

Power of Strengths:

Examination of the Strengths-Engagement Relationship



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Introduction and Key Findings

A **strength** is any activity that makes a person feel “strong”. That is, the idea of engaging in that activity is exciting and motivating, it is easy to lose track of time while engaged in that activity, and completing the activity brings forth feelings of pride and satisfaction. The importance of strengths in the workplace is an integral piece of the StandOut philosophy and approach. It is by leaning into strengths that people find the most fulfillment in the work they do, a key variable in the equation of workplace engagement.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the relationship between strengths use and engagement. By leaning into data from both general population and StandOut user samples, we are able to step away from StandOut’s philosophical foundation and examine the nature and direction of the strengths use-engagement paradigm from an empirical perspective.

The key takeaways from this work include:

- Multiple data sources and types consistently reveal that people who spend time leaning into their strengths are significantly more likely to be FE than people who do not.
- Leveraging one’s strengths every day is associated with the highest levels of engagement.
- When a change in the frequency of strengths use occurs, engagement often changes as well

Data Collection and Samples

General Population Sample. The general population samples for this study are comprised of two samples of adults (ages 18 - 75 years) who were employed in at least one full-time position in the United States at the time of data participation. Data were collected using the existing audience panel of an U.S.-based online survey platform. For each data collection effort, the sample consists of a random sample of audience members stratified to mimic the then-current demographic profile of working adults in the U.S. with respect to sex, age, and race / ethnicity (as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau).

Sample 1 includes $n = 1,405$ participants whose data were collected in April 2022; sample 2 includes $n = 2,270$ participants whose data were collected in March 2024. In both samples, approximately 49% of participants identified as women, approximately 49% identified as men, about 1% identified as gender fluid or non-binary, and the remaining participants chose to not respond. The distribution of age groups across the two samples were as follows: 48% ages 18 - 39 years in sample 1, 53% in sample 2; 31% ages 40 - 54 years in sample 1, 35% in sample 2; 21% ages 55 – 75 years in sample 1, 12% in sample 2. Across both samples, nearly half of participants (45%) identified themselves as individual contributors, 18% identified as frontline managers, 17% identified as middle managers, 13% identified as interns / temporary employees, and 7% identified themselves as upper managers / senior leaders within their organization.

StandOut User Sample. The StandOut user sample for this study consists of data submitted between January 2023 and December 2024. Users were selected into the study at the person level; all TMs are included who meet the following criteria:

- responded to at least one EP invitation;
- eligible to submit Check-Ins for at least 5 weeks prior to EP launch;
- submitted at least 2 Check-Ins (and responded to the strength pulse Check-In item) during the 5 weeks prior to EP launch; and
- rated at least one Check-In priority as making them feel *strong*, *weak*, or *neither strong nor weak* during each week for which they submitted a Check-In during the 5 weeks prior to EP launch.

All data for TMs who met these criteria for more than one EP launch between January 2023 and December 2024 were included in the data set, provided the multiple time points corresponded to consecutive admin-launch EP time points for their respective organizations. When TMs had data for more than one non-consecutive time point, only the data from the first time point was included. Thus, some TM data represents up to 8 consecutive time points of data. In total, 34,423 TMs from 54 client organizations had sufficient data to be selected into the sample used for point-in-time analyses. Of these, 19,555 TMs from 45 client organizations had sufficient data at consecutive time points to be selected into the subsample used for longitudinal analysis.

Count of TMs with Consecutive Time Points of Data								
	Number of (Consecutive) Time Points							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<i>n</i>	14,868	6,190	3,785	2,771	2,130	2,098	1,323	1,258
<i>%</i>	43%	18%	11%	8%	6%	6%	4%	4%

Operational Definition of Strengths Use

An *operational definition* is a description of how data are used in the measurement of a latent construct (i.e., things that cannot be measured directly, such as strengths use and engagement). The bullet points below explain how the key variables of interest in this research were calculated using the available data.

