Exploring Clients' Readiness for Coaching

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores clients' readiness for coaching. A grounded theory methodology is adopted and framed within an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm. The research data is generated from eighteen semi-structured face-to-face interviews and nine email interviews involving coaches, coaching clients and enquirers about coaching. All research literature is treated as another form of data for testing and refining the emerging theory and therefore the literature review was delayed until the theory emerged. Clients' readiness for coaching emerges as a multi-layered and complex concept. The study discovered enabling and hindering factors affecting clients' readiness which are incorporated into six themes: Culture and Class, Knowledge about Coaching, Access to Coaching, Psychological Interpretations, Feeling Safe and Commitment to Change. The findings inform an emerging Coaching Client Readiness Model that describes clients' readiness and can be applied in practice for discussing readiness issues both with clients and with organisations.

Key words: readiness for coaching, client coachability, readiness factors, Coaching Client Readiness Model, grounded theory.

Introduction

At the International Coaching Research Forum in September 2008, internationally recognised researchers defined a research agenda in order to advance coaching as an evidence-based discipline. Three of the proposals emphasised the need for research into the readiness of the coaching client, an area which needs to be better understood as the clients' readiness for coaching can affect its effectiveness (Kauffman, Russell, & Bush, 2008).

Coaching requires financial commitment and valuable time and since the training budgets of businesses, organisations and government are getting tighter it is important to identify the dispositional, situational and institutional variables that make clients more or less receptive to coaching. This will enable coaching to be targeted at those people who will benefit most from coaching and whose coaching will make the greatest difference to their organisation. Equally important, organisations themselves need to create conditions that support the readiness of the coaching client for coaching. The business benefit will be an increased Return on Investment (ROI) from coaching for any organisation.

My interest in clients' readiness for coaching comes from my experience of coaching adult learners within the Leys Learning Community Project. Having had successful coaching clients I also experienced the unreliability of some of the learners, their resistance to change and lack of development. As Clutterbuck (2008, p.11) described

it, I felt frustrated with myself "at not being able to achieve the outcomes I felt a good coach should". When searching for coaching literature that could help to understand clients' readiness issues I was surprised to find that it seemed to be non-existent. I have been discussing clients' readiness for coaching with executive, business and life coaches and I realise that it is an issue of great relevance for nearly every coach I have spoken too. Most of the coaches have experienced the occasional lack of readiness and associated negative coaching outcomes and have felt similarly frustrated by it.

Using the grounded theory approach the purpose of this study is to develop a theory/model that describes the readiness factors of coaching by discovering the different variables that contribute to readiness of the coaching client. In order to accomplish this, it is necessary to explore the following research questions:

- What does readiness for coaching mean?

- What are the individual and external factors that support participation in coaching?

- What are the barriers that stop clients engaging in the coaching process?

- What differentiates the clients who are ready for coaching and those who are not?

By beginning to answer these questions and developing a theory it is hoped that this study provides a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of readiness for coaching.

Literature Review and Grounded Theory

Many popular books (e.g. Flaherty, 2005; Rogers, 2004; Whitmore, 2002) are written about the beneficial outcomes of coaching and how well it works for organisations and individual clients. All these books emphasise the importance of the competent coach who is using professional coaching skills and processes and is able to build a trusting and supportive working relationship with his client. However, I agree with Bluckert (2006) that being a competent coach is not sufficient for achieving positive coaching outcomes because one important part in the whole picture is missing – the readiness of the coaching client for coaching. When talking about coaching managers, Bluckert (2006, p.34) recognises how little consideration has been given to the question of who coaching works best for and he questions "whether everyone is potentially a suitable candidate for coaching".

A Google search on 31st of January 2009 using the word phrase 'readiness for coaching' and 'client coachability' returned 1050 and 180 hits, mostly coaching provider websites asking potential clients to assess their readiness for coaching by employing readiness scales, screening questions or quizzes. It seems that clients' readiness is indeed an important issue for coaches and coaching clients when considering a coaching relationship. However, a search of Emerald and EBSCO Host databases on the same date brought no results within peer reviewed journals, indicating that there was little or no research literature on the topic. This profound lack of research suggested the use of

grounded theory since, as Stern (1995, p.30) asserts: "the strongest case for the use of grounded theory is in investigations of relatively uncharted water".

There is a considerable debate in the research literature between scholars who favour the classical grounded theory put forward by Glaser and Strauss that supports a post-positivist ontology (Corbin & Strauss, 1998; Barney G. Glaser & Holton, 2004; Stern, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1994) and others who favour newer variations (Lempert, 2007; Schreiber, 2001) moving towards more constructivist designs (Charmaz, 2006). One major debate is about the relevance and use of conducting a pre-research literature review and taking it to the extreme the grounded theory researcher finds him/herself in a dilemma over wasting her time or conducting a folly. Therefore researchers need to reflect on the opposing arguments taking their own ontological perspectives, pre-conceptions, values and beliefs and the particular circumstances of the research project into account. Cutcliffe (2000, p.1480) asserts that the key question is how rigorous and thorough should the literature review be and at what point should this literature review occur? The different views on the status of the literature review in grounded theory studies are debated here in order to clarify the role of the research literature within this study and to answer those questions raised by Cutliffe.

