

**Title:**

**Coaching using a holistic, strengths-based approach: Dual Perspectives**

**Experience-based paper**

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### **Abstract:**

Coaching is a rapidly growing form of consulting that is frequently used for leadership and career development, performance management issues and career transition. It often includes the use of a variety of assessment instruments in conjunction with counseling sessions. Coaching philosophies vary; however, those that utilize a holistic, strengths-based approach are typically more effective than other methods.

This experienced based paper is co-authored by the coachee recipient and the external coach who utilized a holistic, strengths-based assessment and coaching process as a career development intervention. It focuses on the concept of talent alignment, looking at the “whole person” and how their talents are used both personally and professionally. Aligning the use of one’s gifts to all aspects of life improves performance, increases productivity, retention and employee satisfaction. Data from additional coachees who have completed a holistic, strengths-based assessment process will be compared.

In this paper, the coach describes the appreciative, talent identification model called, the “Inner Circles,” and how it impacted the coachee’s self-perception and job performance. The coachee shares her viewpoint based on the value received via the coaching engagement in contrast to a 360 degree feedback method that was used previously. It discusses the transformation process for the coachee and the specific results and outcomes of the coaching process. Input from the coachee’s human resources vice president is included as another perspective. The paper will address additional assessment tools that were used and the resulting benefits.

### **Introduction**

Coaching is a rapidly growing form of consulting in which the consultant (coach) assists an individual. Both employers and employees hire coaches to help them achieve their goals. Organizations are using coaching for leadership and career development, and performance management for mid to upper

managers. Individuals may also hire coaches for career development and career transition.

Cummings and Worley (2005) notes that coaching can be seen as a specialized form of OD, one that is focused on using the principles of applied behavioral science to increase the capacity and effectiveness of individuals as opposed to groups or organizations. It is one of the fastest growing areas of OD practice. They discuss that coaching has a fuzzy relationship to OD and questions its boundaries, but includes this topic in his current eighth edition as a response to the demand for coaching and how well-positioned OD practitioners are to fulfill these requirements.

Although coaching has been practiced for many years, few studies have assessed its effectiveness. Cummings (2005, p. 218) discusses two studies on coaching effectiveness. One found improved personal productivity, quality, working relationships, and job satisfaction. The other found improvements in productivity and employee satisfaction. The return on investments was 5.7 percent and 529 percent respectively.

An intervention suggests entering into an organizational system for the purpose of creating change. Rarely is there just one intervention. Coaching involves improving individual behaviors that will eventually improve overall organizational effectiveness. Good coaching emphasizes certain success criteria including trust, openness, honesty, authenticity, and inquiry. Some tools and techniques used include 360 feedback and other assessment instruments, discussions with the coachee's supervisor and human resources via periodic update meetings.

Hunt (2004) reports on a grounded theory study of fifteen executive coaching cases to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of this increasingly important consulting practice. Techniques found to be helpful in

coaching relationships include a results oriented approach, useful tips and ideas, and a focus on data rather than feelings in giving feedback. Unhelpful techniques include over reliance on negative feedback, too much attention to process, naïve recommendations and personal agenda pushing.

Appreciative Inquiry was originated by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva from the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University in the 1980s. Since their original theory was published in 1987, many more research studies, books, and articles have followed.

“Appreciative Inquiry is a co-constructive inquiry process that searches for everything that ‘gives life’ to organizations, communities, and larger human systems when they are most alive, effective, creative and health in their interconnected ecology of relationships. To appreciate, quite simply, means to value and to recognize that which has value - and is a way of knowing and valuing the best in life.” (Cooperrider & Avital, 2005). This research perspective is intended for discovering, understanding, and fostering innovations in social-organizational arrangements and processes and uses what is known 4 “D” Cycle: Discovery (What gives life – Appreciating), Dream (What might be – Envisioning Impact), Design (What should be the ideal – Co-Constructing) and Destiny (How to empower, learn, and adjust/improvise – Sustaining). (Cooperrider, 2005, p. 192) Could a similar approach be used for effective coaching outcomes?

The following describes the two author’s perspectives as they worked together in a pro-bono consulting arrangement. The Coach (Diane Kubal) offered her consulting services to the coachee (Sue Lawler) in exchange for her authorization to use her story on the success of her Inner Circles model in her book, ***Talent Circles, Discover What You Do Best and Why***. Little did the coachee know that this experience would shape her immediate career and frame the topic of her dissertation research. A holistic, strengths based appreciative approach was used.

