

Are Selection Processes Allowing Talent Diverse Members Advance Through The Leadership Ranks of FFA?

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Abstract

As a student-led organization, the National FFA Organization and the selection of student leaders is an essential element of its continuation and success. As the National FFA Organization continues to strive to provide opportunities for personal growth and premier leadership, considerations to member advancement through selection criteria at the state level ultimately increases awareness of the potential end products of these criteria - - the students. The purpose of this study was to identify the self-identified talents among state FFA officers using data collected by the National FFA Organization. All state FFA associations are provided, free of charge, the opportunity for state FFA officers to utilize the Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment. Once a student completes the assessment, the signature top five themes of talent are recorded and made available to the National FFA Organization. This research design utilizes a convenience sample of participating state FFA officers in the Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment tool. After compiling the themes, additional data was collected on the election process each state FFA association uses to select state FFA officers. Each selection process yielded the same top ten talents: Achiever, Restorative, Responsibility, Includer, Learner, Belief, Positivity, WOO, Input, and Communication. This indicated no differential between the type of selection process utilized and the strengths state FFA officers possessed. State and National FFA staff should consider and review each step in the selection process, and if these steps are truly effective at allowing diversely talented members to be authentically represented.

Introduction

The heart of any organization is its members. The National FFA Organization is a student-led organization, with an essential element of its success is the selection of student leaders. Research has shown that state FFA officer leadership programs provide the opportunity for professional and personal development while instilling a positive sense of self and abilities (Hoover & Bruce, 2006). Additional research highlights the necessity for leadership opportunities to continue to help each student understand oneself and how to interact with others (Horstmeier & Nall, 2007). As outlined by the American Association for Agricultural Education (AAAE, 2023) in the Agricultural Education National Research Agenda in Priority Area 3, Sufficient Scientific and Professional Workforce that Addresses the Challenges of the 21st Century, the need exists to investigate soft skill development. As the National FFA Organization continues to strive to

provide opportunities for personal growth and premier leadership, considerations of member advancement through selection criteria on the state level ultimately increased awareness of potential student outcomes.

Student leader selection and impact has been no stranger to the agricultural education community. Several articles described below report the details, importance, best practices, and impact in selection of FFA leadership teams and their function. In 1978, issue one, volume 50 of *The Agricultural Education Magazine* was dedicated to FFA Leaders. One article identified that students often have a lack of confidence and keep abilities hidden or can't identify their strengths, and FFA provides opportunities to discover themselves (Jensen, 1978). Another article in that same issue notes the value in identifying personality characteristics of leaders that may provide insight into the type of student leader they may become (Cox & McCormick, 1978). Jensen goes on to further discuss how difficult it is to measure and place a value on these leadership experiences (1978).

In November of 1991, another entire issue of *The Agricultural Education Magazine* was dedicated to the theme "Impact of FFA Leadership". Gartin (1991) discussed the benefit of students recognizing their own leadership style, the strengths and weaknesses of this style, and provided insight to appreciate the strengths of others, leading to helping groups become more effective and more productive. Various practices and tips were identified throughout this issue dedicated to FFA leadership. Peters (1991) provided discussion on the importance and success of assisting students through a mentoring program where older students or members provide support and guidance to younger ones. Types of leadership styles and their impact on students were also considered (Barrett, 1991). Further implications were noted for teachers and students to consider throughout this issue. Barrett noted how "[h]elping students develop confidence and an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses as leaders will go a long way in achieving the aim of leadership development" (1991, p. 11). Woodard and Herren (1991) discussed the leadership impact of the officer team and noted that it is necessary for advisors to help students realize the importance of being an authentic team member, willing to work and lead along with the team.

