

Strengths of an Organisation

# What works?

**DIGITAL BOOKLET**

**28 DOUBLE-SIDED CARDS WITH  
112 ORGANISATIONAL STRENGTHS**

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**'An invaluable addition to the field of Appreciative Inquiry, What Works can be used to inspire the rich, transformational conversations so essential for success.'**

Sue James, Appreciative Inquiry facilitator and consultant'

What  
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## Welcome to the digital version of **WHAT WORKS?**

Organisations that work well draw on a dynamic combination of strengths. What are the strengths of your organisation? How well does your organisation do with strengths such as planning, leadership, fairness, communication, role clarity, and creativity? What about managing change and resolving disputes? Which strengths will be needed for an upcoming project, a current challenge, or for the long-term future?

First published as a hard copy card set, this set of 28 cards is now available in this interactive, user-friendly, digital version.

You can:

- swipe through the 28 digital cards, one at a time
- see both sides of the cards on the screen at once—on the left is a key strength such as planning, leadership, change, transparency, and on the right are four indicators of strength in that area. There is also a simple scale for assessing how your organisation is doing with that strength.
- swipe through a row of thumbnail images at the bottom of the screen

- bookmark/tag images
- add and drag notes to anywhere on the images
- write, scribble or draw on the digital cards—you may want to circle a relevant topic as a number on the evaluation scale, or scribble notes about next steps
- highlight, draw and write in multiple colours
- take a screen shot and access the image in your photo gallery—then print or email it if you wish (you can't print directly from the digital images).

### **What is the purpose of *What Works?***

This resource is for assessing and building organisational strengths. It is designed to stimulate strengths-based, solution-focussed conversations for:

- Team building
- Shared vision
- Collaborative planning
- Shared leadership
- Best practice
- Change management.



## Who might use this resource?

This resource is suitable for anyone interested in using strengths-based, solution-focused or Appreciative Inquiry approaches to plan around strengths and capacities rather than weaknesses and deficits. It can be used in any workplace, small business, large corporation, organisation, club or community group. It can be used in both 'for profit and 'for purpose' settings.

- a manager might use the cards to gain insight into a specific operational function or objective
- a supervisor might introduce the cards at a planning meeting as a different window into good practice
- mentors, coaches and trainers might use the cards to help people develop leadership skills
- a leadership group might use the resource to gather feedback about the organisation
- a team leader might use the cards to build a strengths-based culture in a work group
- an Appreciative Inquiry practitioner might use multiple sets to invite an entire organisation to identify its strengths by working in small groups
- an individual might use the cards to reflect on aspects of her work
- a group might use the cards to review the past year
- a team might use the cards to identify strengths needed for a particular project
- a team might use the cards to celebrate the strengths of a member who is retiring.

## How many cards are in the digital set?

*What Works* contains 28 cards—each naming a key organisational strength (domain) and four ways to review and build that strength (indicator). This is a total of 112 indicators of organisational strengths.

Bring your teams together and use *What Works* to create dynamic conversations about building strengths, skills and processes that really work.

## What is 'strengths-based, solution-focussed' practice?

Strengths-based practice holds that everyone has strengths and resources, and by building and calling upon these we are better able to grow, learn and tackle difficulties. At the heart of the strengths approach is the collaborative sharing of power known as 'power-with' rather than a top-down, prescriptive, 'power-over' relationship.

Solution-focussed practice holds that solutions and possibilities are more likely to arise out of focussing on where we are heading rather than in going around and around in problems. Solution-focussed questions often focus on what is going well, what is happening when the problem is absent or less dominant, what we value, and what is important to us.

In the context of organisations, a strengths-based, solution-focussed approach includes:

- identifying and mobilising strengths, possibilities and hopes for the future
- managers and staff working collaboratively to share resources and power, and develop a shared vision for the future
- an understanding that leadership is a strength that can be demonstrated by anyone in the organisation regardless of position
- curiosity about possibilities and things to try
- sharing stories, insights and reflection about good practice that really works
- a focus on each person's growth, development and contribution rather than 'top down' expertise
- sharing openly and respectfully.

(For a comprehensive text on the strengths approach, please see [The Strengths Approach](#) book)

### **What should I consider before using this resource with others?**

While there are 112 indicators of organisational strengths in this resource (4 on each of the 28 cards), they are not exhaustive nor prescriptive. Conversations can take unexpected pathways and many other questions and topics may arise. Please consider how you will help ensure that conversations are respectful and that people can be supported if highly-charged topics arise. Also consider such things as the timing, the setting, literacy levels, cultural relevance, privacy and confidentiality—especially in groups.



## IDEAS FOR USING THESE DIGITAL CARDS

### Getting Started

Invite the participant to scroll through the cards one at a time to become familiar with the whole set. The thumbnails along the bottom can be useful for this. If you are working with a group, you can project the images onto a screen and scroll through so everyone can see.

Then you can ask questions such as the following:

- What would you say are the key strengths of your organisation?
- Would everyone in the organisation agree with your selection?
- How might these strengths be used to develop other strengths?
- What strengths do you believe people outside your organisation (your competitors perhaps) would use to describe your organisation?
- Which cards show strengths that are most important to you?
- As you plan for an upcoming project or for the long term future, what organisational strengths do you believe should be emphasised?
- What strengths does your organisation have that make you optimistic about the future?
- Which strengths come easily to your organisation and which ones take more effort?
- Are there strengths that you believe deserve a higher priority than they currently have?