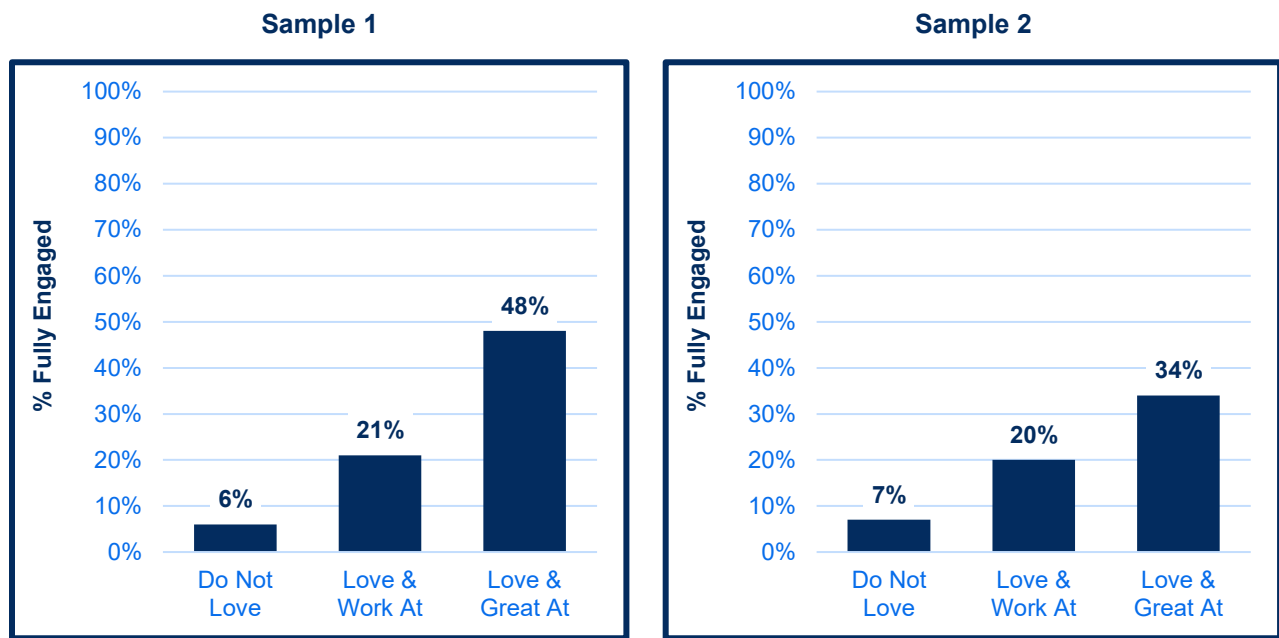
- **Strengths Use.** Average responses to the Check-In Strengths Pulse item (*Last week, I had a chance to use my strengths every day.*) were calculated for each TM at each time point.
- **Strengths Use Groups.** Strengths use values (defined above) were aggregated to create 4 groups across which responses to other measures would be compared. Response distributions were carefully examined prior to the creation of these groups to ensure that effects would not be masked, underestimated, enhanced, or otherwise biased in any way that might misrepresent the data or skew the findings.
 - **High Strengths Use.** Average Check-In Strengths Pulse item responses ranging from 4.5 - 5.0.
 - **Positive Strengths Use.** Average Check-In Strengths Pulse item responses ranging from 3.5 - 4.4.
 - **Neutral Strengths Use.** Average Check-In Strengths Pulse item responses ranging from 2.5 - 3.4.
 - **Low Strengths Use.** Average Check-In Strengths Pulse item responses ranging from 1.0 - 2.4.

