

# How Can Strengths Awareness Make a Difference in the Lives of Our Students?

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# Foundational: Helping Students Understand Their Talents

Identify

Develop

Apply

Celebrate!



# Building Blocks: Linking Strengths Awareness to Student Flourishing



Moments That Matter



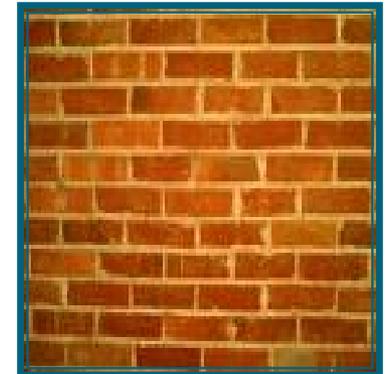
Broaden and Build



Growth Mindset

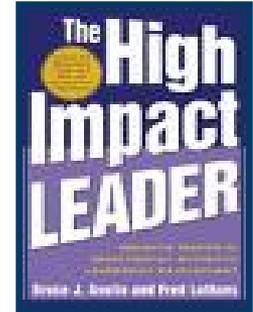


Psychological Capital



# “Moments That Matter”

Bruce Avolio – University of Washington



Also known as “Trigger Moments”

Trigger Moments cause us to think about who we are and what we do. They may not seem so consequential when they occur, but over time, as we think more about what happened, we go deeper into thinking about ourselves (p. 100).

Something in the briefest fleeting moment that changes our perspective.

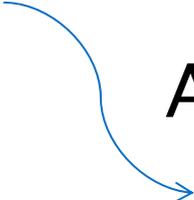
- Oprah Winfrey watched Sidney Poitier receive an Academy Award (age ten).
- Every conversation matters.
- Wherever you are, be there until you leave.

# “Moments That Matter”

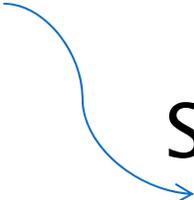
- ▶ Nobel Prize–winner Daniel Kahneman
  - Research on the “thousands of moments” in each waking day (20,000)
  - Key: How we relate within the moments (intentionality)
- ▶ Awareness of these “Moments” can enhance self–awareness and self–regulation.

“The key to effectiveness in life is to be intentional and reflective, seizing and building upon those Moments that have the potential to shape one’s own leadership or to contribute to the development of others.”

# Linking Strengths Awareness and Trigger Moments



An authority figure speaks into the life of a student



Someone who knows/loves a student identifies giftedness and potential



A student reframes self-perceptions (negative or positive): “strategery”



# What Do We Want for Our Students? Human Flourishing!

“Flourishing describes a state of optimal human functioning, one that simultaneously implies growth and longevity, beauty and goodness, robustness and resilience, and generativity and complexity. (Keyes 2003; Fredrickson & Losa, unpublished data)

# Human Languishing Contrasted to Flourishing

“Languishing has been linked with comparable levels of emotional distress, limitations in daily activities, psychosocial impairment and economic cost from lost work days.” (Keyes, 2003)

“Negative states – like anxiety, depression and failure – predict local biases consistent with narrowed attention.” (Derryberry & Tucker, 1994; Basso *et al.*, 1996)

“The cognitive literature on depression had already documented a *downward spiral* in which depressed mood and the narrowed, pessimistic thinking it engenders influence one another reciprocally....” (Beck, 1979; Peterson & Seligman, 1984)

# More about Human Languishing

People whose lives focus on inadequacy, negativity and limitations can enter a state described as “languishing” –

...on the mental health continuum, these tend to be people who “describe their lives as hollow, empty, or ‘stuck in a rut’.”

# Question: How Can Strengths Awareness Contribute to Human Flourishing?

- ▶ Reframing our Mentality
  - From Scarcity
  - To Abundance

# The Benefits of Positive Affect

## (Awareness of Strengths Gives Confidence)

Positive affect has been shown to lead to greater creativity, flexible thinking, and increased negotiation and problem-solving skills (Isen, 1987, 2002).

People experiencing positive versus negative affect were found to be more ingenious and innovative when solving problems. Research measuring positive affect among medical personnel show that those students high in positive affect were more efficient, less confused, and more thorough in patient diagnosis than other medical students (Isen, 2000).

