

Academic Paper

# Towards building theory on coachee readiness

Salomé van Coller-Peter  (University of Stellenbosch Business School, South Africa)  
Dina Johanna Adriana de Vries  (University of Stellenbosch Business School)

## Abstract

Lack of coachee readiness impacts negatively on the effectiveness of coaching. Despite the general awareness of the phenomena that influence coachee readiness, this concept needs better description in the coaching literature. This article reports on a Critical Interpretive Synthesis (CIS) study of the factors that influence coachee readiness and consider ways to overcome this. This article seeks to contribute to the formulation of a theory on the concept of coachee readiness by developing a theoretical framework with the aim of guiding stakeholders at the pre-contemplation, contemplation, and preparation phases of a coaching assignment.

## Keywords

behavioural change process, coachee readiness, coachee commitment to change, Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

## Article history

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## 1. Background

Evidence exists that the effectiveness of coaching can be improved if certain conditions prevail during the coaching relationship (Grover & Furnham, 2016; Jones, Woods & Guillaume, 2015; Theeboom, Beersma & Van Viaven, 2014). The level of coachee commitment and, in particular, the coachee's readiness to be coached, appear to be critical determinants of successful coaching initiatives (Grover & Furnham, 2016). Various studies indicate that, if not addressed, a lack of coachee readiness has an impact on the effectiveness of coaching (Grover & Furnham, 2016; Theeboom et al., 2014). While a thorough understanding of the factors that influence coachee readiness appears to be key for the success of coaching, it appears that this topic has not yet been fully explored and is only partially understood (Grover & Furnham, 2016; Theeboom et al., 2014).<sup>1</sup>

An examination of the relationship of the various concepts that affect coachee readiness will, therefore, contribute to the theory on coachee readiness. Such a theoretical foundation could assist in developing a theoretical framework to assist coaches to identify and interpret coachee readiness

and could further assist in creating some understanding of the process required to convert a lack of coachee readiness into readiness for coaching.

Various studies refer to coachee readiness as a significant determinant of coaching success (Grant, 2014; Grover & Furnham, 2016). The findings of various recent studies indicate a need for further research on the topic (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Carter, Blackman, Hicks, Williams & Hay, 2017; Grover & Furnham, 2016). The construct of coachee readiness has, to date, not been fully operationalised and has not been described well, nor has it been measured. This study attempts to build a theoretical foundation to assist in operationalising the construct of coachee readiness.

To this end, the following two research objectives were formulated:

- To provide a theoretical basis for the construct of coachee readiness
- To develop a theoretical framework to guide coaches on how to assess and enhance coachee readiness at the start of a new coachee relationship

The theoretical foundation provided in this study could serve as a guide for coaches to assess coachee readiness at the commencement of a coaching assignment. The theory and framework provide a starting point to conceptualise coachee readiness and how to overcome the lack thereof. Table 1.1 provides an overview of the topics that are covered in this research assignment.

**Table 1.1: Layout of article**

Section	Theme
Section 2	Research method
Section 3	Factors that enhance and inhibit coachee readiness
Section 4	Building motivation towards change
Section 5	Towards a coachee readiness framework
Section 6	Summary, findings, recommendations and limitation

## 2. Research Method

Critical Interpretive Synthesis (CIS) was used as a research method as it is well suited for research where the subject emanates from a broad and complex field of study that is not well developed (Dixon-Woods, Cavers, Agarwal, Annandale, Arthur, Harvey and Sutton, 2006). The CIS method processes data through induction and interpretation (Flemming, 2009) and supports the synthesis of a large and diverse body of literature to develop descriptive clarity. It allows for the emergence of the meaning of key concepts from an array of disciplines (Dixon-Woods, et al., 2006). The recurring themes allow for the development of some critique and build up toward synthesised argument.

The study considered different forms of evidence to build on the theory of coachee readiness. In interpretive synthesis, the process of analysis determines the concepts rather than the concepts being predetermined at the start of the study, as is the case with an aggregate review (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006). The indicators of coachee readiness were, therefore, allowed to emerge from the literature rather than having been predetermined. The benefit of such an approach is that it enables the various viewpoints to influence each other. The study examined literature on coaching, organisational change management, behavioural sciences, and clinical psychology. The study further made use of data sources that are in the public domain or that are accessible by means of university subscription.

Firstly, a framework of factors that impact on coachee readiness was compiled with suggestions on how to overcome these obstacles. In doing so, a process of change emerged. This is discussed under point 3. It became apparent that the coachee should possess certain insights for the process of change to advance. Motivational theories that encourage coachee commitment towards change

were considered, and the process of change itself was thoroughly explored to inform the research further under point 4. After the inclusion of each new theory, its influence on the body of knowledge was considered. The respective theories allowed for certain concepts to emerge from different disciplines, and these gradually merged to support and influence the formulation of a theoretical framework under point 5. Towards the end of the study, the variables responsible for coachee ambivalence became evident and the requisite solutions for overcoming the ambivalence became apparent. Combined, these insights formed a more cohesive and integrated body of knowledge on coachee readiness.

