

Strengths of State FFA Officers Through the Years

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Abstract

The depth and strength of agricultural professions, in all facets, rely on self-aware and purposed-driven individuals armed with accurate confidence in personal competencies. In this descriptive study, a convenience sample of state FFA officers (N=3,283) in the National FFA Organization were administered the Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment, from 2006-2010 and 2012-2015, as a tool provided by the National FFA Organization as part of a state FFA officer leadership training program. Authentic leaders have a profound sense of self, which can be essential in shaping a strengths-based organization. Strengths provide an opportunity to develop state FFA officer self-awareness and authentic leadership skills that are highly transferable to current student interests and any future schooling or career path chosen. This pre-existing data was studied and outlines the trends in the top five signature talent themes of this sample population, the most frequently shared talents in this sample are Achiever (36.83%), Responsibility (32.17%), Restorative (29.33%), Includer (28.88%) and Learner (25.46%). Future research recommendations include following up with a random selection of state officer teams at the conclusion of their state officer year with reflection on the impact, utility and rigor of strengths, and strengths training program may shed valuable insight. Additionally, a one- year post survey, followed by a five-year post survey, could also help identify the impact and utility of the strengths component to state FFA officers. The State and National FFA Organizations should also consider these findings with regard to all leadership development programming. Also including a random sample population of students to complete the StrengthsFinder® assessment both in FFA and not in FFA could provide an opportunity for comparison in student talents, which lay groundwork in relation to student motivations, interests, and retention.

Introduction

Students today want to pursue careers that will be personally and professionally rewarding and are aligned with their values and interests (National Research Council, 2009; Quinlan et al., 2022). Well-known, the basis of the National FFA Organization is reflected in the mission, “FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their

potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education” (National FFA Organization, 2016, p. 7). Every student is unique, has individual needs, interests, motivations and aspirations. Better understanding the diversity of students in our classrooms may provide more understanding of effective educational practices, and could lead to improved learning environments (Woolfolk, 2010). Nurturing and growing leadership skills are essential for students who are developing professional competencies and majoring in the field of agricultural and life sciences (Strong et al., 2013).

Velez et al. (2015) posited “agricultural leadership education opportunities are prevalent and growing across the nation,” (p. 124). Modern views of leadership focus more on authenticity, with the concept that leaders are most effective when they are being themselves and holding true to that (Gardner et al., 2021; Linley et al., 2007). The depth and strength of the agricultural profession, in all facets, rely on self-aware and purpose-driven individuals armed with accurate confidence in personal competencies. Providing empowerment and preparation in this self-awareness and understanding others paves the way to be agents of social change (DeMink-Carthew, et al., 2020; Wisner, 2011).

Additionally, autonomy promotion is commonly used as a pedagogical approach in social change centered youth leadership programs (Buzinde et al., 2019). Agency and determination through critical social analyses are used to advance community development and well-being of youth. Horstmeier and Nall (2007) explored youth leadership development from a national perspective on FFA member role and activity context in 2007. Recommendations from the study highlight a perpetuation of members experiencing a continuum of leadership development activities, which should include an emphasis on assisting youth to gain skills that help them better understand self and interaction with others (Horstmeier & Nall, 2007). The study goes on to bring attention to the potential need for even more opportunities of community and group development experiences to plug in adequate personal development experiences (Horstmeier & Nall, 2007). The rapid pace of today’s societal change makes learning part of almost every environment and effectively connecting with people in those environments can be pivotal in success (Clifton et al., 2006).

Development of state FFA officers was considered in a study completed by Hoover & Bruce (2006) where they evaluated that holding a state level FFA office engages youth in self-exploration and discovery of strengths and weaknesses. In addition, it provides an avenue to receive recognition for competence, which is a long-term consequence associated with serving as a state FFA officer in Pennsylvania. Results also indicated support of positive adolescent development, transference of leadership skills, and purposeful civic and community engagement were also benefits (Hoover & Bruce, 2006).

Two identified contributions, recruitment of new students to the college of agriculture and leadership in campus organizations, were identified as being made to undergraduate student leadership involvement by former 4-H and FFA members (Park & Dyer, 2005). Park and Dyer (2005) examined potential relationships between involvement in FFA and 4-H and increased undergraduate student leadership involvement at a land-grant college of agriculture.

Nearly 500 colleges and universities have explored the application of strengths (Bowers & Lopez, 2010). At Michigan Ross School of Business, students who reported having a strong understanding of their own strengths were more engaged with school and more hopeful for the future (Gallup, 2016). While they measured success in multiple ways, the University of Southern Maine initially sought the strengths program to aid efforts to increase first-year students' retention and a slight increase in retention was noted (McCarville, 2016).