Strengths Use and Engagement

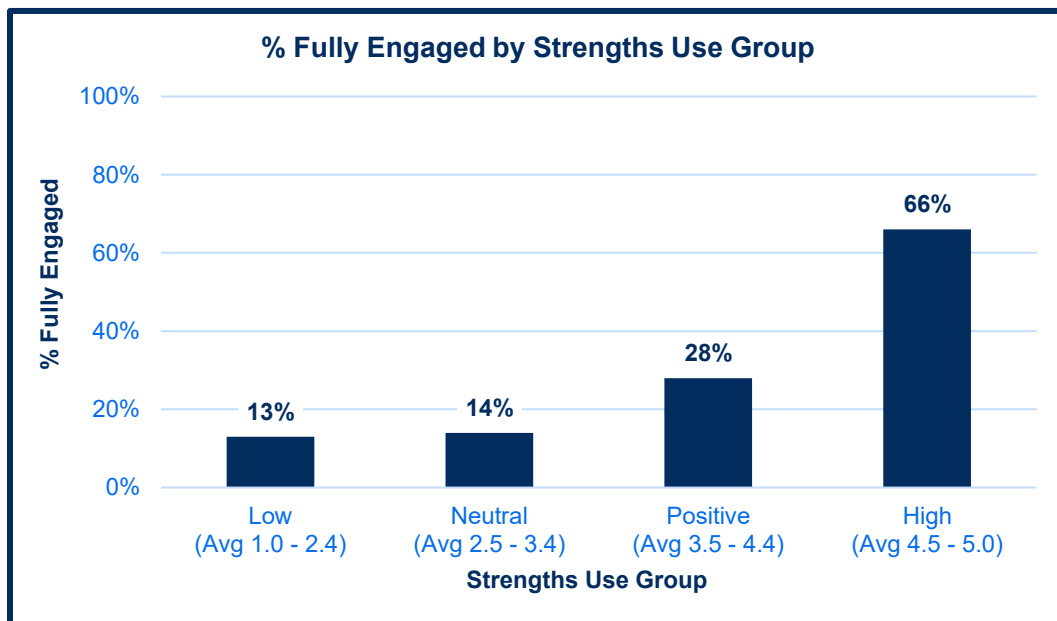
General Population Samples. Participants in both general population studies were asked to select which of the following four options best described most of the tasks they complete for work: *Things I love to do and am great at doing*, *Things I love to do but have to work at to do well*, *Things I do not love doing but am great at doing*, and *Things I do not love doing and have to work at to do well*. The first of these response options (*Things I love to do and am great at doing.*) reflects the experiences of using one’s strengths.

Strong relationships were observed between engagement and the extent to which someone uses their strengths at work in both general population samples (depicted in the figures below). In sample 1, 48% of participants who have the opportunity to play to their strengths (i.e., describe their work tasks as things they love to do and are great at doing) are FE, 21% of those who spend their time on tasks they love but have to work at are FE, and only 6% of those who expend most of their work efforts on things they do not love are FE. A similar trend is observed for sample 2, with 34% FE, 20% FE, and 7% FE, respectively. In both samples, participants who spend their time playing to their strengths are more than 2× more likely to be FE than those who do what they love but have to work at to do those things well, and more than 6× more likely to be FE than those people who are not doing what they love.

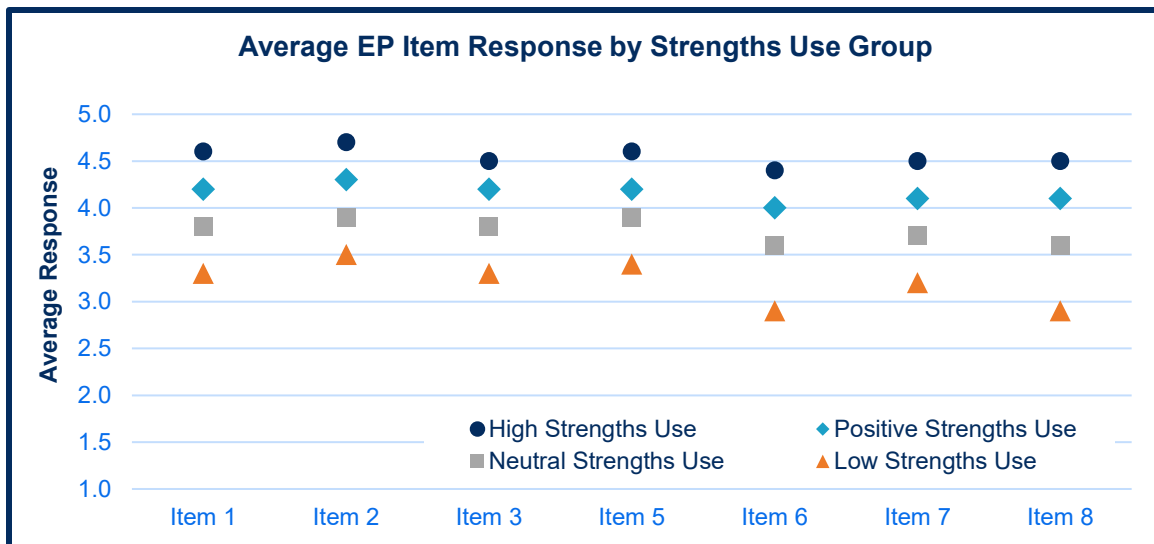
% Fully Engaged by Description of “Most” Work Tasks in General Population Samples



