



LIBERATE HUMAN STRENGTH & LIFE

CHRISTINE BIZZELL

Canon Collaborative
christine@canoncollaborative.com

Keywords: Nature; Humans; Work; Wellbeing; Agency.

Humans are part of nature – its oneness includes all of us [1]. As our climate is greatly challenged to regulate itself, humans naturally follow suit. After all, we are subordinated to the motherly flows that created us. The same flow and flow architecture that generates life on earth moves through our bodies, minds, and consciousness. As freedom of thought goes hand-in-hand with access to power, space, and wealth [2], management designs that empower people more uniformly could enhance the flow of innovations to sustain life on our finite-sized planet. We could invest in workplace engagement as a holistic and generative strategy to support human and planetary health and wellbeing. As Adrian Bejan states, “the onus [is] on citizens, schools, businesses, and government to speed the process of creating designs to better serve society -- more effectively and with much greater confidence [3].”

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health encompasses an individual’s ability to cope with stress, realize and engage their abilities, and contribute to their community [4]. In 2019, 970 million people were living with a known mental health disorder – note these figures were presented before the Covid-19 pandemic and do not account for unknown conditions. Mental health is closely linked with productivity [5] and the WHO estimates that 12 billion working days are lost every year due to depression and anxiety, which costs an estimated 1 Trillion U.S. dollars in lost productivity. These mental health disorders impair the human spirit that drives innovation and economic energy [6]. These mental health disorders exist alongside the increasing prevalence of burnout, which is not categorized as a mental health disorder. Burnout is a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. However, stress management is a significant aspect of mental health. In 2024, many estimates show a minimum of half of the global workforce is at risk of burnout.

According to Gallup, wellbeing can be understood and measured in five interconnected domains: career, financial, physical, social, and community. With work claiming 20–50% of our waking hours, our experience in the career domain or “liking what you do everyday” is heavily weighted in connection with our holistic wellbeing and can be a tremendous stabilizing force in an individual’s life [6]. Therefore, the positive transformation of work experience becomes a magnificent opportunity to support global wellbeing. Jim Harter, Chief Scientist at Gallup shares that the combination of strengths and wellbeing at work is “potentially the most transformational treatment yet” in the pursuit of mental health [6].

The human mind has an instinctive urge to recognize and understand the configuration required to promote ease, fulfillment, and happiness [7]. The CliftonStrengths assessment, written in 26 languages,

identifies a person's most natural and prevalent currents of thinking, feeling, and behaving that can be consciously engaged and therefore productively called upon or utilized. For individuals, these currents of strength are dynamically interconnected and an extremely rare subset [8] often first appearing in childhood. The language associated with each strength, which can be likened to energy, is expressed in relatable terms for immediate utilization in any environment combined with knowledge of and access to the fuel enabling its contribution [9]. We know that "language speeds and strengthens connections in the brain when we are processing sensory information" [10] and that better utilizing language advances adaptations [11]. Our approach to strength empowerment illuminates significant aspects of an individual's tacit knowledge, which is understood as knowledge embedded in the human mind through subjective experience that is often very difficult to put into words, including personal wisdom, insight, and intuition. An individual may not be consciously aware of this embodied knowledge, yet it influences how we each perceive and interact with the world [12]. When understood, this embodied strength and tacit knowledge illuminates the path to individual genius – supporting an individual's ability to create situations and opportunities to release their strength with greater self-trust and confidence. Claiming this agency, we can map our instincts beyond survival and bring forth innovations that our mind, and only our mind, could create.

Our embodied strength naturally meets resistance in abundant and highly unique-to-us forms. This resistance or stress is often associated with work or the required activities that support the structure of our lives and niche environments. Gaining clarity of our unique environmental stressors, we can lead ourselves to success through the path of least resistance – conscious selection, claimed agency, and methodical self-directed movement. The Hungarian-American Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi introduced the concept of a psychological flow state as empowered concentration on a consciously chosen goal and worthy challenge [13] – when our strengths and skills meet resistance with clarity and confidence [9]. These flow state experiences are represented in the mind as information, containing immensely invaluable data we can utilize to replicate past success and avoid past failure. A personal wellspring, this flow experience data can inform the best design for work. In Mihaly's view, this flow state arises when we claim control of our inner state of energy and experience, which can not only lead to success, but is also the closest that anyone can come to creating happiness in life [13]. As Mihaly states, "The steps we take to improve the quality of experience are very important to culture as a whole."