Goleman, et al. (2002) discussed how “the ability of a leader to pitch a group into an enthusiastic, cooperative mood can determine its success. On the other hand, whenever emotional conflicts in a group bleed attention and energy from their shared tasks, a group's performance will suffer” (p.14). In a study by Lehnert (2009) results indicated that participants who engaged in the strengths training thus reported greater gains on the five dimensions of Kouzes and Posner's (2007) Leadership Challenge Model. These ideas all support the key role of not only strengths awareness and utilization of self-identified strengths, but also those of teammates' strengths. Five practices uncovered common to personal-best leadership experiences, which are part of the model, include model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Analyzing through strengths-colored glasses, according to the research, has shown that one can view oneself, their future, and others all differently (Clifton, et al., 2006).

Finding out what gives meaning to others' efforts proves as an element of envisioning the future (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Utilizing strengths has been associated with significantly higher levels of happiness, well-being and fulfillment, leading to a greater degree of authenticity (Linley et al., 2007). At a midwestern university, students reported influential leadership growth upon receiving their strengths results (Bayer, 2012). Another study supported that the “focus on students' strengths fostered a positive perception of the university and encouraged students to feel as though they uniquely and positively impacted the university community with their particular combination of strengths” (Soria & Stubblefield, 2015, p. 630).

Analysis of state FFA officer teams can provide insight into the true diversity of talents among student members, while providing a glimpse towards the future. Balancing work according to the strengths of the team and of the collective introduces a higher-level of strengths implementation and strengths-based teamwork (Linley et. al. 2007). Buckingham & Clifton (2001) discussed how all strengths have a ‘shadow side’, underscoring the importance to find balance with using strengths, not to let them overpower other people or talents inappropriately. Organizations like the National FFA Organization are challenged to keep pace with society, while continuing to prepare students for vigorous personal growth and provide unique and challenging leadership opportunities, which can pave a solid path to a number of experiences that lead to career success.

The Clifton StrengthsFinder[®] is a web-based assessment that measures the presence of 34 talents organized into themes (Clifton et al., 2006). A theme is a category of talents, which are defined as recurring and consistent patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior (Buckingham

& Clifton, 2001). The intentional purpose of the assessment is to nurture personal growth through discussion with others and as a tool for self-awareness (Asplund et al., 2009).

Figure 1

Talent	Definition
Achiever [®]	People exceptionally talented in the Achiever theme work hard and possess a great deal of stamina. They take immense satisfaction in being busy and productive.
Activator [®]	People exceptionally talented in the Activator theme can make things happen by turning thoughts into action. They are often impatient.
Adaptability [®]	People exceptionally talented in the Adaptability theme prefer to go with the flow. They tend to be “now” people who take things as they come and discover the future one day at a time.
Analytical [®]	People exceptionally talented in the Analytical theme search for reasons and causes. They have the ability to think about all the factors that might affect a situation.
Arranger [™]	People exceptionally talented in the Arranger theme can organize, but they also have a flexibility that complements this ability. They like to determine how all of the pieces and resources can be arranged for maximum productivity.
Belief [®]	People exceptionally talented in the Belief theme have certain core values that are unchanging. Out of these values emerges a defined purpose for their lives.
Command [®]	People exceptionally talented in the Command theme have presence. They can take control of a situation and make decisions.
Communication [®]	People exceptionally talented in the Communication theme generally find it easy to put their thoughts into words. They are good conversationalists and presenters.
Competition [®]	People exceptionally talented in the Competition theme measure their progress against the performance of others. They strive to win first place and revel in contests.
Connectedness [®]	People exceptionally talented in the Connectedness theme have faith in the links among all things. They believe there are few coincidences and that almost every event has meaning.

Consistency™	People exceptionally talented in the Consistency theme are keenly aware of the need to treat people the same. They try to treat everyone with equality by setting up clear rules and adhering to them.
Context®	People exceptionally talented in the Context theme enjoy thinking about the past. They understand the present by researching its history.
Deliberative™	People exceptionally talented in the Deliberative theme are best described by the serious care they take in making decisions or choices. They anticipate obstacles.
Developer®	People exceptionally talented in the Developer theme recognize and cultivate the potential in others. They spot the signs of each small improvement and derive satisfaction from evidence of progress.
Discipline™	People exceptionally talented in the Discipline theme enjoy routine and structure. Their world is best described by the order they create.
Empathy™	People exceptionally talented in the Empathy theme can sense other people's feelings by imagining themselves in others' lives or situations.
Focus™	People exceptionally talented in the Focus theme can take a direction, follow through, and make the corrections necessary to stay on track. They prioritize, then act.
Futuristic®	People exceptionally talented in the Futuristic theme are inspired by the future and what could be. They energize others with their visions of the future.
Harmony®	People exceptionally talented in the Harmony theme look for consensus. They don't enjoy conflict; rather they seek areas of agreement.
Ideation®	People exceptionally talented in the Ideation theme are fascinated by ideas. They are able to find connections between seemingly disparate phenomena.
Includer®	People exceptionally talented in the Includer theme accept others. They show awareness of those who feel left out and make an effort to include them.
Individualization®	People exceptionally talented in the Individualization theme are intrigued with the unique qualities of each person. They have a gift for figuring out how different people can work together productively.
Input®	People exceptionally talented in the Input theme have a craving to know more. Often they like to collect and archive all kinds of information.

