Focus on your strengths?
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CHAPTER 1
Introduction
Introduction

In our present society, our success in life greatly depends on our competence - that is, the extent to which we master certain knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Therefore, strategies that may enhance individuals’ learning are of great value. In this dissertation we examined a self-regulatory strategy that may bolster individuals’ motivation to learn: focusing on strengths. Focusing on strengths entails that individuals identify their relative strengths and weaknesses and subsequently engage in learning activities that fit their strengths rather than their weaknesses. In the past decade, the notion of focusing on strengths has gained substantial resonance among practitioners in the fields of education and human resource development. However, research backing this practice is scarce. Although a vast amount of research has examined the role of self-perceived competence in motivation, not much research has specifically looked into the role of perceived strengths in motivation to learn. We do not know whether individuals who have the choice of working on multiple topics or skills are willing to put more effort into their learning when they work on their strengths rather than their weaknesses. In the present dissertation, we addressed this issue by examining the role of perceived relative strengths versus weaknesses in learning effort.
1. Motivating Individuals to Learn: Focus on Your Strengths?

How to become good at something? Across a variety of domains, including sports, music, academic, and professional competence, research shows that extended engagement in goal-directed learning activities is essential to attain high levels of competence (for reviews, see Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993; Ericsson & Lehmann, 1996). For example, in a classic study on expertise development, Ericsson et al. (1993) examined the musical development of elite violinists. Their results showed that the more accomplished musicians had spent considerably more time in deliberate practicing. By the age of 20, the group of best musicians had spent over 10,000 hours on practicing; on average, 2,500 and 5,000 hours more than the good and the least accomplished musicians, respectively. These findings clearly illustrate the importance of effort for learning. To develop competence, individuals have to invest time and energy in goal-directed learning activities. Therefore, the key to learning is motivation, which is the psychological process whereby goal-directed efforts are instigated and sustained (Schunk, Meece, & Pintrich, 2014). To invest time and effort in learning activities, individuals have to be motivated.

Unfortunately, motivation for learning is not always abundant. Students often struggle to commit themselves to their studies, and many professionals find it hard to allocate sufficient time to their professional development (Brophy, 2013; Mahatmya, Lohman, Matjasko, & Farb, 2012; National Education Commission on Time and Learning, 2005; Rumberger & Rotermund, 2012). Moreover, in daily life, individuals’ learning and development endeavors compete with other pressing demands, such as productivity targets at work, family obligations, and leisure activities. Consequently, engaging in learning activities may place considerable demands on individuals’ motivation. Therefore, there is an obvious need for strategies that may help individuals to strengthen their motivation for learning.

Furthermore, a case can be made that motivation to learn may be even more important in the future than it has been in the past. Referring to developments such as globalization, the implementation of new technologies, and the flexibilization of labor relations, many scholars have outlined the highly dynamic character of our present societies (Bennett, Dawes, & Cunningham, 2012; Friedman & Phillips, 2004; Jarvis, 2004; Knapper & Cropley, 2000; Webster-Wright, 2009). In Western countries, markets, products, methods, procedures, organizations, and jobs are often subject to frequent change. Therefore, it is imperative for professionals to guard their employability and to keep their skills and knowledge up to date.
Accordingly, for many educational institutions, an important objective is to educate students to become self-regulating learners; to breed professionals who are able and driven to self-initiate, direct, and maintain their competence development throughout their career (Boekaerts, 1997; Bolhuis, 2003; Candy, 2000; Loyens, Magda, & Rikers, 2008; Zimmerman, 1990). Likewise, an important objective in human resource development (HRD) is to encourage professionals to self-regulate their professional development. Many employers aim to stimulate their employees to proactively work on their professional competence, to maintain their added value, and to keep pace with organizational change (Chalofsky, Rocco, & Morris, 2014; DeSimone, Werner, & Harris, 2002; Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2014; Swanson & Holton, 2001).

