Strengths and Weaknesses in the Omega Framework

At some point I began to think about how I think about some things. It may be part of what Chris Argyris called "double-loop thinking." Or, it could be that I took the wrong medication that morning.

What I'm about to share probably came to me about the time I came head-to-head with the Gallup research that resulted in the body of literature on strengths-based leadership. In order to embrace that research and to adjust my work with some leadership based on their findings, I had to let go of some old models and construct some new ones.

In the course of doing that I realized that my notion of strengths and weaknesses was in part a result of being a left-brain oriented westerner who tends to think in linear terms. In this framework, the relationship between strengths and weaknesses might look like this:

Strengths <———————————> Weaknesses

We see "Strengths" at one end of the continuum and "Weaknesses" at the other. In the linear framework, they are opposites and quite different from each other.

In some cases this is probably true. In other cases, the two may not be so different. In fact, what turn out to be our strengths and weaknesses may often have the same core characteristics. This notion led me to look for an alternative image or framework with which to view strengths and weaknesses.

Voila! The Greek symbol Omega (Ω) appeared one day.

When we frame strengths and weaknesses around the Omega symbol, they are far apart if we travel the linear route (from point-to-point following the shape of the letter), but are quite close to each other in relative terms.

Ω
Strength   Weakness

For many of us, some of the characteristics and abilities that serve as strengths in many contexts and situations turn out to be weaknesses in other contexts and situations. Or, as Daniel Ofman contends in his *Core Qualities* framework, in many cases our "Pitfalls" (aka weaknesses) are a result of over-done strengths; that is, strengths that are cranked up too high.

So, if we can think in terms of "what works and what doesn't?" in certain situations or with various individuals, groups, or organizations, rather than in terms of "my strengths and weaknesses," we might have a better understanding of how to manage motives and behaviors in a more efficient and effective way. Adjusting behavior may not require the personal equivalent of rocket science, but merely a different framework for understanding why things are as they are.

This is not a Nobel prize-winning breakthrough, but it has given me a different lens through which to view my reality and, hence, a different platform from which to evaluate the real distinction between strengths and weaknesses.