Intellection [®]	People exceptionally talented in the Intellection theme are characterized by their intellectual activity. They are introspective and appreciate intellectual discussions.
Learner [®]	People exceptionally talented in the Learner theme have a great desire to learn and want to continuously improve. The process of learning, rather than the outcome, excites them.
Maximizer [®]	People exceptionally talented in the Maximizer theme focus on strength as a way to stimulate personal and group excellence. They seek to transform something strong into something superb.
Positivity [®]	People exceptionally talented in the Positivity theme have contagious enthusiasm. They are upbeat and can get others excited about what they are going to do.
Relator [®]	People exceptionally talented in the Relator theme enjoy close relationships with others. They find deep satisfaction in working hard with friends to achieve a goal.
Responsibility [®]	People exceptionally talented in the Responsibility theme take psychological ownership of what they say they will do. They are committed to stable values such as honesty and loyalty.
Restorative [™]	People exceptionally talented in the Restorative theme are adept at dealing with problems. They are good at figuring out what is wrong and resolving it.
Self-Assurance [™]	People exceptionally talented in the Self-Assurance theme feel confident in their ability to manage their own lives. They possess an inner compass that gives them confidence that their decisions are right.
Significance [™]	People exceptionally talented in the Significance theme want to be very important in others' eyes. They are independent and want to be recognized.
Strategic [™]	People exceptionally talented in the Strategic theme create alternative ways to proceed. Faced with any given scenario, they can quickly spot the relevant patterns and issues.
WOO [™]	People exceptionally talented in the Woo theme love the challenge of meeting new people and winning them over. They derive satisfaction from breaking the ice and making a connection with someone.

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Knowing talents and areas of potential strength help individuals become more of who they are. Strengths identification and development can be an aid to being a more genuine version

of self. StrengthsFinder® helps “find where you have the greatest potential for a strength” (p. 78) by aiming to “identify the strongest aspects of your mental network, your signature themes” (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001, p. 141).

Conceptual Framework

Authentic leadership serves as one piece of framework for this study. Luthans and Avolio (2003) outlined authentic leadership in the context of an organization as “a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders” (p. 243). Begley (2004) described authentic leadership as “a function of self-knowledge, sensitivity to the orientation of others, and a technical sophistication that leads to a synergy of leadership action” (p. 5). Each definition contains similar language and components, yet they are stated in slightly different perspectives. Through the authentic leadership research agenda and Gallup Leadership Institute associates, Avolio et al. worked on a more refined definition (Garner, et al., 2011). “Authentic leadership is a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development” (Walumbwa et al., 2008, p. 94). Across these variances in interpretation of authentic leadership, one component has been widely agreed upon as the beginning of authentic leadership development, a leader’s self-awareness (Steffens et al., 2021; Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

Wisner (2011) outlined how authentic leadership development is a theory that promotes the development of strengths and is rooted in positive psychology. She goes on to discuss that even though further research is needed to fully understand the impact of strengths ownership on leadership effectiveness, indications exist that effective leadership behaviors in her college student sample may be increased through the development of psychological strengths (Wisner, 2011). Avolio & Gardner’s (2005) key distinction of authentic leaders was “anchored by their own deep sense of self” (p. 329) and that “authentic leadership can help develop and shape a strength-based organization” (p. 334).

Purpose and Objectives

State FFA officers have the opportunity to complete a rigorous training and curriculum program offered by the National FFA Organization as part of the state FFA officer continuum. Some states actively utilize the strengths concepts and resources throughout the year of office (Mills, et al., 2023), while others do not utilize the Clifton StrengthsFinder® program at all, or beyond utilization of just the initial assessment. The data from the state officers who have completed the assessment provided by the National FFA Organization has been collected since 2006, yet little analysis has been completed for student development information and insights.