## **Coachee's Perspective (Sue Lawler)**

2008 was a year of transformation for me. In April, I was accepted into Benedictine University's PhD program in Organizational Development. It was also the same month that I was introduced to Diane Kubal, who would coach me over the year, enable me to see my strengths, and help me transition into a new career direction that eventually lead to a new role at my organization.

My career began at Arthur Andersen in 1987. A graduate of the University of Illinois's Accountancy program, I passed the Certified Public Accountant exam and audited for this firm for a few years. In 1989, I left the firm to work for Baxter International in a number of financial roles and moved to its spin-off company, Caremark, where I was able to transition into a corporate business development role. Both of these companies supported my MBA studies at the Kellogg School of Business at Northwestern University.

Consulting in KPMG's national healthcare strategy practice came next, followed by consulting in a nonprofit civic organization that provided pro-bono consulting to local governments including the City of Chicago and the State of Illinois. During this period, I started teaching MBA classes which I thoroughly enjoyed. This led me to my current organization, Lake Forest Graduate School of Management, where I was hired in 2000 as the Associate Dean of the Chicago campus.

For nine years, I proudly made significant accomplishments in my associate dean role. I developed healthcare and organizational behavior specializations, recruited, coached, and managed scores of practioner faculty members, introduced the school to three organizations that eventually became onsite MBA partners contributing millions of dollars in incremental tuition, and

oversaw the downtown campus academic and operations team located in the a fiercely competitive Chicago MBA market.

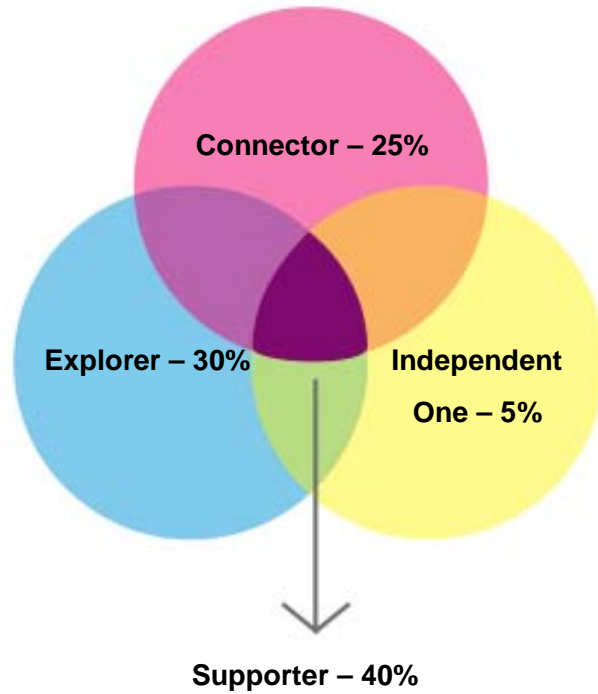
I also had a few projects that did not fare well. In 2007, I piloted an electronic portfolio tool which failed miserably. I reluctantly overcame my fear of technology, but often got lost in the details of the complicated tool. The roll out of this tool came simultaneous with the introduction of a new curriculum and a new learning management system, so faculty buy-in was almost non-existent.

In addition, writing a strategic plan of a new student experience initiative was difficult and had many stops and starts. Project management and strategic thinking were areas of development for me noted in my performance review. In 2007, I had my first 360 feedback. While my co-workers rated me as a collaborative team player, my ratings were lower with my supervisor and supervisee. Areas of strengths were networking ability, great at relationships, a keen eye for detail and a very hard worker. Areas of improvement included dealing with difficult people, slowing down, prioritization, and focus on results.

I was introduced to Diane Kubal by my supervisor and my Human Resources Vice President. They had both had meetings with Diane who had developed a model, was writing a book, and was looking to test her model and approach in a live coaching situation. They thought that I would really enjoy and benefit from Diane's model. I was very open to this and I appreciated the talent management initiative that was going on in my organization.

Diane and I first met at a Starbucks café where we would periodically meet throughout 2008. Our first meeting amazed me. The two hour meeting consisted of getting to know me and asking positively framed questions. From that meeting, she developed my Inner Circles which identified my natural gifts and talents. My circles are Explorer, Connector, and Independent One. My overall purpose is to be a Supporter. My circles follow. (See exhibit 1).