Glaser and Holton (2004) call the pre-study literature review of qualitative data analysis a "waste of time" (2004, par. 44) and point out in their guide to novice researchers who wish to explore the fundamental principles of grounded theory that "Grounded Theory begins with no preconceived idea and then generates one during data analysis" (2004, par. 19). It means that the grounded theory researcher should avoid theoretical preconception and postpone the literature review until after data collection when the developing theory becomes sufficiently grounded in data. The aim of grounded theory is to increase knowledge by developing new theories instead of analysing data within existing theories.

Another view is proffered by Schreiber (2001, p.58) who advocates a pre-research literature review. She argues that "plunging into the field research without delving into the relevant literature would be folly". Similarly Lempert (2007, p.254) deviates from classic grounded theory and uses literature extensively from the beginning for pragmatic reasons. She explains that "a literature review provides me with the current parameters of the conversation I hope to enter" and then adding "It does not, however, define my research". Both researchers rely on literature to have a good level of understanding when they enter their research to provide them with some kind of orientation to start with.

In this study there is no obvious coaching research literature to delve into. To conduct a pre-research literature review from other areas like adult learning, therapy, psychology would require me to make assumptions about what constitutes readiness for coaching. The findings from such a preliminary literature review might not be relevant for the phenomenon of readiness for coaching. It might also impact my chance of being open to new discoveries, for generating fresh ideas and identifying the accurate factors that affect readiness for coaching. I agree with Hickey (1997) who argues that the early literature review in grounded theory might lead the researcher to make inaccurate

assumptions of what is and what is not important in the study instead of letting the data speak for itself.

Therefore I decided not to undertake a pre-research literature review until categories and themes from the data provided by the research respondents emerged and the theory started building. To gain further insight into the readiness topic, research was needed that explored with the enquirers, coaching clients and coaches themselves what determines readiness for coaching from their point of view and what helps or hinders their engagement with coaching. This minimizes the risk of the research being 'contaminated' by existing literature.

Later in the research process "an entirely new body of literature" (Hutchinson, 2001, p.233) informed by the categories and themes was researched and critically analysed to inform, support or extend the emerging theory. Literature was progressively accessed and the reading of relevant literature became data in itself and was used as a source of comparative analysis. Furthermore this iterative process helped to extend the theory so that the literature made sense of the data from the study and vice versa.

Research Design

Since Glaser and Strauss developed the grounded theory method (GTM) in the 1960's as a formal methodology, it has become increasingly complex and varied. Bryant and Charmaz (2007, p.11) referring to Wittgenstein's concept of 'family resemblances' termed it the "family of methods claiming the GTM mantle," and like all families it has been experiencing disagreement. After thoroughly studying the methodological know-how of grounded theory it was important for me to move behind disagreements about the correct application of grounded theory and to decide on the key principles and processes of grounded theory which this study will adhere to. I mainly based them on the work of Glaser and Holton (2004) and Wiener (2007). The key principles and processes devised for this grounded theory study are:

1. The area of interest is clients' readiness for coaching. The broad research questions are: What does readiness for coaching means? What are the internal and external variables that determine readiness for coaching?
2. Collection of data from the research participants and its immediate analysis without the preconception of a hypothesis and without influence by a pre-research literature review
3. Data gathering, analysis and theory construction are an iterative process
4. Coding starts with the first interview
5. Memo writing begins with the first interview
6. The constant comparison technique is used to find similarities and differences and to identify core categories
7. When the core categories evolve then relevant research literature is used as data and will inform themes as well as position the study within the existing research landscape
8. Theoretical sampling is directed by the emerging theory
9. Theoretical sorting of memos sets up the outline for the writing of the findings section of the dissertation

10. Theoretical saturation is when there is no need to collect further data
11. When the data is saturated a theoretical model should emerge informed by the coding and memo writing process

It should be noted that grounded theory is a method of inquiry and a method of analysis where data collection and analysis are undertaken simultaneously informing further data collection until data saturation as outlined in the research design model (Figure1) of this study.