As outlined by Roberts et al. (2016) in the Agricultural Education Research Agenda in Priority Area 3, Sufficient Scientific and Professional Workforce That Addresses the Challenges of the 21st Century, the need to investigate soft skill development and

preparedness, as well as, agricultural recruitment and retention, is necessary to address this priority. The existing body of research specific to agricultural education leadership settings is growing. Analysis of state FFA officer data could provide foundational information in student leadership insight into soft skill development, as well as student recruitment and retention to leadership programs, and potentially the FFA. The strengths revolution is focused on utilizing differences in each person and building the organization around those differences (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

The purpose of this study was to analyze and examine self-identified talents among state FFA officers spanning nearly a decade of student leaders ($N=3,283$) with data collected from the National FFA Organization. This will be accomplished through the following objective. Examine diversity of the top five talents of state FFA officers as talent is identified by the Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment.

Methodology

The focus of this study was to identify and explore self-identified talents among state FFA officers spanning nearly a decade of student leader data collected by the National FFA Organization. A convenience sample of state FFA officers who participated in the Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment tool who chose to participate. Unfortunately, the exact number of state FFA officers was not collected each year, as the number is not static. In some state associations, regional officers or presidents are considered state FFA officers who thus train together. Since this total number of officers is not consistently reported the exact percentage of the total population is not available. The structure of the National FFA Organization's state officer leadership resources, specifically the utilization of the Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment, is the basis of this research. All states' FFA associations are provided, free of charge, the opportunity and information to distribute an access code to state FFA officers in order to utilize the Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment. Once a student completes the assessment, the signature, top five themes of talent are recorded and available to the National FFA Organization. Resources are available to assist the officer and association with further development and information in regards to each officer's talents. According to Clifton et al. (2006) in *StrengthsQuest*, the Clifton StrengthsFinder® is a "Web-based talent assessment consisting of 180 item-pairs (with five response options), presented to the user over a secure connection." Clifton et al. (2006) further states that,

The participant is then asked to choose from that pair the statement that best describes him or her, and to the extent to which that chosen option is descriptive of him or her. The participant is given 20 seconds to respond to each pair of items before the system moves on to the next item-pair. Upon completion, the respondent receives feedback including his or her top five themes and related action items (p. 301).

Using Microsoft® Excel to organize the themes, and when present, attaching the state association demographic, the data was then analyzed using JMP for frequency and percent.

Helping individuals identify natural positive talents, the Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment was built on the concept of positive psychology, and has been vetted through aspects of

validity, reliability, consistency, and utility. Content validity has shown evidence of strength in its results, as well as, deeper exploration into construct validity has shown no problem with multicollinearity (Asplund et.al, 2009). Criterion-related validity studies have shown positive results in comparison to other well-validated personality instruments similar to the Clifton StrengthsFinder® (Gallup Strengths Center, 2016; Schreiner, 2006). Schreiner (2006) conducted a study across 14 colleges and universities with $N=438$ usable sample and measured construct validity in two ways, comparing Clifton StrengthsFinder® student results to the same students taking two similar inventories, the California Psychological Inventory (Gough & Bradley, 1996) and the 16PF (Cattell, 1993). “93.4% of these predictions were confirmed by significant correlation coefficients”, as well as the “average item clustering percentage across all possible theme pairs was 90%” (Schreiner, 2006, p.7). A number of studies exist that have shown such evidence to strongly support positive utility and are easily found across a number of outlets (Schreiner, 2006; Bayer, 2012; Lane & Chapman, 2011; Stebleton, et al. 2012; Wisner, 2011; Gillum, 2005; Lehnert, 2009).

Two types of reliability estimates were used to examine the Clifton StrengthsFinder®, internal consistency using Cronbach’s alpha, as well as test-retest reliability (Asplund, et. al, 2009). Test-retest correlations were generally consistent; however, the reliability of the score profile is also critical, and a Chi-Square test of independence was conducted on each theme. (Asplund, et.al, 2009). Evidence of stability for 33 of the 34 themes had significant results; however, one theme, self-assurance, was less stable over time (Asplund et.al., 2009). The test-retest reliability was also examined and deemed appropriate by Schreiner (2006) by taking the assessment a second time 8-12 weeks after the first, and after not receiving their results, the mean score was .70, an acceptable measure.

StrengthsFinder® data has shown benefits to teachers in effective teaching and responding to youth (Educational Horizons, 2006). Research has revealed the idea of three possible stages of strengths development: talent identification, integration and acceptance of one’s talents followed with changed behaviors (Hodges & Harter, 2005). Exploration of leadership development from a strengths perspective serves as an alternative path to evaluate leadership development practices. Interviews administered by Gallup analysts to more than two-million individuals were reviewed and generated into data that was used to capitalize on the accumulated knowledge and experience of strengths-based practice (Asplund, et al., 2009). Currently, the assessment is available in over 20 different languages, and after a revision in 2006, these 180 items were reduced to 177. These items are grouped into 34 themes, which are listed in Table 4.1 (Clifton et. al. 2006).

