

## Reflections from the Field

# Fight Theory: A Coaching Framework for Resistance, Intensity, and Identity in Goal Pursuit

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### Abstract

When coaching high-purpose performers, executives, athletes or mission-driven leaders, traditional goal pursuit models often fail to account for the psychological complexity of real-time resistance. This paper introduces 'Fight Theory', a transdisciplinary coaching framework that conceptualizes growth as a strategic interaction between resistance, calibrated intensity, and identity evolution. Drawing from multiple psychological theories, it equips coaches with diagnostic tools to identify resistance patterns and modulate effort. Central to its application is the Fight Readiness Profile (FRP), a proposed psychometric tool for mapping resistance, guiding intensity, and supporting identity-aligned development.

### Keywords

coaching psychology, resistance, identity development, motivational intensity, goal pursuit

### Article history

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## Introduction

The genesis of Fight Theory began during a moment of physical recalibration, recovering on a Peloton Tread while listening to Eminem's "Till I Collapse." As the beat intensified and fatigue set in, I reflected not only on the physiological experience of pushing limits, but also on the leaders I coach—driven, purpose-filled individuals who often face profound resistance in the pursuit of meaningful goals. These leaders were not struggling because they lacked ambition or clarity. They were struggling because their intensity was miscalibrated, their resistance misunderstood, and their identity misaligned with the strategies they were employing. In that moment, the seeds of Fight Theory were planted—not just as a performance model, but as a framework for identity-aligned transformation under pressure.

As an executive coach working with leaders in high-stakes environments, leadership transitions, entrepreneurial ventures, and elite athletics, I observed a pattern: resistance was not simply a barrier; it was a message. Yet, most coaching frameworks treat resistance as something to push through, reframe, or overcome with mindset alone. Traditional coaching

tools often emphasize values, vision, and goal setting, but rarely offer precise methods for diagnosing resistance, calibrating intensity, or understanding how effort interacts with identity over time. Fight Theory addresses this missing link by offering a system-level understanding of goal pursuit: one that recognizes how cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and motivational dynamics fluctuate in real-time, and how coaching can become the lever for effectively recalibrating those dynamics.

The name Fight Theory was not chosen for its metaphorical edge; it was chosen because it reflects the lived reality of meaningful goal pursuit. Growing up, I was captivated by boxing. I did not just admire the physicality; I admired the strategy. A great fighter does not charge into every round with blind aggression; they conserve energy, read their opponent, and adapt their tactics. They understand that winning a fight is not just about force; it is about timing, stamina, and choosing when to throw and when to step back. Fight Theory borrows from that logic. Every goal worth pursuing is its own fight, full of resistance, uncertainty, and identity stakes. The coachee, like the fighter, must learn to map the terrain: What kind of resistance is present? What strengths can be leveraged? When is the moment to strike?

And when the final bell rings, it is never just about the outcome; it is about what has been forged in the process. If the fighter wins, they emerge as someone new, stronger, more grounded, ready for the next challenge. If they lose, the loss is not wasted; it becomes information. They study the tape, assess what went wrong, and prepare for the rematch with greater clarity and precision. Fight Theory honors that same process. Whether a client is advancing, plateauing, or retreating, each fight reveals data. Every round offers a lesson. And the real goal is not just achievement, it is transformation. That is the fight worth showing up for.

Where Fight Theory breaks new ground is in how it repositions resistance as a signal, not a flaw. In high-purpose goal pursuit, where the stakes are tied to identity, legacy, or meaning, resistance is not a bug in the system. It is the system speaking. These are not superficial obstacles; they are internal shifts, often triggered by change, conflict, or perceived threat to the self. Most coaching models stop at the level of willpower or values alignment, but this framework asks: *What is the resistance telling us? Where is the energy being drained? How do we meet that resistance intelligently, not with blind effort, but with tactical precision?* Fight Theory reframes this landscape by positioning resistance, intensity, and identity alignment as interdependent variables in a nonlinear developmental system.

To build this framework, I had to draw from a wide constellation of psychological theories, not presented as isolated citations, but as interconnected insights braided into a practical, field-ready coaching framework. At its core, Fight Theory challenges conventional models by redefining resistance as diagnostic feedback, not interference, and by reframing intensity as a coachable variable, not an inherent trait or visionless pursuit.

The model empowers the client. It becomes a strategic primer, preparing clients for the energy and identity demands of the path ahead. Rather than relying on willpower alone, Fight Theory calibrates intensity before the goal pursuit begins, mapping likely resistance points and determining the energy required to endure them. Without this awareness, clients risk applying unfiltered effort, overspending energy without knowing the full cost of the fight. In

the presence of unpredictable turbulence, Fight Theory equips clients with the strategic intelligence to apply “just enough” energy, precisely when it matters most.

