparent when we think back to the team roles that we touched on in the previous chapter. An Idea Creator's creativity and leadership may conflict with the Implementer's self-regulation and perseverance. An Information Gatherer's prudence and judgment may conflict with a Decision Maker's zest and bravery.

FIGURE 6.6 Review of the Overuse of Strengths

| Scenario | Strengths/use | Opportunity |
|--|--|---|
| <p>A design lead on an IT development project is responsible for reviewing and approving design suggestions made by colleagues. Each time a suggestion is made, he responds by listing all the reasons why that design option will not work. Colleagues start to avoid making suggestions, and creativity in the team starts to dry up. (See the story of Dr. No.)</p> | <p>This is likely an overuse of judgment by the design lead and possibly an underuse of the same strength by colleagues. There may also be too much prudence, making the design lead more cautious than is ideal. Lack of teamwork may make the design lead take on too much of a leadership role and avoid collaborating with colleagues. Judgment or critical thinking is essentially a weighing of possibilities—positive and negative. And when the team members present ideas in a positive, “This will work” way, the design lead feels obligated to present the counter view.</p> | <p>Helping people to understand the importance of considering all sides of a problem and to ask questions rather than make judgments can help in a situation like this, as it encourages teamwork at an earlier stage so that the design lead can offer insights—positive and negative—as the ideas take shape. Encouraging design and brainstorming sessions in groups, as well as experimentation with the possibility of failure and the need for adaptation, can also help. Additionally, it may be beneficial to encourage the use of creativity and judgment to adapt ideas to make them more workable.</p> |
| <p>At team meetings, the team is coming up with lots of ideas of ways to move forward with a marketing campaign. It seems that ideas abound,</p> | <p>This is a situation in which creativity and possibly curiosity (“What happens if we do this?”) appear to abound, and there is energy (zest) directed</p> | <p>This is a great opportunity to encourage situational leadership—team members taking turns to lead the decision-making process based</p> |

| Scenario | Strengths/use | Opportunity |
|---|--|--|
| <p>but at the end of each meeting it is not clear who is going to take the next step or what the next step is going to be. Progress is slow, and deadlines are being missed. When the next meeting rolls around, the team starts the process again, coming up with many more new ideas.</p> | <p>toward the task of coming up with ideas; but there is also a lack of leadership, prudence, and possibly self-regulation, which is preventing prioritization of the ideas and the creation and implementation of a plan.</p> | <p>on their expertise and the topic at hand. It can also be an opportunity for a team member (possibly the project manager) to apply prudence and ensure that the ideas are turned into executable steps with a timeline and accountability. Additionally, the team can build a sense of collaboration and teamwork to get things done. It is also an opportunity to set clear guidelines for when new ideas will be considered and when the time for creativity is past (leadership).</p> |

Here, familiarity with underlying character strengths and the ability to be nimble enough to insert yourself into different situations and adaptable enough to use most strengths at will—or to call on someone whom you recognize as having the desired strength in the moment—will pay dividends. As with everything, practice makes perfect, so start strengths spotting today!

Strengths are not the only source of contention. In the next chapter we will look at some other topics: planning styles,

learning styles, and the project manager's key responsibility, communication.

In Figure 6.6 there are some suggested answers to the strengths use scenarios in Figure 6.3. If you have been practicing strengths spotting, you may see other strengths and opportunities in the scenarios as well.

7

When Other Things Go Wrong

There are many challenges on a team and many ways that styles conflict. Anticipating and preventing conflict is easier than defusing it.



Just as we need several tools—growth mind-set, appreciative inquiry, influence, and character strengths—to build the connection and appreciation within the team, we need more than just character strengths to understand conflict.

Other Things That Go Wrong—and How to Fix Them

Other factors that can exacerbate and even cause conflict are the ways in which we perceive and plan our activities and the ways that we perceive and process information.

Things to Look Out For

1. Spot planning styles.
2. Spot learning or information-processing styles.
3. Notice the language of planning and learning styles.
4. See new ways to communicate project information to stakeholders.

There are four types of planners. First, there are those who see the big picture and move toward it without getting into the details of all the steps to get there. Second, there are those who see a plan as a series of interim milestones but don't necessarily make a step-by-step plan to accomplish those goals. Third, there are task planners, who break down goals into the component steps needed to achieve them. They may or may not keep the big picture in mind, but their focus is on the details. Finally, there are action planners, who tend to want to start by taking action and then adjust as they go.¹

I often hear from project managers that team members do not seem to be able to accurately plan a large project down to the individual task level. They don't seem to be able to identify a full complement of tasks, and they don't seem to be able to estimate accurately how long each of the tasks will take. Some team members actively resist planning activities, making it hard for a project manager to come up with a good plan. Of course, if the project manager proceeds to plan without the input of team members, it is wildly unpopular and usually wildly wrong. If you want an informed opinion, ask the people with the relevant information, perspective, and experience!

Most project managers I have worked with and around are comfortable with managing down to the detailed task level and adjusting plans as new information is presented. They do not seem to suffer the same "replanning fatigue" that some of our more technical colleagues suffer from.

As a young project manager, I would often make the mistake of assuming that others see the world as I do. My vision of a project is a lot like a neural network diagram, with interconnected milestones that flash as focus is applied to them. Or sometimes

1. Annie McKee, "Individual Differences in Planning for the Future" (PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1991).

it is more like a view of the world from space, with milestones showing up as concentrations of light.

It came as a surprise to me as I matured as a project manager to find that others did not have this “pathway view” to see the tasks laid out before them. For some, the image was more like a map that showed the starting point—where we were at the moment—and the ending point, and how we were going to get from A to B was something to be discovered along the way by making decisions as we went along.

As my understanding of different visions of the project increased, I started to explore theories of how we plan—individually and collectively—and how our different styles can help and hinder a project.

“A Goal without a Plan Is Just a Wish”: How to Plan with Mixed Styles

The relevance of this quote from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry is not lost on most project managers. And yet that does not mean it is easy to get a team behind the planning process. Take this example of a planning meeting that Maggie experienced. She explained it to her other project managers. Maybe you will recognize some of the comments.

Maggie told the story.

“The room was full of people. The lead designer was there, most of the quality assurance (QA) team, some of the testers and programmers, and two of the business analysts. Two customers and a couple of other stakeholders were in the room too. The sponsor was conspicuous by his absence; he had told me before the meeting that he did not care about the detail and just wanted the ‘big picture’ once the planning was in place. I remember marveling at how some sponsors want to know every little detail

and require plan reviews almost daily, whereas there are other sponsors whose eyes glaze over at the sight of a project plan and who want pictures that show a goal and progress toward that goal—somewhat like the signs you see outside churches raising money for a new roof.

“Unexpectedly, the sponsor, Nathan, appeared. He gave us a five-minute overview of what this project was about. He laid it out in terms of the vision for the company and how this project supported it, and the vision for the customer—who the customer was going to be, what the customer experience would be like when the project was over, how the organization’s operational staff would benefit and change their working habits because of what we were doing. He gave a very clear vision of the future. At the end Nathan said, ‘I hope that gives you a sense of our purpose here. We are expecting great things from you. This project could change the way we do business and will put us ahead of our competitors.’ He then left the room.”

Maggie continued, “Of course, the purpose of the meeting was to plan the new project. There was already a project charter, a scope document, some outline requirements from users, a highly skilled team, and some management-imposed milestones, but there was no real plan.

“Derek, our lead business analyst (BA), spoke first. ‘Ultimately, this is where we need to be.’ He projected a PowerPoint slide on the screen and showed us the list of things that we were committed to deliver to stakeholders and users. He then took us through some diagrams and pictures to get his point across. The final picture represented a network of users with our new system in the middle.

“‘I don’t mind how we get there,’ said Derek, ‘but unless we achieve these things, the project has not succeeded. I think there are some big milestones along the way that we will need to achieve. They will help us to stay on track.’

“Our QA lead, Ben, jumped in at that point and said, ‘As soon as I understand the big milestones, our team can start planning the QA work. My team is great at creating the detailed steps from the overall goals.’

“‘How do we get there?’ asked Cristina, the design lead. ‘Is there any detail behind the big goals?’

“‘I don’t know,’ Derek replied. ‘I assume that you will help us to work that out.’

“Our coding team had a shared look of boredom. One of them spoke up, saying, ‘None of this means much to us. Just tell us what you want us to do and when you want us to do it, and we will get started.’

“In that moment,” Maggie said, “I could see they were not all coming at this notion of planning with the same perspective. My sponsor seemed to be a directional planner. He reminded me of Elon Musk and his goal to increase the size of Tesla to \$650 billion in ten years or his even bigger goal of reaching Mars! No detail as to how—just keep moving in that direction.

“Derek, the BA lead, seemed to have taken the planning to a finer level of detail, but it was not down to a task view, which is what project managers are looking for. He had identified lower-level goals or milestones that would get us to the big goal of completing the project.

“Ben, the QA lead, and his team seemed to be task planners—my project managers are mainly like that too. These guys can take the goals and break them down into their component parts. They can get to a Work Breakdown Structure.

“And our coders? They are the action team! They are the ‘Give us the next set of tasks and set us loose and we will get working’ people. They are most comfortable when they can get on with doing something and adjust as they go along.

“With that view of the team,” Maggie explained, “I decided to break up the planning session into stages. There were some

key team members who might have to work in a style that was not their first choice, but the entire team did not have to go through the pains of rolling the plan from the highest level to the details. And in my experience, none of us is 100 percent rooted in one planning style, so it is not usually too hard for people to work across styles for short periods of time.