Results

This study sought to analyze the talent diversity among the sample of state FFA officers as identified by the Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment. Table 1 displays the frequencies and percentages of all 34 talent themes across the sample state officer population throughout the entire data collection period. Achiever and Responsibility were the two most frequently shared talents across state FFA officers. Achiever occurred 1,209 times in 3,283 state FFA officers at a frequency of 36.83 percent. Responsibility occurred 1,056 times in 3,283 state FFA officers at a frequency of 32.17 percent. Command and Intellection were located at the

bottom of the talent frequencies, occurring 162 times at 4.93% and 137 times at 4.17% respectively. Achiever, Responsibility, Restorative, Includer, and Learner were the most frequently shared talents among state FFA officers from. However, across all years, eight of the ten most commonly shared talents were consistently ranked in the top ten of each data collection year. Achiever, Responsibility, Restorative, Includer, Belief, Positivity, WOO and Learner are of the most consistently shared in the top ten each year among state FFA officers. It should also be noted that all 34 talent themes occurred in the sample population of officers.

Table 1
Frequency of strengths in top 5 themes

Strength	<i>f</i>	%
Achiever	1209	36.83
Responsibility	1056	32.17
Restorative	963	29.33
Includer	948	28.88
Learner	836	25.46
Belief	788	24.00
WOO	772	23.52
Positivity	751	22.86
Input	648	19.74
Communication	630	19.19
Strategic	607	18.49
Adaptability	557	16.97
Futuristic	534	16.27
Relator	502	15.29
Harmony	494	15.05
Arranger	475	14.47
Developer	474	14.44
Competition	457	13.92
Individualization	367	11.18
Context	362	11.03
Focus	314	9.56
Ideation	281	8.56
Significance	270	8.22
Activator	250	7.61
Empathy	228	6.94
Discipline	219	6.67
Maximizer	202	6.15
Consistency	194	5.91
Self-Assurance	192	5.85
Analytical	182	5.54
Connectedness	177	5.39
Deliberative	177	5.39
Command	162	4.93

Strength	<i>f</i>	%
Intellection	137	4.17

Table 2 outlines the top ten most frequently shared talents each data collection year. In 2006, *N*=398 state FFA officers, outlining the top two themes, 131 have Achiever in their top five talents which is 32.91%, followed closely by Responsibility with 120 occurrences at 30.15%. In 2007, *N*=390 state FFA officers, outlining the top two themes, Achiever occurred 149 times at 38.21%, followed by Responsibility at 117 instances and 30.00%. In 2008, *N*=338 state FFA officers, the top two themes, Achiever occurred 135 times at 39.94% and Responsibility occurred 112 times at 33.14%. In 2009, *N*=381 state FFA officers who took the assessment, and this year’s data showed Responsibility as the most commonly shared talent, occurring 133 times at 34.91%, while Achiever occurred 129 times at 33.86%. In 2010, Achiever edged back to the most commonly shared talent of the *N*=372 state FFA officers. Achiever occurred 142 times at 38.17% while Responsibility was shared 139 times at 37.37%. Interestingly in 2012, of the *N*=354 state FFA officers who took the assessment, Achiever still tops the list, which occurred 130 times at 36.72%, while Responsibility fell to third most commonly shared. Includer became the second on the list, which occurred 124 times at 35.03%. Responsibility still held on to a 31.92% shared trait among the state FFA officers in the 2012 data.

In 2013, Achiever still continued to be the most commonly shared talent of the *N*=328 state FFA officers, 121 had Achiever in their top five occurring at 36.89%. Responsibility measured in at the second most commonly shared among the 2013 officers, occurring 102 times at 31.10%. Includer and Restorative measured in at third at 30.18%. The *N*=372 state FFA officers who participated in the assessment in 2014, shared Achiever as their most commonly shared talent, occurring 148 times at 39.78% and Restorative as the second most common at 118 times and 31.72%. Responsibility stayed just above 30% as third most commonly shared. In 2015, of the *N*=350 state FFA officers who took the assessment, surprisingly Restorative reigned in as the most commonly shared talent, 130 shared at 37.14%. While Achiever became the second most commonly shared in 124 officers at 35.43%. Responsibility still occurred at 30.86% in 108 students.