A central contribution of Fight Theory is the inclusion of five core resistance domains: cognitive, emotional, behavioral, motivational, and threshold (breakpoint). These domains provide a language for coaches to identify specific friction patterns with clients. For example, cognitive resistance might manifest as overthinking, while emotional resistance may appear as fear, fatigue, or doubt. Threshold resistance, the most acute form, represents the moment where the perceived cost of effort exceeds the perceived value of the goal. When multiple resistance domains stack (e.g., a client facing emotional fatigue while also navigating an unclear goal), the result is what Fight Theory calls stacked resistance, a compounding force that derails progress unless strategically addressed.

To bring it from concept to application, Fight Theory introduces the Fight Readiness Profile (FRP), a psychometric and coaching tool designed to assess fight capacity across domains to support applied use. Built from a synthesis of validated constructs, such as value congruence (Schwartz, 1992), implementation intentions (Gollwitzer, 1999), and feedback loop theory (Silvia, 2008), the FRP provides both clients and practitioners with a diagnostic lens to evaluate readiness, resistance, and alignment. Through the FRP, coaches can help clients determine where to intensify, where to pull back, and how to sustain progress without burnout, using the identity as the anchor point.

This paper proposes Fight Theory as a next-generation coaching framework with four primary contributions:

1. Resistance as Diagnosis – Reframing resistance as actionable insight, not failure. Providing insight that resistance is a process to be mapped and navigated, not addressed in the moment.
2. Strategic Intensity Modulation – Treating intensity as a dynamic, situational variable that can be coached. Individuals define what intensity looks like for them. It’s not a universal concept, and functional meaning should be evaluated before effort is deployed.
3. The Fight Readiness Profile (FRP) – Offering practitioners a tool for structured, real-time assessment of fight readiness. A profile of where the client exists as it relates to their perceptual intensity reservoir over the perceptual resistance map in affiliation with the target identity.
4. Identity Evolution as Coaching Outcome – Moving beyond behavioral metrics to emphasize identity transformation as the true measure of progress. Repositioning the approach of goal setting to home in on who the client is becoming, versus maintaining the focus on performance.

While this paper is a theoretical introduction, it lays the foundation for future empirical validation. Ultimately, this model aims to equip coaches, leaders, and change agents with a more precise, adaptive, and human-centered intelligent way to navigate adversity.

## Theoretical Background and Rationale

In the coaching world, we have long had models to explain motivation, goal setting, grit, and even my personal favorite, moxie. But too often, many of those models view the journey as linear—effort goes in, achievement comes out. Real life rarely works that way. Especially not when the goal is not just about output, but about becoming someone new in the process. Fight Theory steps into this gap with a systems-based lens, one that views resistance, intensity, and identity as co-dependent forces in motion. Rather than stacking traits like mindset or resilience as fixed prerequisites, the model invites a dynamic, moment-by-moment recalibration of effort based on context, internal signals, and evolving self-concept.

Fight Theory builds on decades of research, but it does not treat theory as fixed doctrine. Instead, it weaves together insights from multiple psychological disciplines to build a dynamic, real-time coaching framework. Traditional models often focus on trait-level variables, such as resilience, grit, or mindset. However, they tend to overlook how effort fluctuates over time and how resistance behaves like a moving target. Fight Theory begins where other models might leave off: the moment the client starts to waver, question, or lose momentum.

Several theories have laid the groundwork for this reframing. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) clarifies the psychological needs that drive sustained engagement, i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness. However, Fight Theory adds a diagnostic lens to assess how those needs break down under pressure. Motivational Intensity Theory (Brehm & Self, 1989) describes how effort varies based on task difficulty and goal importance. Fight Theory utilizes this insight to develop its Intensity Calibration Engine, which enables clients to adjust their energy investment in real-time.

Goal Systems Theory (Kruglanski et al., 2002) brings a layered view of competing goals and structural interference, while Ego Depletion Theory (Inzlicht & Schmeichel, 2012) surfaces the limits of cognitive resources in sustaining self-control. Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller et al., 2011) and Self-Regulation Failure Models (Hofmann et al., 2012) explain how overwhelm affects working memory and executive functioning. Each of these concepts informs Fight Theory's understanding of friction, burnout, and derailment risk.