StandOut User Sample. Significant differences in % FE by strengths use group were found, with 66% of those in the high strengths group being FE (compared to 28% of those in the positive strengths use group, 14% in the neutral strengths use group, and 13% in the low strengths use group). This means that TMs who use their strengths very frequently (i.e., nearly every day or more) are 5× more likely to use their strengths than TMs who use their strengths a little less, and **TMs who use their strengths very frequently are 12× more likely to be FE** than TMs who use their strengths infrequently (i.e., TMs in the low and neutral strengths use groups).



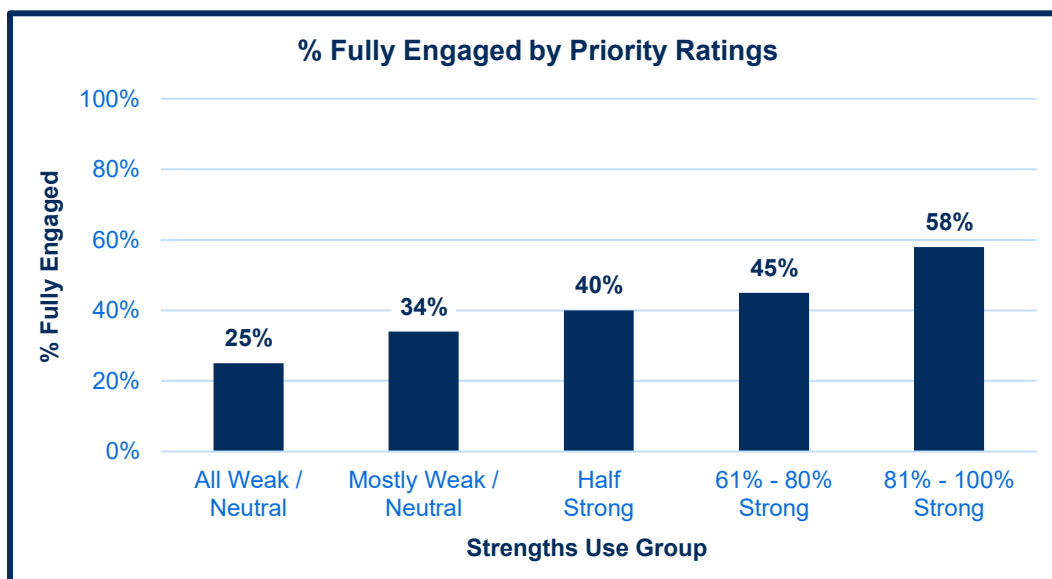
As depicted below, average responses to the EP items are consistently most positive for those in the high strengths use group, followed by those in the positive and neutral strengths use groups, and the least positive for those in the low strengths use group. Note that EP item 4 (*I have the chance to use my strengths every day at work.*) is omitted from the figure below, as it is redundant with the Check-In Strengths Pulse item used to determine strengths use group membership. For all 7 items included below, the differences in average responses between the 4 strengths use groups are both statistically and practically significant.