Table 2

Top 10 Most Frequently Shared Strengths Among State FFA Officers

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2012	2013	2014	2015
	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)
Achiever	131 (32.91)	149 (38.21)	135 (39.94)	129 (33.86)	142 (38.17)	130 (36.72)	121 (36.89)	148 (39.78)	124 (35.43)
Adaptability			66 (19.23)	66 (17.32)					
Belief	96 (24.12)	91 (23.33)	85 (25.15)	82 (21.52)	89 (23.92)	91 (25.71)	78 (23.78)	80 (21.51)	96 (27.43)
Communication			74 (21.89)	91 (23.88)	69 (18.56)	75 (21.19)	64 (19.51)		
Developer						68 (19.21)	60 (18.29)		
Futuristic					70 (18.82)			69 (18.55)	67 (19.14)
Includer	102 (25.63)	105 (26.92)	109 (32.25)	98 (25.72)	114 (30.65)	124 (35.03)	99 (30.18)	106 (28.49)	91 (26.00)
Input		84 (21.54)	69 (20.41)	82 (21.52)	70 (18.81)		59 (17.99)	79 (21.24)	74 (21.14)
Learner	98 (24.62)	80 (20.51)	80 (20.51)	80 (20.51)	80 (20.51)	80 (20.51)	80 (20.51)	80 (20.51)	80 (20.51)
Positivity	78 (19.60)	78 (19.60)	78 (19.60)	78 (19.60)	78 (19.60)	78 (19.60)	78 (19.60)	78 (19.60)	78 (19.60)
Relator	99 (24.87)	99 (24.87)							
Responsibility	120 (30.15)	120 (30.15)	120 (30.15)	120 (30.15)	120 (30.15)	120 (30.15)	120 (30.15)	120 (30.15)	120 (30.15)
Restorative	105 (26.38)	105 (26.38)	105 (26.38)	105 (26.38)	105 (26.38)	105 (26.38)	105 (26.38)	105 (26.38)	105 (26.38)
Strategic	84 (21.11)	84 (21.11)			73 (19.62)	73 (19.62)	73 (19.62)	73 (19.62)	
WOO	100 (25.13)	100 (25.13)	100 (25.13)	100 (25.13)	100 (25.13)	100 (25.13)	100 (25.13)	100 (25.13)	100 (25.13)

Conclusions and Discussion

State FFA officers are members who have sought out the opportunity to serve the organization in the capacity of a student leader. The sample population of state FFA officers shows a diversity of all represented talent themes. With Achiever and Responsibility as two of the most frequently occurring themes in the sample, as a majority, state FFA officers are driven and highly accountable students. With Command and Intellection as the two least occurring in the sample, this population less frequently takes charge of situations or quietly thinks to themselves.

Looking deeper into the definitions of Achiever and Responsibility in the context of the Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment, even more insight can be gained. An Achiever is driven by accomplishment, and therefore keeps very busy and productive (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). Students in the organization, specifically state FFA officers, are generally

seen as driven individuals, diligently working to accomplish the next task at hand. The organization is saturated with opportunities for student achievement, officer positions, competitions, scholarships and awards, which all appeal to students high in the talent of Achiever. An individual with the Achiever talent finds a reoccurring drive to accomplish, consistently pushing for more each day. A state officer with this talent will relentlessly seek accomplishments, facing challenge after challenge. Balance for the Achiever theme is important to encourage those with this talent to not take on too much or be driven to accomplish things without it being purposed. Embracing the drive among state officers with this talent could find a positive impact in the organization, the agricultural classroom, and society.

The Responsibility theme stirs the need to take ownership over everything said, done or committed to doing (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). This sense of ownership marries quite well with the Achiever theme and further leads to the reputation of state FFA officers that not only are driven to accomplish whatever is at hand, but also have the sense of responsibility to see that it is done. The FFA touts the need for a high sense of responsibility in young people throughout agriculture, attracting a high number of state FFA officers with a natural talent of Responsibility. Balancing the talent of Responsibility is necessary, it can also overwhelm individuals into taking on more than realistically can be accomplished. Young people in agriculture that are high in the theme of Responsibility are vitally necessary as continued misinformation floods media outlets, confusing and misleading consumers and the public about food and agriculture.

The Restorative talent speaks to problem solvers, who are energized by identifying and examining symptoms and solutions (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). Restorative state FFA officers can find potential impact when examining challenges and seeking solutions for these challenges, whether in the organization, the classroom, in relationships or in agriculture. Seeking balance for the Restorative talent is necessary to ensure the drive for solutions doesn't overtake the bigger picture. Many agricultural courses have become more focused on problem-based learning. Is this drawing a stronger contingency of naturally Restorative talented young people to the FFA? The potential challenges that lie ahead in food and agriculture can be overwhelming at times. This surprising number of Restorative young people, ready to take on the challenges of any type of problem, is comforting to see in these young agriculturalists.

Being an Includer provides for the desire to make others feel included and part of the group (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). State FFA officers can utilize this talent to support and encourage younger members in the organization and draw new ones to the table. Inclusiveness can promote a welcoming environment that nurtures participation and engagement. A relationship to the official dress of the organization, something as simple as the unity of the FFA jacket, may potentially be appealing to this high number of students who are naturally talented and drawn to inclusion. As demographics of the nation continue to change, appreciation for the talent of Includer in the National FFA Organization among student leaders will potentially have an impact on current members, as well as those that may be considering joining the organization.