Development of state FFA officers was considered by Hoover and Bruce (2006) where they took a deeper look at the long-term consequences associated with serving as a state FFA officer in Pennsylvania. Results indicated that holding a state level FFA office engaged youth in self-exploration, discovery of strengths and weaknesses, in addition to providing an avenue to receive recognition for competence, support of positive adolescent development, transference of leadership skills, and purposeful civic and community engagement (Hoover & Bruce, 2006). Considerations for future leader development was the scope of examining National FFA officer candidate preparation where several factors were identified as important and could result in an individual's enhancement of preparation (Hoover & Atwater, 2005).

There are various leadership assessments and tools available to utilize for leadership development. One such tool is the Clifton StrengthsFinder[®] web-based assessment tool, that measures the presence of 34 natural talents organized into themes (Clifton, et al., 2006). Table 1 provides a description of all 34 themes of talent. 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 by increasing self-awareness (Asplund, et al., 2009). Talent awareness leads to a greater understanding on one's abilities and potential strengths. Collaboration and cooperative learning can both benefit from strengths awareness. "Talking together about how your talents complement one another can lead to what is called 'synergy' – the tremendous result that occurs when a group of people discover and maximize their talents as a team, rather than simply contribute their talents as separate individuals" (Clifton, et al., 2006, p. 87-88).

Table 1

Clifton StrengthsFinder® themes of talent

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 the 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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Conceptual Framework

Strengths-based leadership serves as the first piece of framework for this research. As strengths research progressed, the idea to consider how an individual’s strengths impacted team dynamics and effectiveness gave way to broader groupings of strengths. From this idea Rath & Conchie (2008) identified “four distinct domains of leadership strength.... Executing, Influencing, Relationship Building, and Strategic Thinking” (p. 23) and are outlined in Table 2. The concepts behind the domains of leadership strength embraced the fact that each person is unique to their talents, and when talents were combined with team members, if spread across the domains and usually provided a more successful team experience.

Table 2

Strengths-based domains of leadership

Executing	Influencing	Relationship Building	Strategic Thinking
Achiever	Activator	Adaptability	Analytical
Arranger	Command	Developer	Context
Belief	Communication	Connectedness	Futuristic
Consistency	Competition	Empathy	Ideation
Deliberative	Maximizer	Harmony	Input
Discipline	Self-assurance	Includer	Intellection
Focus	Significance	Individualization	Learner
Responsibility	WOO	Positivity	Strategic
Restorative		Relator	

Strengths Based Leadership: Great Leaders, Teams, and Why People Follow (Rath & Conchie, 2008, p. 24).

“Leaders with dominant strength in the Executing domain know how to make things happen” (Rath & Conchie, 2008, p. 24). These types of people produce results, get things done and will work until the task or project is completed. “Those who lead by Influencing, help their team reach a much broader audience” (Rath & Conchie, 2008, p. 25). The people who are strong in the Influencing domain, will be successful in spreading the key messages and principles of the

organization both inside and out. “Those who lead through Relationship Building are the essential glue that holds a team together” (Rath & Conchie, 2008, p. 25). These types of people will bring teams and efforts together and will commonly produce a higher yield. “Leaders with great Strategic Thinking strengths are the ones who keep us all focused on what could be” (Rath & Conchie, 2008, p. 26). These types of people on a team push and stretch thinking, often leading to better team decisions and outcomes. A focus on the strengths approach is more about authenticity, not positive or negative, but truly authentic self-discovery (Welch, et al., 2014).

Authentic leadership provides the second framework of this study. Diddams and Chang (2012) discussed, “authentic leadership holds great promise for producing effective leaders who are oriented toward the service of others” (p. 600). 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). A more prevalent, well-encompassed definition established in 2008, as part of the authentic leadership research agenda.

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)

One component, a leader’s self-awareness, has been widely agreed upon as the beginning of authentic leadership development across these variances in interpretation of authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Student leaders demonstrating true authentic leadership should begin with self-awareness of one’s own abilities and skills. Avolio and Gardner’s (2005) key distinction of authentic leaders was how “authentic leadership can help develop and shape a strength-based organization” (p. 334).