- Have your organisation's strengths changed as compared to twelve months ago or when you joined?
- Can you identify a particular challenge the organisation faced in the last twelve months? What strengths would you say were employed to overcome it? Which strengths were the most effective?

## Random Selection

Another way of getting activities started is to select images randomly, for example:

- Ask the person to randomly select a number from 1—28 (there are 28 cards). The facilitator or participant can then swipe through the images, counting each image as they go. Stop at the image that corresponds with their random number.
- If working with a group, ask each person to pick a random number and then swipe through and stop as above.
- Or you can ask an individual to close their eyes (or turn their back) and randomly say, 'Stop!' as the facilitator swipes through the images.
- Or use a timer that has been set to a chosen interval—5 seconds, 10 seconds, etc. Stop on the image that is on screen when the timer dings.

Then you can ask questions such as the following:

- What significance do these cards have for both you and your organisation?
- Are there indicators that have not been listed on a card that you think are even more relevant than those listed?
- How do these cards relate to each other?

- What relevance do these cards have to your organisation? Do they assist reflection? Do they illustrate an organisational blind spot? Do they suggest something that regularly gets in the way?
- In thinking about these cards as a linked combination, do they bring to mind something that may have been overlooked in planning or culture-building?

## Scaling

There is a simple numerical scale (1—5) on one side of each card. This scale can be used to rate an organisation's performance in that particular domain (the key word on the card) or in any of the indicators (the four statements on the card). Use the scribble tool to circle numbers on the scale, as required.

Questions that might be asked for scaling or rating include:

- How would you rate the performance of your organisation or team on each indicator?
- How does your rating differ from other staff?
- Is the rating you give your organisation now, different from when you first joined?
- Can you rate every card (or a selection of cards) according to how much of a priority you think that particular strength is for your organisation or team?

For those who are particularly interested in scaling, Innovative Resources has produced a digital tool with 12 scaling masters using different visual metaphors such as a water tank and a pathway. It's called [The Scaling Kit](#).

## Leadership

- Within which of the thirty domains do you make your most significant contributions?
- Can specific domains be 'led' or championed by different people within the management team?
- How are these skills within domains passed on by leaders in your organisation?
- Which of the domains do you consider essential to expressing good leadership?
- If leadership responsibilities are shared throughout the organisation, which 'skill sets' identified by the 28 domains does each person on the management team do well?
- Which ones would individual managers and leaders want to develop further?
- Which ones does the management or leadership team want to develop as a whole?

## Planning

- Select the 'Planning' card. Which of the four indicators (if any) would you want to see addressed explicitly in your organisation's strategic or business plan?
- Do you see any of these four indicators as a priority?
- Can acceptable minimum standards be set for each of the four indicators on the 'Planning' card?
- Looking through the rest of the cards, are there other domains or indicators that you see as particularly relevant to your organisation's planning?

- Given the culture or history of your organisation, if some of these domains or indicators become part of planning, what are the possible implications for other domains not featured?
- For a given domain or indicator, what are the first steps to take?
- What is a reasonable timeline for this change?
- What will be the key milestones along the way?
- Who might take this forward?

## Change Management

- The 'Change' and 'Planning' cards each list four indicators. Do you think the order of these four is significant? What are the next two, four or six?
- Select any three cards. What implications for change do these cards present? How do they relate to managing the proposed change?
- What other cards are important in relation to change?
- Choose one card. What would the change process be like if this domain were strengthened in your organisation? How might that be achieved?
- Is there a better or worse time for particular changes to take place? How can this be ascertained?
- What is expected from the proposed changes? Is this expectation clear to everyone?
- Are there any hidden agendas in the proposed change?
- Is the change simply for its own sake?
- What are the values that underpin the change?
- Is the proposed change ethical?
- Can the outcomes of the changes be quantified?

- Is the change process likely to build or destroy relationships?
- Is the change respectful of staff, customers, and the community?

## Role Clarity

- The 'Roles' and 'Transparency' cards each list four indicators. Do you think the order of these four is significant? What are the next two, four or six?
- Substitute the word 'I' for the word 'We' in the indicators on the 'Roles' and 'Transparency' cards. How does this affect the meaning?
- Are you clear about your own work roles?
- Are you clear about the work roles of others?
- How might other cards have relevance for role clarity?
- How 'fluid' are roles in your organisation? What advantages or challenges does this bring?
- How often are work roles and position descriptions reviewed in your organisation?

## Team Building

- The 'Learning' and 'Trust' cards each list four indicators. Do you think the order of these four is significant? What are the next two, four or six?
- Can you select other cards that are significant factors in team building? How well does your team and your organisation 'do' these strengths?
- How can you build these strengths in your team?
- What does 'team building' mean to you and to the organisation itself?
- How are new individuals introduced into an existing work group or team?

- Sometimes it is said: 'A new member means a new team'. What implications does this statement have for your work group?
- In your organisation, does team work apply only to output, quality, safety, and so on, or does it also apply to less tangible things such as shared values and purpose?
- How do you know when a team is working well?
- Think of a time when a team you were part of was working well. Use the cards to describe what skills and strengths were being applied.
- What enabled these strengths to come to the fore?



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- Shared vision
- Collaborative planning
- Shared leadership
- Best practice
- Change management

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