Learners, quite simply, love to learn and are drawn to the process of learning (Clifton et. al., 2006). As agriculture is an ever-evolving field, those with the natural talent of a Learner would tend to be drawn to it by the nature of learning. Serving as a state FFA officer can offer a large learning curve to many, finding a large component of state FFA officers naturally talented in this ability could support this relationship. This love of learning will potentially transcend future endeavors, a continued desire to learn more, in career skills and technical training, in post-secondary education, graduate courses and adult education programs. This constantly changing field of agriculture will require those with this drive to not just sustain that need, but also to exceed that expectation.

A strong Belief theme indicates that an individual holds certain core values that are enduring (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). These values shape everything one does, and quite frankly, why they do it. The FFA has strong traditions and foundations, is it really a surprise that student leaders strong in the Belief talent are found in this organization? Those high in the Belief theme find a demand to have meaning behind what one does and meaning that meshes with those core values (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

Always looking on the positive side of any situation is what the talent theme of Positivity is simply all about (Clifton et. al., 2006). Positiveness can be contagious, and state FFA officers with this talent can impact a number of other members they encounter throughout their experience. Recognizing students with this talent and approaching experiences in school and in life can be impacted with a positive perspective.

WOO stands for winning others over and embraces the challenge of meeting new people and getting them to like you (Clifton et. al., 2006). In fact, people strong in this talent are energized from this process, continually seeking opportunities to do it over and over again. This is a useful talent to have as a state FFA officer, since a large part of their responsibilities include meeting new people both in and out of the organization.

Looking at the less common strengths shared among state FFA officers in their top 5 themes is also revealing. The five least commonly occurring strengths in state FFA officers across this data period were Deliberative, Analytical, Connectedness, Command and Intellection. The Deliberative talent is expressed as a careful, vigilant, private person that carefully assesses each decision (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). As one considers this nature described in a person with the talent of Deliberative, questions arise that if the instant access and gratification rich in today's world has impacted this talent, is it not as prevalent in young people? Or, is it not as prevalent among state FFA officers? The Analytical theme shows an appreciation of data while being objective and dispassionate (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). This theme provides a necessary challenge at times to question ideas and look deeper past emotions to proof. Someone that can provide this talent, and naturally have the ability to look deeper beyond emotions of situations, may have a profound impact on any challenge encountered. Consider the high number of controversial issues involved in agriculture, someone that has the natural ability to wade through these types of challenges and evaluate evidence in light of varying emotions may be necessary to advancing the organization and the industry. The Connectedness talent allows someone to see the relationships and

connections among all things, embracing that everything happens for a reason (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). The natural talent of seeing connections among things could be of value to the FFA and agriculture, allowing a perspective that may provide others with a sense of being part of something bigger.

Command and Intellection weigh in at less than five percent of the time occurring in state FFA officers' top signature themes. Individuals high in the talent of Command have a desire and need to take charge and share their opinions with others (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). Confrontation is accepted as part of the process towards resolution and is not avoided by most individuals high in the talent of Command (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). State FFA officers high in Command may find this talent a natural fit for seeking opportunities, which allow them to exercise this sense of authority. The talent of Intellection is about liking to think and enjoying mental activity, even in multiple directions (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). This introspective nature tends to be noted as someone who likes time alone or time to think. Nurturing this talent in state FFA officers can provide a valuable resource to a group or team as someone who has taken some time to think about situations, solutions and questions. Why are these strengths found less frequently among state FFA officers? Serving as a state FFA officer does present as a team experience. Do individuals strong in the talent of Intellection and Command feel less embraced to serve on a team of officers? Do FFA programs and opportunities discourage these abilities from flourishing in students? Does FFA not attract students with these talents, or are these talents simply not as prevalent across young people taking the assessment or in today's youth?

Notably, all 34 themes of talent are represented across the 3,283 state FFA officers represented in this data, ranging from 4.17% to 36.83% in the top 5 themes. Diversity among state FFA officers is quite visible with this array of talents while common themes also bring these students together. Strong representation and shared talents of Achiever and Responsibility fuel this collective group to 'do' much with this broad representation of student talents.

Embracing the complex facets of each talent encountered could be a huge step in embracing greater self-awareness. Authentic leadership promotes a nurturing environment towards greater self-awareness, internalization of moral perspectives, balanced processing and relational transparency, ultimately advancing positive self-development (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Furthermore, objectively considering how talents can grow into strengths and honestly recognizing non-strengths could be considered a component of internalization and balanced processing. Relational transparency can build from learning about teammates' strengths and considering other's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors about these strengths as well as their own. Potentially each of these steps in authentic leadership development could find a parallel in state FFA officer strengths development.