“We avoided a lot of tension and frustration by keeping people engaged at the right level of planning. There is nothing more disruptive than people in the room who are not fully engaged!

“Cristina, our design lead, was great at translating the goals into tasks and was happy to work with both the goal-planning members like our BA lead, Andrew, and the task-oriented people like our project manager, Mark, and Ben from QA to build out the detailed plan that would be essential to ensure that we were still moving toward the designated milestones and the overall picture.

“Finally,” said Maggie, “I created a planning review panel. This consisted of me; the action-oriented team members, who were mainly the programmers; and a second stakeholder, Denny, who had a real love of analyzing the detail but not of building it. Denny could point out when the build plan did not make sense in terms of sequencing the deliverables because of business dependencies between one deliverable and another.”

This is a *very* short review of planning styles that is aimed at encouraging you to consider which style of planning is most comfortable and most productive for each of your team members. Being aware that there are different ways that individuals approach planning helps to build social intelligence—that elusive strength that project managers sometimes seem to lack.

And how do *you* plan? In my experience, project managers are often task and action oriented and can sometimes lose sight of the big picture. This can lead to placing too much emphasis on

the delivery sequence for items that make up a single deliverable rather than on whether the big deliverable is on time.

Maggie experienced a task-orientation challenge with Mark.

His team had a deliverable due on Friday, May 31, that comprised six separate components. None of the components was worth delivering without the other five, and at the time the team constructed the plan, they could not exactly tell which components would be completed first. They numbered the components 1–6 and put them in the task list to be delivered Friday to Friday, one each day, as was required by the company’s project management standards (no tasks longer than eight hours). In the event, items 1 and 3 were delivered on Friday; 2 and 6 were delivered the following Wednesday; and on May 31, as planned, the team completed the delivery to the consumer of components 1–6 as a single functional delivery.

Despite the on-time delivery of the complete deliverable—sometimes known as the minimum viable product—Mark reported the project to Maggie as noncompliant and late because the components did not show up at the exact times specified in the plan, even though the measurable deliverable showed up on time and the team used no additional resources and took no extra time. They just did things in a different order.

This is task-oriented planning and execution gone wild!

Building a Multifaceted Communication Plan

Planning styles also directly impact communication needs. Understanding the way people plan can also help us to understand how they take in information. Our big-picture sponsor is probably much happier with a single-slide overview of progress and a quick chat. Our BA may want to see a list of goals accomplished, goals that are up next, goals at risk, and so on. The best project managers are skilled in communication and relationship management,

and understanding how people envisage the project will help you to tailor their personalized communications.

Here are some suggestions for matching communications to planning styles. Of course, individuals have their personal preferences, and we still need to check their needs with them. For example, a directional planner may be happy to plan that way but want to see progress measured at the next level of breakdown—milestones or major objectives.

- **Vision planner—the sponsor, Nathan:** Vision planners want short reports showing progress toward the goal with highlights of interim deliverables that provide early support to the overall direction of the organization—for example, a measure of how much of the entire project is complete and a list of items available that already support the organizational goals. They also appreciate summary totals of risks, issues, and so on, as well as reports that highlight any major development or obstacle—particularly if the recipient is involved in the resolution. Directional planners are likely to assume the project manager is responsible. They are less interested in knowing about individuals who are working on tasks, issues, or risks.

- **Milestone planner—the BA, Derek:** These planners appreciate communications that include a list of objectives, progress measured against each one, and any completed objective highlighted, as well as summary totals of risks and issues, with the most pressing ones highlighted and a description of the plan to address or mitigate them. These planners probably want more detail than the directional planner, but still only in relation to individual milestones, not the task-level detail.

- **Steps-to-get-there planners—the design lead, Cristina, and the PM, Mark:** These planners appreciate a list of tasks for an agreed period that shows tasks completed (say, in the last two weeks) and upcoming tasks (for the next two weeks). Keep a list of older completed tasks available in an archive, as well

as an easily accessible list of future tasks. If possible, keep a running total of tasks completed and tasks left to complete. This report may be longer than the others. Risks and issues are reported in more detail—possibly with a page for each category, with more details about the nature of the issue or risk and the plans to address and mitigate it, along with owners of the resolution or mitigation plan.

- **Do-it-and-adjust planners—the coders and the stakeholder, Denny:** This group is probably less interested in what the team has just finished and more interested in what it is working on now and what is coming up next. Highlight any risks or issues on which the recipient is expected to take action.

As project managers, we need to cater to all these planning and information styles. And although many of us are most comfortable with a task-oriented planning style, we need to be able to communicate in the style of the stakeholder. This is part of engaging stakeholders—communicating with them in the way that is most meaningful to them.

Learning Styles: “It Is Not the Notes I Take; It Is the Taking of the Notes”

Having briefly explored planning styles and some examples of how they show up, let’s also look at learning styles. These also significantly impact the way that we work together, the effectiveness of our knowledge and information transfer, and the degree of mutual understanding.

There are many models for learning styles, and each of us generally has more than one style that works for us. It is useful to use a simple model of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners. Even this simple model helps us to see that communication that is effective for one person may have little meaning for others.

Our team members have various ways of taking in information, known as learning styles. Some people learn better through visualization and like to *see* new information; others are auditory and like to *hear* an explanation; and still others are predominantly kinesthetic and need to move, draw, doodle, and experiment in order to learn new information.

Maggie noticed that Derek took lots of notes during meetings. She asked Derek one day what he did with them. Derek replied, “I put them in a drawer until there is no more room, then I throw them away to make room for the next notes. I rarely if ever look at them. It is not the notes I take that makes the difference; it is the taking of the notes that counts.”

This is an example of kinesthetic learning. The act of writing down notes is what helped Derek to understand and remember whatever he was being told or shown. As with planning styles, we are not 100 percent locked into one way of learning information. The acts of listening to others speaking (auditory) and seeing the notes on the page (visual) probably contributed too. But the key to Derek’s staying on top of so much information was the act of taking the notes. These styles of information processing have a significant effect on the way team members connect and communicate.

When I started as a project manager, I had little understanding of learning styles. What thought have you given to them? If someone asks you about your learning style, what do you think of? That you are visual or aural? Or maybe, like the famous dancer and choreographer Gillian Lynn, and like April, you learn by touching, doing, and moving.

April described her experience. “Early in my career as a project manager, I struggled with the diagrammatic representation of project updates. I would produce all sorts of documents reporting on status, risks, issues, and testing, and I would be happy

to walk and talk people through the information in status meetings. I always loved flip charts and colored pens and would happily stand and draw or write as I explained something.

“When I attend meetings and am shown a set of diagrams and other representations, I am always the one asking for the data or the supporting document. Even better, I like to read up ahead of time and then have someone create the visual (back to those flip charts and colored pens again!) on the fly, as they tie the material I have read to the overall picture they are trying to convey. My favorite is to read first and then have them talk it through while I scribble on a piece of paper, making my own visual. Often it takes the form of a mind map. It’s usually not meaningful to anyone else, but the process means something to me. And then I generally don’t look at it again!” she laughed.

Maggie described a similar thinking process in one of the project manager meetings. “A thinking habit of mine is to mull things over on my own before working in a group. Don’t get me wrong—I love working in a group, but I need that lead time to develop my understanding of the topic before sitting down with others and coming up with a solution or plan.

“As you know, I am often invited to off-sites to participate in group problem-solving sessions. On one occasion, we were told that the problem to be solved would not be revealed until we arrived at the meeting. We were told that the purpose of this approach was to create a level playing field and to prevent participants from showing up with a laundry list of preconceived solutions before we had had a chance to brainstorm and explore as a group. We started at nine thirty that morning, and the session went on all day. The discussions were animated. We did a brainstorming session first—I was uncharacteristically quiet.”

“You, quiet?” asked Mark boldly, with a grin on his face. The others laughed. Maggie was pleased with how comfortable the group had become in just a few weeks.

She continued, “We then evaluated the list of ideas. Again, I was largely silent. Once or twice I thought I noticed colleagues looking at me strangely. I am not usually shy about speaking up in these sorts of sessions. Finally, we wrapped up around five o’clock that afternoon. I was feeling decidedly uncomfortable about some of the decisions we had made, but I could not put my finger on why and did not feel I could challenge the group based on a gut reaction. I noticed that two or three of my colleagues were looking similarly uncomfortable.

“As I walked to my car deep in thought, my manager approached and asked if everything was OK. Although his tone was friendly, I could tell he was more than a little frustrated. I told him I had felt unprepared for the meeting. He responded that they had wanted ‘fresh minds’ and ‘no preconceptions.’ I think he again mentioned something about everyone being on a level playing field. He also said that he had expected a bigger contribution from me.

“I drove home thinking about the meeting, the problem, and our proposed solution. About two-thirds of the way home, my thoughts cleared and various things that had not made sense all day seemed to come into view. I could finally articulate my concerns with our solutions and could identify some of the risks that we had overlooked. When I arrived home, I wrote up my concerns and took them to my manager the next day. Although he was receptive, he was still frustrated and wanted to know why I had not raised the issues at the meeting.

“There were several factors at play here for me. I am initially a solitary learner. It takes me time to process information. For me to be the best contributor I can be, I need to consider the problem alone before meeting in the group.

“I am also a social learner. As a project manager, I would have liked to get the input of the team—to mine their expertise to enhance my own knowledge before participating in the problem-solving session.

“A large portion of the data presented at the start of the problem-solving session was in graphs and diagrams. These did not convey as much to me as they did to others. I would have liked to have something to read before attending the meeting so that I could understand the context.