The process that was followed to gather data from different search engines is set out below:

1. Commenced with the library search engine SUNSearch (multi-database search)
2. Followed by Google Scholar (articles linked with SUNSearch or academic databases)

Keyword search:

1. Searched combination of theory and authors. Searched strategy theory as title on SUNSearch
2. Searched theory only. Searched strategy theory as title on SUNSearch or on Google Scholar theory between inverted commas

Keywords searched:

- Self-determination theory (Markland & Vansteenkiste)
- The theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991)
- Efficacy (Bandura)
- Motivational interviewing (Miller & Rollnick)
- Transtheoretical model of behavioural change (Prochaska & Velicer)

Breakdown of article sources:

- SUNSearch – 18 articles
- Google Scholar linked to SUNSearch and academic databases – 12 articles
- Google Scholar other sources – 14 articles (Scientific Research, Research Gate, Frontiers in Human Neuroscience, Econstor, PLOS ONE, Citeseer, Intellectica, Books, Academia, MDPI, Jonathan Passmore, Changes, RADAR Institution Repository)

### 3. Factors that enhance and inhibit coachee readiness

The first objective of the study was to build a theory on coachee readiness by considering the factors that enhance or inhibit coachee readiness. An understanding of these factors could potentially enable coaches to deploy strategies that would enhance coachee readiness at the outset of a coaching assignment (Carter et al., 2017; Kretzschmar, 2010).

The theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) is used as a tutorial map to introduce individual factors that impact on coachee readiness and to provide context to the concept. The purpose of the theory is to assist in predicting the intention of an individual. The intention pre-empts the adoption of a specific behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). The assumption is made that coachee readiness implies an intention for self-improvement. Understanding the elements that influence the formation of such an intent could, therefore, contribute to understanding coachee readiness, as the two concepts are interrelated.

Figure 3.1: Theory of planned behaviour (Source: Ajzen, 1991)

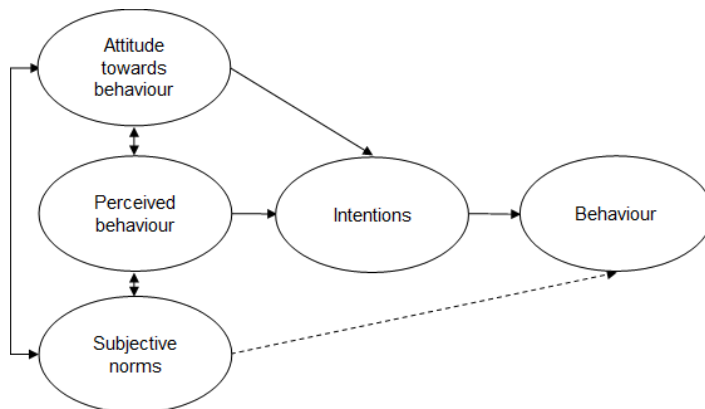
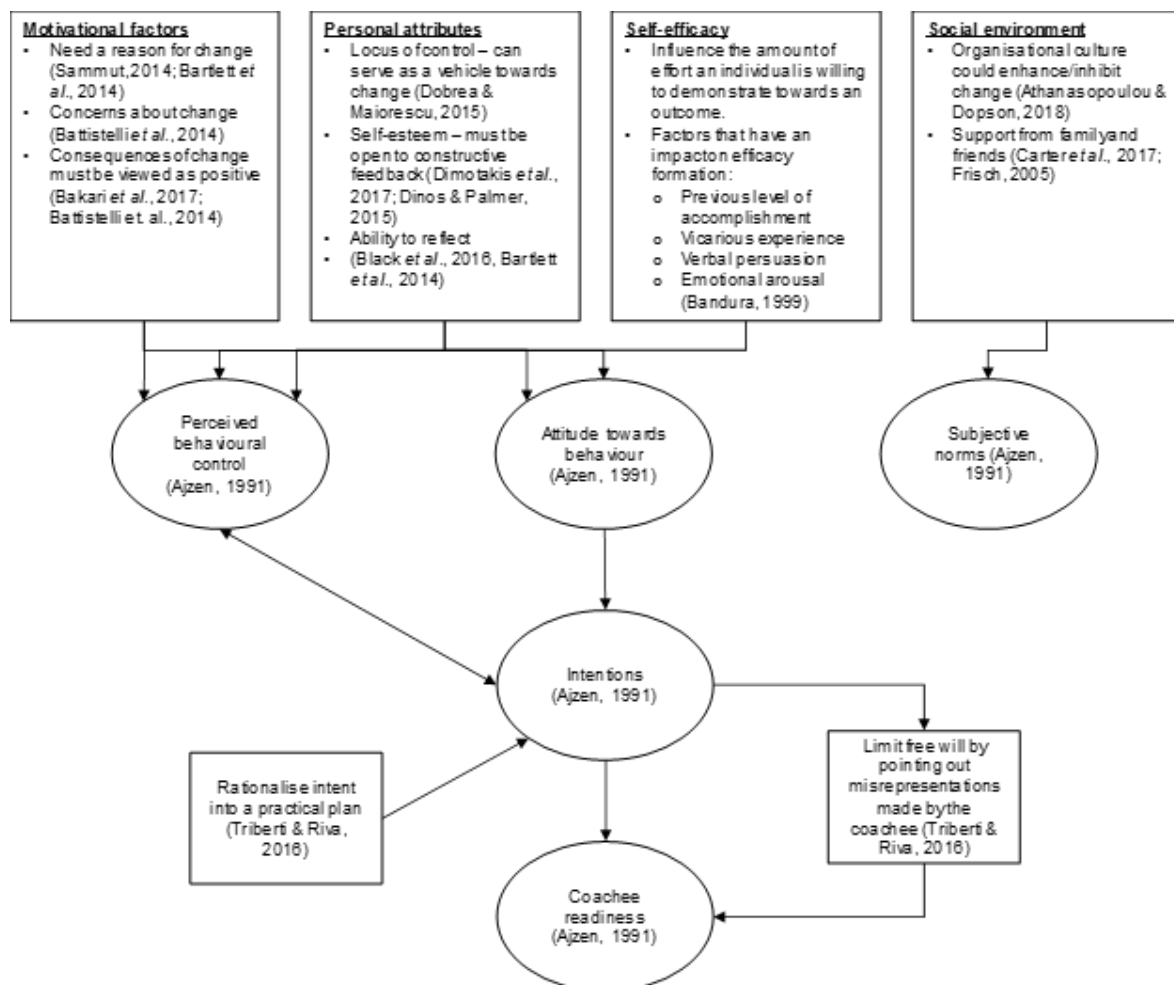


