

What's New In Research?

Using Strengths in an FYE program

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Sondra Cave, Ed.D.

Adjunct Professor /Emeritus

MidAmerica Nazarene University, Olathe, KS USA

(Strengths Consultant, Gallup Organization)

Achiever, Discipline, Focus, Significance, Competition

The strengths perspective

- A [revolutionary] way to reorient work around what is right with others.
- Two basic premises:
 1. Individuals already have within themselves what they need to succeed!
 - Our job is to
 - Recognize it
 - Nurture it
 - Celebrate it
 - Build on it as we teach them skills and knowledge
 2. “Individuals gain more when they build on their talents, than when they make comparable efforts to improve their areas of weakness.”

--Clifton & Harter, 2003, p. 112

StrengthsQuest™ Mission

HELPING STUDENTS, STAFF, AND FACULTY ACHIEVE
ACADEMIC, CAREER, AND PERSONAL SUCCESS.



StrengthsQuest™



What is StrengthsFinder®?

- Web-based assessment from the perspective of positive psychology
- 178 items over a secure Internet connection
- Each item lists a pair of potential self-descriptors
- Participant chooses statement in each pair, and to what extent
- 20 seconds to respond

The 34 Themes of Talent Measured by StrengthsFinder®

Top 5 Talent Themes (a theme is a group of similar talents)



278,256
possible unique combinations.

33,390,720

different permutations with unique order.

What It Is....and What It Isn't

WHAT IT IS:

- Tool for development
- Identifies “how you are wired”
- Understand the lens through which you view the world
- Common language to integrate within the organization
- Maximize productivity
- Where you find your energy vs. what exhausts you

WHAT IT ISN'T:

- Tool for hiring
- Tool for promotion or advance
- Identify the “right” vs. “wrong” or “good” vs. “bad” talents
- Labeling people
- One-size-fits-all approach
- An excuse to NOT do something because “it’s not my strength”
- Complete explanation of who you are and why you do things

Strengths in Action: Time I

- Write the phrase “I use my strengths every day” three times with your ***dominant*** hand.

Strengths in Action: Time II

- Write the phrase “I use my strengths every day” three times with your *non-dominant* hand.

What is talent? Who is talented?



Talent: A naturally recurring pattern of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied.

A talent is a potential strength.

Clarifying the Language

Theme: Found in StrengthsFinder; a cluster or group of talents.

Knowledge: What you are aware of. It may be purely factual knowledge. Or, it may be how you make sense of what you know — your understanding.

Skills: The capacity to perform the fundamental steps of an activity. Skills deal with the “how-to” areas of your job. Once you have acquired the skill for something, you know how to do it.

Clarifying the Language

Talent

(a natural way of thinking, feeling, or behaving)



Investment

(time spent practicing, developing your skills, and building your knowledge base)



Strength

(the ability to consistently provide near-perfect performance)



StrengthsFinder® Themes...