In this context, the key question in the present dissertation was: How to motivate individuals to learn? How can we motivate students to put effort into their studies, and how can we motivate professionals to put effort into their professional development? Specifically, we were interested in the motivating potential of a self-regulatory strategy that has been proposed to enhance individuals’ learning and professional development: focusing on strengths. In the past decade, a steady stream of popular publications has emerged, proposing that to stand out at school or at work individuals should focus on their strengths. Some of these titles, such as Now, Discover Your Strengths (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001) and Strengths Finder (Rath, 2007) are among the best-sellers in the management book genre. Moreover, strengths-based development methods, such as Strengths Quest (Clifton, Anderson, & Schreiner, 2002), VIA Signature Strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), and Realise2 (Linley, Willars, & Biswas-Diener, 2010), are being applied on a substantial scale in education and HRD. Typically, these methods use a self-assessment instrument to help individuals to identify their perceived relative strengths and weaknesses, and advise them to use and further develop their strengths in academia, at work, or in their personal lives. For example, the Strengths Quest method (Clifton et al., 2002) entails that students complete an online questionnaire, the outcome of which displays a personal rank order of 34 competencies ranging from their perceived relative strengths to weaknesses. Next, the participants reflect on how they may use and further develop their highest ranked competencies (i.e., their perceived relative strengths). Subsequently, they draw a personal development plan in which they specify how they intend to work on those strengths; for example, by engaging in learning and professional development activities that fit their strengths.

The reception of strengths-based development methods by practitioners clearly illustrates their appeal and practical relevance. The question is, however,
whether focusing on strengths is beneficial for learning. In psychological research, the concept of strengths was put on the empirical agenda by proponents of positive psychology. In January 2000, in a special issue of *The American Psychologist*, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (p. 7) posited that “… the time has arrived for a positive psychology, our message is to remind our field that psychology is not just the study of pathology, weakness, and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is broken; it is nurturing what is best.” Indeed, since 2000, a growing amount of research has been dedicated to the study of strengths. However, this work has predominantly focused on the role of character strengths in well-being (for reviews, see Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012; Lopez, Pedrotti, & Snyder, 2015). Within the framework of positive psychology, not much research has examined the role of strengths in motivation to learn (however, Austin, 2005; Louis 2008).

In addition to the research instigated by the agenda of positive psychology, a line of inquiry that is particularly relevant for our research question is the research on the role of self-perceived competence in motivation: obviously, focusing on strengths appeals to the commonly held notion that believing oneself to be competent is motivating. Since the late 1950s, a vast amount of research has investigated the role of competence self-perceptions in motivation (Elliot, McGregor, & Thrash, 2002; for reviews, see Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003; Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000; Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991; Richardson, Abraham, & Bond, 2012; Sitzmann & Ely, 2011; Vancouver, More, & Yoder, 2008). However, we cannot conclude from this body of research that focusing on strengths is positively related to motivation. On the one hand, many studies have found positive relations between self-perceived competence and motivation (see, e.g., Multon et al., 1991). On the other hand, negative relations have been observed as well (see e.g., Vancouver et al., 2008). What is more, little research has specifically examined the role of perceived relative competence across multiple separate goals (i.e., perceived relative strengths versus weaknesses) and motivation to learn. Despite a vast amount of research on the role of self-perceived competence in motivation, we do not know whether in multiple goal contexts, such as education and professional development, when individuals have the choice of working on different topics or skills, individuals tend to put more effort into their learning when they work on topics or skills they believe they are good at rather than not good at. The present research was aimed at addressing this issue.
1.1. Outline of This Introduction

In this introductory chapter, we first define the concept of focusing on strengths more precisely. Next, we discuss the concept of motivation. We then consider the concepts of self-perceived competence and perceived relative strengths versus weaknesses. After defining our central concepts, we discuss the extant literature on the role of competence self-perceptions, and perceived strengths versus weaknesses, in learning effort. Finally, we set the stage for the empirical research in this dissertation. Based on our discussion of the extant literature, we outline our research model, define our research questions, and give a brief overview of the empirical studies in this dissertation.

2. Focusing on Strengths: A Self-Regulated Learning Strategy

The ultimate aim of this dissertation is to help students and professionals to bolster their learning and development endeavors. Accordingly, we examined individuals’ learning from a self-regulatory perspective (Boekaerts, Pintrich, & Zeidner, 2000; Vohs & Baumeister, 2011; Zimmerman & Pons, 1986; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). This perspective implies that we regard individuals as active agents who are able to exercise control over their behavior, rather than passive intermediates who merely respond to external stimuli. In this section we first outline a conceptual framework of self-regulated learning. Based on this framework, we then define what we mean by focusing on strengths.