Figure 3.2: Conceptual framework of indicators that enhance and inhibit coachee readiness for change



According to the theory, intention is made up of three independent components including: attitude towards behaviour; perception of control; and subjective norms. An attitude towards a behaviour refers to an individual's assessment of the behaviour and whether the individual concerned views the behaviour as having positive or negative consequences (Ajzen, 1991). Perception of control refers to an individual's assessment of their ability to perform the behaviour, and it assumes that past experiences and the perception of potential obstacles form part of this assessment of ability (Ajzen, 1991). Lastly, subjective norms refer to the perceived social influences or feelings of moral

obligation to perform a specific behaviour or not to do so. Subjective norms influence behaviour, although not as much as an attitude or behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the independent components that influence intentions according to the theory of planned behaviour.

The theory of planned behaviour provides a valuable context for considering the factors that influence coachee readiness and are used as a framework to examine the most significant determinants of coachee readiness. A schematic overview of the indicators that enhance and inhibit coachee readiness is provided in Figure 3.2.

Various attributes could inform the coachee's attitude towards change. A brief overview of the most important indicators identified in the literature that impact coachee readiness is presented below. Four categories were identified. These are motivational factors, personal characteristics, self-efficacy, and the social environment.

### **3.1 Motivational factors**

The success of coaching resides with a decision by the coachee for self-improvement (Bartlett, Boylan & Hale, 2014). Commitment to change relates to the act of taking responsibility for change (Kretzschmar, 2010) and doing so requires a convincing reason to change and serves as a vehicle for change (Sammut, 2014).

For the coachee, past experiences of unsuccessful change create cynicism towards a commitment to future attempts (Wanous, Reichers & Austin, 2000). The perceived threat of change and the perception of one's ability to adapt to the change could create apprehension towards change (Bakari, Hunjra & Niazi, 2017; Battistelli, Montani, Odoardi, Vandenberghe & Picci, 2014, p. 2010). An adequate level of self-esteem is required for the coachee to be open to feedback and self-reflection. Individuals with low self-esteem employ dysfunctional and destructive thinking patterns as a default reaction and, if not resolved, these could sabotage the coaching process (Dimotakis, Mitchell & Maurer, 2017; Dinos & Palmer, 2015). The ability of an individual to reflect is a basic requirement for coaching to succeed (Black, Soto & Spurlin, 2016). The intent of coaching is for the coachee to reach a point where self-reflection creates space for self-assessment and correction, to the extent that the coach becomes obsolete (Bartlett, Boylan & Hale, 2014).

#### **3.1.1 Self-efficacy**

An individual's assessment of their own efficacy towards goal-directed behaviour will influence their openness, the amount of effort they expend, and the extent of their persistence when they are faced with obstacles (Grant, 2014). Low levels of efficacy could lead to an individual's resistance to accepting constructive feedback (Cinar & Schou, 2014). Self-efficacy is affected by the coachee and their particular situational elements and can be improved upon (Cinar & Schou, 2014).

#### **3.1.2 Social environment**

Various studies suggest that a lack of support by the coachee's organisation is a potential barrier to the success of the coaching process (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Grover & Furnham, 2016; MacKie, 2015). Carter et al. (2017) suggest that social support from friends and family may be more important and have a more significant impact on the effectiveness of coaching than organisational backing has. Personal or familial concerns or instability could severely affect the outcome of coaching as the coachee might have more pressing needs in terms of family responsibilities or other external circumstances that require their attention (Frisch, 2005).

## 3.2 Converting intention into behaviour

As previously discussed, intentions interrelate closely with motivation, and these depend largely on an individual's personality, social circumstances, and self-belief factors. These factors serve as a prediction model for future behaviour (Triberti & Riva, 2016). Individuals form abstract intentions, and over time these intentions are refined through a process of alignment with incoming sensory information from the external environment (Brocas & Carrillo, 2018). An individual scans and interprets the external environment to determine whether there is sufficient alignment between the counterfactual world and the real world to realise their own intention. This allows for the alignment between the abstract intention and the thinkable and perceivable world (Palmer, 2020). Alignment between the intention and the external world creates the opportunity for action and assists the individual in understanding how the intention can progressively be transformed into action. The progressive transformation then becomes increasingly practical. This process, whereby an individual can match an intention in the real world and envisage the enactment thereof, is referred to as the intentional cascade (Triberti & Riva, 2016).

The inconsistency that individuals might face in their attempts to match their abstract intentions in the real world is referred to as free energy (Triberti & Riva, 2016). The brain continuously formulates prediction models based on the sensory inputs received from the environment to create scenarios of the future body in the external world (Chambon, Sidarus & Haggard, 2014). The purpose of creating these scenarios is to preserve the self by mitigating unexpected events in the future and minimising the level of free energy (Triberti & Riva, 2016). The fundamental function of the brain is to reduce inconsistency between predictions about the world and the world as perceived.