Purpose and Objectives

Each state association in the National FFA organization evaluates and selects state level, student leaders in varying election formats. Analyzing if there is a relationship in student leadership strengths compared to the type of selection tools utilized to choose state officers was the focus of this study. The National FFA Organization provides state leaders with the opportunity, free of charge, to complete the Clifton StrengthFinder® assessment. State FFA officers also have the opportunity to complete rigorous training through a leadership curriculum. Some states actively utilize strengths development and resources throughout the year of office, while others do not utilize the Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment or the program. The data from the state officers that have completed the assessment provided by the National FFA Organization has been collected since 2006, except for 2011. The data have not been analyzed and used to propel student leadership development forward.

The purpose of this study was to identify and explore self-identified talents among state FFA officers using data collected by the National FFA Organization. The first objective was to analyze state FFA officers’ talents according to the strengths-based domains of leadership utilizing the Clifton StrengthsFinder®. The second objective was to compare the top five talent themes of state FFA officers utilizing the Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment data to the state

selection process utilized to elect said officers. This objective allows researchers to investigate the spectrum of diversity in the talents of student leaders in the organization on the state level in relationship to the process utilized to elect student leader assessment data. The third objective of this study was to identify the election process used in the selection of state FFA officers.

Methodology

All states FFA associations are provided, free of charge, the opportunity for state FFA officers to utilize the Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment. Once a student completes the assessment, the signature top five themes of talent are recorded and made available to the state associations and are compiled by the National FFA Organization, and if provided by participating officers or state association, the state demographic were also recorded. If sought by the student or staff, some additional resources are available to assist the officer and association with further development and information regarding each officers' 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). Clifton et al. further states that the participant is then asked to choose from a pair of statements 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. Coming to know, understand, and value talents, have the ability to develop into strengths and can lead to achieving team success (Clifton, et al., 2006). The Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment is based on positive psychology and has been used in understanding individuals in a variety of situations including student, team and personal development (Asplund, et al., 2009). 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 and were grouped into 34 themes, listed in Table 1 (Clifton, et al., 2006). After compiling the themes, additional data was collected on the process by which state FFA officers were selected.

The research design utilizes a convenience sample of participating state FFA officers who were administered the Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment tool. The data was organized in Microsoft® Excel and then analyzed using JMP for descriptive statistics. In some state associations, regional officers or presidents are considered state FFA officers, and thus train together. Unfortunately, the number of total State FFA officers is not reported each year. The numbers are not static; therefore, the exact percent of the total population is not available to report.

The Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment has been vetted through aspects of validity, reliability and consistency. 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). Schreiner (2006) 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). These predictions were confirmed by significant correlation coefficients (93.4%). Additionally

the average item clustering percentage across all possible theme pairs was 90% (Schreiner, 2006). Several studies exist that have examined the overall usefulness of the instrument, and such evidence to strongly support positive utility is easily found across a number of outlets (Clifton & Harter, 2003; 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 and 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). The results of this test indicated that 33 of the 34 themes had significant results, indicating evidence of stability for those themes. However, one theme, self-assurance, was less stable over time in this study (Asplund, et al., 2009). Test-retest was also examined by Schreiner (2006) and performed like other similar instruments.

Results

The first objective of this study was to analyze state FFA officers' talents according to the strengths-based domains of leadership utilizing the Clifton StrengthsFinder[®]. Throughout the entire data collection period when the 3,283 state FFA officers' top five themes of talent were grouped and counted into the four leadership domains identified in strengths-based leadership, the results (Table 3) show most talents fell in the executing domain (32.87%). The influencing domain was ranked as the lowest of the five talents at 17.88%.