A Common Language

Achiever

Activator

Adaptability

Analytical

Arranger

Belief

Command

Communication

Competition

Connectedness

Consistency

Context

Deliberative

Developer

Discipline

Empathy

Focus

Futuristic

Harmony

Ideation

Includer

Individualization

Input

Intellection

Learner

Maximizer

Positivity

Relator

Responsibility

Restorative

Self-Assurance

Significance

Strategic

Woo

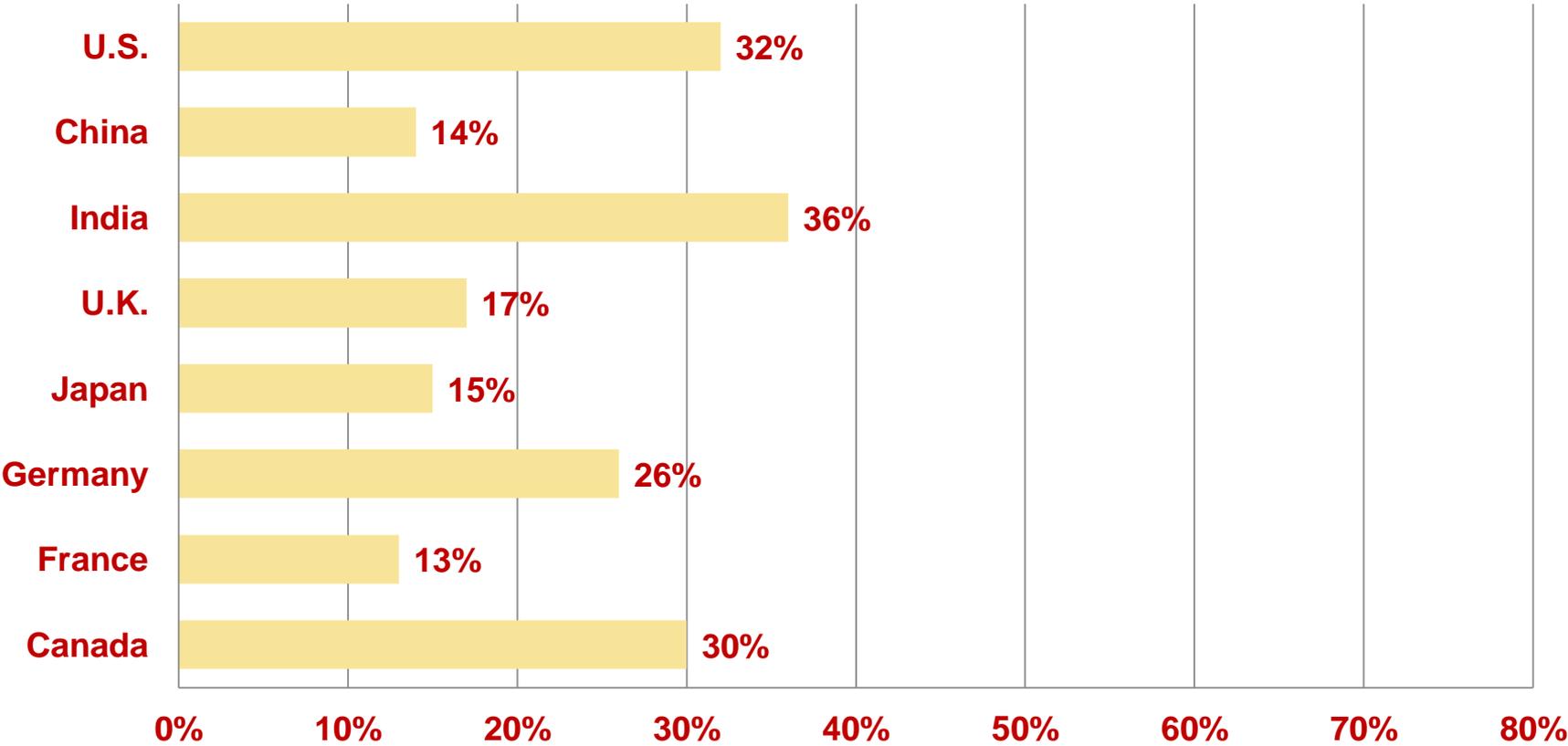


“One should waste as little effort as possible on improving areas of low competence. It takes **far more energy** to improve from **incompetence to mediocrity** than it takes to improve from **first-rate performance to excellence.**”

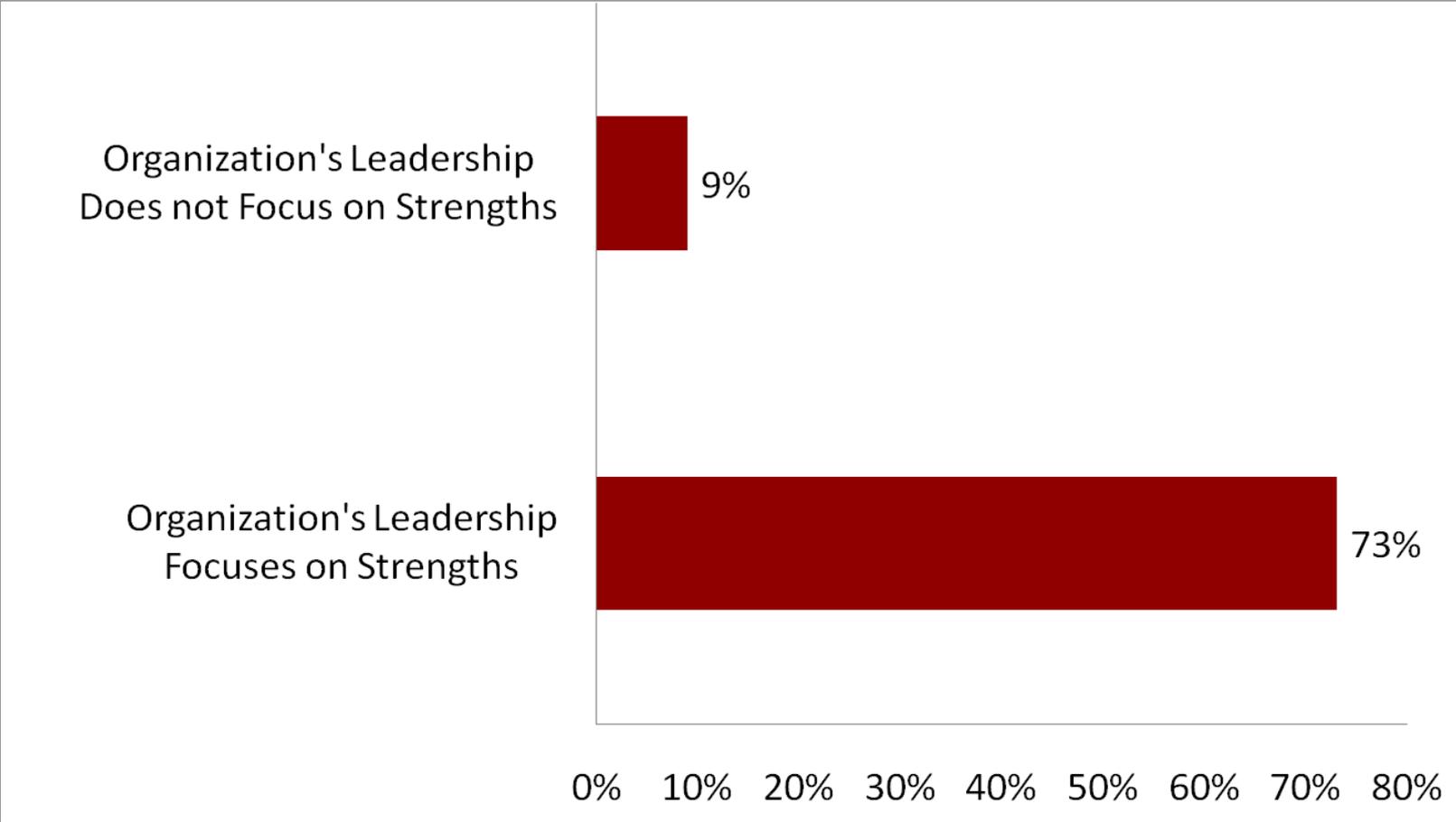
-Peter Drucker

Do You “Get the Opportunity To Do What You Do Best, Every Day?”

Based on Gallup’s 2007 Global Client Database



Investing In Strengths Drives Engagement



The Organizational Focus

The Three Types of Employees

Engaged – employees work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive the innovation and move the organization forward.