2.1. A phase model of self-regulated learning

Self-regulated learning (SRL) refers to the cognitive processes that influence individuals’ learning efforts, as well as to the strategies that individuals employ to influence their learning efforts (Zimmerman & Pons, 1986). A common framework for describing self-regulated learning processes and strategies is the phase model of SRL (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2005). This model depicts learning as a self-regulatory process which includes three cyclical phases (see Figure 1): self-reflection (looking back on one’s prior learning efforts), forethought (looking forward to one’s subsequent learning efforts), and performance control (regulating one’s present learning efforts).
2.1.1. The self-reflection phase

The self-reflection phase involves the cognitive and behavioral processes that occur in response to external and internal feedback on individuals’ prior learning performances. Major self-reflection processes include self-evaluations (individuals’ self-assessments of whether their performance was good or not), causal attributions (individuals’ explanations of why their performance was good or not), self-satisfaction (individuals’ positive or negative feelings regarding their performance), and adaptive inferences (individuals’ conclusions about whether and how to alter their subsequent learning efforts). For example, in response to his (i.e., his or her) test outcomes, a student may believe that mathematics is one of his strengths, whereas English is one of his weaknesses (self-evaluation). He may think that this is due to his greater talent for math than for English (causal attribution), feel more positive about his math performance (self-satisfaction), and believe he would be better advised to go further into math than into English (adaptive inference).

*Figure 1.* Phase model of self-regulated learning

- **Performance Control Phase**
  - Environmental structuring
  - Time and effort management
  - Attention focusing
  - Self-monitoring

- **Forethought Phase**
  - Goal-selection
  - Goal-setting
  - Strategic planning
  - Self-motivation beliefs

- **Self-Reflection Phase**
  - Self-evaluations
  - Causal attributions
  - Self-satisfaction
  - Adaptive inferences
2.1.2. The forethought phase
The forethought phase concerns the processes that set the stage for individuals’ subsequent learning efforts. Major forethought processes include goal-selection (individuals’ choices regarding which goals to pursue), goal-setting (individuals’ decisions on which standards to pursue), strategic planning (individuals’ intentions for how to pursue their goals), and self-motivation beliefs (individuals’ competence self-perceptions, intrinsic interests, and values regarding those goals and standards). For example, a student may decide one afternoon to work on both a math and an English-language assignment (goal-selection). He may perceive math rather than English as a personal strength and believe that math is more enjoyable and more important than English (self-motivation beliefs). He may aim for no less than an A on the math assignment, while settling for a C on the English assignment (goal-setting). Accordingly, he may decide to work for three hours on math and after that for one hour on English (strategic planning).

2.1.3. The performance control phase
The performance control phase concerns the processes that regulate individuals’ efforts while performing their learning activities. Performance control involves environmental structuring (organizing one’s workplace), time and effort management (allocating one’s time and energy), attention focusing (concentrating), and self-monitoring (observing one’s progress and performance). For example, a student may choose to work in the library (environmental structuring), take a 10-minute break each hour (time and effort management), observe that he is making fast progress on the math assignment (self-monitoring), and decide to complete the math assignment sooner in order to spend some extra time on the English assignment (time and effort management).

Individuals’ learning performances in the performance control phase, in turn, form the input for their subsequent reflection in the self-reflection phase, which closes the circle.

2.2. Focusing on strengths
Using the phase model of SRL, we can now define focusing on strengths more precisely. In terms of the phase model of SRL, focusing on strengths can be defined as a self-evaluation, goal-selection, and effort-management strategy which entails that individuals:
• in the self-reflection phase, based on internal and external feedback on their prior learning performances, self-assess which qualities, topics, or skills they are relatively good at (i.e., their strengths) and not good at (i.e., their weaknesses), and subsequently,
• in the forethought phase, based on self-perceptions of their relative strengths and weaknesses, select learning activities or goals to work on their strengths rather than their weaknesses, and subsequently,
• in the performance control phase, in accordance with the goal selections made in the forethought phase, perform learning activities in the area of their strengths rather than their weaknesses.