Table 3

StrengthFinders Leadership Domain Themes of State FFA Officers

Domain	<i>f</i>	%
Executing	5395	32.87
Relationship Building	4498	27.40
Strategic Thinking	3587	21.85
Influencing	2935	17.88

The second objective was to compare the top five talent themes of state FFA officers utilizing the Clifton StrengthsFinder[®] assessment data with the state selection process utilized to elect said officers. In Table 4, all student data ($N=1,642$) that corresponds to the participating states that employed a state FFA officer application as a component of the selection process, is displayed. Notably, the top ten most frequently occurring talents were: Achiever, Responsibility, Restorative, Includer, Learner, Belief, Positivity, WOO, Input and Communication. While the ten least frequently reported talents were: Activator, Empathy, Analytical, Consistency, Connectedness, Deliberative, Self-Assurance, Maximizer, Intellection, and Command.

Table 4

StrengthFinders Themes of State Officers Who were Elected Through Applications.

Strength	<i>f</i>	%	Strength	<i>f</i>	%
Achiever	611	37.21	Arranger	213	12.97
Responsibility	529	32.22	Relator	192	11.69
Restorative	527	32.10	Context	161	9.81
Includer	492	29.96	Significance	147	8.95
Learner	437	26.61	Ideation	144	8.77
Belief	407	24.79	Focus	134	8.16
Positivity	392	23.87	Discipline	128	7.80
WOO	365	22.23	Activator	114	6.94
Input	324	19.73	Empathy	113	6.88
Communication	302	18.39	Analytical	101	6.15
Strategic	294	17.90	Consistency	94	5.72
Developer	287	17.48	Connectedness	88	5.36
Futuristic	284	17.30	Deliberative	86	5.24
Harmony	247	15.04	Self-Assurance	77	4.69
Adaptability	244	14.86	Maximizer	71	4.32
Competition	243	14.80	Intellection	69	4.20
Individualization	226	13.76	Command	67	4.08

In Table 5, all student data ($N=1,643$) that corresponds to the participating states that employed a state FFA officer interview as a component of the selection process is displayed. Notably, the top ten most frequently occurring talents were: Achiever, Responsibility, Restorative, Includer, Learner, Belief, Positivity, WOO, Input and Communication. While the ten least frequently reported talents were: Activator, Empathy, Analytical, Consistency, Connectedness, Deliberative, Self-Assurance, Maximizer, Intellection, and Command.

Table 5

StrengthFinders Themes of State Officers Who Were Elected Through Interview Processes

Strength	<i>f</i>	%	Strength	<i>f</i>	%
Achiever	612	37.25	Arranger	213	12.96
Responsibility	529	32.20	Relator	192	11.69
Restorative	528	32.14	Context	161	9.80
Includer	492	29.95	Significance	147	8.95
Learner	437	26.60	Ideation	144	8.76
Belief	408	24.83	Focus	134	8.16
Positivity	392	23.86	Discipline	128	7.79
WOO	365	22.22	Activator	114	6.94
Input	324	19.72	Empathy	113	6.88
Communication	302	18.38	Analytical	101	6.15
Strategic	294	17.89	Consistency	94	5.72
Developer	287	17.47	Connectedness	88	5.36
Futuristic	285	17.35	Deliberative	86	5.23

Strength	f	%	Strength	f	%
Harmony	247	15.03	Self-Assurance	77	4.69
Adaptability	245	14.91	Maximizer	71	4.32
Competition	243	14.79	Intellection	69	4.20
Individualization	226	13.76	Command	67	4.08

In Table 6 student (N=1,058) data that corresponds to the known participating states that utilize a state FFA officer slate as a component of the selection process is displayed. The top ten most frequently occurring talents were: Achiever, Responsibility, Restorative, Includer, Learner, Positivity, WOO, Belief, Input and Communication. While the ten least frequently reported talents were: Empathy, Activator, Analytical, Consistency, Deliberative, Connectedness, Self-Assurance, Intellection, Maximizer, and Command.

Table 6

StrengthFinders Themes of State Officers Who Were Elected Through a Slate Election Process.