Figure 1: Research Design Model
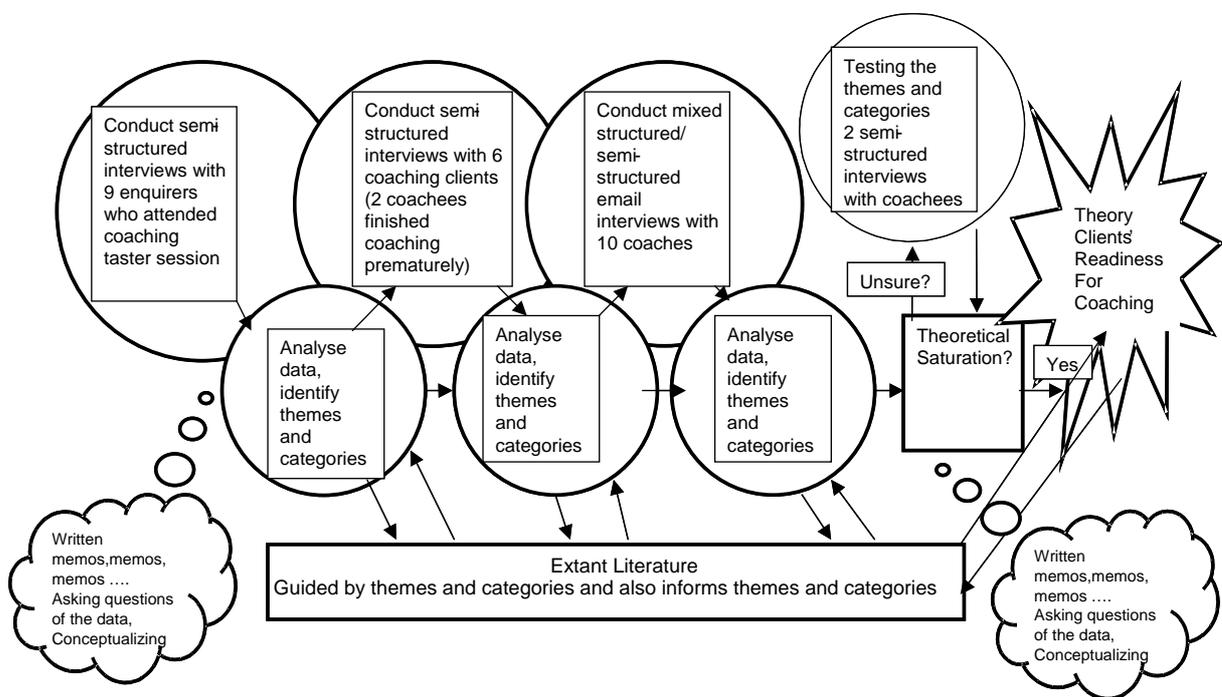
Data Collection

For the first interview round I chose a convenience sample and concentrated on the enquirers group, who had participated in one coaching taster session about what coaching is and does and after that had the opportunity to sign up for six coaching sessions provided by volunteer coaches. I felt that they would be excellent research participants as they had experienced variables that helped and hindered them in signing up for coaching. I interviewed 9 enquirers using a semi-structured interview.

After interviewing the enquirers, and coding and analysing the data, the emerging theory directed the further process of data collection. Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.47) described this as theoretical sampling by asking the basic question "What groups or subgroups one turns to next…and for what purpose?". I turned to the group of 6 coachees from the business sector, life coaching and community coaching, who had experienced

coaching sessions. Two of the coachees (business and community sector) had finished the coaching relationship prematurely before the sixth coaching session. One purpose was to check the categories that had emerged from the enquirer data and the other was to add different categories as the coachees had experienced particular factors that had an influence on their readiness during the coaching process. Again, I chose a semi-structured interview.

The third group I turned to in response to the analysed data from enquirers and coachees were 10 coaches from executive, business, life and community coaching who had experienced clients' readiness issues within their coaching practice. I decided on interviewing by email using a mixture of a structured and semi-structured questionnaire.

Some degree of triangulation was achieved by using multiple sources of data; the enquirers (E), the coachees (CE) and coaches (CO) who had experienced the phenomenon clients' readiness for coaching in different contexts which "adds depth and rigor to research as multiple perspectives contribute to more comprehensive findings" (Foss & Ellefson, 2002, p.245).

The aim of grounded theory is not the theory itself but a theory that is applicable to those that share the problem under investigation (Cutcliffe, 2000; B.G. Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Heath & Cowley, 2004). After I had interviewed 25 respondents and analysed the data and relevant research literature I tested the emerging Coaching Client Readiness Model. I interviewed two more coachees to assess the model's potential relevance and practicality.

Data Analysis

In grounded theory the data analysis begins with the first interview. Immediately after each interview I created a memo where I processed some of the information given, by writing down my initial thoughts, observations and questions. As Lempert (2007, p.249) has demonstrated, over time the memos became an invaluable tool during the study for developing ideas as well as having analytical discussions with myself about the research data.