Authentic leadership connects back to the intentional purpose of the Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment, which is to nurture personal growth and be utilized as a tool for self-awareness (Asplund et al., 2009). What will a greater number of self-aware students in FFA and agricultural education truly mean? What impact can a greater number of self-

aware students with the talent of Achiever have on the agricultural education world? Are those students aware of their talents in Responsibility? Restorative? Inclusion? Learners? Although true strengths development takes the ability to hone and develop natural talents, so they can be harnessed for best benefits, do opportunities in the FFA organization encourage students with any talent to join the organization? Does the opportunity to serve as a state FFA officer attract all facets of FFA members, at least in the context of talent diversity? Does this state FFA officer population data also represent the talent statistics across the general membership of the National FFA Organization? Are some talents more or less common among the general student population? What about just agricultural education students? Furthermore, do the programs and opportunities in the National FFA Organization nurture all students with a variety of talents, or does the organization attract certain students with specific natural abilities more readily?

Implications and Recommendations

Positive psychology applied in modern views of leadership are more positioned around the concept of authenticity, simply stating that the most effective leaders are being themselves and being true to themselves (Linley et. al, 2007). As noted by the National Research Council (2009) and Quinlan et al. (2022) today's students want careers that will be not only personally and professionally rewarding but are also aligned with their values and interests. Considering this talent information about students may allow these natural abilities to potentially become areas of great strength. Young people at times can be challenged to focus on their ever-changing interests, with heavy weight placed on future decisions, like certifications, schooling and careers.

A strength's focus encourages organizations to become great by utilizing each person's differences, and then build the organization around those differences (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). Providing programs and opportunities to authentically develop natural talents through leadership development may further pave the way for not only a strong organization, but a strong strengths-based organization. Utilizing strengths has been associated with significantly higher levels of happiness, well-being, and fulfillment leading to a greater degree of authenticity (Linley, et. al., 2007). Strengths-focused programs and classrooms is one way to move towards a student-centered, personal instruction approach.

Furthermore, considerations of this data lead to future research recommendations. Following up with a random selection of state officer teams at the conclusion of their state officer year with reflection on the impact, utility and rigor of strengths and strengths training program may shed valuable insight. Additionally, a one-year, post survey followed by a five-year post survey could also help identify the impact and utility of the strengths component to state FFA officers. The State and National FFA Organizations should also consider these findings with regard to all leadership development programming. Are students receiving adequate information, opportunities and resources to identify, nurture and grow their talents? As reflected in the data, with over 30% of state FFA officers with talents heavy in the Executing Domain, simply providing the tools and resources for self-exploration and learning may lead to surprising results. Evaluating and realizing the talents of students and the respective domains each are categorized may also be valuable when creating curriculum and content

revisions to programs. More content focused on finding solutions (talent of Restorative), exploring new information (talent of Learner), and taking ownership of projects (talent of Responsibility), for example, may actively engage more officers.

Is giving the Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment a second time, perhaps at the end of the state FFA officer experience, an appropriate suggestion? Indications exist that it is likely the individual's measurements may project accurately for years, as the concept implies, one grows into their talents, developing into strengths (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). Therefore, a re-test at the end of the state officer experience would most likely not be beneficial in that short timeframe. However, major life experiences may alter the results of the assessment, and some students have noted the heavy impact of the state FFA officer experience. Could this situation be an appropriate exception for a test-retest of the assessment?

Caution should be applied when using these data results to populations differing from state FFA officers. However, a random sampling of FFA members utilizing the Clifton StrengthsFinder®, or similar assessment at large, could be valuable. This research could provide insight and identify if state FFA officers are truly a representative sample of talents comparatively across FFA members nationwide. Additionally, this research may also lay foundations for a greater understanding of whether programs and opportunities are nurturing and attracting a talent-diverse array of students into the organization. A random sampling of agricultural education students not in FFA may also be a valuable comparison of this data, and furthermore lead to an understanding of whether opportunities in FFA are attracting all 34 themes of talent respectively.

Moreover, while there are concerns for equal encouragement for all students, regardless of natural talent, to be involved in agriculture and the FFA, recognizing the diversity of this data sample and the inherent strengths within is impressive. Strengths provide an opportunity to nurture and grow through developing self-awareness and authentic leadership skills that can ultimately fit into the current interests of the student and any future path that student may take. Can it be considered as potentially shedding some light on recruitment and retention throughout agricultural education and the National FFA Organization? Could strengths utilization and subsequent evaluation provide an avenue to develop the necessary soft skills that are required for the 21st Century?

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