## Inner Circles <sup>SM</sup>



Metaphor/ Archetype	Explorer	Connector	Independent One	Supporter
Role	Traveler, Columbus, "fun aunt"	Networker, resource provider	Campus Dean, achiever	Counselor, altruist
Activity	Reading, learning	Teaching informally, spirituality book club	Investing, growing and searching for potential, controlling own destiny	Volunteering for causes, thinking of others
Skills	Researching, educating	Influencing, swimming and spinning	Goal setting, creating options for self	Listening, empathizing, meeting new people

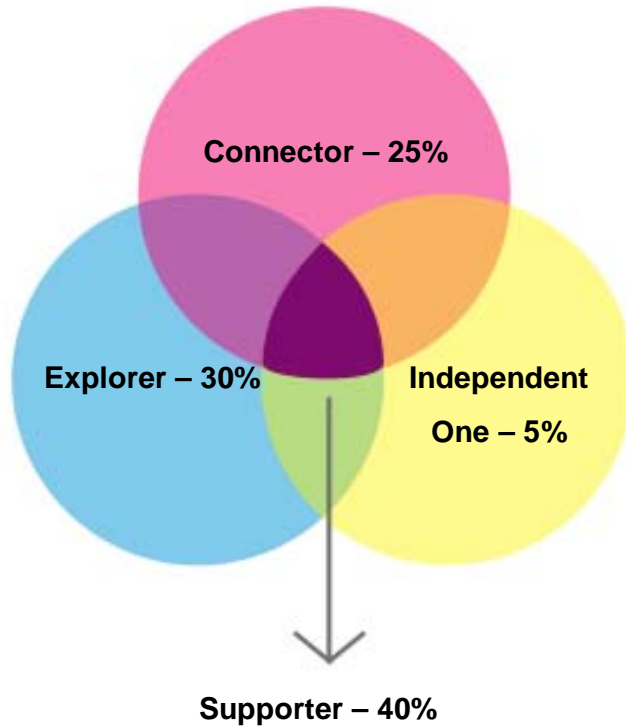
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### Exhibit 1

My next step was to map some of the themes of our conversation and other assessments I had taken in a grid. In addition, I was to take some of the findings from other instruments that I had taken in the past and include it in the

grid (See exhibit 2). Other assessments that I had taken all helped in my personal reflection. My enneagram is the Peacemaker (with Loyalist and Achiever as tied seconds). The Peacemaker is defined as receptive, reassuring, agreeable and complacent. This is further confirmed with my top strength. My top 5 strengths from Rath's (2007) Strengthfinder 2.0 assessment tool are Harmony, Woo, Input, Activator, and Positivity. My Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is ENFJ (Extraversion, Intuition, Feeling, and Judging). MBTI describes this combination as "Warm, empathetic, responsive and responsible. Highly attuned to the emotions, needs and motivations of others. Find potential in everyone; want to help others fulfill their potential. May act as catalysts for individual and group growth. Loyal, responsive to praise and criticism. Sociable, facilitate others in a group and provide inspiring leadership." This is an extremely accurate reflection of who I am.