Strength	f	%	Strength	f	%
Achiever	369	34.88	Arranger	139	13.14
Responsibility	334	31.57	Relator	121	11.44
Restorative	334	31.57	Context	109	10.30
Includer	314	29.68	Ideation	102	9.64
Learner	280	26.47	Significance	95	8.99
Positivity	261	24.67	Discipline	92	8.70
WOO	244	23.06	Focus	84	7.94
Belief	241	22.78	Empathy	79	7.47
Input	220	20.79	Activator	70	6.62
Communication	203	19.19	Analytical	67	6.33
Strategic	189	17.86	Consistency	60	5.67
Developer	187	17.67	Deliberative	53	5.01
Futuristic	186	17.58	Connectedness	51	4.82
Harmony	162	15.31	Self-Assurance	49	4.63
Competition	161	15.22	Intellection	48	4.54
Adaptability	156	14.74	Maximizer	45	4.25
Individualization	144	13.61	Command	41	3.88

In Table 7, all student (N=826) data that corresponds to the known participating states that utilize a state FFA officer slate with an immediate vote to accept slate as a component of the selection process is displayed. The top ten most frequently occurring talents were: Achiever, Restorative, Responsibility, Includer, Belief, Learner, Positivity, WOO, Communication, and Input. While the ten least frequently reported talents were: Activator, Focus, Consistency, Analytical, Deliberative, Maximizer, Connectedness, Intellection, Self-Assurance, and Command.

Table 7

StrengthFinders Themes of State Officers Who Were Elected Through Immediate Vote of

Accepted Slate.

Strength	<i>f</i>	%	Strength	<i>f</i>	%
Achiever	289	34.99	Arranger	103	12.47
Restorative	282	34.14	Relator	100	12.11
Responsibility	268	32.45	Ideation	85	10.29
Includer	241	29.18	Context	82	9.93
Belief	208	25.18	Discipline	76	9.20
Learner	205	24.82	Empathy	63	7.63
Positivity	194	23.49	Significance	61	7.38
WOO	185	22.40	Activator	57	6.90
Communication	162	19.61	Focus	57	6.90
Input	159	19.25	Consistency	54	6.54
Developer	154	18.64	Analytical	49	5.93
Strategic	150	18.16	Deliberative	47	5.69
Futuristic	149	18.04	Maximizer	40	4.84
Adaptability	133	16.10	Connectedness	39	4.72
Harmony	131	15.86	Intellection	33	4.00
Competition	110	13.32	Self-Assurance	31	3.75
Individualization	105	12.71	Command	28	3.39

In Table 8, all student data (*N*=578) that corresponds to the known participating states that utilize a popular vote per individual office for selection of state FFA officers as a component of the selection process is displayed below. The top ten most frequently occurring talents were: Achiever, Responsibility, Includer, Restorative, Learner, WOO, Belief, Positivity, Input, and Communication. While the ten least frequently reported talents were: Empathy, Discipline, Analytical, Connectedness, Self-Assurance, Consistency, Deliberative, Intellection, Maximizer, and Command.

Table 8

StrengthFinders Themes of State Officers Who Were Elected Through Popular Vote Per Individual Office.

Strength	<i>f</i>	%	Strength	<i>f</i>	%
Achiever	214	37.02	Arranger	66	11.42
Responsibility	173	29.93	Context	62	10.73
Includer	172	29.78	Significance	59	10.21
Restorative	170	29.41	Relator	56	9.69
Learner	158	27.34	Focus	47	8.13
WOO	146	25.26	Ideation	46	7.96
Belief	143	24.74	Activator	45	7.79
Positivity	137	23.70	Empathy	42	7.27
Input	115	19.90	Discipline	38	6.57
Communication	110	19.03	Analytical	36	6.23
Strategic	108	18.69	Connectedness	36	6.23
Competition	102	17.65	Self-Assurance	31	5.36
Futuristic	102	17.65	Consistency	29	5.02