Emotional Intelligence (Bar-On, 2006) gives the framework emotional depth, equipping practitioners to recognize how internal regulation and emotional volatility affect performance under stress. Temporal Motivation Theory (Steel & König, 2006) explains the phenomenon of urgency decay and future discounting, which Fight Theory integrates to map the energy drop-off during long-horizon goal pursuit. Moxie Theory (Wright & Pincus, 2022), which captures momentary bursts of motivational resolve under uncertainty, aligns directly with Fight Theory's emphasis on dynamic, high-intensity effort as a trainable skill rather than a fixed trait.

Taken together, these theories, along with others from developmental psychology, behavior change, and performance science, give Fight Theory both depth and dimension. They are not presented as isolated concepts, but as part of a system in motion, where resistance,

intensity, and identity alignment continuously interact. Fight Theory translates this ecosystem into something coaches and clients can feel, see, and respond to in the moment.

## **Fragmentation in Motivation Science**

For decades, psychological theories of motivation, emotion, cognition, and identity have evolved in separate lanes, each offering valuable insight, but rarely integrated into a single system. Motivation was long treated as the spark that initiates action, emotion as a secondary consequence, cognition as a rational processor, and identity as a distant developmental arc. Coaching models have followed suit, often offering siloed interventions: a mindset shift here, a values clarification exercise there. Helpful, yes, but insufficient when clients are navigating overlapping pressures, identity disruptions, or goal environments riddled with resistance.

Fight Theory challenges this fragmentation. It posits that these domains of motivation, emotion, cognition, and identity do not operate in isolation. They collide, compound, and recalibrate one another constantly. Resistance is not just a mindset issue or a failure of willpower; it may stem from emotional overload, cognitive fatigue, or misalignment between current goals and an evolving sense of self. Fight Theory treats these interactions as co-regulating systems operating on feedback loops. It does not ask “What’s wrong with the client?” It asks, “What system is overloaded, and what needs to shift?”

Where some conventional models often diagnose a lack of progress as a problem of discipline or drive, Fight Theory reframes it as a systems issue, an imbalance of internal forces that must be readjusted. By unifying formerly fragmented domains and introducing tools to map their interaction, it invites coaches to intervene not with generic encouragement, but with precision. This shift, from compartmentalized traits to dynamic interdependencies, is what gives Fight Theory its practical edge.

## **Resistance as Diagnostic, Not Dysfunctional**

Traditional models often pathologize resistance as failure, lack of discipline, or avoidance. In coaching, resistance is commonly reframed as a mindset issue or cognitive distortion. Fight Theory departs from this lens, proposing that resistance is neither failure nor friction, but rather data, a diagnostic signal that can guide recalibration.

Drawing from Inzlicht and Schmeichel’s (2012) reconceptualization of ego depletion, Fight Theory asserts that resistance emerges from motivational shifts and attentional reprioritization, not willpower loss. As mentioned, it maps resistance across five domains, cognitive (“I can’t do this”), emotional (“I feel overwhelmed”), behavioral (“I keep avoiding it”), motivational (“This doesn’t matter anymore”), and threshold (complete overload). These domains are informed by interdisciplinary theory, including ego depletion (Inzlicht & Schmeichel, 2012), self-regulation failure (Hofmann et al., 2012), goal systems theory (Kruglanski et al., 2002), emotional regulation frameworks (Gross, 2015), and cognitive load theory (Sweller et al., 2011).

These resistance types are not flaws. They are friction patterns, each pointing toward a specific tension between the goal, the environment, and the self. Coaches can use them to identify the exact location of breakdown and intervene with greater precision.

## **Intensity as a Modulated Variable**

Where Grit Theory (Duckworth et al., 2007) champions long-term perseverance and passion, Fight Theory zooms in on the moment-to-moment modulation of effort. Rather than encouraging clients to simply “push through,” the model introduces intensity as a coachable, situationally driven variable, something to be tuned, not maxed out. This nuance matters. In the pursuit of high-purpose goals, effort that is mistimed or misapplied often leads not to progress but to burnout or disengagement.

Drawing from Motivational Intensity Theory (Brehm & Self, 1989), Fight Theory proposes that effort is mobilized when (a) success seems possible, (b) the task holds personal relevance, and (c) adequate psychological energy is available. This three-part evaluation, possibility, importance, and readiness, drives the client’s intensity threshold in any given moment. Additionally, Moxie Theory (Blasberg et al., 2023) reinforces this view by highlighting individual variability in motivational intensity, emphasizing that people differ not only in their tolerance for adversity but in their ability to summon, sustain, and recover from intense effort.