“Finally, I find it hard to disconnect idea generation from idea evaluation, which means that classic brainstorming approaches do not work well for me. I want to get an idea and put it through its paces—even theoretically. (Interestingly, research now shows that the old brainstorming techniques are less effective than a combination of idea generation and evaluation.)²

“The project managers agreed to pay more attention to how people take in information. They felt that this was often the cause of friction as people with different styles tried to convey and understand ideas. They felt that even being aware that everyone processes information in his or her own way was a start.

“They decided to start modeling asking more questions such as, ‘What would help you to get a better picture of what we are discussing?’ or ‘How I can help you get a better feel for this?’ These can be enough to open the discussion. Although most people cannot put labels on their information-processing styles, most experienced workers can tell you how they like to receive new information.”

2. Ali Montag, “Why the Most Innovative People Don’t Use Brainstorming Meetings,” CNBC, February 5, 2018, <http://www.cnbc.com/2018/02/05/whartons-adam-grant-explains-how-to-be-more-creative.html>.

The Foundation of Conflict Avoidance: Communication as Connection

A big task for project managers during a project is communication management. At the start of a project, we work with stakeholders to agree on the communication plan. What sort of communication, when, and sent to whom? These are all questions we answer in order to create the plan. We include status meetings, email updates, dashboards, Key Performance Indicators, and personal briefings to get the message across about where the project is, where it is going, and what challenges lie ahead.

The process used to be relatively straightforward, and expectations from stakeholders were usually manageable, but in the information age, the answer to the question, “When would you like updates?” is either “Whenever I want” or “Now.” Pinning stakeholders down to a particular time frame reduces the effectiveness of the communication and reduces their level of satisfaction. Not pinning them down means that project managers often become the ball in the pinball machine, ricocheting from one stakeholder to another to provide tailored, in-the-moment updates.

Maggie and her team faced this challenge. The sharing of information was causing a lot of pain, especially with the size of the team and its wide distribution. The team said that they had a hard time keeping track of what everyone was doing, what issues had been raised, and the progress from week to week.

When they were asked how they would like to receive information, the result was rather surprising: they wanted to see it on the walls. All the locations agreed.

Maggie and the project managers thus created the information wall. This was a wall covered with flip-chart paper so that they could take down and replace the various sections. Each sheet had a designated purpose. Based on team feedback, they created sheets for the following topics:

- recent events and accomplishments
- people they wanted to thank
- testing events
- key dates to be aware of—upcoming holidays in all locations, vacations of key people, release dates, and so on
- milestones
- issues—anyone could stick up a note with the details of a challenge or problem encountered
- graphs of error numbers and fixes

In each location, a person volunteered to update the sheets as needed. In the US office, the volunteer had very neat handwriting, and the sheets became somewhat of a work of art! Volunteers took photos of the sheets each day and posted them on Share-Point and emailed them to the other locations so they could incorporate updates from all locations.

It was not just the immediate project team that loved it—stakeholders were thrilled as well. If they were in the office late, they could check the wall and get the information they needed. If they were on their way to a meeting, they could take a quick look at the wall on the way. In the US office, Maggie would find people huddled around the sheets, checking out what was coming up. Other teams appreciated it too.

When Maggie arrived in the morning, she often would find new sticky notes on the “issues” sheet. Sometimes they were issues, and sometimes they were questions or suggestions. Whatever they were, they were always reviewed with the team.

Within a few days, Maggie heard anecdotal evidence that the team felt better informed. It was not perfect, but it never is—some things that did not seem worthy of a place on the wall

later turned out to be critical. Overall, many people felt that it had contributed a lot, and it made the information feel more available.

Of course, this could not replace all project communication. Maggie still had to provide a dashboard each week to senior management. She still had regular emails to send and update meetings to attend, but the ad hoc requests for information were greatly reduced, and the team felt it had a better appreciation of what was going on and what was on the horizon.

Another concept that Maggie tried was video updates. A lot of her stakeholders wanted a more personal explanation of the dashboard, but it was not always easy to get time on the calendar with them. Maggie would prepare the update slides and then record her update with the slide show to support it. She could then email the updates to whoever wanted them. The videos were also stored on the team's intranet page so that it was easy to send the link to anyone who wanted to get updates.

Initially Maggie found the recordings a bit daunting, but after a while she got used to them and found they were often quicker to do than to construct a long—often unreadable—email full of all the pertinent information. She tried not to overthink—or overedit!—the videos but instead just focused on making them good enough. Maggie felt that they created a better connection with stakeholders, and they also improved the information sharing with the overseas team members, who could watch the updates at times convenient to them. Recording the videos was a simple, quick, and personal way of conveying a lot of information.

Using a wide variety of information-sharing platforms really helped to engage and energize the team and the other project stakeholders. It ensured that as many stakeholders as possible received information in the way most accessible to them, and it reduced friction caused by miscommunication and the imbalance of understanding and information.

Making It Stick for You

1. What planning styles are most prevalent on your team?
 2. What learning styles are most prevalent on your team?
 3. How do you take in new information?
 4. How do strengths and planning and learning styles influence communication needs?
 5. What channels of communication can you try on your team to make knowledge transfer timelier and more effective?
-

Strategies for Success

1. **Be hopeful:** Plan for different planning and learning styles. Leverage the strengths of each to build a robust plan.
2. **Be strong:** Expect to communicate in many different ways using different formats, varying levels of detail, and different frequencies of communication.
3. **Be brave:** Explore planning and learning styles with team members.
4. **Be curious:** Ask team members about their planning and learning preferences. Even if they don't know how to answer, having the discussion will help smooth the way.

Use Your Influence: Model the Behavior You Want to See

As I have mentioned before, one of the most powerful things you can do is increase your awareness of the personal preferences of those around you and start actively taking account of them. Ask team members how they process information, how they want to plan, and how they want to receive updates, and they will start asking each other. Cater to multiple planning and learning styles,

as well as multiple channels of communication, and team members are likely to start catering to them too. If you can actively encourage others to explore and understand planning and learning styles, that is great, but if not, you can still build your knowledge and awareness and benefit your team by avoiding assumptions and checking in to see what works.

As with everything in this book, I come from the position of appreciation. Each of the planning styles offers something and has its place. Each learning—or information-processing—style also has its place and can offer something to the team as a whole. Every mode of communication has its benefits. As we learn to appreciate the way that our colleagues plan and learn, we instinctively make room for them to contribute more and feel more engaged and satisfied. We make room for everyone to show up, join in, and contribute. And we remove some causes of conflict.

8

Completing the Circle to Be a Project Motivator



**Be hopeful. Be strong. Be brave.
Be curious. And *motivate!***

Our process to becoming a project motivator began with three areas of project management:

- expectations of the project manager—held by project managers and by others
- the project manager’s knowledge and beliefs about engagement
- the strengths that project managers have—and don’t have

Things to Look Out For

1. How to use hope to keep the focus on the project goals
2. How to use strengths to connect with the intrinsic motivation of the team
3. How being brave—and vulnerable—builds rapport, influence, and trust
4. How being curious increases knowledge and taps into more resources

Be Hopeful

Project management involves communicating, considering the big picture, planning the detailed steps to achieve the big picture, aligning team members, and motivating them to get it done.

Project managers believe that engagement is a core part of their role; they want to be more engaged themselves, and they want to know more about engaging others.

Project managers have some great tools in their toolbox. On the top are hope and love of learning. These foster a growth mind-set and generate a belief in the project and the team. Along with these strengths comes the intentional use of influence through modeling.

In the second shelf of the box is prudence—the counter to hope—which, in that detailed planning, helps to make sure goals are accomplished and the big vision is achieved. And alongside prudence is appreciation of beauty and excellence, which puts us in a great position to pay and call attention to the strengths and contributions of others.

Use hope to keep you and the team focused on the future and believing that you and they have the ability to put together a plan to accomplish the desired result.

We do have an Achilles heel because in the bottom of the toolbox is social intelligence. It is not missing altogether—we all have some social intelligence—but as leaders and motivators of teams, we may find that the challenge of reading our team members and stakeholders effectively leads to conflict and a breakdown in communication. As the project manager strengths data show, social intelligence is a strength that challenges us as a group. It may also be a contributor to team members' feeling misunderstood and underappreciated.

Another strength that may be languishing in the bottom of the toolbox is perspective. As one of the key roles of a project

manager is to stay focused on the big picture, perspective is very important. Focusing on really getting to know what motivates our team members, how they like to plan, and how they process information creates social intelligence, which builds our sensitivity to the motives and feelings of others. We learn what makes other people tick.

With the help of a growth mind-set, intentional appreciation achieved by leveraging character strengths, and a willingness to learn, project managers have all they need to build social intelligence and to create an environment of appreciation where people follow the Platinum Rule and treat others the way they want to be treated. Paying attention to planning and learning styles and creating many ways of sharing information will add to a sense of inclusion and collaboration. Team members will start to feel they belong, they are seen for who they are, and they are respected for what they bring to the project.

Be Strong

If your team is engaged and productive, then don't change anything. If things are working, take time to observe what is working and to understand why. Notice what the various team members are bringing to the mix and focus on making it easier for them to be at their best.

See where your strengths appear, how they help the team be the best it can be, and when your strengths get in the way. Notice how team members like to plan, how learning occurs, and the team's attitude toward mistakes and experimentation.

If, as is often the case, you feel your team could be more—more connected, more engaged, more productive, and more motivated—try new things. And don't be afraid to fail. Learn from each experience and start again.