Organizational structures have evolved with the human species, as outlined by Frederic Laloux in his work "Reinventing Organizations." As our society grows more complex, so does our need for more complex structures to support our movement and empowerment. Scientific management was created during the Industrial Revolution and instrumental in building human connection or relationship to our new machine extensions. Eventually, some organizations realized this mechanistic approach diminished our humanity and pursued organizing as a family [14]. Today, Laloux believes organizations can be viewed as a living organism that would best flourish under holistic management practices that center higher purpose, distributed decision making, and self-management. Through viewing an organization as a living organism, we can gain powerful insight into pathways that can liberate human strength and ingenuity. This perspective not only gives us insight into individual pathways to flourishing, but also how the whole may be nourished through cultural practices and structures. Viewing an organization's

ecosystem of living human strength, we can analyze its design to understand dominant pathways to productivity, mitigate unique environmental stressors, and leverage outlying strength that might otherwise be overpowered. Through embracing a shared language, an organization can utilize strengths to connect on issues that greatly matter to the work – bolstering collaboration, innovation, and adaptation. Through this connection, leaders and managers can gain truly invaluable insight into what fuels their team to intrinsically pursue shared goals and collaborate toward realizing vision. Freedom to operate in strength at work is directly correlated with workplace engagement, which brings tremendous organizational benefits such as decreased safety incidents, lower turnover, higher productivity, and more [15].

With greater strength awareness, individuals can design for success, support their wellbeing, and be more confident in their quest for happiness. We can all learn to generate congruence in our lives by embracing our most natural strength and absorbing the timeless wisdom of the natural world in pursuit of balance and harmony that “form the golden thread of life [16].” Wellbeing and agency are critical components for an inclusive and sustainable path to global development [16]. The science of management should rapidly evolve to provide greater access to human strength for the sole purpose of benefiting global wellbeing – innovation and profit will naturally follow, which is why 90% of Fortune 500 companies have implemented a strength-based approach [15]. Viewing an organization as a living organism, we can gain insight into pathways that can liberate human strength and life [9]. The onus is on every one of us – we are empowered and it’s time to revolutionize the way we work.

REFERENCES

1. Bejan A., Zane J.P., *Design in Nature: How the Constructal Law Governs Evolution in Biology, Physics, Technology, and Social Organization*, Doubleday, New York, USA, 2012.
2. Bejan A., *Freedom and Evolution*, Springer Nature, New York, USA, 2020.
3. American Institute of Physics (AIP), *Physics can predict wealth inequality*, ScienceDaily. ScienceDaily, 28 March 2017. <www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/03/170328120613.htm>.
4. World Health Organization (WHO), <www.who.int/health-topics/mental-health>
5. Psychology Today, Mental Health and Productivity <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/productivity/mental-health-and-productivity>>
6. Clifton J., Harter J., *Wellbeing at Work: How to Build Resilient and Thriving Teams*, Gallup Press, 2021.
7. Bejan A., *Time and Beauty: Why Time Flies and Beauty Never Dies*, World Scientific, Singapore, 2023.
8. Science of CliftonStrengths, The Gallup Organization, 5 Aug. 2024, www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/253790/science-of-cliftonstrengths.aspx#
9. Bizzell C., *Grounding Journey*, Canon Collaborative Website, 2024. www.canoncollaborative.com/grounding-journey/.
10. Brown B., *Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience*, First edition, New York, Random House, 2021.
11. Bejan A., *The Physics of Life: The Evolution of Everything*, St. Martin’s Press, New York, USA, 2016.
12. Key Concepts in Information and Knowledge Management, Tacit and Explicit Knowledge. www.tlu.ee/~sirvir/Information%20and%20Knowledge%20Management/Key_Concepts_of_IKM/tacit_and_explicit_knowledge.html. Accessed 18 Nov. 2024.
13. Csikszentmihalyi M., *Flow: The classic work on how to achieve happiness*, Rider, Random House, 2002.

14. Laloux F., *Reinventing organizations: A guide to creating organizations inspired by the next stage of human consciousness*, Nelson Parker, Brussels, Belgium, 2014.
15. CliftonStrengths for Organizations, The Gallup Organization <https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/253808/cliftonstrengths-for-organizations.aspx>. Accessed 29 May 2024.
16. Global Wellbeing Initiative, *Wellbeing for All: Incorporating Harmonic Principles of Wellbeing in Subjective Wellbeing Research and Policymaking*, 2023.