Beyond reinforcing situational dynamics, Moxie Theory also bridges trait and state motivation. Some individuals possess a natural disposition toward high-output behavior under challenge (trait-level moxie), while others may require greater external support or clarity to engage effortfully (state-dependent moxie). Fight Theory integrates this variability by emphasizing that calibrating intensity is not one-size-fits-all; it must account for both the client’s internal wiring and their present energetic context.

This logic is embedded in the model’s Intensity Calibration Engine, which functions as an internal pacing guide. It takes into account the perceived difficulty of the task, the identity salience of the goal, and the client’s available emotional and cognitive bandwidth. Clients who attempt to power through without calibrating these variables often experience intensity misfires, either under-engaging when more effort is needed or over-engaging to the point of collapse.

Silvia’s (2008) research on emotional arousal and interest highlights the importance of identity congruence in activating effort. Fight Theory extends this insight, inviting coaches to help clients interpret intensity fluctuations as meaningful data, not character deficits. In some cases, fatigue may indicate misalignment rather than weakness. In others, a lack of engagement may signal a goal that no longer resonates with the client’s evolving self-concept.

Fight Theory positions the coach not as a motivator but as a calibration partner, someone who helps the client read their own energetic dashboard and respond intelligently. This reframing shifts the emphasis from grit to guidance, from “grind harder” to “fight smarter.” Meeting the client where they are, discovering their own understanding of what intensity looks like for them.

## **Identity as the Anchor System**

While many coaching and psychological frameworks view identity as a background context or long-term outcome of development, Fight Theory emphasizes identity as a central

organizing force in the real-time regulation of effort and resistance. When goals are aligned with one's evolving sense of self, they may become more emotionally resonant, sustainable, and psychologically coherent. Conversely, when identity and goal pursuit diverge, individuals often experience strain, dissonance, or disengagement, not due to a lack of motivation, but because of a mismatch between their actions and self-concept.

Drawing on Ibarra's (1999) theory of provisional selves and Boyatzis and Akrivou's (2006) Intentional Change Theory, Fight Theory suggests that identity evolves through cycles of action, reflection, and recalibration. The model also introduces the notion of identity resistance, a particular form of friction that emerges not from effort mismanagement, but from internal conflict about who one is becoming. In such moments, ramping up intensity may prove counterproductive; instead, clients may benefit from reexamining goal alignment, exploring narrative coherence, or even pausing to preserve psychological stability.

This perspective does not suggest that identity-aligned goals are the only viable paths to achievement, but rather that in many high-purpose pursuits, identity salience often plays a critical role in determining emotional engagement and endurance. Fight Theory offers one lens through which coaches and clients can explore this relationship more intentionally, positioning identity not as a static destination but as a dynamic reference point for navigating challenge, growth, and recalibrated effort.

## **Resistance Mapping and Fight Stacking**

Once resistance is understood as diagnostic, the next challenge becomes navigating its complexity, especially when it emerges across multiple life domains. In high-purpose pursuits, clients rarely face a single obstacle. More often, they can potentially encounter a convergence of pressure, emotional strain from home, cognitive overload from work, motivational fatigue from misaligned goals, all interacting and compounding. Fight Theory captures this dynamic through the concept of stacked resistance: the psychological accumulation of effort barriers that, if left unaddressed, increase the likelihood of derailment.

This stacking effect reflects a systemic challenge, not just an intrapersonal one. Unresolved resistance in one domain often bleeds into others. Emotional depletion may reduce cognitive bandwidth; motivational uncertainty may spark behavioral avoidance. Drawing on executive function research (Hofmann et al., 2012) and goal interference literature (Kruglanski et al., 2002), Fight Theory encourages practitioners to map where resistance is surfacing, how domains are interacting, and what order of operations might relieve pressure.

Here, resistance mapping becomes both an assessment tool and a coaching dialogue. Coaches use structured inquiry to identify which battlefronts are active and the amount of energy they are consuming. The model supports a sequencing logic, choosing which goals to pursue now, which to defer, and where to invest strategic bursts of intensity, based not only on urgency, but also on identity salience and energetic readiness (Gollwitzer, 1999; Hofmann, Baumeister, Förster, & Vohs, 2012; Baumeister & Vohs, 2016).

By incorporating this logic, Fight Theory reframes effort management as periodized, not constant. Just as athletes alternate training cycles to avoid injury and maximize growth,

clients are supported in alternating psychological intensity. Fight stacking without strategic sequencing leads to burnout (Hofmann et al., 2012); sequencing informed by resistance patterns fosters sustained identity evolution.