To formulate a theory I used the systematic coding approach based on Strauss and Corbin (1998). At first the data from the interviews were coded, sentence by sentence, through open coding. In the later interviews only already established categories and properties or new emerging properties with relevance to the emerging theory were marked through the process of selective coding. Throughout the data collection process, as the categories and properties emerged, the effort was made to seek out confirmation or rejection of such categories in further interviews. Following the procedures of constant comparative analysis based on the suggestion of Glaser and Strauss I kept comparing and contrasting all the collected data. This ensured that repetitive themes were noted, additional categories recognised and explored, sometimes renamed, and that the properties within each category were developed until data saturation occurred and a final conceptual framework of clients' readiness for coaching emerged.
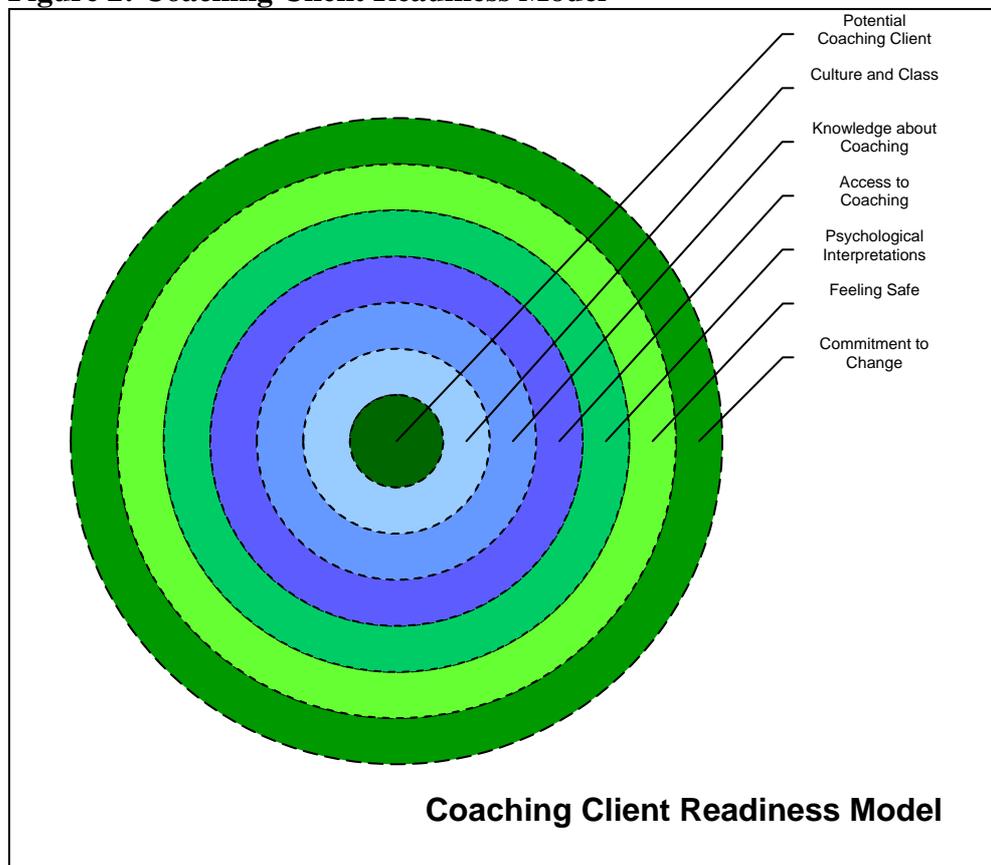
After analysing the data from the enquirers and coachees, categories emerged more strongly; the relevant research literature became more easily identified and began to play an important part in this research project. All literature was treated as another form of data for testing and refining the emergent theory (Dick, 2007, p.405). The interdisciplinary-based literature review from a range of disciplines particularly sociology, psychology, adult education and coaching was used to explain the data already collected and assimilated into the theory building process. It also positioned this study within the wider research landscape.

Emerging Theory - The Coaching Client Readiness Model

The decision to delay the literature review until the theory emerged has been beneficial for this study complimenting and supporting the respondent data. I believe that this choice has significantly increased the scope of this study by allowing two completely unforeseen themes 'Coaching and Class' and 'Knowledge about Coaching' to emerge which to my knowledge have not been discussed within the coaching research literature to date.

Thirty-two categories in relation to clients' readiness for coaching emerged during the research process and were incorporated into six themes which inform the Coaching Client Readiness Model (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Coaching Client Readiness Model

Potential
Coaching Client

Culture and Class

Knowledge about
Coaching

Access to
Coaching

Psychological
Interpretations

Feeling Safe

Commitment to
Change

Coaching Client Readiness Model

The Coaching Client Readiness Model emphasises the six layers that influence clients' readiness for coaching, proceeding from the more situational and institutional variables (blue inner layers), to the dispositional client variables (green outer layers). In the core of the model is the potential coaching client, with the assumption that this could be anyone who has the mental capacity to communicate with a coach. The first layer is 'Culture and Class' because individuals are embedded in their culture and class, which not only influences their self-concept but also their opportunities and choices in life, thus impacting on their readiness for coaching.