You have seen how Maggie's team introduced character strengths and a general sense of appreciation and how they focused on including everyone and making information sharing interesting, varied, and open. They consciously modeled the behavior they wanted to see in others—hopefulness, enthusiasm, and curiosity. They paid attention to their own strengths—both the ways they used them well and the ways in which they got in the way.

Try new things and see what happens! Then learn and adjust. As project managers, we have the strengths we need—hope for the outcome and a willingness to learn. We can also take a step back and use perspective to see the bigger picture. What great strengths do you bring? They are all powerful, and as you saw in Chapter 4, there is no magic recipe for being effective.

A great way to go in search of strengths is to look outside the confines of your formal team. People outside can be considered the undercover team. Who else supports the success of the project and the team? The staff in the cafeteria who make sure that the team is well fed, the security guards who make sure the building is secure, the cleaners who make sure the office is clean—these are all part of your undercover team. Additionally, colleagues on other teams, experts in other departments, and customers are all great sources of insight and ideas.

I had an experience once in which the office cleaner suggested the best way to rearrange an open-plan office. He was explaining how the new layout would make cleaning easier, but it quickly became apparent that it would help us better utilize the space and improve the flow of the space. His perspective helped us to change ours. His judgment helped us to look with fresh eyes and to create a better working environment.

Project managers should also encourage the input of junior staff. What they lack in expertise and experience they often make up for in ingenuity, curiosity, and energy! And who knows, one

day one of those junior staff may be the CEO or some other senior person, having made his or her way up in the company by using that ingenuity and energy. Some really creative ideas on my teams have come from interns, and yet we often leave them out of team meetings and brainstorming sessions.

Be Brave by Being Vulnerable: Building Influence and Trust

We are all well aware that most project managers work in environments where they are not supervisors and do not have line management responsibility for their project resources. As discussed in Chapter 3, influence is our best friend. Modeling and appreciation build influence and trust. Good communication builds influence and trust too. Our strengths superpowers help. We are high in hope and our love of learning. We not only see what the future state is but also believe we can reach it, and we have the means to come up with a plan to get there. What we don't know at the beginning we will learn along the way.

A big contributor to Maggie's winning over the team was her willingness to be vulnerable. She admitted early on that she was not a subject-matter expert, though there was a chance that this would not be well received by the team. The alternative—faking it until she picked up the knowledge she needed—would not have served her purpose. It would have limited her ability to ask questions of the team, making it harder to learn the things she needed. It is likely that any team, but particularly one high in honesty, would have seen her as inauthentic and possibly someone not to be trusted. In order to collaborate effectively, we must also be prepared to be vulnerable. Admitting that we don't know it all and that we need input from others can feel uncomfortable, but team members are much more likely to trust people who are confident enough to believe they don't need to

know it all. And most people appreciate genuine curiosity. So, when in doubt, ask.

Be Curious

Your team and your stakeholders represent a wealth of knowledge, information, and strengths. Seeking their input and feedback is a great way to build rapport and to get valuable perspective.

Maggie's project manager group felt positive about the changes that had been taking place in the team. There seemed to be a higher sense of connection, better communication, and generally an increased sense of well-being. And, just as important, more was getting accomplished. But they were reluctant to rest on their laurels and wanted to hear from the team just how well things were going.

There was much discussion about the best way to solicit feedback. Should it be one-on-one meetings, small group discussions and interviews, or a survey? What would the questions be about? What would the group do if the feedback was negative? Jackson pointed out that not knowing how the team felt was not going to make things better. If the initiatives that they had taken were not working, it would be better to know and then plan some ways to adjust. Maggie reminded the team that they need not be afraid to fail.

She said, "We have been experimenting with a lot of things, and some of them are likely to have missed the intended mark. That is OK. We will learn from the feedback and do better in the future. We have what we need to keep a growth mind-set. We are hopeful, and we are happy to learn. And I agree with Jackson—we cannot tackle things we do not know about."

Ben, Cristina, Mark, and April expressed their support for the survey, as well as some trepidation.

“What do we make of it if no one responds?” asked Cristina. “After all, we cannot make them take the survey.”

Mark stepped in and said, “I believe that we will get a good response. I think the team knows we have their success and their well-being at heart. Anyway, look at how many people took the strengths assessment!”

Ben added, “And if we get a low response rate, we can look at other ways to solicit feedback. If the first way does not work, we will try another, right?”

“Right,” they all said together.

Maggie worked with April to create a survey for the entire team.¹ The topics covered were the following:

- communication
- participation in decision making
- work–personal life balance
- cooperation/morale
- physical work environment
- stress level
- recognition for work
- things that are working well
- things that need improvement
- overall experience of the program

The idea was to see whether the team felt engaged and whether all members felt included and appreciated. The project managers

1. The team used a free Survey Monkey survey of ten questions.

also wanted to see whether their efforts had resulted in a sense of well-being.

Without a benchmark for the beginning of the program, they would not be able to measure their progress, but everyone felt that the survey would still give a sense of where they were hitting the ground running and where there was room for improvement.

The group made a specific commitment to provide a response to any issue that was raised—even if it was only to say that they would not be tackling it and why.

Of course, the survey was not mandatory because, as already discussed, Maggie had no line manager authority over any of the team. Nevertheless, there was a 65 percent response rate, which is high for most engagement surveys. According to *Forbes*, it is typical to see response rates of 30 to 40 percent.²

The team confirmed that, encouragingly, stress was not consistently high, with an even distribution between low and variable stress levels. Anecdotal evidence from the early days of Maggie's time on the project suggested that stress levels three months earlier had been higher, so this was encouraging.

Nearly all of the team said the physical work environment was OK or good. And nearly everyone felt his or her work was recognized at least some of the time. Interestingly, recognition was one of the areas that respondents highlighted as a keeper, allaying Maggie's concerns that some people would feel left out or that recognition was inappropriate.

The results were not completely positive, and Maggie and her colleagues did not expect them to be. There were some issues that were outside their control. And practices that made some team

2. Reuven Gorsht, "SAPVoice: How the Best Leaders Get Full Participation in Employee Surveys," *Forbes*, October 25, 2013, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/sap/2013/10/23/lousy-response-rates-on-your-employee-survey-heres-how-the-best-leaders-get-great-participation-every-time/#6693be1f151a>.

members happy made others uncomfortable. Unfortunately, you cannot please all of the people all of the time. With such a large team, there may have been times when the contributions of some of the team members were overlooked—just as some team members may have overestimated the impact of the work they did on the program as a whole.

However, what the survey results did establish was that in a fast-paced, potentially high-pressure environment, the team felt things were done right at least most of the time.

There are many other things that changed over time on the team. The team members remained adaptable, recognizing that some practices that work at one stage of a program or project may not be relevant later. Some practices also become stale. The team was not afraid to propose a change as a new stage of the project demanded it.

Developing lines of communication within the team and between the team and stakeholders was a big focus. Some examples of communications initiatives that were established over time include the following:

- The team instituted focus groups with stakeholders in which the team discussed progress and visualized the future.
- Building on the information wall, the team shared all its working papers and documentation not just within the team but with anyone who cared to see them. Feedback was invited and responses were provided.
- The team introduced lunch and learns for stakeholders to hear from the team and for stakeholders to educate the team. They were recorded and put up on the intranet site.

- Monthly portfolio-wide newsletters provided a forum to update on progress, highlight personal successes and news, share stories, and provide recognition. On one program, the newsletters were weekly.
- During the implementation phase, the team followed an elaborate process of providing updates by email and on huge, facilitated conference calls. They were complicated to orchestrate but were very popular because by the end of a test, there was a ready-made, blow-by-blow account of the testing encapsulated in the email chain. Anyone joining could see the old updates and get a sense of progress. These emails told the story of the ups and downs of the testing.

Receiving the feedback directly from the team helped Maggie and the project managers to target their efforts and also helped to create an inclusive, collaborative environment. This continued to build trust and engagement, and it helped to keep the team motivated because they could see that their opinions mattered.

Motivate!

How do we motivate people to get things done? This entire book has been about motivation. You have tools to use:

- **Influence and modeling:** You can change the way people around you act by modeling the behavior you want to see. Others are influenced by what they see; they want to belong and be accepted. They will be *motivated* to follow your lead. And once a few people follow you, others will follow them and the effect ripples!

- **A growth or learning mind-set:** If you don't know it, you can learn it, and so can the team. If you are high in love of learn-

Making It Stick for You

1. Review the material.
 2. Create a plan.
-

Strategies for Success

1. Choose some ideas to implement, and put them into practice today.
2. Find out about and develop your character strengths.
3. Watch for the strengths of others, and tell them what you see. No one is ever disappointed to hear that you spotted a strength in them!

ing or curiosity, you enjoy a head start. But even if you don't, you can apply a growth mind-set and go in search of the knowledge you need. When others see you learning, they are *motivated* to learn too!

- **Appreciative inquiry:** You can look for what is working, highlight it, and applaud it. This opens up the channels of creativity for the team and enables and *motivates* them to become great problem solvers.

- **Character strengths:** By seeing the strengths in others and helping them to use them, you engage the team and *motivate* them to support the goals of the organization, the goals of the team, and your goals.

If you apply the tools from this book to yourself and to your team, you will see motivation increase all around you. If you do no more than work on developing a growth mind-set, identifying your character strengths, and understanding your planning and learning preferences, you will interact with your colleagues more effectively.

You can take this to another level by spotting the strengths of colleagues and calling them out when you see them, as well as by noticing the way they like to plan and how they learn.

And if you are in a position that allows you to formally take some of these tools to the team, even better. But you can go a very long way just by seeing a world of possibility in every room of people and by carrying the project flame.