Strength	f	%	Strength	f	%
Developer	96	16.61	Deliberative	28	4.84
Adaptability	87	15.05	Intellection	28	4.84
Individualization	87	15.05	Maximizer	22	3.81
Harmony	80	13.84	Command	19	3.29

In Table 9, all student data (N=690) that corresponds to the known participating states that utilize on convention stage speeches and/or rounds for selection of state FFA officers as a component of the selection process is displayed below. The top ten most frequently occurring talents were: Achiever, Responsibility, Restorative, Includer, Learner, Belief, WOO, Positivity, Input, and Communication. While the ten least frequently reported talents were: Empathy, Connectedness, Analytical, Discipline, Deliberative, Consistency, Self-Assurance, Intellection, Command, and Maximizer.

Table 9

StrengthFinders Themes of State Officers Who Were Elected Through Convention Onstage Speeches and/or rounds.

Strength	f	%	Strength	f	%
Achiever	253	36.67	Arranger	85	12.32
Responsibility	224	32.46	Relator	77	11.16
Restorative	224	32.46	Context	68	9.86
Includer	211	30.58	Significance	65	9.42
Learner	183	26.52	Ideation	56	8.12
Belief	177	25.65	Focus	52	7.54
WOO	173	25.07	Activator	51	7.39
Positivity	169	24.49	Empathy	50	7.25
Input	137	19.86	Connectedness	44	6.38
Communication	134	19.42	Analytical	41	5.94
Strategic	128	18.55	Discipline	40	5.80
Developer	127	18.41	Deliberative	35	4.07
Futuristic	108	15.65	Consistency	34	4.93
Competition	106	15.36	Self-Assurance	31	4.49
Adaptability	100	14.49	Intellection	29	4.20
Individualization	97	14.06	Command	23	3.33
Harmony	96	13.91	Maximizer	22	3.19

The third objective of this study was to identify the election process used in the selection of state FFA officers. Table 10 outlines the election process used to select state FFA officers. A variety of selection process tools are utilized across the National FFA Organization’s member associations. Of the 52 total state associations including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands in the National FFA organization, this information is known to 49 of those associations. When considering these results, 49 used an interview process, 48 used a state officer application, 30 utilized a slate of state officers, 24 held an immediate vote to accept slate, 20 held some type of on convention stage speeches and/or rounds and 16 held a popular vote per officer position. It is noteworthy to explain that each state association may use any or all of these methods. While

there may be additional components to each individual association's selection process, these are the most easily and commonly identified and grouped components.

Table 10

State FFA Officer Election Process

Process	<i>f</i>	%
Interview	49	100
Application	48	98
Officer Slate	30	61
Slate with Immediate Vote	24	49
On-Stage Speech with Voting	20	41
Popular Vote	16	33

Limitations

This study has several limitations. The authors first recognize that this study is limited to the states that utilized Strengthfinders. Furthermore, the study is limited to the accuracy of state leader's abilities to remember or correctly identify the election processes used during the data collection period. Finally, this study is limited to the accuracy of the responses provided by the respondents. Did they answer the items that best describe themselves or did they answer the items they would prefer to be identified as possessing. This selection could alter the actual strengths of the individual respondents. Although the instrument used in this study is valid and reliable, the method in which participants were selected to complete the Clifton StrengthsFinder[®], was not consistent across all states and is based solely on data provided by the National FFA Organization. Care should be taken in generalizing recommendations from this study to all state FFA Officer training programs.

Conclusions and Discussion

The first objective of this study was to analyze state FFA officers' talents according to the strengths-based domains of leadership utilizing the Clifton StrengthsFinder[®]. We conclude that the Executing Domain was the most common theme identified among all state officers that completed Strengthfinders while the Influencing Domain was the least common. It is easy to assume the Executing Domain would be one of the most common domains among state officers when you consider Achiever, Belief, Discipline, Focus, and Responsibility are among the nine Executing sub-themes. However, it is quite interesting that the influencing domain was the least common when you consider command, communication, self-assurance, significance, and WOO fall under this theme.