It is important to note that the mental representations of our intentions do not necessarily accurately represent the state of the external world but rather the state of our own engagement in the world (Laurent, 2003). How an intention converts into action is a progressive process whereby the individual transforms the abstract intention gradually into a practical guide for action by generating an intentional cascade. At every level of the intentional hierarchy, intentions are cognitively evaluated for authorisation to continue down the cascade until the enacting and monitoring of the behaviour occur (Triberti & Riva, 2016).

Guiding the coachee through the process of intentional cascading is important as this helps the coachee to crystallise the process of enacting the intention in the world. The gradual process of rationalising the intent into a practical plan and practical action is key (Triberti & Riva, 2016). The coach helps the coachee to limit free-will energy by considering the possible conflict between the intention and the real world as perceived by the coachee. The coach could be instrumental in assisting the coachee in matching their intentions with opportunities in the actual world. The conversion process is illustrated in Figure 3.2.

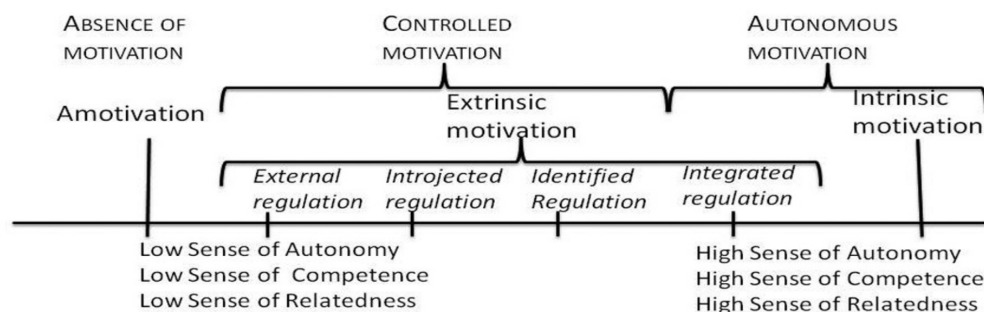
## 4. Building motivation towards change

An understanding of the factors that influence coachee readiness enables the coach to facilitate a coachee's motivation towards change. The two theories of change, the self-determination theory and motivational interviewing, provide coaches with a theoretical perspective with which to address coachee readiness barriers and to expand the theory on coachee readiness. The synergies which exist between motivational interviewing and self-determination theory will be explored further.

The theory of self-determination states that individuals experience high levels of motivation when sufficient levels of competence to perform a specific behaviour are present, when they experience relatedness with others in performing the behaviour, and when they possess the autonomy to decide on whether and how to perform the behaviour (Ryan & Deci, 2007).



**Figure 4.1: The motivation continuum (Visser, 2010. p. 10)**



In Figure 4.1, Visser (2010), based on Ryan and Deci (2000), illustrates that autonomous motivation – on the right hand of this continuum – represents a state where a person’s needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are cared for. Intrinsic motivation, at its highest, is defined by Ryan and Deci (2000) as “the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfaction rather than for some separable consequence. When intrinsically motivated, a person is moved to act for the fun or challenge entailed rather than because of external products, pressures, or rewards” (p. 56). This signifies that all three factors which facilitate high motivation, namely a sense of autonomy, competence and relatedness, are well addressed. How do we get there, though? Visser goes on to provide some actions which could foster all three, which the researchers interpret as follows:

A sense of autonomy can be fostered by allowing a choice of approach: encouraging creativity; providing a safe space within which to try out own ideas; and provision of considerate and meaningful feedback. Relatedness can be enhanced through a caring approach: consideration for varying perceptions; and recognition of efforts and achievements. A sense of competence can be increased by: providing clear expectations and realistic challenges; followed by giving constructive feedback.

The theory of motivational interviewing provides an application for creating the elements of competence, relatedness, and autonomy as described by self-determination theory, thereby creating suitable conditions for building motivation (Markland & Vansteenkiste, 2007). These approaches independently and collectively assist in forming motivation and intention towards change (Markland, Ryan, Tobin & Rollnick, 2005).

Motivational interviewing consists of five overarching principles including expressing empathy, developing discrepancy, avoiding arguments, rolling with resistance, and supporting self-efficacy. These principles will briefly be explained. Expressing empathy in the context of motivational interviewing is a process of reflective listening where the purpose is to comprehend the emotions and perceptions of the individual without any judgement or assumption (Miller & Rollnick, 1991). It involves showing respect and openness towards the coachee and a sincere intention to understand the coachee's experience. Developing discrepancy involves the process of magnifying the discrepancy between the status quo and the coachee's perceived goal. The approach deals with ambivalence as part of the change process. It sees indecisiveness as inherent to the internal conflict and, by dealing with it, allows a better understanding of the complexity of the individual's dilemma (Miller & Rollnick, 1991).

Attempting to convince the coachee to change usually results in parties taking opposing views to convince each other. Such an approach has the potential to induce defensiveness and resistance towards change in the coachee and should be avoided at all costs (Miller & Rollnick, 1991). Rolling with resistance involves an approach of reflective listening where “what is said” by the coachee is slightly reframed and offered back to the coachee to create new insights that will move the individual towards change (Miller & Rollnick, 1991). The approach invites reframing and the option of gaining new perspectives (Harakas, 2013). Believing in the possibility of change is a critical

motivator and is often at the heart of change (Miller & Rollnick, 1991). Building the coachee's self-confidence in their own ability to make the required change is vital. Instilling hope and a demonstration of belief in the ability of the coachee to change will support the formation of self-efficacy.