# Inner Circles<sup>SM</sup>



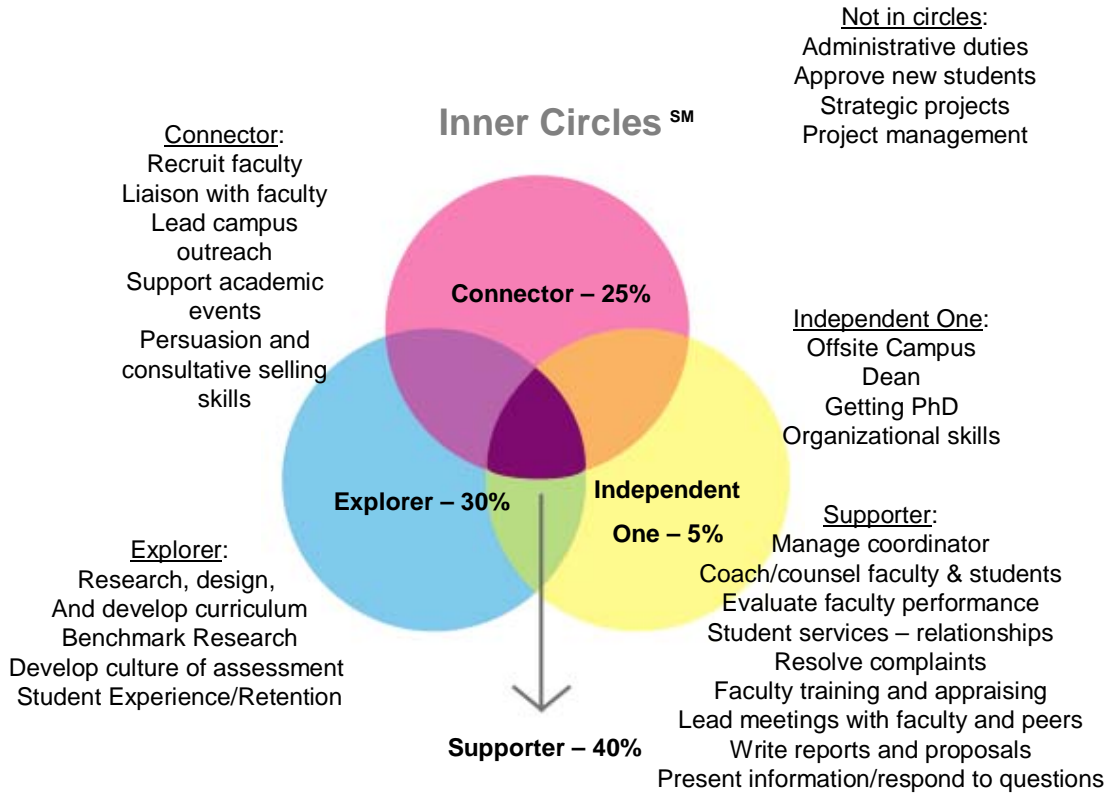
Metaphor/ Archetype	Explorer	Connector	Independent One	Supporter
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Skills	Researching, educating	Influencing, swimming and spinning	Goal setting, creating options for self	Listening, empathizing, meeting new people
Strengths	Input	Activator, Woo	Harmony	Positivity, Peacemaker
Enneagram				

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Exhibit 2

Other assessments, such as my FIRO-B indicates that I have a high need for inclusion and affection and a low need for control. My DISC is an off the chart “I” (Influential) and my combined profile is a “Promoter”. Conducting this personal, reflective, and introspective work was unusual for a highly extroverted individual, but having a coach to discuss it with made it more fun and engaging. More important, she helped me pull it all together.

The next step was to map my current job description to my circles. (See exhibit 3). During the first round, I estimated that my circles and my job duties were around a 90 percent match. However, in presenting these circles to my supervisor and VP HR, it was deemed that those duties that fell outside of my circles (i.e. project management and strategic thinking) were a much larger part of my job in their estimation than I viewed them. For me to get to the next level; I’d needed to further develop those skills.



Metaphor/ Archetype	Explorer	Connector	Independent One	Supporter
Role	Traveler, Associate Dean, student	Networker, resource provider, Business Development	Campus Dean, achiever	Counselor, altruist
Activity	Reading, learning	Teaching, sharing	Investing, growing and searching for potential, controlling own destiny	Volunteering for causes, thinking of others
Skills	Researching, educating	Influencing, Promoter	Goal setting, creating options for self Harmony	Listening, empathizing, meeting new people Positivity, Peacemaker
Strengths	Input	Activator, Woo		
Enneagram				

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Exhibit 3

This is when the difficult, yet transformative part of the experience commenced. In discussing this with Diane, I realized that my true strength and the value that I've brought to my employers were my strong people relater skills and being a positive ambassador of my organization. This had led to my success in attracting faculty, students, and onsite MBA clients. However, my adversity to conflict prevented me from acting effectively as a change agent which was critical in my current role. My supervisor noted performance gaps including leadership, communication, and developing others. Diane saw this struggle and coached me to realize that a role that leveraged my strengths would be a much better fit for me and the organization.

During this period a Business Development sales position became available in the Corporate Education division of the school. I was immediately attracted to the job description and called the HR VP and spoke to the hiring manager. However, the pay was significantly lower than my current salary and the location was about 33 miles from my home. Despite these obstacles, Diane coached me to see the value of this opportunity. Some of the language that she used really enabled and inspired me to see the possibilities this position could create for me. She claimed that this role would be a good way for me to leverage my OD learning's from my PhD to help clients. She claimed that I would be less drained each day in this role because it was leveraging my strengths.

It was also during this period that I was really struggling in my current role. However, I was very stubborn and wanted to hold on to my current role despite my challenges. After significant coaching and conversations with Diane, I applied for the job. Each of the seven interviews that followed gave me a better idea of the role and more confidence that I could be successful. Diane checked in after each round of interviews. I was offered the job in late December and started in January 2009. At the time of this writing, I'm thrilled that I made the switch. I'm energized and engaged; and initial feedback from my team has been very

positive. It has truly been a transformation for me. I could not have made this change without Diane's help.