Be hopeful. Be strong. Be brave. Be curious!

9

Creating the Implementation Plan



I love books and reading. There is so much to learn—there it is, love of learning!—and so many people with great stories and ideas to share. At the end of a book, though, how do you save the learnings that you want to keep? How do you make it stick? The answer is to make a plan and implement it. In medicine, the cornerstone of teaching new doctors is “See one, do one, teach one.”

Although we may argue about the efficacy of this approach when someone’s life is on the line, it nevertheless articulates simply the way that we learn. In Chapter 7 we looked at learning styles—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. “See one [visual], do one [kinesthetic], teach one [auditory]” essentially covers all three learning styles. More than that, though, it emphasizes that learning is more than just seeing—or reading about something. We need to practice it and share it to have the biggest impact on our learning and retention. And by sharing we extend the reach!

In Figure 9.1, I have provided a sample plan for putting your reading into action. Feel free to modify—and even throw out the plan. Some people may want to read the entire book first and then go back to a plan such as this one. Others may want to practice as they go. The secret is to understand how you learn best and to devise a plan that you can stick to.

FIGURE 9.1 A Sample Implementation Plan

| Timing | Brave activity | Braver activity | Bravest activity |
|----------------------|--|--|--|
| Day 1—prework | Review the reasons that you should read this book. Read Chapter 1—Project Managers: More Than Just Plate Spinners and Ball Jugglers. | | |
| Day 2 | What are your beliefs about the role of the project manager? What are the top three functions of a project manager? | Ask your team how they see the role of a project manager. | Ask your leadership team how they see the role of a project manager. |
| Day 3 | What role does the project manager play in building engagement? What skills do you have that help in cultivating that sense of engagement? | Ask your team about their level of engagement. | Explore engagement with your leadership team. |
| Day 4 | Read Chapter 2—Seeing Is Believing: The Maggie Method. Think about what these tools look like in action. | | |
| Day 4 | What practices do you already use? What new ideas interest you from the story? | What practices from the story will your team respond to? | What practices from the story will your leadership team support? |
| Day 5 | Read Chapter 3—Influence: The Project Motivator’s Best Friend. | | |
| Day 5 | Influence | | |
| Day 5 | Who are the most influential people you know? What do they do to increase their influence? | Ask team members what you are doing when you are most influential. | Ask the leadership team what you are doing when you are most influential. |
| Day 5 | What type of project manager are you? Are you a generalist or a specialist? | Ask some team members what they want from a project manager—a subject-matter expert or a generalist. | Ask the leadership team what they want from a project manager—a subject-matter expert or a generalist. |

| Timing | Brave activity | Braver activity | Bravest activity |
|-----------------|--|--|--|
| Day 5 | How do your answers, your team's answers, and the leadership team's answers compare? | | |
| Day 6 | Growth mind-set | | |
| Days 6–7 | Observe yourself at work. When do you demonstrate a growth mind-set? | Who in your team has a growth mind-set? | What about your management team? Supervisor? Project sponsor? |
| Days 6–7 | Observe yourself at work. When do you demonstrate a fixed mind-set? | Who in your team has a fixed mind-set? | What about your leadership team? Supervisor? Project sponsor? |
| Days 6–7 | Consider some ways you can encourage a culture of experimentation. | Discuss experimentation and failure with the team. | Discuss tolerance for experimentation and failure with your leadership team. |
| Day 7 | Appreciation | | |
| Day 7 | What works well in your team? Make a list. | Ask others in your team what is working well. | Ask those outside the team what is working well in your team. |
| Day 7 | Create a vision of how things would be if they were perfect. | Ask some members of your team to create the vision with you. | Invite the whole team to contribute to the vision. |
| Days 8–9 | Read Chapter 4—Building a Culture of Appreciation. | | |
| Day 9 | Your strengths | | |
| Day 9 | Take or review your VIA assessment. | Share the results with someone close to you. | Share the results with a manager or leader. |

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from previous page)

| Timing | Brave activity | Braver activity | Bravest activity |
|-------------------|---|--|--|
| Day 9 | How do your strengths compare with the more common strengths of project managers identified in Chapter 1? | Which strengths do you have that most help you as a project manager? | Which strengths do you want to cultivate to help you as a project manager? |
| Days 10–11 | Observe how your signature strengths show up every day. | Observe signature strengths in others. | Observe signature strengths in your leadership team. |
| Days 11–12 | Observe when and how your middle or situational strengths show up for you. | Observe when and how your middle or situational strengths show up for your colleagues. | Show appreciation when colleagues use strengths that are not their most frequent ones. |
| Days 12–13 | Review your strengths. | Explore strengths with friends and family. | Find a collaborator at work, and explore strengths together. |
| Day 14 | Review the twenty-four character strengths. Plan how you will use them during the day. | Share your top strengths with a colleague. | Share your top strengths with someone in the leadership team. |
| Day 15 | Project manager superpowers and you | | |
| Day 15 | Review your character strengths against those of other project managers. | Connect with a group of project managers, and start a strengths discussion. | Encourage other project managers to take the VIA assessment. |
| Day 15 | Exploring hope | | |
| Day 15 | Write down some examples of when you have displayed hope. | Ask team members whether you display hope and what that means to them. | Ask someone in the leadership team whether you display hope and what that means to them. |

| Timing | Brave activity | Braver activity | Bravest activity |
|----------------------|--|---|---|
| Day 16 | Exploring love of learning | | |
| Day 16 | Write down some examples of times that you have enjoyed learning something new and sharing it with others. | Ask team members whether you display love of learning and what that means to them. | Ask someone in the leadership team whether you display love of learning and what that means to them. |
| Day 16 | Exploring social intelligence | | |
| Day 16 | How do you show social intelligence? | Ask team members whether you display social intelligence and what that means to them. | Ask someone in the leadership team whether you display social intelligence and what that means to them. |
| Day 17 | Exploring perspective | | |
| Day 17 | How do you take a step back when things are difficult? | Find out who on your team has perspective as a signature strength. | Ask your manager whether he or she has perspective and how it shows up. |
| Day 17 | Your leadership strengths blend | | |
| Day 17 | How do your top five or six strengths help you as a leader? | Do this same analysis for a leader you work with based on the strengths that you see in him or her. | Share your analysis with that leader. |
| Days 18–19 | Read Chapter 5—Building a Culture of Appreciation for Our Stakeholders and Teams. | | |
| Day 18 onward | Practice strengths spotting in others. | Provide feedback to team members on the strengths you see. | Provide feedback to leadership on the strengths you see. |

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from previous page)

| Timing | Brave activity | Braver activity | Bravest activity |
|---------------|--|--|--|
| Day 19 | Make a list of the strengths that you see often in the team. | Ask colleagues for feedback. | Ask the leadership or stakeholders for feedback. |
| Day 19 | Make a list of strengths that seem to be less common in your team. | Ask colleagues for feedback. | Ask the leadership or stakeholders for feedback. |
| Day 19 | Share the concept of character strengths with others. | Introduce character strengths to team members, and offer them the link to the free assessment. | Introduce character strengths to the leadership team, and offer them the link to the free assessment. |
| Day 20 | Review and research the reasons that character strengths are useful at work. | Share what you learn with your team members. | Share what you learn with the leadership team. |
| Day 21 | Consider whether you can ask a few team members to take the assessment. | Introduce the entire team to the assessment, and ask them to take it. | Propose a strengths review to the leadership team. |
| Day 22 | Observe which of the team roles are present on your team. | Discuss the concept of roles with the team, and solicit their feedback. | Explain the concept of team roles and their connection to character strengths to your leadership team, and solicit their feedback. |
| Day 22 | Read Chapter 6—When Strengths Go Wrong. | | |
| Day 23 | Explore your overuse of strengths. | Explore overuse by colleagues and team members. | Explore overuse by your leadership team. |

| Timing | Brave activity | Braver activity | Bravest activity |
|-------------------|---|---|---|
| Day 23 | Which strengths did you underuse today? | Who on your team underused a strength? Is it situational or habitual? | Which strengths do your leadership team underuse? Is it situational or habitual? |
| Day 23 | Which of your personal strengths get in each other's ways? | Who on your team has strengths that clash? | Which of your leaders have strengths that clash? |
| Days 24–26 | Focusing on others | | |
| Day 24 | Which of your personal strengths clash with those of others? | What strengths clashes can you spot in your team or stakeholders? | How do your strengths clash with your leadership team's? |
| Day 25 | Which strengths do you see clashing for other team members? | How can you call on other strengths to intervene and defuse conflict? | What can you suggest or what strength can you offer to your leadership team to reduce conflict? |
| Day 26 | What balance of heart and mind strengths does the team have? | Discuss the concept of heart and mind strengths with the team, and get their feedback. | Share the chart of strengths with the leadership team, and discuss the balance of heart and mind strengths and interpersonal and intrapersonal strengths. |
| Day 26 | What balance of interpersonal and intrapersonal strengths does the team have? | Discuss the concept of interpersonal and intrapersonal strengths with the team, and get their feedback. | |
| Day 27 | What is the culture of the team? | Discuss the culture of the team with them. | Discuss the culture of the organization with the leadership team. |

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from previous page)

| Timing | Brave activity | Braver activity | Bravest activity |
|-------------------|--|--|--|
| Day 28 | Choose one of the happiness strengths—curiosity, gratitude, hope, love, or zest—and focus on it for the day. | Choose one of the happiness strengths—curiosity, gratitude, hope, love, or zest—and build it into team encounters during the day. Note what happens. | Choose one of the happiness strengths—curiosity, gratitude, hope, love, or zest—and build it into leadership team encounters for a day. Note what happens. |
| Days 29–30 | Read Chapter 7—When Other Things Go Wrong. | | |
| Day 29 | Planning styles | | |
| Day 29 | What is your planning style? | What planning styles do you see in your team? Discuss with two members of your team. | What planning styles do you see in your leadership team? |
| Day 30 | Learning styles | | |
| Day 30 | What is your primary learning style? | What learning styles do you see in your team? Discuss with two members of the team. | What learning styles do you see in your leadership team? |
| Day 31 | Read Chapter 8—Completing the Circle to Be a Project Motivator. | | |
| Day 31 | Decide on your next steps. | Make a concrete implementation plan. | Share the plan with others and enlist their help. |
| Day 31 | Write a summary of what you learned. | Share your summary with someone close to you. | Share your summary with your team or your manager. |

Bibliography

Introduction: An Accidental Project Manager

Books

Crowe, Andy. *Alpha Project Managers: What the Top 2% Know That Everyone Else Does Not*. Kennesaw, GA: Velociteach, 2016.

