

Work is more fun if the character fits the bill

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Anyone who can apply his or her personal character strengths in his or her career experiences more enjoyment, flow and meaning at work. These people are also more satisfied with their job and perceive it more as a calling. This is the result of two large-scale studies conducted by a team of psychologists from the University of Zurich. The studies provide key insights for the selection of personnel and human resources development.

Character strengths can be defined as traits that are evaluated as morally positive, such as self-control, [teamwork](#) or [kindness](#). Character strengths that are particularly distinctive for a person and which he or she likes to use frequently are referred to as signature strengths. Everybody typically has between three and seven of these signature strengths. For the first time, Claudia Harzer and Professor Willibald Ruch from the Section on Personality and Assessment at the University of Zurich now prove in two studies that a job is particularly cherished if it suits one's own signature strengths: The application of signature strengths in one's profession actually goes hand in hand with more positive experiences at [work](#), namely enjoyment, flow, sense of purpose or [satisfaction](#) and calling.

High level of satisfaction with four or more signature strengths applied

In the first study, Harzer and Ruch interviewed over 1,000 working people about the manifestation of their character strengths, whether they are able to apply these strengths at work and how positively they experience their work. In their second study, besides self-assessments

the scientists also analyze how the [test subjects'](#) colleagues rate the applicability of the character strengths.

The degree of positive experiences increases with the number of signature strengths applied. In both studies, people who are able to apply four or more signature strengths at work have the highest values in terms of positive experience. They enjoy work more, are more wrapped up in it, perceive their work as more meaningful and are more satisfied with their job. These people also perceive their work more as a calling than people who are able to apply three signature strengths or fewer in the workplace.

Whether character strengths can be applied at work depends, among other things, on which rules are stipulated in the job description or whether strength-related behavior is helpful to carry out the work. A job description for nursing staff, for example, might contain a lot about hygiene but not so much on friendly conduct. Nonetheless, we can expect patient care to be more successful if the nursing staff is friendly and sympathetic.

Useful for employers and employees

Harzer and Ruch's findings provide insights that might be useful for the selection of personnel, human resources development and workplace design. "If it is clarified which character strengths are central for the job before a position is filled, a person can be recruited based on these strengths. Employers and employees only stand to benefit from this," explains Harzer. According to the scientist, further studies should examine whether four signature strengths are found in all professions and hierarchical levels or whether fewer signature strengths suffice to facilitate a positive experience in employees.

More information: Harzer, C., & Ruch, W. (in press). The application

of signature character strengths and positive experiences at work. Journal of Happiness Studies. [doi:10.1007/s10902-012-9364-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-012-9364-0)

Harzer, C., & Ruch, W. (2012). When the job is a calling: The role of applying one's signature strengths at work. The Journal of Positive Psychology, 7, 362-371. [doi:10.1080/17439760.2012.702784](https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2012.702784)

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