Of particular importance when dealing with coachee readiness is the establishment of trust in the coaching relationship since this enables coachee commitment (Baron, Morin, & Morin, 2011; Grover & Furnham, 2016; Rekalde, Landeta & Albizu, 2015). Trust encourages motivation thereby promoting the development of change readiness (Grover & Furnham, 2016). The principles of motivational interviewing and self-determination advocate the establishment of a trusting relationship (Markland & Vansteenkiste, 2007).

The need for relatedness is satisfied by a coach expressing empathy (Patrick & Williams, 2012). If genuine interest and understanding are demonstrated, the coachee will feel personally accepted and valued (Markland & Vansteenkiste, 2007). Providing feedback to the coachee is regarded as similarly important as it not only fosters trust but also enables the coachee to identify patterns in their own behaviour and this assists in mobilising efforts to change (Markland & Vansteenkiste, 2007). Machin (2010) states that the ability of a coach to display empathy and the possession of attentive listening skills are valuable behavioural characteristics for the building of trust. By adopting a non-judgemental attitude and keeping the individual in high regard, the approach of motivational interviewing reinforces the coachee's level of competence (Markland et al., 2005). This is often demonstrated by providing facts and information while maintaining a neutral state, by assisting clients to have realistic expectations, by inspiring clients to set their own appropriate goals, by affirming their attempts, and by acknowledging the progress that has been made (Markland & Vansteenkiste, 2007).

Motivational interviewing encourages autonomy. This is done by recognising the individual's views, by avoiding a confrontational approach, by raising awareness of discrepancies in the coachee's present self and ideal future self, by considering behavioural options with the individual, and by providing the coachee with the freedom to choose a preferred way forward (Markland & Vansteenkiste, 2007). The need for autonomy required in self-determination theory is therefore supported by motivational interviewing (Markland et al., 2005).

The two theories share the principle that individuals have an instinctive capacity for self-direction and a propensity for personal growth towards integration and cohesion (Patrick & Williams, 2012). The second objective of this study is to encourage coachee readiness by developing a theoretical framework that will provide coaches with an informed approach on the issue of coachee readiness. A clear understanding of the factors that influence coachee readiness provides the foundation for approaches to motivate change. Two theories of change, self-determination theory and motivational interviewing, were considered to provide coaches with a theoretical perspective to address coachee readiness barriers and to expand the theory on coachee readiness.

## 5. Towards a coachee readiness framework

Theeboom, Van Vianen and Beersma (2017) and Passmore (2011) recommended the trans-theoretical model of behavioural change as a framework to incorporate the respective theories to determine a coachee's progress towards change readiness. The authors indicate that the model could offer a useful structure for coaching, specifically in terms of readiness for change. Different coaching interventions might be more effective and relevant at different intervals during the change process (Theeboom et al. 2017). Hackman and Wageman cited in Theeboom et al., (2017) explain that the effectiveness of coaching can be improved by using the right approach at the right time in the change process. The first three stages of this process has been used to create a theoretical



framework for coachee readiness and summarized in Table 5.1. The stages will consequently be discussed in greater detail.

**Table 5.1: Framework to address coachee readiness**

Pre-contemplation stage	Contemplation stage	Preparation stage
<b>Purpose</b>		
To move coachee towards having some intention to change (Theeboom et al., 2017)	To overcome ambivalence in favour of change and strengthen self-efficacy (Miller & Rollnick, 1991)	Cementing the intention into concrete commitment towards a change (Theeboom et al., 2017)
<b>Coachee characteristics</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low self-efficacy levels towards change (Prochaska &amp; Velicer, 1997)</li> <li>• Avoids re-evaluating themselves (Prochaska &amp; DiClemente, 2005)</li> <li>• Limited insight to the consequences of not changing (Theeboom et al., 2017)</li> <li>• Avoids information about what change will involve (Theeboom et al., 2017)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shows intention to change in the future (Miller &amp; Rollnick, 1991)</li> <li>• High ambivalence, and/or low self-efficacy (Miller &amp; Rollnick, 1991)</li> <li>• Has some information on benefits and disadvantages (Prochaska &amp; Velicer, 1997)</li> <li>• Shows openness to new information (Prochaska &amp; DiClemente, 2005)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The coachee intends taking action soon (Prochaska &amp; Velicer, 1997)</li> <li>• Change in coachee is focused on action and no longer on the possibility of change (Prochaska &amp; DiClemente, 2005)</li> <li>• Might already be involved in self-regulating behaviour (Theeboom et al., 2017)</li> </ul>
<b>Coaching guidelines</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create awareness of the ambivalence experienced (Theeboom et al., 2017)</li> <li>• Avoid arguments (Miller &amp; Rollnick, 1991)</li> <li>• Roll with resistance (Miller &amp; Rollnick, 1991)</li> <li>• Show empathy (Miller &amp; Rollnick, 1991)</li> <li>• Provide information (Miller &amp; Rollnick, 1991)</li> <li>• Recognise and give full autonomy to the coachee (Markland &amp; Vansteenkiste, 2007)</li> <li>• Provide support and encouragement (Markland &amp; Vansteenkiste, 2007)</li> <li>• Affirm the coachee (Cinar &amp; Schou, 2014)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider benefits and disadvantages of change (Miller &amp; Rollnick, 1991)</li> <li>• Get clarity on needs and values (Miller &amp; Rollnick, 1991)</li> <li>• Link change to intrinsic goals (Prochaska &amp; DiClemente, 2005)</li> <li>• Create discrepancy between values and status quo (Miller &amp; Rollnick, 1991)</li> <li>• Detangle and remove barriers to change (Passmore, 2007)</li> <li>• Elicit self-talk in favour of change (Passmore, 2011)</li> <li>• Recognise autonomy of coachee (Markland &amp; Vansteenkiste, 2007)</li> <li>• Display a non-judgmental approach (Markland &amp; Vansteenkiste, 2007)</li> <li>• Draw on personal mastery achieved in the past to build efficacy (Bandura, 1999)</li> <li>• Build generalised skills (Bandura, 1999)</li> <li>• Consider role models in coachee's social context (Bandura, 1999)</li> <li>• Use affirmation of the coachee and their progress (Bandura, 1999)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage verbalising the vision of a future life (Theeboom et al., 2017)</li> <li>• Guide coachee in developing goals and action plans (Prochaska &amp; DiClemente, 2005)</li> <li>• Verbalise intrinsic goals and align with action plan (Theeboom et al., 2017)</li> <li>• Assist coachee in identifying and addressing any misrepresentations in the plan (Triberti &amp; Riva, 2016)</li> <li>• Explore confidence level to realise action plan (Bandura, 1999)</li> <li>• Apply learnings from past failed attempt (Prochaska &amp; DiClemente, 2005)</li> </ul>
<b>Outcomes to be obtained</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Openness to assess themselves and their environment (Theeboom et al., 2017)</li> <li>• Taking ownership of the need to change (Prochaska &amp; DiClemente, 2005)</li> <li>• Shows concern with the status quo and shows signs of an intention to change (Prochaska &amp; DiClemente, 2005)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overcome ambivalence (Miller &amp; Rollnick, 1991)</li> <li>• Confidence in their own ability to accomplish the required change (Theeboom et al., 2017)</li> <li>• Readiness to develop goals that are self-concordant and intrinsically motivated (Theeboom et al., 2017)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clear sense of commitment towards change (Prochaska &amp; DiClemente, 2005)</li> <li>• A clear plan of action towards change (Theeboom et al., 2017)</li> </ul>