Project Management Institute. *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide)*. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute, 2017.

Journal Article

Fredrickson, B. L. "The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 359, no. 1449 (2004): 1367–1377.

Websites

Gallup. *State of the American Manager*. 2015 report. Washington, DC: Gallup, 2015. <http://www.gallup.com/services/182138/state-american-manager.aspx>.

Wikipedia. "Project Manager." Last modified May 10, 2018. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_manager.

Chapter 1. Project Managers: More Than Just Plate Spinners and Ball Jugglers

Books

Crowe, Andy. *Alpha Project Managers: What the Top 2% Know That Everyone Else Does Not*. Kennesaw, GA: Velociteach, 2016.

Lopez, S. J. *Making Hope Happen: Create the Future You Want for Yourself and Others*. New York: Atria Paperback, 2014.

Peterson, Christopher, and Martin E. P. Seligman. *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Project Management Institute. *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide)*. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute, 2017.

Journal Articles

Hone, L. C., A. Jarden, S. Duncan, and G. M. Schofield. "Flourishing in New Zealand Workers: Associations with Lifestyle Behaviors, Physical Health, Psychosocial, and Work-Related Indicators." *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 57, no. 9 (2015): 973–983.

McGrath, Robert E. "Character Strengths in 75 Nations: An Update." *Journal of Positive Psychology* 10, no. 1 (2015): 41–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.888580>.

Reports

Gallup. *State of the Global Workplace: Employee Engagement Insights for Business Leaders Worldwide*. 2013 report. Washington, DC: Gallup, 2013.

Project Management Institute. *The High Cost of Low Performance: How Will You Improve Business Results?* 2016 Pulse of the Profession Report. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute, 2016. <http://www.pmi.org/learning/thought-leadership/pulse/pulse-of-the-profession-2016>.

———. *Project Management between 2010 + 2020*. 2013 Project Management Talent Gap Report. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute, 2013. <http://www.pmi.org/-/media/pmi/documents/public/pdf/business-solutions/project-management-skills-gap-report.pdf>.

———. *Success Rates Rise: Transforming the High Cost of Low Performance*. 2017 Pulse of the Profession Report. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute, 2016. <https://www.pmi.org/learning/thought-leadership/pulse/pulse-of-the-profession-2017>.

Websites

Rigoni, Brandon, and Jim Asplund. "Strengths-Based Employee Development: The Business Results." Gallup, July 7, 2016. <http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/193499/strengths-based-employee-development-business-results.aspx>.

VIA Institute on Character. "Love of Learning." Accessed June 7, 2018. <http://www.viacharacter.org/www/Character-Strengths/Love-of-Learning>.

Chapter 2. Seeing Is Believing: The Maggie Method

Books

Cuddy, Amy Joy Casselberry. *Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges*. Large-print ed. New York: Little, Brown/Hachette, 2015.

Websites

MacDonald, Lynne. "What Is a Self-Managed Team?" Chron.com, *Houston Chronicle*, March 28, 2018. <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/selfmanaged-team-18236.html>.

Chapter 3. Influence: The Project Motivator's Best Friend

Books

Cialdini, Robert B. *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*. New York: Collins, 2007.

Cooperrider, David L., and Diana Kaplin Whitney. *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2005.

Dweck, C. S. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. New York: Random House, 2006.

Fredrickson, Barbara L. *Positivity*. New York: Three Rivers, 2009.

Journal Articles

Acharya, Sourya, and Samarth Shukla. "Mirror Neurons: Enigma of the Metaphysical Modular Brain." *Journal of Natural Science, Biology, and Medicine* 3, no. 2 (2012): 118–124. PubMed Central.

Baker, Wayne. "The More You Energize Your Coworkers, the Better Everyone Performs." *Harvard Business Review*, September 15, 2016. <http://hbr.org/2016/09/the-energy-you-give-off-at-work-matters>.

Bush, G. R. "Appreciative Inquiry Is Not (Just) about the Positive." *OD Practitioner* 39, no. 4 (2007): 30–35.

Collins, Sonya. "BMJ Analysis Calls Medical Errors Third Leading Cause of Death, Shines New Light on Ongoing Problem." *Pharmacy Today* 22, no. 7 (2016): 36–37. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ptdy.2016.06.022>.

"Medical Errors: Focusing More on What and Why, Less on Who." *Journal of Oncology Practice* 3, no. 2 (2007) 66–70. <https://doi.org/10.1200/jop.0723501>.

Pinto, Jeffrey K., and Om P. Kharbanda. "Lessons for an Accidental Profession." *Business Horizons* 38, no. 2 (1995): 41–50.

Chapter 4. Building a Culture of Appreciation

Books

Biswas-Diener, Robert. *The Courage Quotient: How Science Can Make You Braver*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012.

Peterson, Christopher, and Martin E. P. Seligman. *Character Strengths and Virtues: a Handbook and Classification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Journal Articles

Hone, L. C., A. Jarden, S. Duncan, and G. M. Schofield. "Flourishing in New Zealand Workers: Associations with Lifestyle Behaviors, Physical Health, Psychosocial, and Work-Related Indicators." *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 57, no. 9 (2015): 973–983.

Lavy, S., H. Littman-Ovadia, and M. Boiman-Meshita. "The Wind beneath My Wings: The Role of Social Support in Enhancing the Use of Strengths at Work." *Journal of Career Assessment*.

Littman-Ovadia, H., and M. Steger. "Character Strengths and Well-Being among Volunteers and Employees: Toward an Integrative Model." *Journal of Positive Psychology* 5, no. 6 (2010): 419–430.

Chapter 5. Building a Culture of Appreciation for Our Stakeholders and Teams

Journal Articles

Littman-Ovadia, Hadassah, et al. "When Theory and Research Collide: Examining Correlates of Signature Strengths Use at Work." *Journal of Happiness Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2, July 2016, pp. 527–548., doi:10.1007/s10902-016-9739-8.

McGrath, Robert E. "Character Strengths in 75 Nations: An Update." *Journal of Positive Psychology* 10, no. 1 (2015): 41–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.888580>.

Ruch, Willibald, Fabian Gander, Tracey Platt, and Jennifer Hofmann. "Team Roles: Their Relationships to Character Strengths and Job Sat-

isfaction.” *Journal of Positive Psychology*, published ahead of print, November 14, 2016. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1257051>.

Website

Gallup. *State of the American Manager*. 2015 report. Washington, DC: Gallup, 2015. <http://www.gallup.com/services/182138/state-american-manager.aspx>.

Chapter 6. When Strengths Go Wrong

Books

Crowe, Andy. *Alpha Project Managers: What the Top 2% Know That Everyone Else Does Not*. Kennesaw, GA: Velociteach, 2016.

Websites

VIA Institute on Character. *Pro Team: Sample Report*. 2016. <https://www.viacharacter.org/www/Portals/0/Sample%20Team%20Report%202016.pdf>.

Chapter 7. When Other Things Go Wrong

Dissertations

McKee, Annie. “Individual Differences in Planning for the Future.” PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1991.

Websites

Montag, Ali. “Why the Most Innovative People Don’t Use Brainstorming Meetings.” CNBC, February 5, 2018. <http://www.cnbc.com/2018/02/05/whartons-adam-grant-explains-how-to-be-more-creative.html>.

Chapter 8. Completing the Circle to Be a Project Motivator

Journal Articles

Gorsht, Reuven. “SAPVoice: How the Best Leaders Get Full Participation in Employee Surveys.” *Forbes*, October 25, 2013. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/sap/2013/10/23/lousy-response-rates-on-your-employee-survey-heres-how-the-best-leaders-get-great-participation-every-time/#6693be1f151a>.

Acknowledgments

My favorite practice is collaboration. And this book would not exist without the collaboration of many people. How do I begin to thank the people who have given me such tremendous support not just during the writing of this book but in my whole life and career, which led up to this wonderful opportunity?

My biggest thanks goes to my husband, Gareth. He has supported me in all my learning and experimentation and urged me to pursue the idea of the book, even when it seemed impossible. He has used all his strengths of wisdom to read, edit, and challenge my words and thinking. I could not have done any of this without him. He is my project motivator!

My friend Shelley Haith deserves thanks for so much—urging me to be brave and to experiment with my teams, reminding me to persevere because Rome was not built in a day and change takes time, and reframing my most negative thoughts to be opportunities. Shelley has been another project motivator.

