The Four Domains of Leadership Strength

As Gallup studied and worked with thousands of leadership teams, we began to see that while each member had his or her own unique strengths, the most cohesive and successful teams possessed broader groupings of strengths. So we initiated our most thorough review of this research to date. From this dataset, four distinct domains of leadership strength emerged: Executing, Influencing, Relationship Building, and Strategic Thinking.

Executing

Leaders with dominant strength in the Executing domain know how to make things happen. When you need someone to implement a solution, these are the people who will work tirelessly to get it done. Leaders with a strength to execute have the ability to “catch” an idea and make it a reality.

Influencing

Those who lead by Influencing help their team reach a much broader audience. People with strength in this domain are always selling the team’s ideas inside and outside the organization. When you need someone to take charge, speak up, and make sure your group is heard, look to someone with the strength to influence.

Relationship Building

Those who lead through Relationship Building are the essential glue that holds a team together. Without these strengths on a team, in many cases, the group is simply a composite of individuals. In contrast, leaders with exceptional Relationship Building strength have the unique ability to create groups and organizations that are much greater than the sum of their parts.

Strategic Thinking

Leaders with great Strategic Thinking strengths are the ones who keep us all focused on what could be. They are constantly absorbing and analyzing information and helping the team make better decisions. People with strength in this domain continually stretch our thinking for the future.
Gallup found that it serves a team well to have a representation of strengths in each of these four domains. Instead of one dominant leader who tries to do everything or individuals who all have similar strengths, contributions from all four domains lead to a strong and cohesive team. This doesn’t mean that each person on a team must have strengths exclusively in a single category. In most cases, each team member will possess some strength in multiple domains.

According to our latest research, the 34 Clifton StrengthsFinder themes naturally cluster into these four domains of leadership strength. See below for how your top five themes sort into the four domains. Then, use the chart at the end of this report to plot your team members' top five themes and see how their strengths sort into the four domains as well. As you think about how you can contribute to a team and who you need to surround yourself with, this may be a good starting point.

Your Top Five Clifton StrengthsFinder Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Executing</th>
<th>Influencing</th>
<th>Relationship Building</th>
<th>Strategic Thinking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activator</td>
<td>Individualization</td>
<td>Strategic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Command</td>
<td></td>
<td>Analytical</td>
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Followers’ Four Basic Needs

Followers have a very clear picture of what they want and need from the most influential leaders in their lives: trust, compassion, stability, and hope. On the next several pages, for each of your top five Clifton StrengthsFinder themes, you will find a brief definition of the theme, strategies for leveraging that theme to meet followers’ four basic needs, tips for leading others who are strong in that theme, and illustrations of what that theme sounds like in action.
Activator
LEADING WITH ACTIVATOR

People strong in the Activator theme can make things happen by turning thoughts into action. They are often impatient.

Build Trust

☐ Action is what you are all about. Show people that you are someone whose ideals and principles are not just talk. Do something that promotes the values that are important to you. Make a difference. Demonstrate your integrity. Make your actions a reflection of your words.

☐ Action for action’s sake is not enough. Honoring the desires of others is a way of demonstrating respect. Is this the direction they want to take? Are they willing to carry out what you start? Making certain that you are truly on their side, not merely promoting your own agenda, will build the trust and respect that allow you to lead.

Show Compassion

☐ Activator talents can be a catalyst for creating one-on-one relationships and then taking them to the next level. Is there someone you can help? Reach out and offer. Make the first move, and you can boost the number of people in your network or deepen a connection that leads to an important friendship.

☐ Your rapid actions, on behalf of another person, send a powerful message. By showing that you care, you can create bonds much more rapidly than idle words.

Provide Stability

☐ Stability may not be the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about activation. However, consistency is part of stability — and you are consistently there to help others overcome hurdles and blast through resistance. Say it out loud: Let others know that you enjoy moving an objective forward and breaking bottlenecks. Knowing that you are there as a resource is a comfort to people who lack your talent for action.

☐ Perhaps courage is the part of stability you can offer. When others are reluctant to act and know they can count on you to help push them or their idea forward, they feel a sense of confidence that they do not have to go it alone. They can count on you to get them there faster.