## **Coach's Perspective (Diane Kubal)**

### **The Inner Circles Model**

The Inner Circles model is an appreciative approach to identifying a person's talents. It identifies and names, using archetypes and metaphors, an individual's best talents and points out their "purpose," calling or what they are meant to do. It answers the question, "Why am I here?"

The model consists of three concentric circles that overlap. Where these talents overlap is the person's core or purpose. In order for a talent to be a "circle," that talent must be manifest in all aspects of a person's life, personally and professionally. These metaphors show up on a physical, mental, emotional and spiritual level.

For example, one of Sue's circle's (natural gifts) is **Explorer** (see Exhibit 1 on page 5). This is demonstrated by her interest in world travel. She has visited many countries around the globe and continues to learn about new places. Intellectually she loves to read and is constantly learning new things; she explores the mental world and travels to new lands metaphorically. This is why she truly enjoys her PhD work. As a **Connector** she is emotionally connecting with people and always networking.

The assessment process makes four inquiries which are the levers that surface an individual's natural talents. These questions focus on:

1. Roles played in childhood and as an adult, personally and professionally
2. Childhood dreams

3. Themes playing out from childhood to the present
4. Imagining the possibilities for life today with no limitations

The answers to these questions are given via a facilitated conversation with a certified Inner Circles coach. From these answers, themes and metaphors are tested and identified with the coachee.

Some key principles behind the Inner Circles model include:

- To be a natural “talent,” it must appear in all aspects of life
- Natural talents manifest on many levels, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual
- “Right work” builds upon past experiences vs. starting over
- What you do for yourself, you do for others, this is your gift
- Core talents never change, although their manifestation may express in new ways
- Moving forward should be easy, not a struggle, motivation and enthusiasm are present with healthy individuals. If not, the purpose is not identified correctly or there is a blockage that needs to be removed.

Since the Inner Circles process is not yet statistically validated, although more than 120 people have successfully completed the assessment, the model creator utilizes two additional validated online assessment tools, Buckingham’s/Rath’s Strengthfinder and Riso and Hudson’s Enneagram.

Typically there are five steps involved in the assessment process. Because the creator is writing a book, she utilizes five chapters that describe the model.

1. The coachee reads the five chapters that describe the model with examples of other people’s Inner Circles
2. A one-on-one 90 minute facilitated conversation occurs between coach and coachee to identify and name their circles and purpose

3. These are further described by completing the corresponding chart using examples of how the talents demonstrate in roles, activities and skills
4. the coachee completes the online Strengthfinder and Enneagram assessments
5. The results of these assessments are mapped to the chart and aligned with the circles in a second conversation between the coach and coachee

With coaching interventions there are additional steps and goals identified for the coaching intervention.

### **Coaching Context and Background Information**

My initial introduction into Sue's organization was as a talent broker where my firm, Fulcrum Network, provided some external organization development consultants and coaching resources for this client starting back in 2003. Fulcrum's relationship was with the President and transitioned to the VP of HR over the past few years.

In 2007 I approached the VP of HR about a book I was writing and requested an interview with her. After interviewing about 35 people over a period of one year, I developed a model that identifies an individual's natural gifts and talents.

In 2008, I asked the VP of HR if she'd be willing to be a "guinea pig" for my talent alignment model and she agreed. Upon completion of the assessment process with her, I explained that I was looking for someone to coach where I could apply the model to a career development situation. She thought she might have someone that would be a good fit and discussed this with the employee's manager. The manager was open to the idea and shared it with Sue. She was interested in being coached and this is how our coaching relationship began.

The HR VP explained Sue had been overlooked for promotion and expressed her dissatisfaction about this given that she had been in the role for 8 years performing successfully. The VP of HR and Sue's manager were concerned about Sue's fit for her current role as Associate Dean and felt she could benefit by taking a closer look at her talents to determine her career direction. She was a good employee and there were no specific job related performance issues at the time. The situation seemed a bit gray and some clarity would be useful for everyone involved.

At this point in time, Sue had just enrolled as a PhD student at Benedictine University, in the Organizational Behavior program, which her supervisor deemed was not directly related to her job. This was evidenced by the fact that even though the organization has a tuition reimbursement program, the organization did not provide any financial support for anyone getting their PhD.