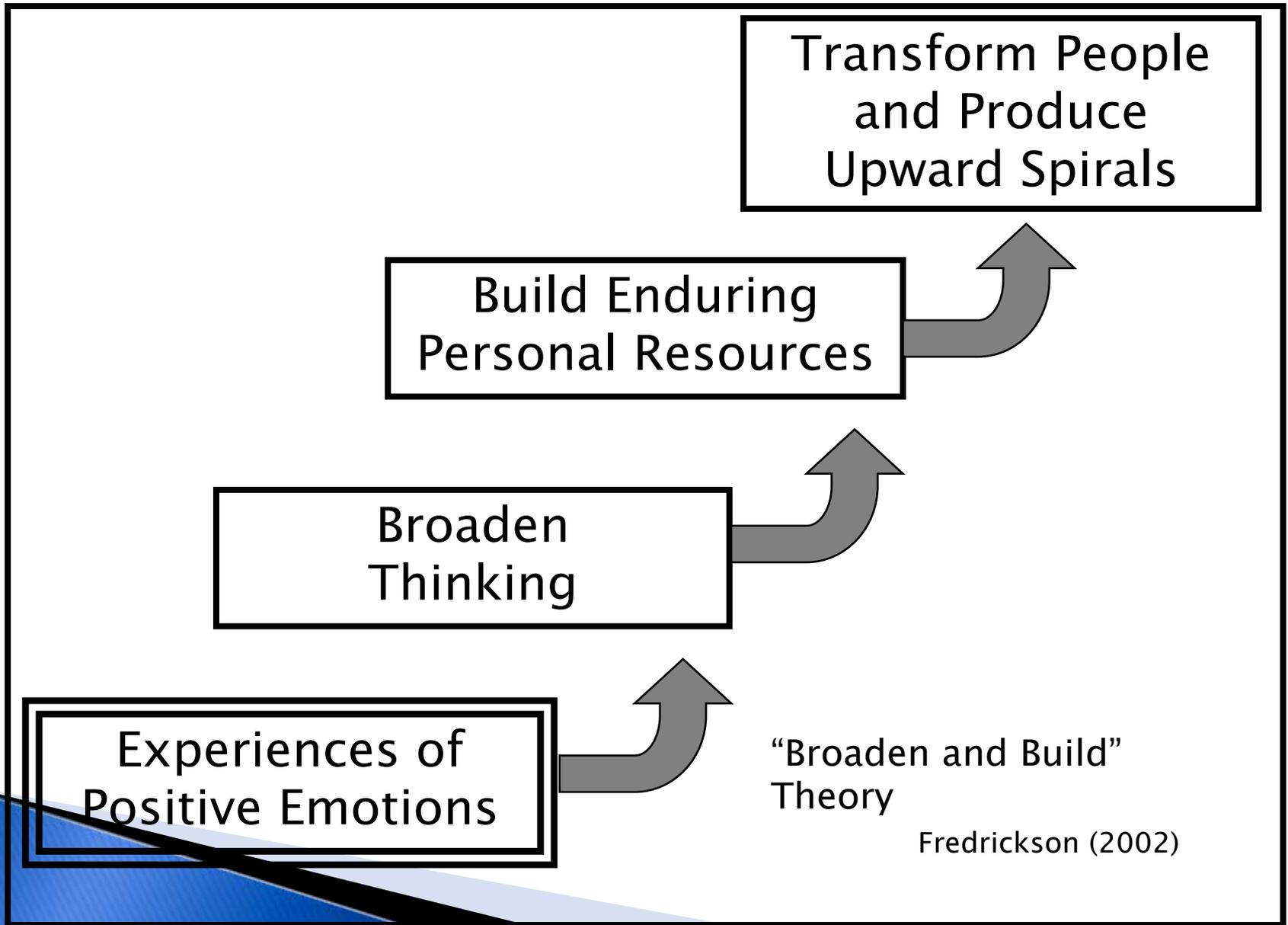


*Dr. Barbara Fredrickson*  
*University of North Carolina*

Professor of Psychology and Principal Investigator -  
Positive Emotions and Psychophysiology Lab

- ▶ Leading scholar within social psychology, affective science, and positive psychology.
- ▶ Research on positive emotions and human flourishing and is supported by grants from the National Institute of Mental Health.
- ▶ Awarded the 2000 APA's Templeton Prize in Positive Psychology.