Create Hope

☐ You can help others by reducing their fear of failure. “You never know until you try” is an Activator attitude. Your ability to boost people’s belief in a positive outcome and reduce the trepidation of a negative one can be very productive. “What’s the worst case scenario?” you might ask. Helping others see that even the downside isn’t so terrifying
can be one way to lead them and help move them toward their dreams sooner than they would have gotten there without you.

☐ Sometimes others simply need your energy to move them from fear to action. Getting started can be daunting, especially when uncertainty looms. Your “put one foot in front of the other” approach can help lessen the intimidation factor. Boost others’ confidence that they can launch initiatives and new projects. Cheer them on by sharing your enthusiasm, and help them gain momentum.

LEADING OTHERS WITH STRONG ACTIVATOR

☐ Give this person the responsibility for initiating and organizing a project that fits within her area of expertise.

☐ Tell this person that you know she is someone who can make things happen and that you will be asking her for help at key times. Your expectations will energize her.

☐ Assign this person to a team that is bogged down and talks more than it performs. She will stir them into action.

☐ When this person complains, listen carefully — you may learn something. Then get her on your side by talking about new initiatives that she can lead or new improvements that she can make. Do this immediately, because unchecked, she can quickly stir up negativity when she gets off track.

☐ Examine this person’s other dominant themes. If she is strong in Command, she may have the potential to sell and persuade very effectively. If she is also strong in Relator or Woo, she may become an excellent recruiter for you, drawing in recruits and then pressuring them to commit.

☐ To prevent this person from running into too many obstacles, partner her with people who are strong in Strategic or Analytical. They can help her look around the corner. However, you may have to intercede for her in these partnerships so that her instinct to act is not stymied by their desire to discuss and analyze.

ACTIVATOR SOUNDS LIKE THIS:

Jane C., Benedictine nun: “When I was prioress in the 1970s, we were hit by the energy shortage, and costs skyrocketed. We had a hundred and forty acres, and I walked the acreage every day pondering what we should do about this energy shortage. Suddenly I decided that if we had that much land, we should be drilling our own gas well, and so we did. We spent one hundred thousand dollars to drill a gas well. If you have never drilled a gas well, you probably don’t realize what we should do about this energy shortage. Suddenly I decided that if we had that much land, we should be drilling our own gas well, and so we did. We spent one hundred thousand dollars to drill a gas well. If you have never drilled a gas well, you probably don’t realize what I didn’t realize: namely, that you have to spend seventy thousand dollars just to drill to see if you have any gas on your property at all. So they dug down with some kind of vibratory camera thing, and they told me that I had a gas pool. But they didn’t know how large the pool was, and they didn’t know if there was enough pressure to bring it up. ‘If you pay another thirty thousand dollars, we will try to release the well,’ they said. ‘If you don’t want us to, we’ll just cap the well, take your seventy thousand, and go home.’ So I
gave them the final thirty thousand and, fortunately, up it came. That was twenty years ago, and it is still pumping.”

Jim L., entrepreneur: “Some people see my impatience as not wanting to listen to the traps, the potential roadblocks. What I keep repeating is, ‘I want to know when I am going to hit the wall, and I need you to tell me how much it is going to hurt. But if I choose to bump into the wall anyway, then don’t worry — you’ve done your job. I just had to experience it for myself.'”

**Individualization**

**LEADING WITH INDIVIDUALIZATION**

People strong in the Individualization theme are intrigued with the unique qualities of each person. They have a gift for figuring out how people who are different can work together productively.

**Build Trust**

- Sometimes you know more than people would like you to know. Keep strict confidences, and only share your insights with a person one-on-one. She should be the one to decide if she wants you to relate those insights to others.
- Others trust your instincts about people’s unique qualities. Continue to build on that trust by focusing on the positive as much as you can when you are asked to share your impressions about someone.
- Stand behind your tendency to treat each person individually according to need, strength, and style. Many may see this as “playing favorites” and distrust you. Be prepared to defend your Individualization from a performance-excellence standpoint, as well as from a humane perspective. This will give others confidence in your decisions.