As grouped talents, the domains provide another perspective on these results. Individual state FFA officer strengths collected together and grouped in these domains stir some additional thoughts and questions. The Executing domain provides further information as to how these particular top talent themes work together to potentially benefit the organization. The culture of state officers often reflects this domain, working relentlessly to make things happen (Rath & Conchie, 2008). The Influencing domain weighs in as the least prevalent grouping. Focusing upon the successful spreading the key messages and principles of the organization both inside and out (Rath & Conchie, 2008). What does this mean to the organization? The heart of the state

FFA officer concept is rooted in the peer leadership model of state FFA officers providing a conduit to the greater membership at large. While the Influencing talents of state FFA officers in this sample are less frequently measured in the top five themes, it does not definitively mean this is an area of non-talent. Areas of non-talent could only be identified by knowing the entire ranked 34 themes of each officer. Theoretically, for example, what if many of these themes were ranked sixth or seventh? With investment into knowledge and skill, a talent theme can become a true strength. Through the strengths-based leadership framework, considerations should be given to the content of leadership development programming and opportunities.

The second objective was to compare the top five talent themes of state FFA officers utilizing the Clifton StrengthsFinder® assessment data (Clifton, et al., 2006) to the state selection process utilized to elect said officers. While there is a variance in the number of associations that utilize different election processes, each process yielded the same top ten talents: Achiever, Restorative, Responsibility, Includer, Learner, Belief, Positivity, WOO, Input, and Communication. The different election process also yielded the same bottom ten talents: Activator, Empathy, Analytical, Consistency, Connectedness, Deliberative, Self-Assurance, Maximizer, Intellection, and Command (Clifton, et al., 2006). Maximizer, Intellection, and Command strengths typically rated below five percent by the participants in this study. We believe that most state selection processes reviewed do not provide officer candidates with the opportunity to showcase these particular skills, and therefore they may not be at the forefront of the officers thoughts as they completed strengths assessment. Additional research in this area is warranted. Additionally, as we look from state association to state association, slight variations can be seen across the most commonly occurring talents ranked within the top 10. However, these results would indicate no relationship between the type of selection process utilized and differentiation of those strengths.

The third objective of this study was to identify the election process used in the selection of state FFA officers. An interview and application process appear to be universally adopted for use during the state officer selection process. It also appears that most states have adopted an officer slate selection process as well. It is quite possible that states have moved towards a nomination committee that interviews all applicants and forward a recommended slate of candidates in an effort to align applicant strengths with officer positions. It is possible that state FFA associations have moved away from on stage speeches/election processes in an attempt to find a more streamlined approach to officer elections and avoid popularity contests.

Implications and Recommendations

Potential state officer candidates and those involved with student leader selection alike can benefit from this research. School-Based Agricultural Education teachers and FFA staff at all levels should consider the type of selection process component utilized and the pattern of talents shared across state FFA officers. Do the selection processes utilized for selection of state FFA officers provide for all talents to move through the ranks of FFA leadership? Do the selection processes utilized provide the opportunity to showcase strengths other than these top ten talents? Providing opportunities throughout the selection process for students to authentically express their talents could be the beginning of building a strengths-based organization. With no differentiation of talents across these selection components, is that truly being accomplished?

As reflected in the data, over 30% of state FFA officers talents are heavy in the Executing Domain—that is, they are hard workers who can make things happen (Rath & Conchie, 2008). By simply providing officers with the tools and resources for self-exploration to learn about their own strengths, interesting results may develop. Evaluating and realizing the talents of student officers and how the respective domains of each are categorized may also be valuable information for coordinators when creating curriculum and programmatic content revisions. For example, more content focused on finding solutions (talent of Restorative), exploring new information (talent of Learner), and taking ownership of projects (talent of Responsibility) may actively engage more officers and students in their own development.

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