### **The Coaching Intervention**

The coaching process includes applying the model, the Inner Circles, to the VP of HR and Sue's direct supervisor so that they both had a clear understanding of the work that Sue and I would be doing together.

Sue and I initially met to complete the Inner Circles assessment process which included a two-hour facilitated conversation to identify her talents. Exhibit 1 on page 7 is a graphical depiction of her gifts using the Inner Circles approach. The second step was to complete the online Strengthfinder and Enneagram assessments which we aligned with her circles shown in the chart in Exhibit 2 on page 9.

After mapping her job responsibilities to her circles, the third step, we found that a few of her responsibilities fell outside her areas of strengths. However, from Sue's perspective, most of her responsibilities seemed to fall

under her areas of strength. Sue shared that leadership, strategic thinking and project management were identified as gaps in her 360 feedback report and her performance review from the previous year. She was given assignments that would enable her to utilize strategic thinking skills and she attended a project management training class. However, assignments and tasks that involved these skills were still challenging for Sue.

Although Sue requested time to meet with her boss to review her talents based on our coaching, she did not get the opportunity to discuss her Inner Circles with her in detail. This was a very busy time for the organization and other priorities got in the way. Also, Sue's office was off-site, so it was not easy for them to meet in person. Even when meetings were scheduled, they were cut short due to time constraints and business at hand.

However, in preparation for meeting with her boss, Sue did share her Inner Circles with the VP of HR and received some initial feedback. During the time of our coaching relationship, Sue was scheduled to receive a performance review. The review did not happen until September, even though it was scheduled for July/August.

While coaching Sue, my sense of the best use of her talents would have been in some type of sales role. I did not share this with her at the time because I wanted her to realize this for herself. During our coaching relationship, there were 3 business development positions that opened up in her organization. These were the only jobs that were available at the time. I encouraged Sue to inquire about them to see how they might be a fit with her talents.

She seemed quite reluctant to consider it because it would require a significant pay cut. With much persuading, she did inquire about the positions with the hiring manager. Both the hiring manager and Sue agreed that she could

be a good fit. However, once she found out the salary range, she immediately dismissed the idea.

In the meantime, Sue had her performance review which was not as positive as she had expected it to be. From Sue's view, she had put in long hours and a great deal of effort with little or no recognition from her boss. Although she met the requirements for the job with a rating of "Meets Expectations," her boss noted areas that needed improvement that were key to her role. Sue shared with me that she felt that there were some issues with her boss and that she had some concerns based on her supervisor's behavior toward her.

Shortly after this, she had a meeting with her boss and HR. They talked about how the project management and strategic thinking aspects of her position were about 60% of the job and Sue viewed them as about 10% of her responsibilities. It was clear that there was a mismatch between Sue's and her boss's expectations for her job. As a result, they asked Sue to take 45 days to determine if she felt her position as Associate Dean was a good fit for her. In that meeting, Sue communicated that she wanted to continue in her role as Associate Dean and would work on her strategic thinking and project management skills to improve.

Sue and I reviewed the results of the meeting and determined that the requirements of her job had changed over the past eight years because she had received solid reviews in previous years. She was still quite adamant that she wanted to remain in her current role and improve her weaknesses. One of Sue's reasons for remaining in this position was because she was paying for her PhD herself and this was quite a large sum of money. It would be more difficult for her to do this on her own on a decreased salary.

During the 45 day period, Sue wanted to demonstrate her ability to think strategically and be a good project manager. She solicited feedback from other leaders in the organization about her situation and two of them suggested that she interview for the business development positions since they knew this was strength for her. They gave her similar feedback as her boss did on areas for improvement, with one of them being the importance of focusing on results. Again, she did not acknowledge or consider the sales position as an option.

With the stress of the situation with her boss, it was difficult for her to focus, as her fear and emotions seemed to get the best of her. I knew this was a critical time and the “writing seemed to be on the wall.” If Sue was not able to turn around in the 45 days, she would likely be put on a “performance plan.” The signs were there, but she didn’t want to acknowledge them. This was a good example of how she tended to avoid conflict.

Sue did not reach out to me during this time. I contacted her several times to get updates on the meetings that she was having with her boss and HR to support her through this time. Needless to say, she was very nervous, but still wanted to stay in her position. There was also a prestige associated with her role that she did not want to give up, in addition to the money. She was getting a lot of negative vibes from her boss, which didn’t help her toward her goal of improving her weak areas. She seemed to become a bit paralyzed.