**Show Compassion**

- Others are often surprised at the depth of your insights about them, especially when you’ve known them only a short time. You’ve probably heard “How did you know that?” many times. As relationships develop, others will want to hear in greater depth your thoughts and insights regarding their actions, motivations, and talents. You are a mirror for them, and you offer a valuable perspective. Ask them to tell you more about themselves, and test your insights. Accept and affirm what they have to tell you.
- You may have the gift of gifting — choosing the perfect gift for another person — even someone you don’t know particularly well. Finding a small token and giving it at an unexpected time can be a quick relationship builder. Give yourself permission to reach out in this way, and enjoy the rewarding looks of surprise and delight. Who can resist a perfectly chosen gift? Bring joy into others’ lives with little surprises.
Provide Stability

☐ Your awareness is essential to providing stability. By being attuned to others’ desires and needs, you can help them because you can position them in the right place. Their confidence grows because they are being asked to do what they do best.

☐ “All generalizations are false, including this one” is a phrase you might enjoy. Knowing that you are conscious of each person’s special circumstances helps him or her feel understood and secure. Let people know that despite the rules or the classic wisdom, you will take their unique talents and needs into account when making decisions about opportunities they can pursue.

Create Hope

☐ Sometimes people are more predictable to you than they are to themselves. Use your talent to notice others’ consistent behavior patterns to help them see things they can’t. You might be able to help them capitalize on talents they seldom use intentionally or avoid pitfalls that repeatedly ensnare them. Kindly give them feedback to help them streamline their dreams and aspirations.

☐ You are instinctively aware that individuals will be most productive when their environments are suited to their talents. Wherever appropriate, implement organizational policies that allow your associates to work in their own style — policies that allow people to express their individuality in the clothes they wear, how they decorate their offices, and the hours they work. Through these policies, you will engage and inspire your associates and enable them to produce their best work.

☐ You move comfortably among a broad range of styles and cultures, and you intuitively personalize your interactions. Consciously and proactively make full use of these talents by leading diversity and community efforts in your organization.

LEADING OTHERS WITH STRONG INDIVIDUALIZATION

☐ Ask this person to serve on your selection committee. She will probably be a very good judge of each candidate’s strengths and weaknesses. By figuring out the right people for the right roles using her Individualization talents, she will also help improve the organization’s productivity.

☐ When appropriate, have this person help design pay-for-performance programs in which all employees can use their strengths to maximize their pay.

☐ Ask this person to teach an internal training class or mentor new employees. She may well have a knack for spotting how each person learns differently.

☐ Look at this person’s other dominant themes. If her Developer and Arranger talents are also strong, she may have the potential to be a manager or supervisor. If her talents lie in Command and Woo, she will probably be very effective at turning prospects into customers.
INDIVIDUALIZATION SOUNDS LIKE THIS:

Les T., hospitality manager: “Carl is one of our best performers, but he still has to see me every week. He just wants a little encouragement and to check in, and he gets fired up a little bit after that meeting. Greg doesn’t like to meet very often, so there’s no need for me to bother him. And when we do meet, it’s really for me, not for him.”

Marsha D., publishing executive: “Sometimes I would walk out of my office and — you know how cartoon characters have those balloons over their head? I would see these little balloons over everyone’s head telling me what was in their minds. It sounds weird, doesn’t it? But it happens all the time.”

Andrea H., interior designer: “When you ask people what their style is, they find it hard to describe, so I just ask them, ‘What is your favorite spot in the house?’ And when I ask that, their faces light up, and they know just where to take me. From that one spot, I can begin to piece together the kind of people they are and what their style is.”

Command

LEADING WITH COMMAND

People strong in the Command theme have presence. They can take control of a situation and make decisions.

Build Trust

☐ Because you’re known for saying what you think, others trust that you won’t play games. They can take what you say at face value, and they can be confident that you won’t change your stripes once they’ve left the room. This directness builds trust, and trust builds relationships.

☐ Examine the correlations between your stated values and your actions. Are they consistent? Do they demonstrate integrity? Jot down the values that are most important to you. Can you think of recent examples of actions you have taken that confirm the integrity of your beliefs? Make this “walk the talk” checklist a regular part of your self-assessment, and ensure that others should trust what you say and respect your actions.

Show Compassion

☐ You feel things intensely and are capable of expressing great emotion. Do what you do naturally. Tell people how you feel and why they are important to you. Express the connection that others may be too reserved to say out loud. Your saying it first may free them to acknowledge that the feeling is mutual. And even if they are not there yet, you can launch the opportunity for a meaningful relationship. An expression of genuine
caring, affection, or regard can be a powerful step toward initiating or deepening a bond between a leader and a follower.