3. Motivation: Cognitions and Behavioral Effort

In this dissertation, we are interested in the motivating potential of focusing on strengths. The term ‘motivation’ stems from the Latin verb *movere*, which means *to move*. Accordingly, things that motivate us can be understood as things that move us. Since the early 1970s, the cognitive perspective has emerged as the dominant view in psychological research. In line with this perspective, in the present dissertation we define motivation as the psychological process whereby goal-directed activities are instigated and sustained (Schunk et al., 2014).

An implication of the cognitive perspective is that, rather than considering behavior as a direct response to external stimuli or feedback, cognitive processes are considered to influence individuals’ behavior. Accordingly, cognitive models of motivation depict relations between cognitions such as perceptions, evaluations, beliefs, and attributions, on the one hand, and actual motivated behavior, which is reflected by effort and persistence, on the other hand.

A second implication of the cognitive perspective is that motivation is regarded as a multi-faceted rather than a one-dimensional concept. That is, instead of delineating an individual’s motivation as a position on a single scale ranging from “not motivated” to “highly motivated”, cognitive models of motivation stress that individuals can be motivated in multiple ways, and the issue is how and why individuals are motivated (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). For example, a student may be highly motivated for math, but not for English. Moreover, one student may be highly motivated for math because he enjoys doing math, whereas another student may be highly motivated for math because he believes that math is important for his future career.
Furthermore, cognitive theories of motivation typically consider motivation in relation to goals, explaining how certain qualities of individuals’ goals influence their goal-directed efforts (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). For example, self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 2001) articulates how individuals’ confidence in their ability to attain a goal affects their effort and persistence. Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) explains how motivational outcomes are affected by the locus of causality of a goal (i.e., whether the goal originates from the person’s self or from external incentives), and control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1982) sets out how individuals’ perceptions of discrepancies between a goal and their actual position may incite motivated behavior.

In this dissertation we focus on the role of one particular type of goal-related cognitions: namely, competence self-perceptions. This concept is discussed in the following section.

4. Competence Self-Perceptions

Psychologists have long recognized the importance of competence self-perceptions in motivation. In the late 1950s, White (1959) introduced the concept of effectance motivation, which he defined as the inherent energy representing individuals’ desire for effective and competent interaction with the environment. Herewith, he defined sense of competence as individuals’ subjective perceptions of their skill and ability to interact effectively with the environment (Elliot et al., 2002).

Following the early work of White, many theorists have emphasized the fundamental role of competence self-perceptions in motivation. Noteworthy, different schools of theory have postulated different terms to denote self-perceptions of competence, including self-concept, perceived competence, and self-efficacy. The definitions of these concepts overlap, although they may differ in the level of specificity of the domain of competence (Fulmer, 2014).

The term self-concept is typically used to refer to individuals’ collective self-perceptions. Self-concept has been depicted as a hierarchy of self-perceptions, with a general self-concept on top and subareas of self-concepts at lower levels (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). For example, an individuals’ general self-concept may be formed by his or her academic self-concept, social self-concept, and physical self-concept. Academic self-concept, in turn, may be constituted by self-perceptions of specific competencies, such as math self-concept and
English self-concept. Shavelson and Bolus (1981) proposed that individuals’ self-perceptions are determined by their interpretations of experiences and influenced by reinforcements and evaluations by others. In turn, these self-perceptions influence individuals’ behavior, including their learning endeavors.

Perceived competence has been defined as individuals’ beliefs that their abilities, skills, or capacities meet the demands of a specific domain (Boekaerts, 1991). Perceived competence is a key concept in cognitive evaluation theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and in the achievement goal approach (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Cognitive evaluation theory postulates that individuals progressively develop intrinsic motivation through their evaluations of their competence. Events that satisfy individuals’ need for competence enhance intrinsic motivation. The quality of individuals’ motivation, in turn, determines motivational outcomes such as effort, persistence, and performance. The achievement goal approach (Elliot & McGregor, 2001) proposes that individuals’ achievement goals are determined by the standards that they use to evaluate their competence. Individuals who use an interpersonal standard, rating their competence against the competence of others, endorse performance goals. In contrast, individuals who use an intrapersonal standard, rating their competence against their own (past) competence, hold mastery goals (Van Yperen, 2006). Individuals’ achievement goals, in turn, affect their goal-directed behavior, including effort and achievement.