A huge thank-you goes to Karen Briggs, who worked alongside me on a big project and then volunteered to edit the book. She has been a stalwart companion, and her eye for edits is amazing. Her friendship and support are testaments to her manifest and plentiful strengths. She balances appreciation and judgment, honesty and kindness, and has improved the book immeasurably.

To my test readers, Tim Jaques (who I think has forgiven me for asking him to read both versions of the book!), Phoebe Atkinson, and Shelley Swofford, this book would be so much less without your thoughtful feedback. Each brought a unique perspective—Tim with his expertise in project management and building businesses, Phoebe with her expertise in engaging those around her and coaching people to success, and Shelley with her expertise in managing teams in one of the hardest professions—customer service. They added so much.

To John Garahan, a boss who pushed me to my limits and beyond and made me a better project and people manager and communicator, thank you. Your continued support and encouragement means so much.

To the team at the VIA Institute on Character, I say a huge thank-you. Neal Mayerson, Ryan Niemiec, Breta Cooper, and Kelly Aluise have offered me every support and answered countless questions with patience and precision. They have been partners in this endeavor from my first encounter with character strengths. The team has provided me access to research, information, interpretation, and reports without which I could not have written this book and shared it with the project motivator world. They have been tirelessly encouraging of my efforts to bring positive psychology and character strengths to the world of project management, their work is incredible, and their support means so much.

To Megan McDonough and the Wholebeing Institute team—Sonja Craig, Paula Hurd, and Maria Sirois—I offer deep thanks. From expanding my knowledge of positive psychology to encouraging me to embody my learning through conferences and now this book, Megan and her team have been true advocates for my development.

Thank you to Lisle Baker at Suffolk University Law School and his amazing and intrepid students, who joined me in experiment-

ing with character strengths and helped me to hone my ideas in the way that only students of law can!

To my amazing publishing team at Berrett-Koehler—from Neal Maillet, who was willing to offer a new writer a chance; to Charlotte Ashlock, my creative, curious, and brave editor and partner in crime who got on board and experimented along with me; to Lasell Whipple, who used her vision to marshal the resources and creativity of the design team to create a book cover that I love; to Jeevan Sivasubramaniam, who truly is the man behind the curtain; and to all the supporting people who made this such a great experience—I say thank you from the bottom of my heart for an amazing experience. You made the roller-coaster ride of book writing as smooth as possible. I hope you invite me back!

To all my friends and family who have supported me along the way, you know who you are. Your encouragement lives in the pages of this book.

To Rob Kelly, creator of the Thrive Programme and my Thrive clients: you have shown me what thriving means and how far we can go when we put our minds to it.

Most of all, to all my teams who have been on board with all my harebrained schemes and experiments and lived to tell the tale: this book is for you and the project motivators who have the privilege to lead you.

Index

- accountability, 21
- agency, 32
- anxiety, 83
- appreciation
 - of beauty and excellence, 33–34, 50, 100, 110, 124, 194
 - building, 95–108
 - character strengths and, 96–108
 - definition of, 102
 - engagement and, 93–95
 - expressing, 42, 43–44, 64–66
 - modeling, 92
 - for planning and learning styles, 192
- appreciative inquiry, 49, 57–58, 89–92, 203
- attitude, 72
- authority, 16, 70–73, 75
- awareness, building your, 112–114
- beauty, appreciation of, 33–34, 50, 100, 110, 124, 194
- big picture view, 20–21
- bravery
 - character strength of, 43, 44, 53, 102, 197–198
 - definition of, 99, 108
 - leader strength mapping of, 124
 - in project managers, 16
- challenges, overcoming, 86–89
- change, 76–77
- character strengths
 - See also specific strengths*
 - for achieving goals, 48–53
 - applying, 6, 102–107, 111–120, 125–130
 - appreciation and, 96–108
 - assessment of, 96–98, 101–102, 133, 137–139, 167
 - awareness of, 112–114, 143–144
 - benefits of using in workplace, 131
 - building, 8, 118
 - calling forth, 44–45
 - challenges with, 146, 147–174
 - characteristics of, 110–111
 - collisions of, 159, 168–171, 173–174
 - concentration of, 161–163, 166–167
 - concept of, 5
 - definitions of, 99–100
 - dimensions of, 164–168
 - engagement and, 93–95
 - exploring, 114–118, 163–168
 - guidelines for, 107–108
 - introduction to, 29–30
 - leadership and, 120–126
 - lower ranked, 148–150

- character strengths (*continued*)
 - motivation and, 203
 - opportunities, 34–36
 - overuse and underuse of, 150–163, 172–173
 - of project managers, 30–36, 42–69
 - signature strengths, 97, 131, 167
 - situational, 33–34
 - spotting, 204
 - in teams, 130–145, 161–168
 - understanding, 108–111
 - using, 195–197
 - virtues, 97–100
- Cialdini, Robert, 74
- commitment, 24, 47–48, 71, 75
- communication
 - channels, 188–190
 - initiatives, 201–202
 - plans, 181–183, 188
 - by project managers, 21, 34–37
 - skills, 36–37, 38
 - with stakeholders, 34–35, 183, 188
- conflict avoidance, 188–190
- conflict management, 146
- conflicts
 - character strengths and, 147
 - in planning styles, 175, 176–181
- consistency, 75
- coordination, 21
- corporate culture, 24
- courage, 99, 108–109
- creativity
 - character strength of, 51, 54, 102
 - cultivating, 57–58
 - definition of, 99
 - environment to encourage, 83–84
 - growth mind-set and, 81–82
 - understanding, 108
- credibility, 75
- critical thinking, 160
- criticism, 81
- curiosity
 - character strength of, 30–31
 - definition of, 99, 102, 108
 - leader strength mapping of, 124
 - using, 15, 42, 198–202
- decision makers, 134
- disengaged employees, 27–28, 38
- do-it-and-adjust planners, 183
- drive, 18
- educational programs, 38–39
- emotional intelligence, 14
- employees
 - See also* team members
 - disengaged, 27–28, 38
 - engaged. *see* engagement
 - focusing on strengths of, 28–29
 - productivity of, 25
- energizers, 134
- energy, 63
- engagement
 - appreciation and, 93–95
 - benefits of, 24–25, 27–29
 - building, 4, 18, 24, 26
 - character strengths and, 29–30, 93–95
 - as essential to success, 19
 - growth mind-set and, 83–84
 - lack of, 25
 - managers and, 28–29
 - modeling, 26

- motivation and, 3–4
- project managers and, 15–17, 25–27, 40, 194
- project manager's perspective on, 23–26
- sources of, 29–30
- excellence, appreciation of, 33–34, 50, 100, 110, 124, 194
- expectations
 - fixed, 77
 - of project managers, 17–20
- experimentation, 81–84
- failed projects, 22, 38–39
- failure
 - fear of, 81
 - as learning opportunity, 83–84, 195
 - toleration for, 81–82
- fairness
 - character strength of, 30–31, 44
 - definition of, 100, 102, 109
 - leader strength mapping of, 124
 - overuse/underuse analysis, 157, 158
 - using, 61–62
- fear, 83
- feedback
 - negative, 81
 - soliciting, 198–201
- fixed mind-set, 77, 78, 82, 83, 85
- forgiveness
 - character strength of, 102
 - definition of, 100, 109
- generalist theory, of project management, 77–81
- generative thinking, 90
- goals
 - planning and, 177–180
 - progress toward, 48–53
- Golden Rule, 14
- gratitude
 - character strength of, 45, 102
 - definition of, 100, 110
 - leader strength mapping of, 124
- groupthink, 161–163, 167
- growth mind-set
 - benefits of, 83–85
 - cultivating, 84–89, 86
 - definition of, 42
 - hope and, 194
 - modeling, 5, 46, 47, 49, 80–81, 202–203
- happiness strengths, 131, 135, 136
- heart/mind dimensions, 164–166
- honesty
 - character strength of, 30–31, 46–47, 48, 102, 197
 - definition of, 99, 109
 - leader strength mapping of, 126
 - overuse/underuse analysis, 156, 158
- hope
 - building, 62–66
 - character strength of, 6, 31–32, 42, 43–44, 51–52, 102
 - definition of, 100, 110
 - leader strength mapping of, 126
 - using, 194–195
- humanity, 99, 109
- humility
 - character strength of, 30–31, 103
 - definition of, 100, 109

- humor
 - character strength of, 44, 56, 65, 103, 110
 - definition of, 100
 - leader strength mapping of, 124
- idea creators, 134
- implementation, 66–67
- implementation plan, 205–212
- implementers, 134
- influence
 - building, 73–80, 197–198
 - expanding sphere of, 66–69
 - Platinum Rule and, 74
 - power of, 5, 70–73
 - relationship management and, 67
 - using, 50–51, 61, 191–192, 194, 202
- influencers, 134
- information gatherers, 134
- information sharing, 188–190
- information styles, 181–183, 192
- inspirational quotes, 64
- interns, 197
- interpersonal skills, 36–37
- intrapersonal/interpersonal dimensions, 164–166
- job satisfaction, 131, 135
- journaling, 116
- judgment
 - character strength of, 46–47, 49, 52–53, 103, 159–161
 - definition of, 99, 108
- justice, 100, 109
- kindness
 - character strength of, 30–31, 44, 64–65, 103
 - definition of, 99, 109
 - overuse/underuse analysis, 157
- kinesthetic learning, 184–187
- leaders/leadership
 - as cause of problem, 155, 159–161
 - character strength of, 30
 - character strengths and, 56, 103, 120–126
 - definition of, 100, 109
 - project management and, 119–126
 - skills, 37
 - traits, 120–123
- leader strength mapping, 124, 126
- learning
 - from failure, 83–84, 195
 - love of, 6–7, 32–33, 53
 - mind-set, 5, 202–203
 - objectives, 9
 - styles, 183–187, 191–192
- liking, 50–51, 74–75
- line managers, 42
- love
 - character strength of, 64–65, 103
 - definition of, 99, 109
 - leader strength mapping of, 126
- love of learning
 - character strength of, 32–33, 53, 103, 194
 - definition of, 99, 108
 - of project managers, 6–7, 202–203