- You use strong words. Express your sentiments to form a bond with others who will value what you stand for as a human being. Significant relationships are often formed on the basis of shared values, so stating your beliefs or passions can be a way for others to “find” you as a potential friend and champion. Invite others to join you based on your strong feelings and passionate beliefs — they may need the nudge.

- Sometimes others see the tough exterior of an individual with high Command and assume it’s an impenetrable shell that protects him or her from all hurt. They may feel vulnerable and see you as invulnerable. Yet relationships depend on mutual vulnerability. Be open. Share your own pain and struggles. Letting others see the soft underbelly gives them equal power in the relationship and demonstrates trust.

**Provide Stability**

- People know where you stand. The security of understanding that your convictions are not built on sinking sand allows people to feel confident that you will always be there for them and always stick to what you believe.

- Others come to you when they need someone to be strong for them — perhaps to shore up their own flagging courage or to step in and be a spokesperson for their needs. When their courage falters, they seek to “borrow” yours. Be aware of this need you fulfill, and ask others if they would like you to intervene on their behalf or accompany them on a difficult mission. Your “take charge” attitude steadies and reassures others in times of crisis. When faced with a particularly trying challenge, use your Command talents to assuage others’ fears and convince them you have things under control.

**Create Hope**

- Because you call it like you see it, others seek you out when they feel they can handle the truth. They might turn to others for support, but they go to you for an honest assessment of what they can and can’t do, or should and shouldn’t do. You don’t shy away from offering advice. Ask them how committed they are to their current plan. Ask if they want your honest opinion. If they say yes, give it gently, but truthfully.

- Your powerful words inspire. Talk about the “why” of each mission without fearing to appear corny or sentimental. Your emotion allows others to rise to the occasion and give of themselves. They may be counting on you to give voice to the emotions that surround the cause. Paint an inspiring picture with your words.

**LEADING OTHERS WITH STRONG COMMAND**

- As much as you can, give this person room to lead and make decisions. He will not like to be supervised closely.

- When confronting this person, take firm action. And if necessary, require immediate restitution. Then arrange for him to be productive as soon as possible. He will get over his mistake quickly, and so should you.
This person may intimidate others with his upfront, assertive style. You may need to consider whether or not his contribution justifies the occasional ruffled feathers. Rather than pushing him to learn how to be empathetic and polite, you’d make better use of your time by helping his colleagues understand that his assertiveness is part of what makes him effective — as long as he remains assertive rather than aggressive or offensive.

**COMMAND SOUNDS LIKE THIS:**

Malcolm M., hospitality manager: “One reason I affect people is that I am so candid. Actually, people say that I intimidate them at first. After I work with them a year, we talk about that sometimes. They say, ‘Boy, Malcolm, when I started working here, I was scared to death.’ When I ask why, they say, ‘I’ve never worked with anyone who just said it. Whatever it was, whatever needed to be said, you just said it.’”

Rick P., retail executive: “We have a wellness program whereby if you consume less than four alcoholic beverages a week, you get twenty-five dollars; if you don’t smoke, you get twenty-five dollars a month. So one day I got word that one of my store managers was smoking again. This was not good. He was smoking in the store, setting a bad example for the employees, and claiming his twenty-five dollars. I just can’t keep stuff like that inside. It wasn’t comfortable, but I confronted him with it immediately and clearly: ‘Stop doing that, or you are fired.’ He’s basically a good guy, but you can’t let things like that slide.”

Diane N., hospice worker: “I don’t think of myself as assertive, but I do take charge. When you walk into a room with a dying person and his family, you have to take charge. They want you to take charge. They are a bit in shock, a bit frightened, a bit in denial. Basically, they’re confused. They need someone to tell them what is going to happen next, what they can expect — that it’s not going to be fun but that in some important ways, it will be all right. They don’t want mousy and soft. They want clarity and honesty. I provide it.”

**Strategic**

**LEADING WITH STRATEGIC**

People strong in the Strategic theme create alternative ways to proceed. Faced with any given scenario, they can quickly spot the relevant patterns and issues.

**Build Trust**

- When making decisions, discuss options candidly and thoroughly with those involved. Help them learn to trust your process of examining all alternatives and then working toward the optimal solution.
Be aware of your own biases. Are you weighting possibilities objectively or leaning toward personal desires and comfort levels? Give each option its due. Enlist the help of a good thinking partner to ensure that your decisions are made for the right reasons. Others will respect your integrity and your desire for objectivity.