Self-efficacy, which is one of the central concepts in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997), is typically used in reference to a specific task. Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as individuals’ beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance on a task. Social cognitive theory states that individuals use various sources of information to assess their self-efficacy, including past performances, modeling, persuasion, and physiological feedback. In turn, self-efficacy beliefs are hypothesized to affect the choices that individuals make, how much effort they will expend, and how persistent they will be in the face of setbacks (Pajaris, 1996).

In the present dissertation, we use the term competence self-perceptions as an overarching term, which includes self-concept, perceived competence, and self-efficacy. In our empirical studies we consider competence self-perceptions at various levels of specificity: at the level of individual qualities (e.g., analytical, communicative; see Chapter 2), at the level of topics and school subjects (e.g., math, English; see Chapter 3), and at the level of specific skills and tasks (e.g., calculating or spelling; see Chapter 4). In the following section, we define
perceived strengths versus weaknesses as a distinct category of competence self-perceptions.

5. Self-Perceptions of Strengths Versus Weaknesses

An important issue in theories of self-regulation and competence motivation concerns the frame of reference that individuals use to self-assess how competent they are. In a recent review of the literature on the role of comparison processes in individuals’ self-perceptions, Möller and Marsh (2013) proposed that individuals can use three types of comparisons to evaluate their competence: social comparison, temporal comparison, and dimensional comparison. First, individuals who engage in social comparisons (Festinger, 1954) use an interpersonal standard as a frame of reference to evaluate their competence. They compare their level of competence with the competence of others. For example, a student may believe that he is relatively good in math because he scores higher marks than his friends. Second, individuals who engage in temporal comparison (Albert, 1977) use a time-related intrapersonal frame of reference to evaluate their competence. That is, they compare their present level of competence with their own level of competence in the past or in the future. For example, a student may believe that he is relatively good at math because this year he is scoring better marks than last year. Third, individuals who engage in dimensional comparison use a domain-related intrapersonal frame of reference, comparing their level of competence in one domain with their competence in another domain. For example, a student may believe he is relatively good at math because he is scoring better marks for math than for English.

Building on Möller and Marsh’s (2013) tri-partition of comparison processes, we can now define perceived strengths versus weaknesses more precisely. In the present research, we consider perceived strengths versus weaknesses as a specific category of competence self-perceptions. Perceiving a competence as a relative strength or weakness entails that individuals compare their competence on one domain (e.g., math) with their competence on another domain (e.g., English). Accordingly, we define perceived strengths versus weaknesses as competence self-perceptions that result from dimensional comparisons. In this dissertation, we use the term competence self-perceptions to refer to competence self-perceptions in general, which may result from social, temporal, and dimensional comparisons, and reserve the term perceived strengths versus weaknesses to
refer to competence self-perceptions that result specifically from dimensional comparisons. In the following section, we discuss the extant research on the relation between competence self-perceptions and effort.

6. The Relation Between Competence Self-Perceptions and Effort

A vast amount of research has examined the role of competence self-perceptions in motivation, including effort. In general, the extant research suggests that self-perceptions of competence are beneficial for motivation to learn. For example, in a meta-analysis of the relations between self-perceptions of competence and academic performance, Multon et al. (1991) found significant effect size estimates on various measures of effort, including time on task and number of performed items. More recently, Sitzmann and Ely (2011), in a meta-analysis of self-regulated learning in education and work-related training, reported significant meta-analytical correlations between self-perceived competence and effort. In addition, in a meta-analysis of motivation for training and development, Colquitt et al. (2000) found that self-perceived competence was significantly positively related to motivation to learn. These findings indicate that competence self-perceptions are positively related to effort. However, we cannot conclude from this body of research that individuals’ learning effort will benefit from focusing on strengths. Important issues remain to be addressed.

First, interventions targeting individuals’ competence self-perceptions in order to enhance learning have not proved very successful. For example, in a review of the literature on the role of self-esteem in attainment, Baumeister et al. (2003) concluded that enhancing individuals’ self-evaluations does not enhance their learning. They reasoned that “a high correlation between people’s success at doing … [a task] and their self-evaluation for this task may simply result from people’s awareness of their ability in this domain. If so, any attempts to improve performance by way of enhancing self-esteem would fail.” (p. 6). Indeed, enhancing competence self-perceptions in order to enhance learning has become controversial. However, the question is whether the conclusions of Baumeister et al. (2003) apply to focusing on strengths. Although focusing on strengths can be regarded as a strategy targeting competence self-perceptions, it does not strictly entail enhancing individuals’ competence self-perceptions. Instead, focusing on strengths entails building on existing relatively high levels of self-perceived competence, by engaging in learning activities that are aimed at improving
competencies that individuals are relatively good at, rather than not good at. Therefore, we cannot simply deduce the motivational consequences of working on strengths from the extant knowledge of other self-enhancing interventions, such as self-affirmations (Forsyth, Lawrence, Burnette, & Baumeister, 2007; Sherman & Cohen, 2006) or positive feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Vallerand & Reid, 1984). Hence, research is needed to examine the motivational consequences of focusing on strengths versus weaknesses.