- management, working with, 66–69
- managers
 - level of engagement and, 28–29
 - project. *see* project managers
- master's programs, 38
- meetings
 - with team members, 52, 61–62
 - video, 63
- milestone planners, 182
- mind-set
 - fixed, 77, 78, 82, 83, 85
 - growth. *see* growth mind-set
 - prevention, 81
- minimum viable products, 181
- modeling
 - appreciation, 92
 - behavior, 71–74, 76–77, 191–192, 196, 202
 - engagement, 26
 - growth mind-set, 5, 46, 47, 49, 80–81, 202–203
- mood, 72
- motivation
 - definition of, 4
 - engagement and, 3–4
 - influence and, 71
 - tools for building, 202–204
- negative feedback, 81
- negativity, 28, 83
- negativity bias, 5–6, 83, 91–92
- optimism, 32
- organization, 21
- overuse, of character strengths, 150–161
- parents, as project managers, 1
- performance appraisals, 8, 42
- perseverance
 - character strength of, 47, 51–52, 81–82, 103
 - definition of, 99, 108
 - leader strength mapping of, 126
 - overuse/underuse analysis, 156, 158
- personal engagement. *See* engagement
- personal influence. *See* influence
- perspective
 - character strength of, 35–36, 50, 103, 194–195
 - definition of, 99, 108
- persuasion, 74
- planning, 21, 61–62, 63
- planning styles, 176–183, 191–192
- Platinum Rule, 14–15, 34–35, 74, 151–154, 195
- positive focus, 5–6, 90–92
- positive psychology, 6, 7–8, 29, 94
- positivity, 83
- power
 - exercise of, 71
 - of influence, 5, 70–73
- prevention mind-set, 81
- productivity, 25
- professional standards, 36
- project management
 - leadership and, 119–126
 - strengths-based, 5–7
- Project Management Institute (PMI), 2, 14, 36–37
- Project Management Talent Gap Report, 23
- project managers
 - attributes needed by, 80
 - character strengths of, 30–36, 42–48

- project managers (*continued*)
 - definition of, 2–3
 - engagement and, 15–17, 25–27, 40, 194
 - as essential to success, 20
 - expectations of, 17–20
 - with growth mind-set, 84–89
 - influence building by, 73–80
 - job outlook for, 23
 - negatives of, 18–19, 21
 - others' perceptions of, 19–22
 - parents as, 1
 - perspective on engagement of, 23–26
 - responsibilities of, 3–4
 - role of, 7–8, 14, 26, 47
 - skills needed by, 3–4
 - as specialists or generalists, 77–81
 - strengths opportunities for, 34–36
 - training for, 36–39
- project motivators, 4, 8, 193–204
- projects
 - failed, 22, 38–39
 - focusing on positives of, 49–51
 - making progress on, 48–53
 - success rates for, 22–23
- prudence
 - character strength of, 33, 48, 49, 103, 194
 - definition of, 100, 109
- Pulse of the Profession Report, 22
- reciprocation, 75
- relationship management, 36, 38, 54–56, 61, 67
- relationship managers, 134
- ripple effect, 26, 71–73, 76–77
- scarcity, 75
- self-managing teams, 44, 53
- self-regulation
 - character strength of, 29, 30–31, 47, 54, 56–57, 103
 - definition of, 100, 109
 - leader strength mapping of, 126
- Seligman, Martin, 111
- signature strengths, 97, 131, 167
- social intelligence
 - building, 15, 180, 195
 - challenge of, 194–195
 - character strength of, 34–35, 45–46, 49, 51, 63, 103
 - concept of, 14
 - definition of, 99, 109
 - overuse/underuse analysis, 158
 - weakness in, 148–150
- social proof, 50–51, 75
- specialized knowledge, 77–81
- spirituality
 - character strength of, 30–31, 54–56, 101, 104
 - definition of, 100, 110
- stakeholders, communication
 - with, 34–35, 183, 188
- Standard for Project Management, 37
- steps-to-get-there planners, 182–183
- strengths
 - See also* character strengths
 - cultivating, 28–29
 - focusing on, 89–92
- strengths-based project management, 5–7
- success strategies, 11, 40, 68, 117, 145, 171
- SWOT analysis, 91

- team-building exercises, 64–65, 107–108
- team members
 - appreciation for, 65–66
 - building appreciation with, 95–108
 - disengaged, 38
 - feedback from, 198–202
 - input from junior, 196–197
 - meeting with, 52, 61–62
 - modeling growth mind-set for, 80–81
 - remote, 46, 63
- teams
 - building strengths awareness in, 143–144
 - character strengths in, 130–145, 161–168
 - concentration of strengths on, 161–163, 166–167
 - integrating new members on, 26–27
 - joining existing, 41–69
 - roles on, 132–136
 - self-managing, 44, 53
 - undercover, 196
- team vision, 60–61
- teamwork
 - character strength of, 30, 47–48, 50, 52–53, 56–57, 61–62, 69, 104
 - definition of, 100, 109
 - implementation and, 66–67
 - leader strength mapping of, 126
 - overuse/underuse analysis, 157
- temperance, 100, 109
- tracking, 21
- training, 36–39
- transcendence, 100, 110
- trust
 - building, 53, 61, 75–76, 197–198
 - lack of, 51
- undercover teams, 196
- underuse, of character strengths, 150–161
- values, 92
- VIA Institute on Character, 29, 30
- video updates, 190
- virtues, 97–98
- vision
 - building shared, 45
 - team, 60–61
- vision planners, 182
- vulnerability, 197–198
- weaknesses, 149–150
- wisdom, 99, 108
- zest
 - character strength of, 51, 59–60, 63, 65, 104
 - definition of, 99, 109

About the Author



Photo: Jennifer Morris Photography

You are the linchpin of organizational change and success—that is what Ruth believes. She has been a project manager of large-scale, international, complex projects for twenty-five years. Now she focuses on ways that you—as a project motivator—can achieve your greatest goals by building coaching skills and cultivating character strengths in your teams. Based on her extensive experience in team building and project management, Ruth calls on all project managers to take the lead in creating a positive employee experience.

She is the founder of ALLE, which provides project motivation services and coaching for project managers who want to feel more engaged and be more engaging in their work. She also coaches clients struggling with anxiety and phobias and is a licensed

consultant of The Thrive Programme.[®] Ruth has PMP and PMP-ACP credentials, is an accredited ACC coach with the International Coach Federation, and is licensed to practice law in California. Later this year she will start offering coaching training for project managers with the Center for Coaching Certification.

Ruth wanders the world with her husband and their dog, Milo.

Her motto is “Be hopeful, be strong, be brave, and, above all, be curious.”



Berrett–Koehler Publishers

Berrett-Koehler is an independent publisher dedicated to an ambitious mission: *Connecting people and ideas to create a world that works for all.*

Our publications span many formats, including print, digital, audio, and video. We also offer online resources, training, and gatherings. And we will continue expanding our products and services to advance our mission.

We believe that the solutions to the world's problems will come from all of us, working at all levels: in our society, in our organizations, and in our own lives. Our publications and resources offer pathways to creating a more just, equitable, and sustainable society. They help people make their organizations more humane, democratic, diverse, and effective (and we don't think there's any contradiction there). And they guide people in creating positive change in their own lives and aligning their personal practices with their aspirations for a better world.

We strive to practice what we preach through what we call “The BK Way.” At the core of this approach is *stewardship*, a deep sense of responsibility to administer the company for the benefit of all our stakeholder groups, including authors, customers, employees, investors, service providers, sales partners, and the communities and environment around us. Everything we do is built around stewardship and our other core values of *quality, partnership, inclusion, and sustainability.*

This is why Berrett-Koehler is the first book publishing company to be both a Certified B Corporation (a rigorous certification) and a benefit corporation (a for-profit legal status), which together require us to adhere to the highest standards for corporate, social, and environmental performance. And it is why we have instituted many pioneering practices, including the Berrett-Koehler Constitution, the Bill of Rights and Responsibilities for BK Authors, and our unique Author Days.

We are grateful to our readers, authors, and other friends who are supporting our mission. We ask you to share with us examples of how BK publications and resources are making a difference in your lives, organizations, and communities.



Berrett-Koehler Publishers

Connecting people and ideas
to create a world that works for all

Dear reader,

Thank you for picking up this book and welcome to the worldwide BK community! You're joining a special group of people who have come together to create positive change in their lives, organizations, and communities.

What's BK all about?

Our mission is to connect people and ideas to create a world that works for all.

Why? Our communities, organizations, and lives get bogged down by old paradigms of self-interest, exclusion, hierarchy, and privilege. But we believe that can change. That's why we seek the leading experts on these challenges—and share their actionable ideas with you.

A welcome gift.

To help you get started, we'd like to offer you a **free copy** of one of our bestselling ebooks:

www.bkconnection.com/welcome

When you claim your **free ebook**, you'll also be subscribed to our blog.

Our freshest insights.

Access the best new tools and ideas for leaders at all levels on our blog at ideas.bkconnection.com.

Sincerely,

Your friends at Berrett-Koehler