**Show Compassion**

- Apply your strategic thinking to your relationships. Write down a list of the people who have the most positive influence in your life, and then map out specific things you can do to reinvest even more time and effort in each relationship.
- What are your goals for family? Close friends? What are their goals? Turn your strategic thinking talents toward these intimate partners in your life. Does someone have a dream but is seeing only obstacles? Does someone feel stuck somewhere with no options? You can help others circumvent a rocky path by pointing out alternate routes. Show that you care by helping them discover the possibilities.

**Provide Stability**

- Take time to study the strategies employed by effective leaders you respect or admire. Input equals output; the insights you gather are likely to have a stimulating and resourceful effect on your own strategic thinking. Make others aware that you are not bound by your own thinking and that your options and choices are supported by research. When they see the historical perspective and outside counsel you value, they will appreciate the stable foundation upon which your ideas are built.
- While others may consider only the tried-and-true route, you also see the many possibilities that could result from taking a road less traveled. Set aside time specifically for considering “what ifs,” and position yourself as a leader in that area. Explain your belief that focusing only on what has gone before may be more limiting than it is enlightening, and help others understand that all options will be carefully weighed. Your open-minded consideration will give others a sense of certainty that you are always on the lookout for the best path to take.

**Create Hope**

- Make sure that you are involved on the front end of new initiatives or enterprises. Your innovative yet methodical approach will be critical to the genesis of a venture because it will keep its creators from developing counterproductive tunnel vision. Broaden their view and increase their chances for success.
- Your strategic thinking will be necessary to keep an achievable vision from deteriorating into a mere pipe dream. Lead people and organizations to fully consider all possible paths toward making a vision a reality. Wise forethought can remove obstacles before they appear and inspire others to move forward.
- Make yourself known as a resource for consultation with those who are stumped by a particular problem or hindered by an obstacle or barrier. By naturally seeing a way when others are convinced there is no way, you will encourage them and lead them to success.
LEADING OTHERS WITH STRONG STRATEGIC

- Position this person on the leading edge of your organization. His ability to anticipate problems and their solutions will be invaluable. Ask him to sort through all of the possibilities and find the best way forward for your department. Suggest that he report back on the most effective strategy.
- Recognize this person’s strong Strategic talents by sending him to a strategic planning or future-oriented seminar. The content will sharpen his ideas.
- This person is likely to have a talent for putting his ideas and thoughts into words. To refine his thinking, ask him to present his ideas to his colleagues or to write about them for internal distribution.

STRATEGIC SOUNDS LIKE THIS:

Liam C., manufacturing plant manager: “It seems as if I can always see the consequences before anyone else can. I have to say to people, ‘Lift up your eyes; look down the road a ways. Let’s talk about where we are going to be next year so that when we get to this time next year, we don’t have the same problems.’ It seems obvious to me, but some people are just too focused on this month’s numbers, and everything is driven by that.”

Vivian T., television producer: “I used to love logic problems when I was a kid — you know, the ones where ‘if A implies B, and B equals C, does A equal C?’ Still today, I am always playing out repercussions, seeing where things lead. I think it makes me a great interviewer. I know that nothing is an accident; every sign, every word, every tone of voice has significance. So I watch for these clues and play them out in my head, see where they lead, and then plan my questions to take advantage of what I have seen in my head.”

Simon T., human resources executive: “We really needed to take the union on at some stage, and I saw an opportunity — a very good issue to take them on. I could see that they were going in a direction that would lead them into all kinds of trouble if they continued following it. Lo and behold, they did continue following it, and when they arrived, there I was, ready and waiting. I suppose it just comes naturally to me to predict what someone else is going to do. And then when that person reacts, I can respond immediately because I have sat down and said, ‘Okay, if they do this, we’ll do this. If they do that, then we’ll do this other thing.’ It’s like when you tack in a sailboat. You head in one direction, but you jinx one way, then another, planning and reacting, planning and reacting.”

Analytical
LEADING WITH ANALYTICAL

People strong in the Analytical theme search for reasons and causes. They have the ability to think about all the factors that might affect a situation.
Build Trust

- Think about what you endorse. Because others trust your analytical mind, they may follow your recommendations without investigation of their own. This may be just fine, but at times, others may need your help to realize that what’s right for you may not be what’s right for them. Help them sort out the factors that make an action or product likely to be successful for their individual needs and desires rather than allowing them to base their analysis on yours. Help them know that you want what’s best for them, and they will trust you even more.

