

Comprehensive Strengths Assessment

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In upcoming years, I will prioritize work that gives me the chance to nurture liberation and equity in higher education, priorities I take to be deeply connected to my faith. By liberation, I join Freire (2018) in affirming the realities of hegemonic epistemologies and the need for all people, regardless of their social position, to deconstruct oppression. By equity, I refer to the idea that society does not afford all groups the same economic and social opportunities (Baptist, 2014; Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Taylor, 2019; Wilder, 2013) due to historic and systemic forces that must be addressed through policies and mindsets in order to create equity. With my Ph.D. in hand, I will pursue work that allows me to contribute to these priorities. Honest self-awareness is critical for effective pursuit of these goals. As an exercise in such self-awareness, I will use this paper to explore my strengths and motivations and to reflect on how these strengths speak to my professional plans. My top five CliftonStrengths Assessment (CSA) themes are *strategic*, *input*, *learner*, *positivity*, and *connectedness*. Some of these themes are similar to my Values in Action (VIA) results which include *creativity*, *judgement*, *fairness*, *curiosity*, and *forgiveness*. I also took the MCode (MC), an assessment designed to identify underlying motivations. My top five MC motivations are to *experience the ideal*, *make an impact*, *serve*, *achieve potential*, and *meet the challenge*.

Strengths for Liberatory Innovation

I currently serve as the Managing Director of the Wheaton Center for Faith & Innovation (CFI), an academic research and training center that seeks to educate and equip Christians to reflect on how their faith can inform their business practices. My current work is spread out across a portfolio of programs, one of which is the iLab, a project-based consulting platform in which Wheaton students and faculty develop social innovation projects with partnering

companies and non-profits. The iLab exists to help companies and students create sustainable social change by drawing on the richness of the Christian liberal arts, brass tacks business expertise, and a faith-driven commitment to social equity. Motivated to turn abstract ideas that I consider to be just into concrete forms (MC: experience the ideal), I would like to focus my future work more deeply in this area: project- and partnership-based innovation for social equity from a higher education context. This professional advancement could take the form of a senior leadership role within CFI or as academic entrepreneurship in an alternative organizational setting. In such a role, I would like to oversee partnership development so I can strategically build a portfolio of collaborative innovation projects that advance equity.

Because colleges and universities have historically advanced both liberatory and hegemonic ends, I plan to dedicate a perpetual track in the iLab portfolio to higher education innovation projects. I would like to construct modes, structures, resources, and processes that advance liberation and destabilize hegemony in higher education. Specifically, I would like to develop projects that generate innovation possibilities in higher education functions (e.g. admissions, financial aid, development, marketing, physical plant, program delivery) and the broader marketplace (e.g. human resources; diversity, equity, and inclusion; voluntary reparations, and stakeholder relationships) that align these functions to sustainability and liberation. Innovations that implement reparations, environmental sustainability, and stakeholder reconfiguration in the above-mentioned functions are examples of the type of project I have in mind. As this work is enacted, it is my further goal that it serves as a context for critical pedagogy and learning, creating space for students, faculty, and partners to cultivate self-awareness, prophetic vision, and practical competence.

Gaining and being successful in the position described above would afford me the opportunity to exercise my strategic thinking skills and unique motivations. I tend to not follow the expected or default approach when faced with a new problem. Instead, I identify multiple paths toward a goal, reviewing relevant factors and likely outcomes, and I select a path purposefully (CSA: strategic). Naturally curious, I like gathering new information (CSA: input). The CSA input theme means that I like finding, gathering, and organizing new sources of data, so I can access important information later. I also enjoy acquiring new knowledge and skills, a process I appreciate for its own sake as much as for any utility it provides (CSA: learner). In the VIA paradigm, creativity is conceptualized in ways that resonate with the CSA strategic theme—both highlight my tendency to look for alternative approaches to problems and goals and select the best approach intentionally. My VIA creativity result extends beyond artistic endeavors, influencing my approach to a broad range of activities including conceptualizing new programs, developing new partnerships, and building relationships. I value the opportunity to be reflective and prudential in my work (VIA: judgement), seeking to integrate my decision-making procedures with meaningful rationales. My strengths in these strategic areas are a strong basis for leading the partnerships and collaborative projects I describe above. Furthermore, my professional experience selling consulting services (and writing grants) would provide tools for maintaining financial sustainability and expanding the iLab.