## **Tactical Translation and Real-Time Intervention**

One of the most practical contributions of Fight Theory is its capacity to move from insight to intervention, bridging the common gap in coaching between awareness and actionable change. Many frameworks offer compelling narratives or psychological insights, yet stop short of guiding what to do in the moment a client feels stuck, overwhelmed, or tempted to disengage. Fight Theory addresses this gap by linking specific resistance types to tailored coaching responses, enabling real-time tactical adjustment.

Embedded within the model's structure is a system for micro-intervention planning. Each resistance domain, cognitive, emotional, behavioral, motivational, and threshold, invites a corresponding strategy. Drawing on implementation intentions (Gollwitzer, 1999) and emotion regulation research (Gross, 2015), the framework equips coaches to co-create short-form tactics that respond to client-specific signals. A client experiencing cognitive resistance (e.g., looping thoughts or indecision) may benefit from simplification routines or thought disruption cues. Emotional resistance may call for anchor techniques or reframing exercises. Threshold resistance, the most acute form, often requires downshifting, boundary-setting, or intentional recovery before the next push.

What makes this translation distinctive is its feedback-loop orientation. Coaches are encouraged to treat every intervention as a testable experiment, something to evaluate, adapt, and improve. Again, this shifts coaching from merely linear problem-solving to an iterative calibration process. Clients are invited not just to "power through," but to become co-engineers of their own energy and effort patterns.

By operationalizing resistance, Fight Theory makes abstract psychological experiences visible and coachable. In doing so, it empowers both the coach and the client to treat turbulence as terrain, not as a detour but as part of the map. It is not about solving the problem once; it is about building the capacity to respond, recover, and re-engage across the arc of the fight.

## **Summary: Toward an Integrated Model of Human Effort**

Fight Theory presents a systems-based, identity-attuned approach to understanding human effort in the face of psychological resistance. By translating constructs from diverse psychological domains into a cohesive and coachable framework, it repositions failure as misalignment, resistance as feedback, and intensity as a modulated resource. Rather than relying on static traits or abstract principles, Fight Theory offers real-time tools for recalibration, tools grounded in both science and practice.

What distinguishes this model is its structural coherence across the five key domains: resistance type, intensity modulation, identity alignment, goal complexity, and adaptation strategy, each designed to help clients pursue meaningful goals with greater sustainability. For practitioners, this offers not just a new theory, but a new lens: one that recognizes the turbulence of transformation and provides tactical footing along the way.

By integrating theoretical depth with real-world applicability, Fight Theory invites coaches, leaders, and performance professionals to move beyond surface-level solutions. It is not about pushing harder; it is about fighting smarter, applying the right amount of energy, in the right way, at the right time, in service of who the client is becoming.

## From Theory to Tactics: Translating Psychology into Fight Coaching Practice

In this section, we deepen the bridge between theory and application by demonstrating how Fight Theory integrates foundational psychological constructs into a modular coaching framework. While the Fight Readiness Profile (FRP) operationalizes these constructs in assessment form, the broader model is built to support flexible, in-the-moment use. Table 1 illustrates how core theories are embedded not as background references but as functional components, each shaping how coaches understand resistance, modulate intensity, and support identity-aligned growth.

**Table 1: Translating Psychological Theory into Coaching Application**

<b>Foundational Theory</b>	<b>Core Construct</b>	<b>Fight Theory Contribution</b>	<b>Coaching Application</b>
Self-Determination Theory	Autonomy, Competence, Relatedness	Adds resistance diagnostics and calibrates intensity to need frustration	Helps coaches spot when resistance stems from unmet psychological needs
Cognitive Behavioral Theory	Thought Patterns, Cognitive Reframing, Activation	Interprets resistance as a byproduct of internal narratives and misaligned thought-action loops	Helps clients identify maladaptive beliefs, reframe failure, and reengage through action-based strategies
Development Evaluation Theory	Adaptive Learning, Real-Time Feedback	Enables feedback-driven adaptation across identity and effort systems	Supports iterative recalibration and learning within coaching arcs
Job Demands-Resources Model	Burnout, Resource Management	Informs duration load and threshold depletion in goal pursuit	Helps surface when demands outstrip recovery and support systems