- You automatically uncover what’s real, true, and honest. Others will count on you to be the “truth finder” in any information that may conflict or confuse. Think of this as a way you can support others, and don’t wait for them to ask for help. Extend yourself; they will respect and trust your proactive analysis.

Show Compassion

- Others who love to scrutinize ideas will be drawn to your analytical, truth-seeking approach. Stimulate debates, the tug-of-war of ideas that challenge one another. Make it fun to explore new ideas and sort out what is fact and what is conjecture. When you find a kindred spirit, take a gamesman’s approach to discussion and debate, and forge a relationship that you will both enjoy.

- Responding to people in crisis is an obvious way to extend compassion and caring. When others are overwhelmed by data and decisions, you can step in to help sort what’s real and what can improve their odds in a difficult situation.

Provide Stability

- Data are a source of security for many people; if the research backs it, then they are willing to accept a plan and its consequences. Because you carefully examine all possibilities and non-possibilities, you provide the sense of security that many people seek. Do your homework carefully, and know that others are looking to follow your lead.

- Your endorsement can be a source of confidence that allows others to trust their own judgment. Thus empowered, they can move forward and make things happen. When you believe others are making good decisions, tell them. Your belief in their opinions and reasoning can give them the certainty and strength they need to proceed.

Create Hope

- Cheer for others when they are doing something difficult that you believe is right. They may be trying to guess how you feel or what you would do. Give praise for wise judgment, and offer encouragement that they can face what’s ahead. If you believe they will be successful, tell them.

- If others seek you out for advice in making decisions, offer to break down your thought process, and show them how it helps you sort information. Be aware that many people
may not be capable of following suit. However, some will want to be students of your approach. Though it may be so well-practiced that it’s automatic for you, try to articulate the steps you use for analysis. If you have a willing student, teach.

- Guidance can be a mutual endeavor. Partner with someone who has action-oriented talents. You can help them make wise, considered decisions. They can help you turn your analysis into action. Both of you will benefit and be inspired to grow.

LEADING OTHERS WITH STRONG ANALYTICAL

- If you are explaining a decision that has already been made to this person, remember to lay out the logic of the decision very clearly. To you, it may feel as though you are overexplaining things, but for her, this level of detail is essential if she is to commit to the decision.
- Every time you have the opportunity, recognize and praise this person’s reasoning ability. She is proud of her disciplined mind.
- Remember that this person has a need for exact, well-researched numbers. Never try to pass shoddy data to her as credible evidence.
- Discovering patterns in data is a highlight in this person’s life. Always give her the opportunity to explain the pattern in detail to you. This will be motivational for her and will help solidify your relationship.
- You will not always agree with this person, but always take her point of view seriously. She has probably thought through her points very carefully.

ANALYTICAL SOUNDS LIKE THIS:

Jose G., school system administrator: “I have an innate ability to see structures, formats, and patterns before they exist. For instance, when people are talking about writing a grant proposal, while I’m listening to them, my brain instinctively processes the type of grants that are available and how the discussion fits into the eligibility, right down to the format of how the information can fit on the grant form in a clear and convincing way.”

Jack T., human resources executive: “If I make a claim, I need to know that I can back it up with facts and logical thinking. For example, if someone says that our company is not paying as much as other companies, I always ask, ‘Why do you say that?’ If they say, ‘Well, I saw an ad in the paper that offers graduates in mechanical engineering five grand more than we are paying,’ I’ll reply by asking, ‘But where are these graduates going to work? Is their salary based on geography? What types of companies are they going for? Are they manufacturing companies like ours? And how many people are in their sample? Is it three people, and one of them got a really good deal, thus driving the overall average up?’ There are many questions I need to ask to ensure that their claim is indeed a fact and not based on one misleading data point.”

Leslie J., school principal: “Many times, there are inconsistencies in the performance of the same group of students from one year to the next. It’s the same group of kids, but their scores
are different year to year. How can this be? Which building are the kids in? How many of the kids have been enrolled for a full academic year? Which teachers were they assigned to, and what teaching styles were used by those teachers? I just love asking questions like these to understand what is truly happening.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team Members</th>
<th>Executing</th>
<th>Influencing</th>
<th>Relationship Building</th>
<th>Strategic Thinking</th>
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