I was concerned about Sue losing her job and contacted the HR VP to talk about the situation with her. There were no definitive plans on how they were going to move forward, other than to talk with Sue again after the 45 day evaluation period. I surmised that Sue was on “thin ice.”

Just prior to Sue’s performance review, we had completed our work together. I requested a meeting with HR and Sue’s boss to get feedback on the process. We talked about Sue’s strengths and that her best talents were not

utilized in a leadership role. I offered to talk with Sue about her options to help her evaluate what she wanted to do after the 45 day period was over. The HR VP thought this was a good idea and appreciated the additional assistance.

I suggested to Sue that we meet in person, as many of our conversations during this time had been over the phone because the formal coaching process had ended. We did a force field analysis of the situation to help Sue understand where she stood and to determine the best action steps to move forward. In this meeting, Sue realized that the best course of action was to apply for the Business Development position, as it would be better to have a reduced salary than no job at all, especially in this economy and her goal of completing her PhD program.

In my view as her coach, the business development position was a great opportunity for Sue to leverage her learning from the PhD program by selling OD consulting services to clients. It would give her the opportunity to use her Explorer talents as she learns her new job and about her clients challenges. It would allow her to use her Connector talents in networking for business and providing consulting resources to her clients. In a business development role, salespeople typically work independently in the field, so she'd have some freedom to manage her time as the "Independent One."

All of these strengths would integrate into her Supporter purpose and this would be fulfilled in her position, because it would be her job to support her clients in accomplishing their goals as a sales consultant. She already has a great deal of knowledge of the resources her organization could provide because she has been employed there for more than eight years. It seemed like she could not have found a better way to utilize her talents in moving to the next level in her career. But something was in the way of her being able to see this.

One of the questions that came up in our conversations was, was it possible for someone to interview for another position while they were on a 45 day evaluation period as Sue was. I suggested that she look in the employee handbook to see if there was an HR policy on this. She investigated this and there was nothing in the HR handbook on this. She was still set on staying in her current role.

Also, Sue heard that two of the three business development positions were filled. She had a date on the calendar set for her meeting with her boss and HR for the 45 day review and still she did not pursue the business development position. Then she heard through the grapevine that one of the prior business development employees that went on maternity leave came back and took the third position. So, she had totally written off this as an option.

The prior business development employee that came back from maternity leave did not take this position, but only returned to work part-time in another role. At the “11<sup>th</sup> hour” Sue decided that she would consider the business development role. She communicated to HR that she wanted to interview for the position. The organization was ready to make an offer to another individual outside the organization but gave Sue the chance to interview. After several interviews and a couple weeks’ time, she was offered the job!

Sue has now been on the job for several months and seems to be very engaged and doing well.

### **Coach Reflections and Learning**

This intervention was the second time I used the Inner Circles approach in a formal coaching setting. There was a good deal of learning and I consider it a great success.

Sue had received 360 feedback and the focus of the results and follow up was on the areas where her scores were low. These included strategic thinking, project management and leadership. Even though Sue was given opportunities and training to continue to develop these skills, it still did not yield the desired and required results.

Sue's gifts and talents, what she does best naturally, became misaligned with her role as Associate Dean. No matter how much she tried to improve her weak areas, it would require her to put in large amounts of time and effort into tasks she was not very good at nor did she enjoy. This leads to burn out and frustration and reduces job satisfaction, motivation and employee retention.

An area for improvement would be to compare the coachee's view of the Inner Circles and alignment of talents with the job and the supervisor's view earlier in the process. Although this was part of the original plan, this step was delayed too long. As the coach, I should have ensured that it happened and stepped in by talking with Sue's boss. The misalignment issues surfaced in conjunction with the performance review, which made it much more intense.

Sue's resistance to consider the business development position stems from a pattern and history of not addressing conflict and adversity in her life. This was an obstacle that was in the way of her expressing her talents. She had to be forced into looking at it by her work situation.

These kinds of incidents would continue until Sue came "face to face" with who she really is. Now that she is in a position where her talents are well aligned, she can effectively demonstrate her gifts because her new job requires these talents. This should result in increased productivity, greater job satisfaction and retention. Sue was considering positions outside her organization prior to accepting the business development position.