Leading the iLab or a similar unit elsewhere would give me the chance to expand my influence in higher education by building a network of leaders across institutions and organizational functions, keeping me close to trends, and identifying new opportunities for the sector. Observing and serving throughout the sector would also position me to provide thought

leadership among higher education practitioners. Such leadership could be disbursed through consulting, writing for trade publication, and scholarship.

Strengths for Scholarship

I also plan to develop my practice as a researcher. In this capacity, I anticipate making formal academic contributions, but will emphasize collaborative projects and community service in the areas of epistemology and knowledge production as well. I am writing my dissertation on the higher education system in Palestine where academic actors conduct their work under military and political occupation. In future years, I plan to extend this area of research, with attention to knowledge production in other conflicted and hegemonic contexts such as Syria, Rwanda, and the United States. I value asking questions, exploring possible answers, and studying new areas of knowledge not necessarily for immediate application or utility, but for the sake of learning (VIA: curiosity). This strength motivates me as a continual learner and will help sustainably energize my ongoing work as a researcher. As with the innovation work described above, such a research emphasis would allow me to pursue liberatory goals.

As a practicing Christian in the United States, I would also like to make intellectual contributions that promote understanding and appreciation among white evangelicals of a wider world of human experiences and epistemologies, particularly those of marginalized groups. Motivated by the opportunity to pursue structural change (MC: make an impact), I seek to deconstruct hegemonic perspectives around whiteness, Christianity, and capitalism as they are encoded in higher education and society in order to destabilize suspicion, hatred, and polarization. As a member of numerous conservative, white, evangelical communities, I am socially positioned to prompt reflexive conversations in these groups. I value my own certain, though increasingly complex membership to these communities, thus, I can authentically offer

affirmation, love, and appreciation, while prompting critical self-reflection. This work would not be for curious or interested outsiders; rather, it would be work *with* and not *about* my conservative Christian communities. This intellectual service could take many forms such as consulting with churches, Christian colleges, and campus ministries and contributing to relevant, periodicals (e.g. Christianity Today, Sojourners) and publishers of popular work (e.g. IVP, Eerdmans, Cascade, etc.).

I will have to draw on a range of strengths to be successful in this sensitive work. Barring extenuating circumstances, I tend to bring energy and enthusiasm that others find attractive (CSA: positivity). Positivity is one of my best assets for influencing others towards new ideas or projects. Operating with an intuitive belief in people, I am also committed to including others in meaningful work and to sharing credit and rewards (VIA: fairness). This commitment means I tend to deemphasize the role of credentials, rank, and charisma in seeking collaborators, looking instead for people who are hungry to participate and ready for a challenge. I put faith in people, even when they make mistakes or hurt me or others, and I tend to attribute negative experiences that result from the choices of others to circumstantial factors rather than to character flaws (VIA: forgiveness). I am inclined to notice and help with challenges that others face, and to ease others' frustration or anxiety (MC: serve). These people-oriented strengths and values (positivity, fairness, forgiveness, and service) are key assets for defusing conflict and affirming relationships in the delicate work I describe above.

I could partially anchor my scholarly work to my affiliation with Wheaton College and the Center for Faith & Innovation, but I am also open to seeking additional affiliations or establishing a new platform. My multiple experiences founding new academic centers provide me with ample perspective and experience to found a new organization, and my concentration of

strengths in the strategic domain (e.g. strategic, input, learner, creativity, judgement) provide tools for steering, sustainability, and growth. My background in marketing, partnerships, and budgets also provide the practical depth needed to develop an organization.

Conclusion

As a devout Christian, I believe the Bible represents God's words of love and instruction to people. In the old testament book of Micah, the author encourages readers the God has made instructions for life plain: "It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, and don't take yourself too seriously—take God seriously" (Micah 6:8, *The Message*). I intend for the plans described above to give me the chance to continually learn and encourage this kind of justice, compassion, love, and humility in myself and in the world.

References

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