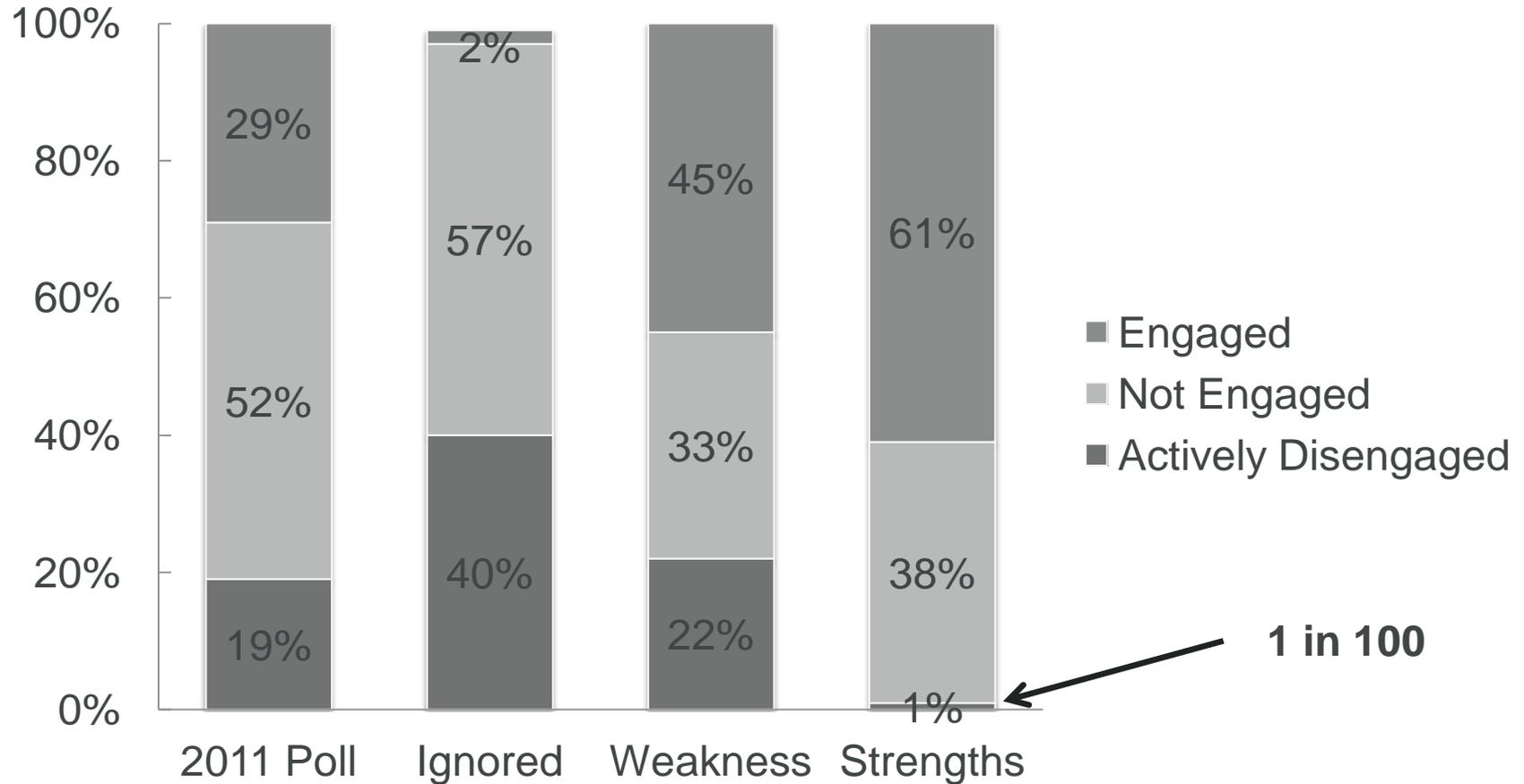
Not Engaged – employees are essentially “checked out.” They’re sleepwalking through their work day, putting time – but not energy or passion – into their work.

Actively Disengaged – employees aren’t just unhappy at work; they’re busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers undermine what their engaged coworkers accomplish.

What “Active Disengagement” Looks Like...



The Organizational Focus



Why A Strengths Approach Promotes Student Achievement

Strengths Awareness → Confidence → Self-
Efficacy → Motivation to excel →
Engagement

Engagement → Invest time and energy →
Achievement

Apply strengths to areas needing
improvement → **Greater likelihood of
success**

How Has Strengths Research Changed Over the Last Decade?

INTERVENTIONS HAVE CHANGED:

FROM

- Short-term
- “Strengths only”
- Talent identification

TO

- Longer-term
- “Strengths and”
- Strengths development

The Types of Studies Have Changed

- From pre-post to controlled studies and regression analyses
- From informal interviews to longitudinal qualitative studies

The Outcomes Have Changed

- Outcomes
 - From self-perception to specific constructs such as:
 - Academic self-efficacy
 - Engaged learning
 - Hope
 - Psychological well-being/thriving
 - From immediate outcomes to longer-term outcomes that matter to higher education
 - From in-house measures to standardized measures (the *Strengths Impact Measure*)

The Ultimate Outcome: Student Success

- Learning and Achievement
- Persistence to Graduation
- Psychological Well-Being/ Thriving

Intermediate Variables

Indicators or Predictors of Learning/Achievement,
Persistence to Graduation, and Thriving