The lines between the layers are dashed, firstly, to symbolise the described ripple effect and, secondly, to indicate that the barriers and enablers within each layer are different and fluid for each client. For example, for the potential coaching client who has the financial resources and makes sufficient time to be able to engage in coaching and has no other barriers in the layer 'Access to Coaching' the line can be almost non-existent. In contrast for another potential client the cost could be the biggest single obstacle and therefore the line would be completely closed. The different layers are now discussed is more detail.

Culture and Class *- "Coaching could be seen as a matter of privilege." (Respondent E8)*

Within coaching and within the coaching practice literature (Brockbank & McGill, 2006; Rogers, 2004; Whitworth, Kimsey-House, Henry, & Sandahl, 2007), I would argue, we often assume the possibility of the self, we believe in individualisation, reflexivity, choice, goals and individual opportunity. However, these possibilities in our society - and that includes coaching - are more open to some than to others determined by social class. As CE8 pointed out:

> *I think you will come across these phenomena of people not being ready for coaching far less frequently in business coaching, just because of the nature of it, […] if you busy trying to work in three jobs to get enough money to pay the rent you spent far less time just actually having the space to talk and think and reflect. (CE 8)*

Depending on which social class the client comes from seems to impact differently on readiness for coaching. Drawing on the research findings and literature (McGivney, 2001; Mowlan & Creegan, 2008; Rubin, 1992; Skeggs, 2004) I suggest that individuals from the lower class have less choice, less coaching opportunities and encounter more access barriers to coaching. They might lack essential coaching skills like reflexivity, self-awareness and/or the ability to take responsibility. However, with enough time coaching could offer the space to develop these skills.

Talking about social class and inequality might be deeply unpopular and unsettling because it implies different groups competing against each other for limited resources (Thompson, 2007). Nevertheless, in order to build a more sustainable and equal society, the whole coaching community, I believe, has a profound responsibility to address issues of social class and inequality within coaching, proactively, honestly and

openly. Coaching needs to be made more accessible to those who have aspirations but are impoverished through inequality.

Developing and nurturing a coaching culture in schools, at work and throughout society to increase clients readiness for coaching has been suggested by several research respondents within this study.

> *Does our society actually really value human beings or does it only value them as consumers? If we really valued individual human beings, then coaching would actually underpin our entire education system from reception onwards, from crèches onwards. (CE5)*

Rosinski, interviewed by Lloyd (2005, p.137), has a similar view and suggests that a way to improve people's receptiveness to the idea of coaching is to develop a coaching culture in schools, where teachers receive coaching training, and where personal development is integrated into the curriculum so that young students develop self-awareness that can guide them through their lives.

Knowledge about Coaching - *"We never ever heard about coaching before. It needs to be more in the public, people need to know about coaching." (E5)*

Respondents suggested that "coaching is not mainstream" (CE6) and that most people do not know what coaching is. The overwhelming consensus from the enquirer and coachee group in this study has been that coaching 'needs to be explained better' and that 'most people don't know what it is'.

> *Even if people have heard about coaching and many haven't anyway they don't really know what it means. (CE7)*

In contrast, only four out of ten coaches mentioned the lack of clients' knowledge of what coaching is and what it does as a significant constraint for clients' readiness for coaching. Askeland (2009, p.65) avows that there is a lack of critical reflection in the coaching community on what coaches actually do. She observed that coaches often turn to the mystical when explaining coaching citing the phrase "to understand what coaching is and what it can do for you, you have to try it" as an example.

The data shows a deep knowledge gap between the coaching industry and the public including organisations and management. Taylor (2004), who interviewed in-depth senior executive coachees, came to similar conclusions. She was surprised by the lack of clarity of what coaching is and its purpose. Furthermore, the coaching community seems to be ignorant about this knowledge gap and its negative impact on clients' readiness for coaching. Coaching needs to be explained better and should be promoted in more creative ways using different communication channels. The dissemination of clear and accurate information about coaching as well as demonstrating its value and benefits to organisations and individual clients is indispensable. In this context a consensus regarding a basic coaching definition within the coaching community would be beneficial.

Within organisations it should be clarified why coaching is offered, what the process involves and what the expected outcomes are. This study found that good practice to increase clients' knowledge about the coaching process and to increase their readiness for coaching would be to run 'taster group' sessions that inform about the coaching process and to have coaching integrated in an organisational culture which is conducive to learning and change and supports the coaching process of their staff whole heartedly.

Access to Coaching - *"There has to be a bit more than just offering it to a few select people." (CE 6)*

The access factors of time, cost and client selection influence clients' readiness for coaching. The most cited reason among the situational barriers that hinders people's readiness for coaching among the enquirers and the coaching client group has been the cost of coaching: "The cost is definitely a barrier, a big barrier" (CE4).