After Sue accepted the new business development position, she shared a story with me. Recently, she ran into an old college friend who she had not seen in twenty years. Sue spoke to her about her new position and that she is pursuing her PhD. Her friend reminded her that when she was in her last year of college she discovered the field of OD. At that time, Sue was very excited about it, and wanted to go down that path and mentioned this to her this college friend. Sue didn't even remember this. She was almost finished with her CPA work and didn't want to start over. She has come full ***circle!***

Over the years, Sue has received signals and warning signs in her life that she chose to ignore or avoid, because it might bring out a conflict. Twenty years later, the same issue has surfaced. I'm pleased that Sue was able to see it and come to terms with it now. It's never too late. I believe she is on a path to increased success and satisfaction with both her personal and professional life.

Upon sharing this paper with the HR VP, Suzanne Coonan, she had the following comments: "From my very first meeting with Diane Kubal, I saw the value and opportunity in using her Inner Circles model to focus on leveraging and aligning strengths. When she asked if I knew of anyone who might be able to benefit from this process, I knew immediately that Sue would be a great fit. I have to say, while there were a few bumps along the way, the end result was truly a win-win for Sue and for the organization. We were able to retain a valuable employee who had a long tenure with the school and leverage her strengths in a different department and role in the company that seems to be a much better fit for her and us. The use of the Inner Circles model, combined with Diane's effective and thorough coaching, truly made a significant impact on Sue and her career. I fully support this model combined with the coaching, and have witnessed firsthand what a difference it made to Sue and to our organization. I can only imagine the widespread impact it could have if it was applied to individuals in organizations all over the world."

## Strengths of the Inner Circles Approach

The Inner Circles is a **simple** method that utilizes a Venn diagram as a visual tool to depict an individual's natural gifts and talents. It is **accessible** in that the talents can be surfaced in people ranging from 16 years of age into adulthood via personal stories. The approach is **personal** and unique to each individual, enabling a person to embrace their talent. There is no limit to the number of talents that can be identified and named since the coachee names their talents with the assistance of the coach.

The process is **fast**, it can be completed in 90 minutes. It does not require months of work and reflection. It **unlocks energy** and creates motivation to act or it will accelerate the manifestation of disconnects to remove obstacles. Lastly, it **activates**; things begin to happen naturally, attracting people and situations that are in alignment.

## Conclusions/Further Research Implications

By aligning a person's talents with their job, there is little need to spend energy on improving weaknesses. There are always areas to improve, but the best utilization of human resources is to align their talents with tasks, responsibilities and assignments. Managers can then focus their time on maximizing people's talents vs. spending time and energy on improving their weak points. It's a much better use of managers' and employee's time and yields more benefits to the organization.

A holistic, appreciative, strength-based approach is the most effective way to manage talent in organizations. The skills required to do this are often possessed by coaches and external consultants. If organizations could harness the ability to identify and maximize talent, productivity could be increased significantly and costs reduced, ultimately improving profits.

Based on a survey of 114 participants in the Inner Circles assessment process, following are some statistics that support the above conclusions. Only two of the individuals that completed the survey experienced a coaching process.

- 80 of the 114 participants responded; a 70% response rate, which we are pleased to report.
- 84% of the respondents have participated in 360 feedback processes either on themselves, others or both. This audience is quite familiar with 360 feedback based on their own experience. Almost half (48%) of the respondents are in the HR profession and the other half are administrative and professional, mostly professionals.
- 84% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they learned something new about themselves via the appreciative, strength-based Inner Circles assessment process. 67% agreed or strongly agreed that what they learned was different than other more popular assessments they have taken. Given that this is a very familiar audience with other assessments tools, this is considered a very positive response.
- 72% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that a holistic, appreciative approach creates more positive outcomes than 360 feedback and other more traditional assessment methods. Positive outcomes were defined as better alignment, clarity, emotions or changes in one's work or personal life.
- 100% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that aligning one's talents both personally and professionally generates

improved productivity and effectiveness at work and in one's personal life.

- 64% agreed or strongly agreed that the Inner Circles assessment process increased their energy level and motivation to use their talents to a greater degree at work and in other relationships.
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that when an employee's natural gifts and talents are aligned with their job, it increases productivity, job satisfaction and employee retention.

Further research can be help to answer the following questions.

How can organizations use holistic, strength-based assessment processes and executive coaching to help leaders effectively utilize and maximize talent to improve productivity, employee satisfaction and retention?

How can individuals use holistic, strength-based, appreciative assessment processes and executive coaching to effectively align their talents with their job and the organization's needs to improve their own productivity, job satisfaction and retention?

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