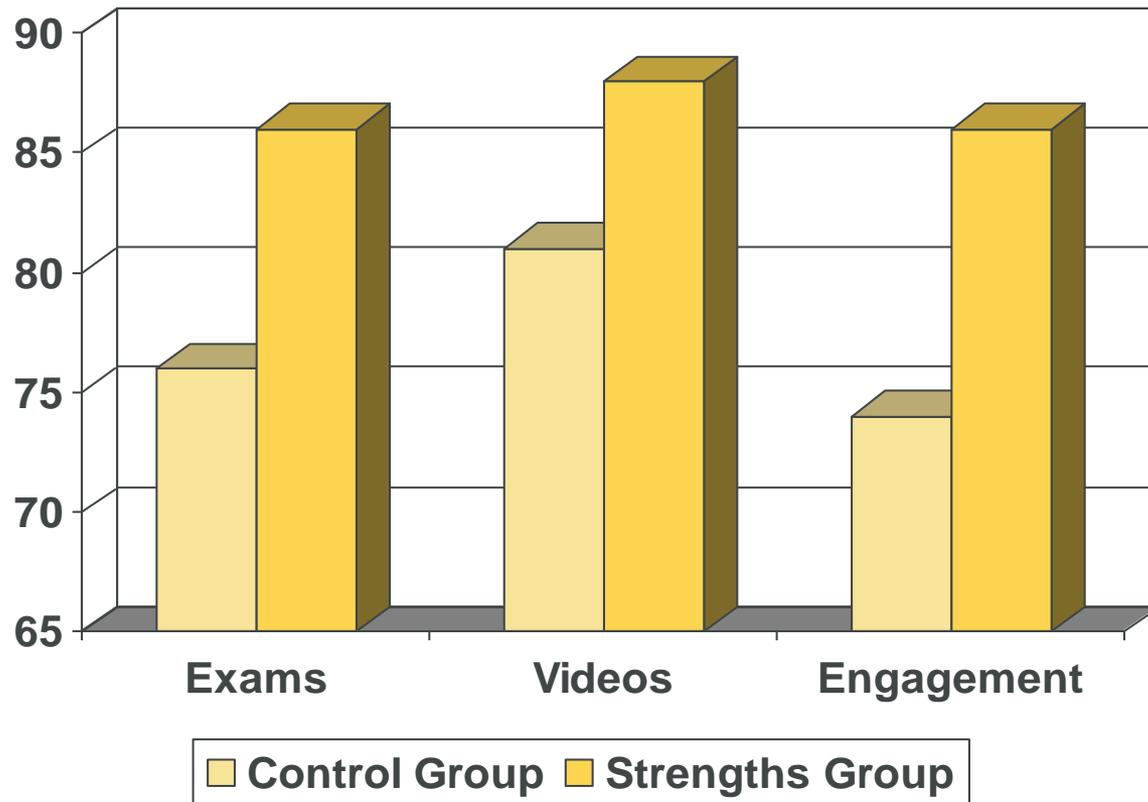
- Engaged Learning
- Grades/Performance
- Academic Self-Efficacy
- Hope
- Satisfaction with the College Experience
- Sense of Community

Engaged Learning

- ◆ A **positive energy** invested in one's own learning, evidenced by **meaningful processing**, **attention** to what is happening in the moment, and **participation** in learning activities (Schreiner & Louis, 2006).
- ◆ Significantly predictive of deep learning, persistence, feeling that tuition is worthwhile, and satisfaction with the college experience.

Strengths-Based Learning

Cantwell, 2005



Does Strengths Awareness and Application Predict Engaged Learning?

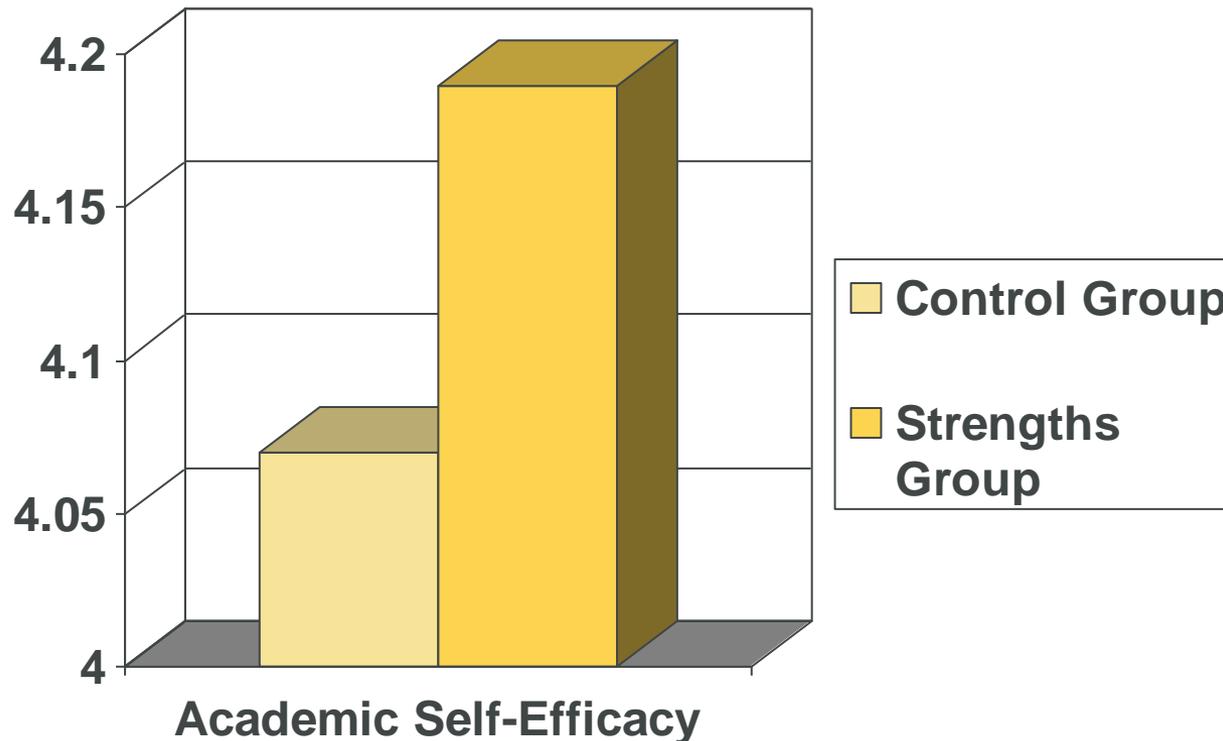
- ◆ In first-year students, 14% of the variation in *Engaged Learning Index* scores can be accounted for by strengths variables
- ◆ In sophomores, learning to apply their strengths to achieve academic success explains 12-15% of the variance in engaged learning
- ◆ BUT we do not see impact of strengths interventions on engaged learning in every instance – other variables are at work, notably the faculty!
(Schreiner, 2008)

