Title of Project: Discovering Our Collective Strengths
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Abstract
We propose to communally share and reflect upon data generated via use of the Clifton StrengthsFinder talent inventory in an action research project designed to explore and enhance the science of community medicine. Awareness of individual and collective strengths will be used to subsequently inform the development and testing of social innovation projects (Prototype 0.8 projects) in a collaborative process involving students, faculty, staff, community members, patients and other interested parties.

Definition: Action research (as defined by Wikipedia) is “research initiated to solve an immediate problem or a reflective process of progressive problem solving led by individuals working with others in teams or as part of a ‘community of practice’ to improve the way they address issues and solve problems. It is sometimes called participatory action research. Action research involves the process of actively participating in an organization change situation whilst conducting research. Action research can also be undertaken by larger organizations or institutions, assisted or guided by professional researchers, with the aim of improving their strategies, practices and knowledge of the environments within which they practice. As designers and stakeholders, researchers work with others to propose a new course of action to help their community improve its work practices. Action research challenges traditional social science by moving beyond reflective knowledge created by outside experts sampling variables, to an active moment-to-moment theorizing, data collecting and inquiry occurring in the midst of emergent structure. “Knowledge is always gained through action and for action. From this starting point, to question the validity of social knowledge is to question, not how to develop a reflective science about action, but how to develop genuinely well-informed action - how to conduct an action science” (Torbert 2002). In this sense, performing action research is the same as performing an experiment, thus it is an empirical process.”

A. Specific Aims It is the goal of this research project to facilitate utilization of an online survey (Clifton Strengths Finder (CSF)) which is designed to provide feedback regarding individual talents to 1) aid in formation of community medicine learning groups; and, to 2) address specific hypotheses formulated after review of results from usage of this tool in various institutional personal and leadership development initiatives. The overall goal in utilizing the CSF tool is to provide individuals with an objective talent inventory from which they can begin personal reflective exercises ostensibly in order to develop natural inclinations (talents) into strengths. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, assessment and subsequent reflection by groups upon talents possessed by individual group members provides a starting point from which to assemble balanced teams (with respect to the assayed talents) in order to more efficiently attain mutual goals and to carry out various collaborative projects. We propose to facilitate administration of the CSF to various groups of students, staff and practitioners in a range of fields (medical, physicians assistants, law, marketing, social work, etc.) to determine whether specific talents are enriched in specific groups and to document this process via publication as well as presentation of the findings to the groups involved. We hypothesize that realization and group reflection upon talents
possessed by members of formed groups will enhance collaborative efforts and may reveal clustering of individuals with particular talents into particular fields of study or occupations.

B. Background and Significance The CSF assessment tool is based on work in the field of positive psychology which address questions and methods aimed at enhancing positive human functioning. This is in contrast to the study of dysfunctional systems which are more typically studied. The tool is publicly available by purchasing the book, “StrengthsFinder 2.0” which contains a single-use code that directs users to a website maintained by the Gallup Corporation where the assessment is taken (https://www.gallupstrengthscenter.com/register/). Alternatively, participants can be provided a single-use code only without the book. At the completion of the survey, users are provided their top-five ranked strengths as calculated by the instrument. Additionally, users are provided the opportunity to establish an online profile and means to share their results through the website. This tool was originally designed for personal growth and development. However in a subsequent publication, “Strengths-Based Leadership”, the proposition was supported that proposes successful teams require a balance of talents within teams and not necessarily within every individual. Results from the individual surveys will be used to inform teams that will be tasked with developing social innovation projects. Initially, results from the surveys will be relayed to the PI through the on-line site which provides participants an option to share the results. Research team members will then collate the results and provide feedback and direction for individual and team development. Additionally, it is anticipated that after individuals have had an opportunity to self-reflect on their results that executive coaching and leadership development exercises will be made available.

C. Preliminary Studies/Progress Report The Clifton Strengths Finder talent inventory has previously been employed at the University of Oklahoma School of Community Medicine in faculty, resident and medical student personal development exercises. The individual results from the CSF surveys were consensually shared amongst participating group members in order to facilitate discussion regarding the potential usefulness of the tool to aid in achievement of institutional goals and objectives. Indeed, we have preliminary evidence that suggests that balanced teams (with respect to the array of talents possessed by groups as a whole) are more likely to receive favorable assessments with regards to predicted success of proposed social innovation projects.

D. Research Design and Methods Participants will initially be solicited via their involvement in the 2013 OUSCM Summer Institute. As collaborations develop with, and within, the community, additional situations may provoke a desire for others to complete and use the assessment. This will be facilitated to the degree possible dictated by the study budget. It is our hypothesis that strengths may segregate based on professions. As the results emerge and as this is an action research project, additional potential survey participants may be solicited. Regardless, potential participants will receive an access code to log on to the site and take the survey. At its completion, the survey provides participants with their top five signature strengths. There are no “negative” strengths, per se. All signature strengths have associated definitions and development exercises associated with them that participants may engage in if they so desire. Importantly, the website provides the participants the ability to share their results, if they so choose. The act of voluntarily sharing of results with the research team will be used as de facto consent for full participation in the study. Composite results will be shared with Summer Institute participants during development

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exercises and individuals will be asked to “display” their strengths (listing them on their nametags) in order to begin to communally reflect on collective strengths. Participants may engage in these activities freely to their own satisfaction level. For the purposes of publication and dissemination however, only results received directly through the StrengthsFinder website will be used. Published works will conceal individual identities.

E. **Statistical Methods** This project represents further exploration of development exercises previously conducted in informal settings across the OU-Tulsa campus. Broadening the scope of use has led to the development of the project in its current form. Appropriate statistical methods will be employed during final data analysis prior to publication of acquired data.

F. **Gender/Minority/Pediatric Inclusion for Research** There will be no inclusion or exclusion criteria on the basis of gender, ethnicity, or racial group. The ethnic, gender and racial make-up of the participants will reflect the ethnic, gender and racial make-up of participants in the 2013 OUSCM Summer Institute and associated collaborators and community members. Exclusion of children (under age 18) and the elderly (65+) is due to intentionally avoiding inclusion of IRB-designated protected groups.

G. **Human Participants**
   a. 200 participants per year, age 18-64, male and female. No other exclusion criteria.
   b. Describe plans for recruitment and consent procedures to be followed.
      i. Participants will initially be recruited from the totality of individuals participating in the 2013 Summer Institute. Participants will receive information in the Summer Institute pre-book regarding how information from the CSF tool will be utilized. Additional participants may be recruited by word of mouth.
      ii. While this status does not require written consent documentation, prior to engaging in the survey exercises, participants will be informed of the goals and rationale for the study and will be provided a copy of this document in the pre-book materials.
      iii. Consent will be ascertained and established by participants forwarding their results from the Gallup website to the designated study e-mail address. Succinct participation instructions and participant protection assurances will be provided in the e-mail sent to participants with their access codes (text at end of this document).
   c. The instrument is designed to be both a personal reflective tool as well as a starting point for assembly of balanced teams. While results can’t be kept private, part of the power of the exercise is to foster interpersonal communication and collaboration. While publically expounding on one’s own strengths and/or how these realizations contribute to the conductance of research into Community Medicine could potentially be psychologically or socially intimidating, there will be no public recriminations or other negative reactions towards anyone for doing so. Additionally, there will be no deceptive practices (concealment or direct deception) utilized in this research project. Thus, risks to individuals involved in this projected are deemed minimal.
   d. Potential benefits to those that consent to participate include receipt of the Gallup provided personal development tools utilizing the information obtained via the StrengthsFinder survey as well as those tangential to successfully utilizing the tool to help develop social innovation projects.