## 5.1 The pre-contemplation stage: overcoming resistance to change

The characteristics of a coachee in this stage are those of someone oblivious to change (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997). During this stage coachees will deliberately avoid any information about the need for change (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997). They are not open to re-evaluating themselves and do not wish to spend time or energy in doing so (Prochaska & DiClemente, 2005). They show little emotional concern for their lack of change and may not adequately process

information regarding their problem behaviour (Prochaska & DiClemente, 2005). Overall, the individual appears to be unmotivated towards change (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997).

The purpose of the coach during this first stage is to move the coachee towards motivation to change (Theeboom et al., 2017). This entails creating a sense of safe and open communication for the coachee to reflect and re-evaluate their situation, to acknowledge the need for change, and also to show a willingness to take ownership of change (Theeboom et al., 2017). The primary intention is to encourage the coachee to acknowledge the need for change (Miller & Rollnick, 1991).

It is important to provide the coachee with the opportunity to discuss their current circumstances. This will provide insight into the factors responsible for coachee resistance and will assist the coach in choosing the most appropriate strategy to overcome resistance (Miller & Rollnick, 1991).

It is vital not to confront the coachee directly when resistance is displayed (Miller & Rollnick, 1991). An empathetic and non-judgemental coach fosters a sense of freedom for the individual to consider change (Miller & Rollnick, 1991). Incisive questions that prompt the coachee to contemplate their stance on their values and goals help to create awareness (Theeboom et al., 2017). A coachee could gain a more informed perspective on their current circumstances if a coach carefully chooses what to reflect to the coachee, what to highlight, and what to ignore (Miller & Rollnick, 1991). In instances where the coachee does not have sufficient information regarding their situation, it is the duty of the coach to provide this information in a manner that will not be perceived as coercive (Miller & Rollnick, 1991). The purpose of doing so is for the coachee to be in possession of all the facts to allow them to make better sense of their circumstances. This is more realistic when inside coaches are used (coaches who are familiar with the context within which the coachee operates). It may not be possible or even useful when an outside coach is used.

This presents the coach and coachee with the opportunity to link a bigger purpose to the proposed change and assists the coachee in visualising 'a better future' that could potentially result from the change. These are important processes which enable the coachee to gain awareness and motivation for change (Pradhan & Pradhan, 2015). Under circumstances of 'involuntary' coaching where a third party nominates the coachee, this process might be helpful to the coachee to obtain a clearer comprehension of their circumstances (Theeboom et al., 2017).

The importance of acknowledging the freedom of the individual is emphasised by Miller and Rollnick (1991). They caution that, in some instances, the coachee might choose not to change, irrespective of the consequences of such a decision. It is important for the coach to recognise and respect the right of the coachee to make their own decision.

## **5.2 The contemplation stage**

A person in the contemplation stage shows an intention to change in the near future and is relatively open to new information (Miller & Rollnick, 1991). They are more informed about the benefits and disadvantages of change with somewhat more emphasis on the disadvantages. This creates levels of ambivalence which frequently result in inaction (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997). For change to occur, the coachee must alter the way they think and feel, and must re-consider what they value (Prochaska & DiClemente, 2005).

The contemplation stage aims to assist the coachee to overcome ambivalence and to build sufficient levels of self-efficacy to enable the change (Miller & Rollnick, 1991). Ambivalence can be described as having mixed feelings on a particular matter. The stage entails the careful consideration of benefits opposed to the concerns associated with the change. This process includes a reassessment of the self and the environment (Theeboom et al. 2017).