Academic Self-Efficacy

- Students' perception that they are capable of achieving academic success – they know how to take notes, pass tests, study, schedule their time, and write papers
- Significantly related to GPA, persistence, and personal adjustment

Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001

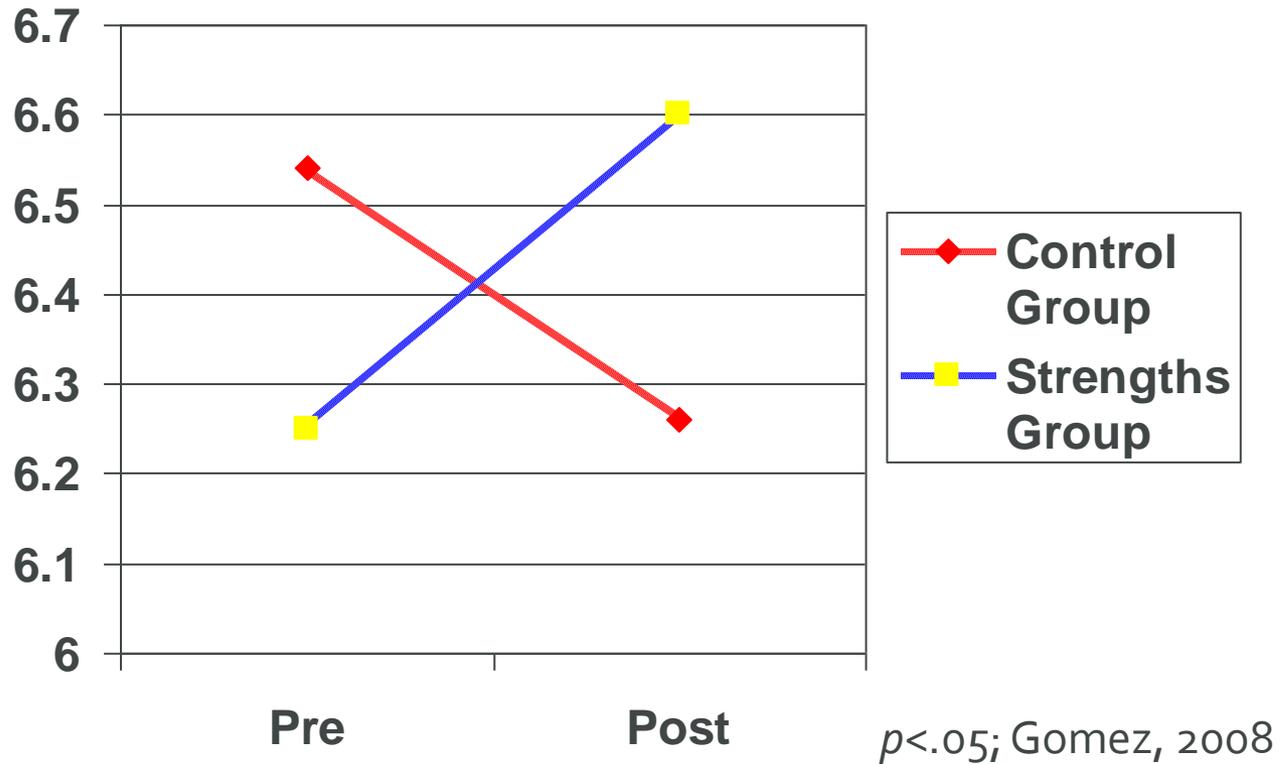
First-Year Students at Azusa Pacific University



Hope

- ◆ GPA = Goals + Pathways + Agency
- ◆ Students with high hope are more likely to graduate from college and to get better grades
- ◆ An individual strengths-based intervention can have a positive effect on students' levels of hope (Lopez, 2005)