Second, despite a vast amount of research showing positive relations between self-perceived competence and effort, a number of studies indicate that at the within-person level negative relations can be observed (for a review, see Vancouver et al., 2008). For example, Vancouver and Kendall (2006) found that students invested less effort in their learning when preparing for tests for which they felt more competent, relative to tests for which they felt less competent. Thus, students may put less effort into their learning when they believe they are good rather than not good at something. In the light of these findings, it is conceivable that negative relations between perceived relative strengths versus weaknesses and effort exist. Therefore, in this dissertation, we examined the relations between perceived relative strengths versus weaknesses and effort, using both between-person (Chapter 2) and within-person (Chapter 3) designs, and investigated the role of variables that may moderate these relations (Chapter 4).

Third, research has typically examined the relations between competence self-perceptions in single-goal contexts, whereas perceived relative strengths emerge in multiple-goal contexts. Therefore, multiple-goal research is required to examine the relations between perceived strengths and effort. In a single goal context, focusing on strengths or weaknesses is not a relevant self-regulatory strategy. When individuals have one single goal, they cannot focus on another goal. However, applied contexts, such as school and work, are typically multiple-goal-contexts, in which individuals work on multiple goals during the same period of time. In such contexts, focusing on strengths or weaknesses is a relevant strategy. When individuals pursue multiple goals, they are likely to possess self-perceptions of relative strengths versus weaknesses in relation to their goals (Möller & Husemann, 2006), and it is likely that these self-perceptions influence their effort allocation across their goals.

To date, surprisingly little empirical information is available on the role of competence self-perceptions in multiple-goal pursuit (Sun & Frese, 2013). Although scholars have frequently called for research on self-regulation in the context of multiple goals (e.g., Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001; Boekaerts, 2009; Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Locke & Latham, 1990; Miron-Spektor & Beenen, 2015),
we do not know how individuals’ competence self-perceptions concerning multiple goals are related to their effort allocation to those goals. In the present dissertation, we addressed this issue by using multiple-goal designs to examine the role of perceived relative strengths versus weaknesses in learning effort (Chapters 3 and 4).

7. Research Model and Research Questions

The purpose of our research was to clarify the relations between individuals’ intrapersonal self-perceptions of relative strengths versus weaknesses and effort expenditure. Hence, our research question was: What is the relation between perceived relative strengths versus weaknesses and effort? Stated differently: Will individuals put more effort into their learning when they work on their strengths than when they work on their weaknesses?

We addressed this question in four steps (see Figure 2). First, we examined the motivating potential of perceived relative strengths versus weaknesses, by examining their effects on effort intentions. Hence, our first research question was: (1) What is the relation between perceived relative strengths versus weaknesses and effort intentions? (Chapter 2). Next, we sought an explanation for the effects of perceived relative strengths versus weaknesses on effort intentions by considering several mediation models. Hence, our second research question was: (2) How can we explain the relation between perceived relative strengths versus weaknesses and effort intentions? (Chapter 2). We then examined the relations between perceived relative strengths versus weaknesses and effort intentions and actual behavioral effort, respectively. We tested whether individuals practice more when they work on their strengths than when they work on their weaknesses. Hence, our third research question was: (3) What is the relation between perceived relative strengths versus weaknesses and (intended and behavioral) effort? (Chapter 3). Finally, we examined whether the relation between perceived relative strengths versus weaknesses and effort is affected by situational factors. Specifically, we considered the role of the learning context. Hence, our fourth research question was: (4) What is the effect of the learning context on the relation between perceived relative strengths versus weaknesses and (intended and behavioral) effort? (Chapter 4).
Figure 2. Research model