<b>Foundational Theory</b>	<b>Core Construct</b>	<b>Fight Theory Contribution</b>	<b>Coaching Application</b>
Grit Theory	Passion + Perseverance	Differentiates sustained grit from strategic intensity bursts	Guides clients to pace energy using redline thresholds
Ego Depletion Theory	Cognitive Resource Limits	Introduces redline monitoring and fight stacking diagnostics	Informs recovery planning and intensity recalibration
Motivational Intensity Theory	Effort as Function of Difficulty + Value	Calibrates effort based on identity congruence and energy readiness	Helps determine when to push, pull back, or redirect energy
Goal-Setting Theory	Specificity and Challenge	Adds sequencing and battlefield prioritization logic	Helps clients decide which goals to focus on and when
Identity Development	Ideal Self, Provisional Selves	Frames identity as both input and outcome of effort modulation	Tracks alignment between goals and evolving self-concept
Emotional Intelligence (Bar-On Model)	Regulation and Awareness	Links EQ markers to resistance volatility and recovery needs	Supports emotional self-monitoring during high-stakes pursuit
Cognitive Load Theory	Working Memory and Overload	Maps overload indicators and stacking risk	Guides simplification and sequence planning
Temporal Motivation Theory	Value × Expectancy ÷ Delay	Adds urgency decay and intensity drop-off logic	Helps clients reengage with long-horizon goals
Self-Regulation Failure	Executive Breakdown	Links resistance domains to coherence loss and decision fatigue	Aids early detection of derailment patterns
Systems Thinking	Feedback Loops and Emergence	Builds modular structure for adaptive coaching	Supports real-time coaching adjustments and strategic redirection
Moxie Theory	Adaptive Motivation in Challenge Contexts	Adds understanding of personal variability in fight intensity	Helps tailor coaching based on personal motivational signatures

<b>Foundational Theory</b>	<b>Core Construct</b>	<b>Fight Theory Contribution</b>	<b>Coaching Application</b>
Implementation Intentions	If-Then Planning, Goal Execution	Builds tactical routines that reduce resistance and improve execution reliability	Guides clients in designing anchor routines and fallback strategies
Achievement Goal Systems Theory	Goal Hierarchies, Subgoals, Means-End Links	Supports means-goal mapping and coherence of goal structures	Enables goal stacking diagnostics and prioritization by purpose
Emotion Regulation Theory	Appraisal, Suppression, Reappraisal	Recognizes unprocessed emotion as resistance signal or regulatory failure	Helps clients metabolize emotional data and develop emotion-literate coping strategies
Interest Theory	Interest as Emotion and Motivator	Connects emotional curiosity to goal engagement and effort activation	Helps identify when lack of progress stems from disinterest or lack of identity salience
Naïve Theories of Intelligence	Beliefs About Effort and Ability	Surfaces limiting beliefs about difficulty and competence	Supports reframing around temporary difficulty vs. fixed ability

To support the transition from theory to application, Table 1 outlines how core psychological frameworks are functionally integrated within Fight Theory’s architecture. Rather than existing as isolated citations, these theories are absorbed into the model’s diagnostic functions, offering coaches actionable levers across diverse client contexts. Each row captures a thread of academic insight and how Fight Theory operationalizes it, bridging the gap between scholarly constructs and everyday coaching practice. The goal is not just to explain behavior, but to equip practitioners to intervene more precisely and adaptively.

### **Fight Theory in Practice: Coaching Cue Cards and Case Applications**

To support real-world use, the five modular domains of Fight Theory are translated into coaching cue cards, micro-guides that help practitioners identify resistance patterns, prompt reflection, and design responsive interventions. Each cue card aligns with one of Fight Theory’s five systems and is grounded in common client language and coachable dynamics.

The activation of each cue card is informed by the Fight Readiness Profile (FRP), a domain-scored tool that reveals which forms of resistance are most salient at the time of assessment. Coaches use the FRP insights to identify which domain, cognitive, emotional, behavioral, motivational, or threshold, is most likely driving the client’s current struggle. The cue card then serves as the tactical lens through which the session unfolds.

These cards are not prescriptive scripts. Rather, they act as real-time coaching instruments, bridging the diagnostic precision of the FRP with the adaptive nuance of human conversation. By translating resistance scores into domain-specific coaching strategies, the cards ensure that interventions are timely, targeted, and identity-aligned.

**1. Resistance Mapping (Resistance Monitoring System)**

Coaching cue: “Where do you feel like you’re getting stuck, even if you’re still moving?”

Client signal: “I just keep putting it off. I’m not sure why.”

Interpretation: May indicate behavioral or emotional resistance disrupting task initiation or follow-through.

Case example: A leader avoids strategic planning not out of laziness, but due to internalized self-doubt (emotional resistance) and perfectionism (cognitive resistance).

**2. Effort Calibration (Intensity Calibration Engine)**

Coaching cue: “Does this feel like a sprint, a marathon, or both right now?”

Client signal: “I feel like I’m gunning it all day and still falling behind.”

Interpretation: Suggests overexertion without sufficient recovery—possible threshold strain or cognitive depletion.

Case example: An entrepreneur underestimates the cumulative load of overlapping launches and requires phased pacing to prevent burnout.