# *Question: How Can Strengths Awareness Contribute to Human Flourishing?*



## *Contributing to Lives on an Upward Spiral*

“The broaden-and-build theory suggests a complementary *upward spiral* in which positive emotions and the broadened thinking they engender also influence one another reciprocally, leading to appreciable increases in emotional well-being over time. Positive emotions may trigger these upward spirals... by building resilience and influencing the ways that people cope with adversity.”

(Fredrickson, 2004)



## *From the previous slide ...*

- ▶ Questions 1 and 2 are the fixed mindset question.
- ▶ Questions 3 and 4 reflect the growth mindset.
- ▶ Which mindset did you agree with more?
- ▶ You can be a mixture, but most people are inclined to one way or the other.
- ▶ And, “intelligence” can be substituted with “artistic talent”, “business skill”, etc.

Dweck, 2006, p. 12

# *Answer these questions*

1. Your intelligence is something very basic about you that you can't change very much.
  2. You can learn new things, but you can't really change how intelligent you are.
  3. No matter how much intelligence you have, you can always change it quite a bit.
  4. You can always substantially change how intelligent you are.
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# *Growth Mindset*

- ▶ Believe intelligence is not a fixed trait that they simply possess, but something they cultivate through learning.
  - ▶ Believe everyone with effort and guidance can increase their intellectual ability.
  - ▶ Conceive that people with a growth mindset want to learn and will readily give up opportunities to look smarter to actually engage in something where they can learn
- 

# *Fixed Mindset*

- ▶ Believe their intelligence and personality traits dwell within, are fixed, and the amount of it is unchangeable.

## **Possible liabilities for students:**

- ▶ Worry about how much intelligence they have
- ▶ Need to look smart at all costs
- ▶ Easy, low effort success and outperforming other students makes them feel smart
- ▶ Will often pass up valuable learning opportunities if the opportunities might reveal inadequacies
- ▶ Readily disengage from tasks that pose obstacles

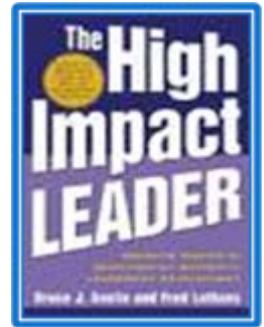
# How Can Strengths Awareness Make a Difference in Students' Lives?

## Psychological Capital

*Psychological Capital: Developing the Human Competitive Edge*  
(Luthans, Avolio, and Youssef – Oxford University Press, 2007)

- ▶ Economic/Financial Capital (“What You Have”)
- ▶ Social Capital (“Who You Know”)
- ▶ Psychological Capital “Who You Are” (Actual Self) and Who You Intend to Become (Possible Self)

In short, “PsyCap involves investing in the actual self to reap the return of becoming a possible self” (p. 147).



# PsyCap: Leadership Effectiveness and Human Flourishing

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Studies estimate:

1 / 3 of leadership capacity is genetic

2 / 3 of leadership capacity is learned/developed

Four components hold great potential for enhanced leadership effectiveness (in yourself & in students):

- ▶ Hope – (GPA) “I’m proposing two feasible alternative approaches”
- ▶ Resiliency – Bounce back. Keep moving forward.
- ▶ Optimism – Communicating “Everything will be OK. We’ll make it.”
- ▶ Self-Efficacy/Confidence – People’s belief in how well they can execute a course of action (Bandura)

# Deposits in Students' PsyCap Bank

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- ▶ Question: How can strengths awareness contribute to:
  - Self-efficacy?
  - Hope?
  - Optimism?
  - Resiliency?
- ▶ Like most things in life, it is what we do well in advance that leverages into benefits downstream.
- ▶ Similar to Rath's *How Full Is Your Bucket?*
  - Building students' lives around their strengths contributes to their PsyCap bank!



# The Secret:

- ▶ Spotting Talent
- ▶ Helping students to
  - Identify their talents
  - Develop their talents
  - Apply their talents
  - Celebrate their talents.

Add knowledge and skills to those talents, sending graduates into life with well-developed strengths.

“You can make a difference.”