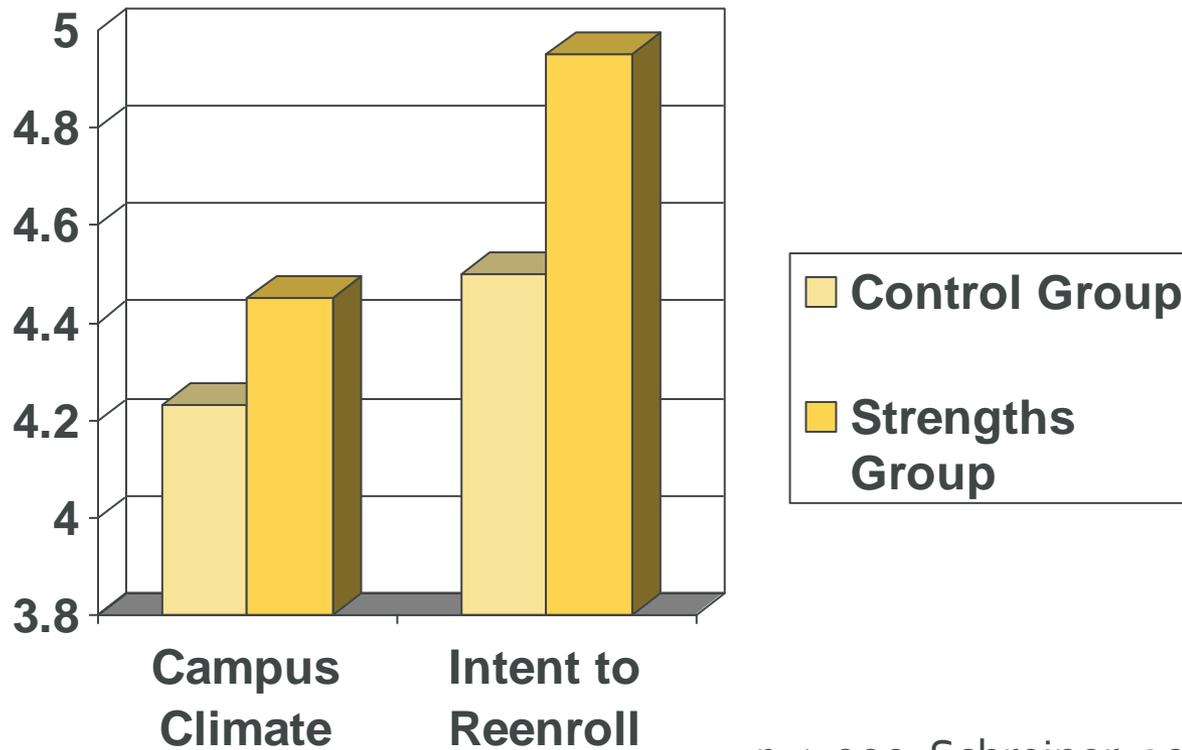
Hope Scores in At-Risk Students



Satisfaction

- Three controlled studies
 - Cantwell (2005) – first-year Public Speaking course
 - Schreiner, et al (2006) – first-year seminar
 - Gomez (2008) – first-year seminar with at-risk students
- Significant differences between strengths groups and control groups in:
 - Overall satisfaction with the college experience
 - Course satisfaction

Sense of Community



Increased Use of Strengths-Based Initiatives

- ◆ Many institutions adding a strengths perspective to their efforts to promote student success
- ◆ Seeking to promote excellence: academic achievement, persistence, maximum development of students
- ◆ Excellence occurs only when individuals capitalize on their strengths and talents, and invest the time and energy needed to excel.

How does a talent become a strength?



Investment is a **MULTIPLIER** of talent!

Nature of Many Existing Strengths-Based Initiatives

Characterized by:

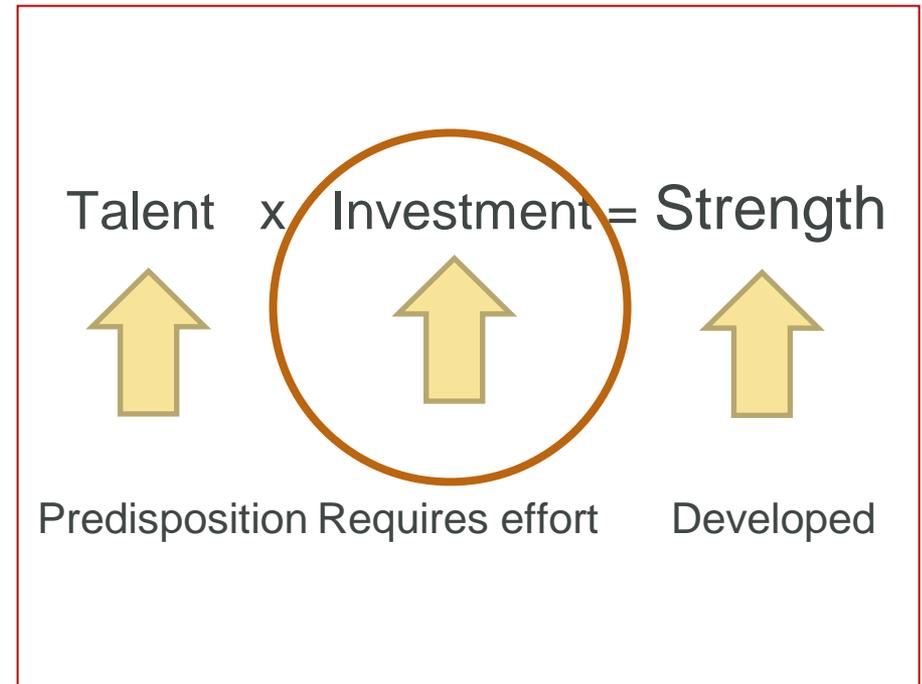
- ◆ Short term, stand-alone content
- ◆ Talent identification and affirmation
- ◆ Most “strengths development programs” do little to help participants *develop* their strengths

Different Messages of Strengths-Based Approaches

Talent Identification



Strengths Development



Represents the **intent** but not the **reality** of many strengths-based programs.

Two Strengths-Based Strategies

Talent Identification

- ◆ Approach widely used in higher education
- ◆ Identify & affirm existing talents
- ◆ Who you *are*
- ◆ Talents produce success

AREAS OF FOCUS:

- ◆ Understand talents
- ◆ Choose environments accordingly

Strengths Development

- ◆ Approach intended by The Gallup Organization
- ◆ Identify & affirm talents as precursors to strengths
- ◆ Who you can *become*
- ◆ Effort to develop talents into strengths produces success

AREAS OF FOCUS:

- ◆ Find new strategies & activities to develop talents into strengths
- ◆ Invest time & energy to add skills and knowledge -emphasize effort

Mindset

- ◆ Beliefs about the nature of human attributes and their responsiveness to developmental efforts

Fixed Mindset

Growth Mindset



Ability is innate, trait-like
Unresponsive to change

Ability is malleable, dynamic
Can be developed through effort

Example:

Intelligence is something very basic about a person that can't be changed very much

You can always change how intelligent you are

Why Does Mindset Matter?