**3. Identity Tracking (Identity Alignment Loop)**

Coaching cue: “Is this goal strengthening who you want to become, or stretching you away from it?”

Client signal: “I’m doing all the right things, but I don’t feel like myself anymore.”

Interpretation: May indicate identity dissonance or stress on a provisional self that no longer fits.

Case example: A mid-career professional realizes her leadership role was built on external expectations, not internal alignment, prompting a narrative reset.

**4. Goal Load Awareness (Fight Stacking Map)**

Coaching cue: “If your life were a training circuit, which stations are overloading you?”

Client signal: “Everything feels important, and nothing is getting done well.”

Interpretation: Reflects stacked resistance across domains, often caused by diffuse goals competing for limited attention.

Case example: A coachee managing parenting, team leadership, and community service simultaneously identifies the need to prioritize identity-salient goals to reduce overload.

**5. Feedback-Driven Adaptation (Feedback-Driven Adaptation Cycle)**

Coaching cue: “What is this frustration trying to tell you?”

Client signal: “I’m constantly second-guessing myself lately.”

Interpretation: Emotional signals are not being metabolized, leading to internal misalignment and impaired self-trust.

Case example: A rising executive reframes imposter syndrome as an emotional cue to clarify values, seek mentorship, and reduce internalized pressure.

These cue cards are not prescriptive scripts, they are strategic tools designed to meet clients where they are. By translating complex theory into real conversational guidance, they

support honest, adaptive, and precisely targeted coaching. Fight Theory lives not only in assessment or reflection, but in these dynamic moments of intervention, where resistance becomes readable, intensity becomes coachable, and identity becomes actionable.

### **Case Study: Evie's Fight – Coaching Through Resistance and Identity Realignment**

To illustrate the applied use of Fight Theory, we introduce Evie, a purpose-driven entrepreneur navigating stacked resistance while trying to scale her business. Her initial FRP reflected high identity alignment and intensity, but also revealed extreme cognitive and emotional resistance, overthinking, emotional flooding, and avoidance cycles were all at peak levels. Despite scoring high on effort indicators, her threshold and behavioral domains flagged burnout warning signs.

Across four coaching sessions, Evie revealed that her struggle was not rooted in laziness or lack of drive. Instead, she was operating without internal permission to pause, recalibrate, or ask for help. Her competition strength, while once fueling excellence, had become a pressure trap. She said, "I live off competition," and described the stress of proving herself in multiple roles, adding, "I don't have anything else to give."

In Session 2, she shifted from a business-centric goal to an identity-aligned one: initiating a family conversation about what "balance" should really look like. This moment captured one of Fight Theory's critical functions, the reframing of resistance as data. Her procrastination was not a flaw; it was feedback. Her emotional resistance masked a deeper fear: "What if I let everyone down?" When she asked instead, "What do they actually need from me?" she found clarity, and with it, energy.

Session 3 centered on redefining consistency. Evie believed she was failing because she was not "consistent," yet no clear goal structure or tracking method existed. Every deviation became self-labeled failure. By renaming setbacks as "data," she began to shift from emotional self-judgment to strategic learning. This aligns with Fight Theory's Feedback Integration domain: emotion is metabolized into a signal, not shame.

In her final session, we explored her fear of visibility in marketing, rooted in social comparison and perfectionism. She adopted a new mantra: *El camino de Dios para mí*—God's path for me. This served as an identity anchor and helped her reorient intensity toward aligned action. With her values affirmed, she stepped into visibility with less fear and more faith.

Through Evie's journey, Fight Theory became more than a model; it became a mirror, a map, and a set of gloves for the ring. Her resistance was not the enemy. It was the message.

Fight Theory gave her a way to decode that message and respond with intelligent, identity-aligned intensity.

### **Empirical Bridge**

As discussed earlier, the Fight Readiness Profile (FRP) was not created to impress; it was created because I needed a compass for the clients I serve. In session after session with high-purpose leaders, I saw the same pattern: they were not falling short exclusively because of a lack of grit, clarity, or drive. They were falling short because no one had ever helped

them map the fight. The FRP emerged as a way to hold that map, something coaches and clients could use together to understand not just where resistance was showing up, but why, and what to do about it. It became a way to take something as abstract as internal struggle and translate it into a structured conversation about pacing, identity, and energy.