This mirrors the data from the Eurobarometer survey data 2003 (Chisolm, Larson, & Mossoux, 2004) where cost is also identified as a major barrier to learning. Only 12%-21% of research respondents were willing to pay all the cost of studying and 50% were not willing to pay anything. Research (Cross, 1992; Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009) suggests that attempting to determine the real impact of cost on participation in adult education is difficult as it can be a statement of the value people ascribe to education and the expected outcome of it. This might be similar in coaching because this research found that the opinion on costs shifts considerably after people experienced the benefit of it:

> *I was lucky I did not have to pay. And if some one would have said to spend so much money on it I would not. Now that I have seen the benefit of coaching I would contemplate paying for it but I would not have considered it before. (CE7)*

Helping the client to recognise the personal value of coaching increases the client's keenness to prioritise coaching under time pressure when different commitments compete. Research literature (Hall, Otazo, & Hollenbeck, 1999; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001) found that the greatest obstacle to the coaching process for executives is time. One coaching client was thinking of giving up coaching:

> *There was one point. It was simply whether I could physically manage to keep doing it in terms of time. I constantly reminded myself I had the right and the need to do something for myself. ... I had to keep reminding myself that I was as important as the work. (CE5)*

Coaches can increase clients' readiness for coaching by "finding ways of delivering coaching that suits the way they work (frequency, length of session etc)" (CO9). In the example above the coach agreed to have the coaching sessions in the morning before the scheduled working day began.

With regard to client selection, Anderson et al (2009) note that the prevalence of individual coaching drops the further down an employee is positioned within an organisation. By contrast the 2004 training and development survey data by the CIPD

(Jarvis, p.10) suggests that "the most common recipients of coaching are in fact junior and middle managers". The experiences of the respondents in this study support Anderson's findings, rather than Jarvis':

> *I think if organisations are going to offer it correctly then there has to be a bit more than just offering it to a few select people ... (CE5)*

This example highlights that the organisation has to commit to building a conducive coaching environment so that people who are ready for coaching will benefit from it regardless of their status in the company.

Psychological Interpretations *- "They got [to] want to do something with themselves and they got [to] want to have the help. They got to be ready in themselves." (E1)*

The data suggest that the potential coaching clients have "got to be ready in themselves" in order to benefit from coaching and this is influenced by their psychological interpretation of themselves and the world. The following categories emerged under this layer: Firstly, openness which includes being open, honest and true to oneself and being willing to increase self-awareness by "looking deep inside" (CE8).

Secondly, the respondents identified healthy self-esteem and a general positive attitude. This view is supported by Marshall (2006) who reported that coaches frequently discovered that self-esteem and confidence issues were keeping clients from being able to engage in the coaching process. Similarly James and Nightingale (2005) and Cross (1992) argue that lack of self-esteem is one of the main barriers to participating in adult learning.

Thirdly the abilities to take feedback and to reflect were identified as skills that respondents thought would enhance clients' readiness for coaching. Lastly the respondents felt that a degree of psychological and emotional stability is essential for clients to profit from coaching. Emotional blockages like anger, fear, anxiety, that the coachee is unable to shift appear to be unhelpful in coaching, as the client has to be in an emotionally steady state to be able to be open and to address deeper issues in order to move forward. Respondent CE1 explains:

> *I think if I had been smack in the middle of having a big crisis in my life I would have never been able to manage people asking me direct questions. So, I think that this sort of crisis is not a time to be doing coaching. (CE1)*

Negative emotions like fear, anger and anxiety threaten the sense of safety and clients might be less likely to suspend defensiveness.

As with research in therapy (Asay & Lambert, 1999) and adult learning (Cross, 1992; K. James & Nightingale, 2005) the findings suggest that the dispositional client variables play a vital role in deciding whether individuals seek coaching in the first place and if they will engage in the coaching process actively. The study found that clients'

readiness for coaching is "never black and white. Every client is 'up for it' to some extent, and never completely up for it!" (CO1).

Feeling Safe - *"I think it is really important to create safety, to create boundaries, to create trust." (CE1)*

The respondents suggested that people who feel safe are likely to be themselves. Feeling safe minimises protective behaviours like defensiveness, denial, resistance. People can be open, honest, and show their vulnerabilities. Therefore it comes as no surprise that the theme 'Feeling safe' permeated throughout this research and has been stressed by all research participants as a contributing factor that increases clients' readiness for coaching. For the respondents 'Feeling safe' related to two aspects: the coach-client relationship – I will focus on - and the support by partner, family, friends but also the organisation offering the coaching.