Fixed

Ability is static

Growth

Ability can be developed

GOALS

- ◆ Appear smart

- ◆ Increase ability or skill

CHALLENGES

- ◆ Avoid

- ◆ Embrace

OBSTACLES

- ◆ Give up easily

- ◆ Persist during setbacks

EFFORT

- ◆ Viewed as fruitless or as indicative of no ability

- ◆ Viewed as the path to mastery

Response to
CRITICISM or
FAILURE

- ◆ Fear negative feedback; “I’m not good at that area”

- ◆ Learn from feedback; use to develop new strategies: “I didn’t use the right strategy”

PERFORMANCE

- ◆ Underperform relative to ability

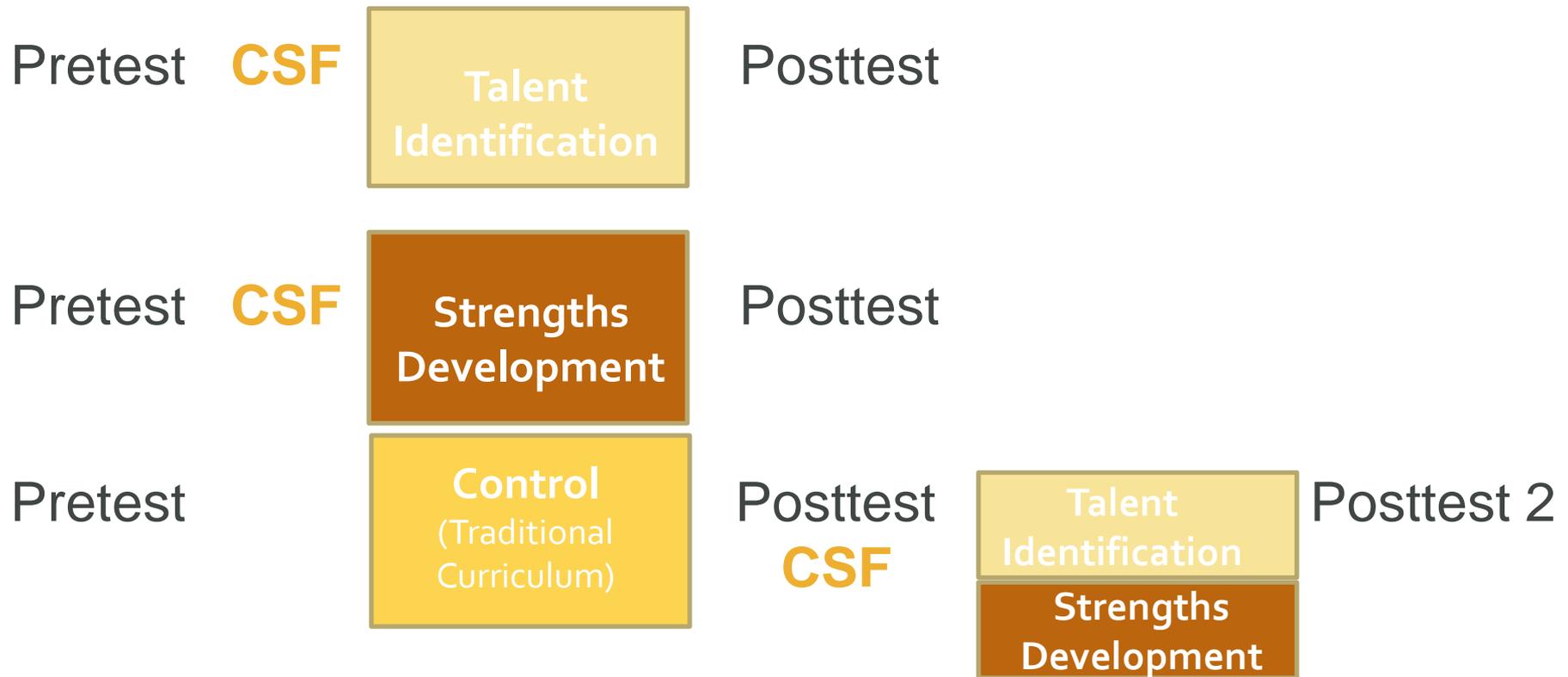
- ◆ Reach increasingly higher levels of achievement

Conceptual Link Between Mindset & Strengths-Based Initiatives

- Mindset can be altered
- Positive labels can be detrimental if they lack emphasis on the role of *effort*
- How does this relate to strengths-based approaches?

Research Design

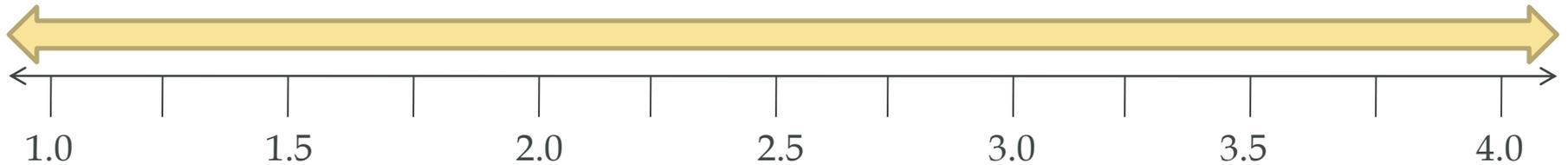
- First-year college student participants ($n = 388$)



Impact of Varying Strengths Program Types on Mindset

Fixed Mindset

Growth Mindset



Before

After

(Fixed) 2.84

3.55

3.57

3.59

3.62

3.64

 **Talent Identification**

 **Strengths Development**

 **Control**

Achievement Goal Orientation

Two goal orientation types:

Performance

- ◆ Gain favorable appraisals of competence
- ◆ Prove or validate ability

Learning

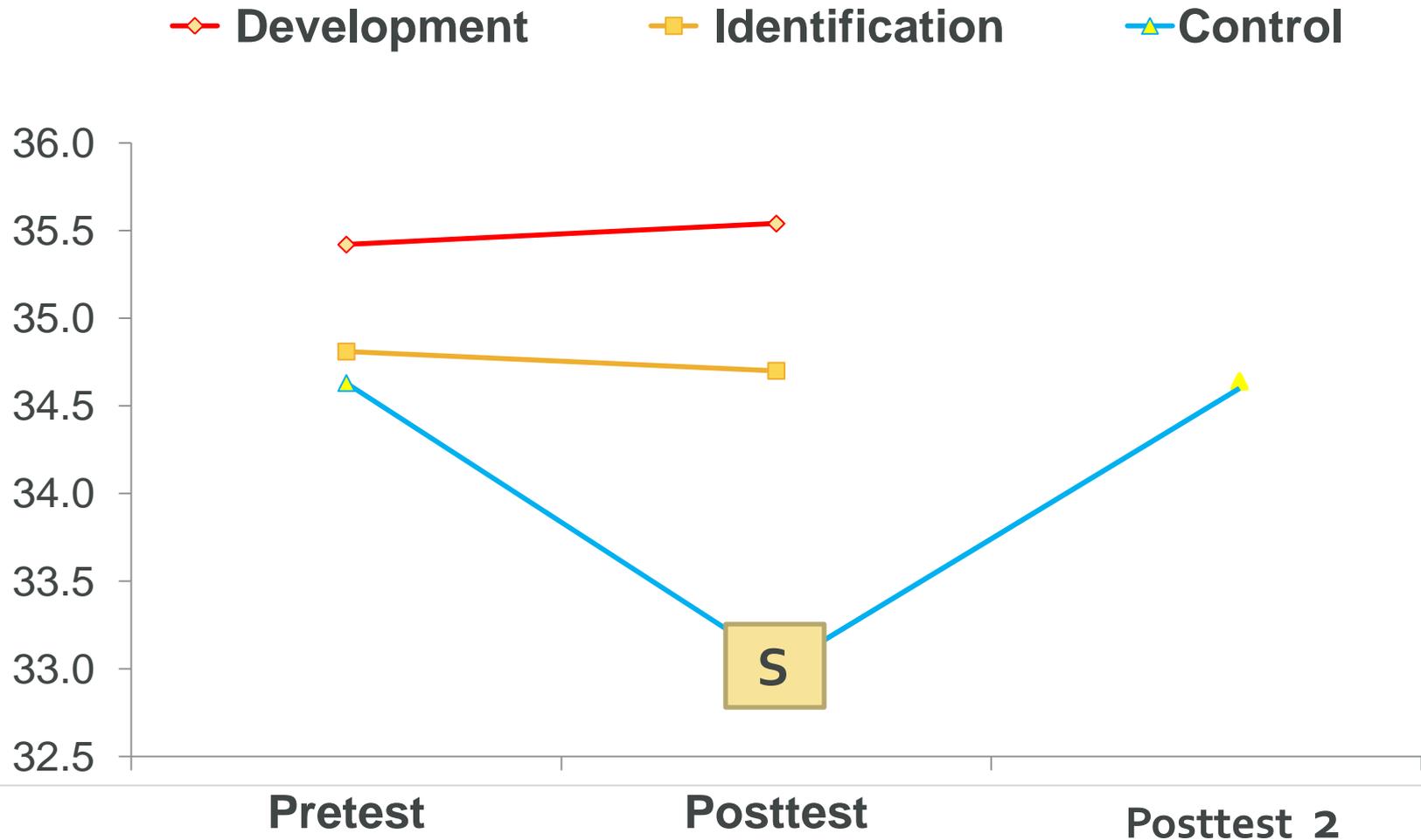
- Master new skills or develop competence
- Increase ability

Learning goal orientation associated with more favorable outcomes over the long term.

Perceived Academic Control

- Students' beliefs about their ability to influence academic outcomes (Perry, 2003)
- Often declines during major transitions
- Responsive to environmental features or teaching methods
- Predictive of:
 - quality & duration of effort
 - GPA
 - persistence, fewer dropped courses

Impact of Strengths Programs on Perceived Academic Control



Summary of Findings

The **strengths development** approach generated the most positive findings in each area:

- Encouraging a **growth mindset**
- Promoting **learning goals**
- Helping students maintain a sense of **control** over academic outcomes

Key Learnings from Research

- ◆ Strengths-based approaches early in the first semester of college bolster students' perceived academic control
- ◆ Many existing strengths-oriented programs may unintentionally promote a fixed mindset *unless* they include a developmental component
- ◆ Strengths development approaches encourage students to set learning goals

Implications for Practice

- Emphasize strengths *development* beyond mere identification and affirmation of talent
- Not the *presence* of talent, but the *productive use* of it produces success!

Implications for Practice

- ◆ Provide opportunities for students to consider resources, skills, knowledge, activities, and experiences that could develop talent
- ◆ Support the autonomy of program designers in selecting strengths-based approaches that allow them to be most authentic
- ◆ Use long-term versus stand-alone programs

What *Should* Be Involved in a Strengths-Based Intervention?

- Identification of talents
- Affirmation and ownership of those talents
- Envisioning the self one wants to become
- Planning for that future and developing strengths (multiplying talents with skills and knowledge)
- Applying talents and strengths to new situations as well as to challenges (few do this!)

What Fewer Interventions Do

- How my talent themes affect others
- How to work with others on teams
- How to capitalize on my talents in specific situations
- Strengths approaches woven into existing best practices and content
- Multiple “touches” – and longer-term follow-up

Directions for Future Research

- More intervention studies are needed!
- More faculty training is needed for classroom interventions
- Hot topics:
 - Academic engagement
 - Psychological sense of community
 - Impact on diversity programs
- Need to connect student well-being or thriving with outcomes that matter to higher education
- Varying the types of interventions to determine the effects

Resources

- www.strengthsquest.com (Educator Resources)
- Strengths Insights newsletter
- For Gallup Student Poll information, please visit:
<http://www.gallupstudentpoll.com/home.aspx>
- For additional resources and research, please visit:
<http://strengths.org/>
- For community postings or to network, please visit:
<http://strengths.ning.com/>

Questions ?

Sondra Cave, Ed.D.

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913-568-9163
rcave@mnu.edu

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