It is not a scorecard. It does not sort people into categories or spit out a number that defines who they are. Instead, it offers a moment of pause, an invitation to notice. Where am I burning too hot? Where am I pulling back when I actually have more to give? What part of me is evolving, and what part is resisting that evolution? The FRP is simply a lens, sharpened by theory but guided by story. Following best practices for psychometric design (DeVellis, 2017), the FRP development process will include item refinement, construct validation, and internal consistency testing as a foundation for future use. The scale structure and validation methodology are grounded in contemporary psychometric theory (Furr, 2022), ensuring construct clarity, reliability, and dimensional relevance for coaching applications. Aligned with the principles of developmental evaluation (Patton, 2010), Fight Theory supports adaptive coaching responses, treating client feedback not as noise but as a system signal for recalibration. My hope is that, as it continues to evolve and finds its way into the hands of more practitioners, it remains exactly that: a way to see the fight more clearly, so that leaders can meet it more wisely, and walk through it more whole.

## **Future Research**

Fight Theory is positioned as a next-generation goal-setting framework that prioritizes resistance diagnostics, identity alignment, and strategic intensity calibration. To test its effectiveness in the field, a mixed-methods validation study is currently in development. This study will explore the real-world utility of the Fight Readiness Profile (FRP) in helping individuals pursue meaningful, high-resistance goals over time.

The proposed validation pathway begins with a mixed-methods field study designed to compare outcomes between individuals who use the FRP-based goal-setting framework and those who engage in traditional goal-setting approaches. Quantitative measures will assess shifts in clarity, confidence, perceived resistance, and motivational sustainability over a defined pursuit period. Qualitative interviews will add depth, capturing how individuals interpret resistance patterns, recalibrate their efforts, and evolve their self-concepts during high-stakes pursuits. By integrating both data streams, the study will explore not only whether Fight Theory works, but also how it works and for whom.

This empirical pathway will also investigate the internal structure and reliability of FRP domains, test the relationship between resistance profiles and outcome variability, and assess the role of intensity modulation in navigating complex goal environments. Longitudinal follow-ups may enable further exploration of identity evolution, burnout mitigation, and sustained goal traction across various life domains. Future phases may examine how FRP-informed coaching compares to existing evidence-based coaching models in terms of client engagement, behavioral persistence, and developmental outcomes.

Ultimately, this research agenda aims to move Fight Theory beyond theoretical contributions toward practical, validated applications, delivering a framework that supports transformation not only in principle but also in practice.

## Conclusion

Fight Theory emerges as a next-generation framework for understanding and enhancing goal pursuit in the face of resistance, making meaningful contributions to motivation science, coaching psychology, and leadership development. Rather than relying on grit, discipline, or willpower alone, the theory reframes progress as a dynamic negotiation between identity, resistance, and effort. These interactions are shaped in real-time by psychological load, emotional calibration, and the relevance of one's goal to their evolving self.

At its core, Fight Theory resolves a persistent fragmentation in coaching and psychological literature: the artificial division between motivation, emotion, identity development, and performance execution. By integrating these domains within a recursive, systems-based architecture, the model enables coaches to treat personal resistance not as a dysfunction, but as real-time developmental data.

Its five interdependent systems, the Resistance Monitoring System, Intensity Calibration Engine, Identity Alignment Loop, Fight Stacking Map, and Feedback-Driven Adaptation Cycle, translate abstract constructs into actionable strategy. Together, they equip practitioners with a tactical framework to assess readiness, navigate internal barriers, and guide identity-aligned growth in high-stakes or high-purpose environments.

The Fight Readiness Profile (FRP) is central to its application, a psychometric tool designed to measure five resistance domains while offering insight into effort sustainability and identity congruence. For coaching practitioners, the FRP becomes a diagnostic compass—helping to identify redline thresholds, surface hidden resistance, and recalibrate action with intention and clarity.

For coaches, consulting psychologists, and performance practitioners, Fight Theory offers more than a set of constructs; it provides a practical map for adaptive transformation. It helps clients navigate the complexity of human striving with strategic insight, equipping them to choose fights that matter, manage intensity without burnout, and align their actions with who they are becoming.

Ultimately, Fight Theory is not only about achieving more; it is about becoming more. Through the resistance we interpret, the intensity we calibrate, and the self we refine in the process, Fight Theory calls clients and coaches alike to pursue transformation with purpose, precision, and power—fighting smarter, not harder, in service of meaningful growth.

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## Statement on Use of Generative AI Tools

Portions of this manuscript were developed with the assistance of generative tools (ChatGPT, OpenAI, 2024) to support the organization and refinement of language during the drafting process. These tools were used under the direct guidance of the author, primarily to clarify structure, enhance flow, and streamline transitions. All core theoretical concepts, citations, interpretations, and original contributions were conceived, authored, and verified by the human author.