It is the responsibility of the coach to create safety, set the boundaries and create trust in a coaching relationship. Coaches need to use all their skills and expertise to develop a non-judgmental, unconditional and empathic relationship. Studies focusing on the role of therapeutic relationships found that relationship factors account for 30% of clients improvement (Asay & Lambert, 1999, p.33). In particular the coachee respondents emphasised the value of a rigorous contracting process and this includes more than just practical issues, like frequency of the sessions:

> *She was setting the boundaries about what coaching was and where you could go and what was not appropriate. And I think that is about creating a safe space, knowing what your boundaries are, the way you are with yourself. (CE1)*

Clearly, this coachee felt that the contract created a safe space for her. Based on these findings all coaches might be encouraged to discuss in depth with their prospective clients the scope and boundaries of coaching, confidentiality, expectations of the client and of the coach, differences between coaching and counselling, intense emotions, obstacles and hindrances as well as focus and outcome. This research found that these factors are essential to create the safe space for the client. Similarly, Sokhela (2007, p.96) recommends that the contract should be negotiated between both parties and put in a written form in a manner understandable to both, the coach and the client.

Commitment to Change - *"It's more than turning up to the session." (CO3)*

Commitment to Change consists of the three categories compelling reason, commitment and taking responsibility and readiness to change. Both Kegan (2000) and Maslow (1999) remind us that development, change and personal growth need energy and have powerful countervailing forces as they can bring feelings of inadequacy, fear and failure. This implies the need for coaching to come at the right time and place in people's lives. People who have to spend lots of energy to satisfy their basic needs might have few inner resources left to engage in coaching and personal growth. Respondents in this study confirm that clients who are ready for coaching actually feel or sense that the coaching is happening just at the right time in their lives.

For some people, the timing of when the opportunity for coaching shows up in their life will feel like an amazing gift which they see as such, they grab and go with it. For others the timing will seem all wrong. (CO2)

The research literature (Hubble, Duncan, & Miller, 1999; R. James, 2003; Prochaska, Norcross, & Diclemente, 2006) asserts that time and place play a critical role in the change process as people take time to move from denial to acceptance that change is needed.

The skilled coach can help the client "to build a compelling reason both at the emotional and intellectual level" (CO9) but ultimately the client has to have a clear reason to engage in the coaching in the first place. The coach can not force that pace:

…after all the coach is only a facilitator but no more than that; it is just drawing out the best in people but ultimately it's got to come from them. (CE6)

Respondents' compelling reasons for engaging in coaching for example are:
- Gaining insight by increasing their self awareness
- Overcoming obstacles
- Getting unstuck by receiving support and space to make decisions,
- Navigating through different options available to them,
- Planning the next part of their life journey

Respondents also felt that individuals who do not have a focus for their coaching, can not see the benefit of/need for coaching or perhaps see coaching as a threat are not ready for coaching as it would hinder them to actively engage in the coaching process. It is notable that the two respondents who did not finish the coaching had not identified a compelling reason for their coaching engagement.

Perhaps the most revealing factor of how ready a client is for coaching is the client's accountability. If a coach feels, that he has to work harder than the client (Marshall, 2006), that he has to cajole or force the client into commitment to the coaching process that should be a warning sign where the client's readiness for coaching has to be questioned and explored further.

Increasing clients' readiness within one layer can have a positive ripple effect onto other layers. For example, if potential clients receive accurate knowledge about coaching they are able to recognise the value of coaching ('Knowledge About Coaching'). They then might be more likely to seek out coaching opportunities and to free up time for it ('Access to Coaching'). Furthermore knowledge about the coaching process might clarify their expectations and increase their confidence that they will achieve their coaching goals ('Psychological Interpretations') and make them feel safer within the coaching relationship ('Feeling Safe'). That in turn will have a positive impact on their ability to change ('Commitment to Change').

Questionnaire to help explore clients' readiness

The research suggests that readiness issues need to be acknowledged and addressed with organisations and with clients because it increases the likelihood of successful coaching outcomes. The Coaching Clients Readiness Model can be applied in practice with organisations and with individual coaching clients to ignite an open discussion to identify obstacles and enablers that affect clients' readiness for coaching. It can be particularly helpful, in conjunction with the developed questionnaire outlined in Table 1 below, when the coach feels that the coaching does not seem to work for the client. Coaches could use these questions either as a reflective tool for themselves or for discussing with their clients and/or sponsoring organisation whether the client is ready for coaching or not.

Table 1: Questionnaire 'Exploring Clients' Readiness for Coaching'