To enable the process this process it may be wise for the coach to

- Acknowledge the ambivalence being experienced by the coachee and emphasise that this is a natural and necessary process which will lead to a clear awareness of the dilemma and complexity of the situation (Passmore, 2007). In the process, the coach will gain insight into what is impeding the coachee.
- Carefully assume that there are discrepancies between the coachee's current behaviour and their values and goals and to identify the discrepancies (Passmore, 2007). Highlighting the discrepancies between values and goals creates discontent with the status quo and might prompt momentum towards change.
- Realise and accept that development of sufficient levels of self-efficacy will be required for the coachee to embark on the change (Passmore, 2007).

The concepts explained above are closely associated as the coachee's readiness depends on their perception that change is intrinsically important and their awareness that they require sufficient confidence to make the change (Passmore, 2007). By exploring the coachee's ambivalence, the coach could gain a better understanding of which of the three underlying principles are responsible for the coachee remaining in a state of ambivalence (Passmore, 2007).

Such awareness will highlight the coachee's possible misalignment of the self in the world and could assist in setting fundamental goals for change (Miller & Rollnick, 1991). The more closely aligned the need for change is with the coachee's core values, the higher the level of self-evaluation will be (Prochaska & DiClemente, 2005).

The use of the decision balance tool could assist in reflecting on the potential benefits of change rather than concentrating on the concerns associated with the change. The approach involves the coachee considering the benefits and disadvantages of the two available alternatives. The perceived benefits and costs of maintaining the status quo are compared with the perceived benefits and costs of change (Passmore, 2011). A detailed exploration of these alternatives with the coachee will assist the coachee in obtaining an objective awareness of their current situation and environment (Miller & Rollnick, 1991). Due consideration and comparison of both options will serve to direct the intention towards a specific course of action (Ajzen & Sheikh, 2013).

The greater the extent to which the coach can encourage the coachee to self-talk towards change, the greater the probability that motivation for change will be entrenched (Passmore, 2007). Self-talk can be prompted by the use of a ruler method where the coachee is asked to measure their readiness to change on a scale of zero to ten. By asking the coachee why they did not choose zero on the scale, self-talk towards change is encouraged (Passmore, 2011). By exaggerating reflections, the coachee can be urged to defend their stance through self-talk towards change (Miller & Rollnick, 1991). Reframing can be used to create a shift in the mind of the coachee.

Strong, Pyle & Sutherland (2009) reasoned that scaling questions require "clients to linguistically construct new understandings and experiences for viable solutions [that] clients can take beyond counselling" and suggested that "a ladder of sorts be constructed to serve both parties in their attempts to ask meaningful questions" (p. 182). Their contribution shed light on the experience of scaling questions by both the counsellor and the client and offered practicable ways in which these questions could be articulated to greater effect. They videotaped interviews between these two parties and asked them to provide feedback retrospectively on the timeliness, helpfulness, respectfulness and appropriateness of questions. This approach is perceived by the researchers a step-up from the pure, ruler-based scaling questions discussed earlier, as they tap into qualitative experiences and perceived reality – the only reality coaches and counsellors have to work with.

The strength of a coachee's self-belief in their ability to realise the change will influence the degree of effort they expend and the coping mechanisms they adopt. Weak efficacy expectations result in less effort, and strong efficacy results in stronger and more persistent effort (Bandura, 1999).

Perceived self-competence affects susceptibility to self-arousal; hence emotional arousal could be a harmful source of information as individuals with low self-efficacy levels could be further demoralised by thoughts that provoke emotional arousals disproportionate to their actual ineptitudes (Bandura, 1999).

Reinforcing personal accomplishment will improve self-motivated persistence. Mastering certain behaviour provides individuals with a sense of efficacy that stretches beyond the specific behaviour. This could provide efficacy in other types of behaviour, thereby generalising self-efficacy over a variety of achievement situations (Bandura, 1999). Drawing on previous mastery of change could, therefore, be an effective approach for the coach to increase efficacy levels within the coachee. By affirming observed progress, the coach affirms the ability of the coachee to change thereby enhancing the sense of self-competence to manage more advanced changes (Bandura, 1999). These realisations could assist the coachee to understand why previous change attempts might have failed. Allowing the coachee to observe others who have managed to overcome obstacles and have adopted new behaviours could encourage the coachee to achieve by exerting the necessary effort and persistence (Bandura, 1999). The coachee will gain the confidence to move towards change if the coach uses every opportunity that presents itself during coaching to convey trust in the coachee's ability to achieve thereby strengthening the coachee's efficacy. When motivation is conceptualised into a cognitive process, the informational and motivational effects of arousal are treated as interdependent rather than as separate events.

The coachee will be ready to move to the next phase when they exhibit a clear intention to change (Theeboom et al., 2017).

### **5.3 The preparation stage**

During this stage the characteristic displayed by the coachee is that of readiness to take action and at this point they should be encouraged to set goals, determine their priorities, and develop an action plan (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997; Prochaska & DiClemente, 2005). The fact that the coachee shows an intention towards change does not necessarily mean that all feelings of ambivalence have been resolved (Miller & Rollnick, 1991).

The purpose of the stage is to cement the intention to change into a concrete commitment to the proposed change (Theeboom et al., 2017).

Providing the coachee with the opportunity to envisage their future life is an important starting point for the planning process (Theeboom et al., 2017). The coachee is ready to take action and should be guided in the process of setting goals, deciding on priorities, and developing an action plan (Prochaska & DiClemente, 2005). During the preparation stage, the coach will assist the coachee to verbalise their intrinsic goals in detail and to convert the goals into action plans. This is an important process as the mental representations of one's intentions do not necessarily reflect the actual state of the world but rather the state of one's personal engagement with the world (Theeboom et al., 2017; Triberti & Riva, 2016). By verbalising the plan, the coach can address possible misrepresentations made by the coachee and the correction of such misconceptions might assist in converting intention into action (Triberti & Riva, 2016).