Priority Strength Ratings

StandOut User Sample. When submitting a Check-In, TMs have the option to rate the priorities they listed on their previous Check-In as having made them feel strong, weak, or neutral. Those selected into this study rated at least one priority each time they submitted a Check-In. On average, TMs included in this study submitted 14 priorities and rated 12 priorities (85% of those submitted) during the 5 weeks leading up to EP launch. Aggregated across time points, TMs rated approximately 82% of priorities as making them feel strong, 3% as making them feel weak, and 15% as making them feel neither strong nor weak.

There is a significant linear relationship between the proportion of priorities TMs rate as making them feel strong and engagement, as illustrated in the figure below. Specifically, 58% of TMs who rate at least 81% of their priorities as activities that made them feel strong are FE, compared to 45% of those who rate 61% - 80% as making them feel strong, 40% who rated about half of their priorities as making them feel strong, 34% of those who rate a majority of their priorities as leaving them feel weak or neither weak nor strong, and 25% of those who rate all of their priorities as leaving them feel weak or neither weak nor strong. Put another way, ***TMs who spend more than 80% of their time of activities that make them feel strong are 2× more likely to be FE than TMs who only spend about 50% of their time on activities that make them feel strong and more than 4× more likely to be FE than TMs who report not spending any time working in their areas of strengths.*** These results provide further evidence of the important role of leveraging strengths in work as a key predictor of engagement.



Effects of Changes in Strengths Use

When TMs who rate few or no of their priorities as making them feel strong (i.e., 0% - 20%) begin working on priorities that do make them feel strong (i.e., rating 21% or more of their priorities as making them feel strong during the consecutive reporting period), increases in % FE are observed immediately, with % FE increasing as much as 10% in a single quarter. Conversely, when TMs who rate most or all of their priorities as making them feel strong (i.e., 81% - 100%) begin dedicating their time to priorities that do not make them feel strong (i.e., rating 60% or less of their priorities as making them feel strong during the consecutive reporting period), decreases in % FE (of up to 13%) are observed immediately. Descriptive statistics related to these patterns of change are presented in the table below.

Changes in % FE Relative to Percent of Priorities Rated as Making TM Feel Strong

Increases in Percentage of Priorities Rated as Making the TM Feel Strong					
% Strong Ratings			% FE		
Time 1	Time 2	n	Time 1	Time 2	Δ
0%	61% - 80%	224	33%	38%	+5%
	81% - 100%	316	41%	48%	+7%
1% - 20%	61% - 80%	330	39%	43%	+4%
	81% - 100 %	251	37%	47%	+10%
Decreases in Percentage of Priorities Rated as Making the TM Feel Strong					
% Strong Ratings			% FE		
Time 1	Time 2	n	Time 1	Time 2	Δ
61% - 80%	0%	325	33%	24%	-9%
	1% - 20%	390	39%	31%	-8%
	21% - 40%	1,438	43%	39%	-4%
	41% - 60%	3,509	50%	48%	-2%
81% - 100%	0%	354	47%	34%	-13%
	1% - 20%	305	48%	39%	-9%
	21% - 40%	1,074	49%	42%	-7%
	41% - 60%	2,785	52%	48%	-4%

These patterns of priority strength ratings and engagement over time are important, as they demonstrate the effect of strengths on engagement and are based on TM reflections on the actual work they are doing. Together, these patterns highlight the potential and power of leaning into one's strengths.

Summary of Findings

The research summarized in this brief had as its objective to examine the relationship between strengths use and engagement from an empirical perspective, relying on quantitative evidence from multiple populations independent of the StandOut philosophy and approach. Both point-in-time and longitudinal analysis of the available data indicates a consistent, strong, and meaningful connection between the experience of leveraging one's strengths at work and engagement. The key takeaways are as follows:

- Multiple data sources and types yield the consistent finding that people who spend time leaning into their strengths are significantly more likely to be FE than people who do not.
- Leveraging one's strengths every day is associated with the highest levels of engagement.
- When a change in the frequency of strengths use occurs, engagement often changes as well.