Questionnaire 'Exploring Clients' Readiness for Coaching'
Potential Coaching Client 　　1.　Do I think this client is ready for coaching? 　　2.　Yes or no, why do I think this? The following questions might help to understand and assess the client's readiness for coaching.
Culture and Class 　　1.　What cultural background or class is my client from? 　　2.　What opportunities has my client had in life, in the context of learning, studying and jobs? 　　3.　How does my client reflect on life/opportunities in life? 　　4.　Is my client supported by significant others/peer group? 　　5.　Is there a positive coaching culture in the client's environment (school, work, etc)
Knowledge about Coaching 　　1.　Is my client clear about what coaching is and what it isn't? What does my client know about coaching already? What expectations does the client have? 　　2.　As a coach have I clearly communicated my approach to coaching? 　　3.　When coaching within organisations, is the organisation clear why coaching is being offered to their employees, what the process involves and what the expected outcomes are? 　　4.　Would it be helpful to offer induction and coaching taster sessions to prospective coaching clients?
Access to Coaching 　　1.　Is the client or organisation able to afford the coaching, if not, are there alternative funds that can be accessed or is there any access to coaching offered at a reduced cost or pro bono? 　　2.　Does the client have the time or want to make the time to commit to the coaching relationship?
Psychological Interpretations 　　1.　Is the client being authentic and honest? 　　2.　Does the client stay in his or her comfort zone? 　　3.　Is the client willing or able to increase self awareness? 　　4.　Has the client had experience of positive helping relationships and does the client trust others? 　　5.　Does the client have healthy self-esteem and confidence in themselves? 　　6.　Is the client able to shift negative mind-sets? 　　7.　Does the client have a positive attitude towards coaching and believe that coaching will make a difference? 　　8.　How does the client react to the coach's feedback? 　　9.　Does the client have some deep seated psychological issues that disrupt the coaching process? 　　10.　Does the client have the emotional freedom to engage with the coaching process?

Feeling Safe

1. Will (or has) a rigorous contracting process take(n) place which clarifies the scope and boundaries of the coaching?
2. Are the expectations of the coach and the client clear to each other?
3. Are any potential or real hindrances and obstacles openly discussed?
4. Does the coach give the client permission to show their emotions (e.g. crying during the session)?
5. What assumptions and judgments does the coach make about the client and what impact does this have on the coach/client relationship?
6. Are there any limits to confidentiality, e.g. does the coach have to report to the sponsoring organisation?
7. Is there a lack of rapport between the client and the coach?
8. Is there too much directness and challenging on the part of the coach, or too little?
9. Is there a lack of support from partners/spouses, friends or family?
10. Is there an organisational culture supportive of learning, development and change? Or does the organisation just pay lip-service to it?
11. Is the coaching venue a confidential and supportive space?

Commitment to Change

1. If the coaching is offered for free, might this have a negative impact on the client's motivation or commitment to the coaching process?
2. Is the client able to reflect or willing to learn how to reflect?
3. Does the client have an intellectual and/or emotionally compelling reason to engage in coaching?
4. Is there a sense that the coaching is happening just at the right time and place in the client's life?
5. Does the client believe and trust in the coaching process that it will aid their learning and personal development?
6. Does the client know that personal insight and change is up to them?
7. Does the client believe in their ability to make change (self-efficacy/beliefs)?
8. Is the client participating in coaching by free choice or have they been coerced?
9. Is the client taking responsibility by regularly attending the coaching sessions and taking action between sessions?
10. Does the client know somebody who has already benefited from the coaching process?
11. Does the client have the energy and drive to make things happen and want something more from life?

Conclusion

The findings from this study suggest that clients who are ready for coaching have the desire and positive energy to engage in a process of change. They are committed and feel safe to explore who they are, where they want to go and to take active steps into the direction they have set out for themselves. On their way they welcome the coach as their supportive, encouraging and challenging companion. In addition clients are well informed about coaching and have a good understanding about the coaching process. Furthermore living and working in a culture where development and change are encouraged, supported and valued increases clients' readiness for coaching significantly.

The development of a coaching culture throughout society from childhood onwards that provides people with an understanding of coaching and its value early on might offer a great chance to improve people's receptiveness to and readiness for change and progress through coaching. Ultimately this is the opportunity for the coaching community to foster "wisdom and self-responsibility" as championed by Whitmore (C. Kauffman & Bachkirova, 2008, p.4) not only within leadership circles but, in my opinion, within the wider community.

This grounded theory study has been designed to generate rather than to verify existing theory. Consequently it has shed some light on the factors that influence clients' readiness for coaching. By doing so it emerged that clients' readiness for coaching is a far more complex and multi-layered concept than was anticipated. Therefore, the findings,

including the Coaching Client Readiness Model, should not been seen as set in, stone, but rather as an important starting point in describing clients' readiness for coaching and the different variables influencing it. Clients' readiness for coaching is a vital research area and would benefit from more evidence-based investigations and further quantitative and qualitative research. The main objective of this study was to generate theory and I suggest that further research is needed to test the research findings and the proposed Readiness Model and questionnaire in practice.

Finally, this has been only a small study integrating the perspective of enquirers, coaching clients and coaches from life, community, business, executive and development coaching. It has not been large enough to exhaust the specifics between the diverse respondents groups and the various fields of coaching in relation to clients' readiness for coaching. For that reason further studies involving diverse respondent groups may illuminate similarities and highlight differences within the different forms of coaching and develop and enhance our appreciation of the factors that determine a clients' readiness for coaching.

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