An assessment of the level of confidence of the coachee to realise the anticipated change is essential as this relates directly to the amount of effort and the level of perseverance that the coachee is likely to exert when facing challenges (Bandura, 1999). Considering and anticipating pitfalls and possible setbacks in advance will develop the necessary resilience to persevere when obstacles present themselves (Prochaska & DiClemente, 2005). A discussion of previous failed attempts and the identification of potentially valuable lessons learned will help to strengthen self-efficacy (Prochaska & DiClemente, 2005). Allowing the coachee to understand and verbalise the

benefits that the change can potentially offer compared to retaining the status quo can strengthen the intention of the coachee towards change (Theeboom et al., 2017).

It is important to obtain a commitment from the coachee to follow through with the chosen plan (Prochaska & DiClemente, 2005).

The final two stages of the trans-theoretical model of behavioural change are action and contemplation. These stages are not discussed in this study as they fall outside the ambit of this research as the coachee, on reaching this stage, will have attained the necessary readiness for change.

## 6. Summary, findings and recommendations

This research aimed to provide information on the notional construct of coachee readiness. A theoretical basis was provided which could potentially lead to further empirical research on coachee readiness. The second objective was to develop a guide for coaches on how to approach coachee readiness by offering a theory-based perspective to utilise at the start of new coachee relationships.

By linking the various concepts that emerged from the literature study, certain key conclusions emerged.

Determining the coachee's readiness stage at the outset of the coaching initiative allows the coach the opportunity to apply the right intervention at the right time, thereby improving the effectiveness of coaching (Miller & Rollnick, 1991; Passmore, 2011; Theeboom et al., 2017). A coachee at a specific stage of readiness must first achieve the outcomes of that specific stage before they can move forward. Each stage consists of a series of change processes and principles that must be followed. The process of change, therefore, requires a systematic approach (Miller and Rollnick, 1991; Passmore, 2011; Prochaska & Velicer, 1997). Each stage of readiness has very specific and distinguishing characteristics. It is therefore relatively easy for an observant coach to determine the stage of readiness of the coachee by asking the appropriate questions regarding their readiness for change (Miller & Rollnick, 1991; Prochaska & DiClemente, 2005; Theeboom et al., 2017).

Change entails more than just readiness. Change readiness is an antecedent for change and is not the actual change. Change readiness implies that the coachee is willing to embark on the change process but still needs to implement actual changes in their behaviour (Prochaska & DiClemente, 2005; Theeboom et al., 2017; Triberti & Riva, 2016). Giving sufficient autonomy to the coachee is vital to overcome a lack of coachee readiness. Autonomy not only assists in forming intrinsic motivation but also builds efficacy in the coachee (Markland & Vansteenkiste, 2007; Miller and Rollnick, 1991; Wilson & Rogers, 2007). Relatedness is required to build intrinsic motivation. Affirming the coachee and building their confidence in their ability to change imparts the courage necessary to make change happen (Grover & Furnham, 2016; Markland & Vansteenkiste, 2007; Miller and Rollnick, 1991; Wilson & Rogers, 2007). A lack of readiness for coaching can be largely attributed to ambivalence. The coachee needs to be guided through the ambivalence in their mind to gain clarity on the way forward (Miller and Rollnick, 1991; Passmore, 2011; Prochaska & Velicer, 1997).

### 6.1 Contribution of the study

Real-world contribution: The study contributes to the theoretical base of coachee readiness, where coaches are provided with additional perspectives to consider when embarking on new coaching assignments. The theoretical framework offers guidance on the characteristics of the coachee



during each specific stage. The achievable outcomes for each stage are described to further assist the coach in gauging readiness to graduate from one stage to the next.

**Research-based contribution:** The study contributes to building a more coherent theoretical base for the notion of coachee readiness. Such a theoretical base could lead to research on coachee readiness that is more empirical and, potentially, gives rise to an operational definition of the theoretical construct of coachee readiness. This article offers a framework of resources addressing the impact on coachee readiness and, in so doing, has discovered and reported on the importance of gaining insight into aspects of change, in order to envisage the possibility of change and then to commit to change. This prompted the researchers to look more closely into the process of change and it became clear that the effectiveness of coaching could be improved by using the right approach at the right time in the change process.

After the inclusion of each new theory, its influence on the body of knowledge was considered. The respective theories allowed certain concepts to emerge from different disciplines and these gradually merged to support and influence the formulation of a theoretical framework. Towards the end of the study, the variables responsible for coachee ambivalence became evident and the requisite solutions for overcoming the ambivalence became apparent.

## 6.2 Recommendations for future research and the limitation of the research

Empirical research on coachee readiness is required to enrich the theoretical base of the concept of coachee readiness. Such research could include validating the theoretical framework established in this research. A limitation of this study is that it comprises a literature review and lacks empirical validation. Until the framework provided is tested, it is uncertain whether the approaches identified will work or how well they will work in different coaching contexts.

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## About the authors

Associate Professor **Salomé van Coller-Peter** is a senior lecturer on various master's degree programmes at the University of Stellenbosch Business School and custodian of the MPhil in Management Coaching

**Dina de Vries** is an alumnus of the University of Stellenbosch Business School. She is a human resources executive at a medium-sized manufacturing organisation.