



Introducing the Ministry Coaching Readiness Assessment: A Faith-Based Organizational Instrument

Dr. Sally V. Fry
Expanding Leaders™

Dr. Diane M. Wiater
Regent University
Roundtable: Professional Coaching

Abstract

The Ministry Coaching Readiness Assessment (MCRA) is an instrument designed to evaluate an organization's readiness to implement or grow a coaching initiative. We have developed this new assessment to evaluate the readiness of faith-based organizations for coaching. Previously available assessments gauging an organization's readiness for coaching were solely focused on secular organizations. Coaching is a key leadership development tool and provides a basis for developing leaders at all levels in ministry. The MCRA considers the essential criteria for healthy and thriving ministries to assess the current ministry conditions. Faith-based organizations would benefit from developing a coaching culture that provides a proactive measure to support ministry leaders. The benefits or return on investment (ROI) of coaching include improved work relationships, increased confidence, enhanced communication skills, higher employee engagement, reduced procrastination, increased goal attainment, improved well-being, and greater self-awareness. Research studies and reports demonstrate the positive ROI of coaching in various contexts. The MCRA is a comprehensive tool that assesses readiness in values and beliefs, cultural support, structural readiness, leadership readiness, participant readiness, resource allocation, and sustainability, making it a valuable resource for faith-based organizations seeking to enhance their effectiveness and positively impact Kingdom work by embracing coaching as a vital component of their leadership development strategy.

Keywords: ministry, coaching, readiness, assessment, ROI, leadership development, sustainability, faith-based

In November 2023, Regent University School of Business and Leadership held its annual Research Roundtables. The 2023 Roundtable was the 20th anniversary event, and the theme was 20 Years of Continuing the Mission. Ten roundtables were presented. The call for abstracts for the Professional Coaching Roundtable sought submissions regarding the research and practices of “Christian faith in coaching pertaining to leadership development, trends, teams, and technology.” One specific request from the chair was for presentations and papers around models and tools being developed and used. Since coaching is a young, emergent field, and Christian coaching is a type of coaching within this profession, models and tools contributing to the profession are vital for practitioners.

This article highlights our presentation introducing the Ministry Coaching Readiness Assessment[®] (MCRA) and delves into its background, development, components, and intended use. The MCRA is beneficial to professional coaches, consultants, organizational and leadership development experts, change agents, trainers, and those interested in helping faith-based organizations grow through a coaching initiative.

Assessments are common, practical tools in the coaching profession. The MCRA is developed for faith-based organizations to assess coaching readiness. This article notes leadership coaching as a preferred leadership development tool as well as the benefits of coaching and addresses the ROI of coaching for the organization, and the value of feedback from multiple stakeholders. A prime function of the instrument is the value to organizational leaders and professionals in assessing the potential viability and sustainability of a coaching initiative for faith-based organizations.

MCRA Development Background

In March of 2022, a Barna survey revealed that 42% of pastors considered quitting full-time ministry within the past year. In January of 2021, from the same study, that percentage was 29%, so this increase made us take note. The key reasons pastors gave for considering quitting full-time ministry included stress, loneliness, political division, family impact, and no longer feeling optimistic about the future of their local church. When we considered this report alongside a Barna study published in 2017 which showed there are fewer people entering ministry as a vocation, we recognized the need to proactively develop ministry leaders. Coaching is critically needed for ministry leaders’ development and retention.

In Dr. Sally Fry’s role as a district leadership development specialist for a church denomination, she works on a team that provides oversight for 75 churches in upstate NY. That team is led by a district superintendent who had the vision 10 years ago to develop a coaching culture and network of peer-to-peer coaching throughout their district. Over the past few years, Dr. Fry has taught workshops to ministry leaders on

the basics of coaching and how to distinguish coaching from other leadership development tools. These workshops included both instructional and experiential components. Participants reported after the peer coaching segment, they experienced genuine impacts during this segment and requested time be set aside at future meetings to engage in further training and peer coaching.

Dr. Diane Wiater teaches leadership coaching at the graduate level. In the mix of assignments, students take on the role of consultant and conduct an audit using a tool to determine organizational readiness for coaching. The overarching goals of the assignment are to assist professionals in determining what is needed for the organization to be successful in its coaching initiative. Over the past 14 years, many students have requested an instrument for ministries or permission to modify the assigned tool used in the class to fit ministries. Without a tool specifically for ministries, assessing organizational coaching readiness is clumsy and can be likened to fitting a square peg in a round hole.

If leadership development is necessary, and coaching is a viable means of leadership development, and churches need leaders, and those leaders need leadership development, then coaching should be in the mix of leadership development opportunities for church leaders. Coaching provides a space for ministry and nonprofit leaders to shift their mindsets and improve their self-efficacy, which can positively impact the organization (Fry, 2023b).

Healthy or Thriving Ministries

The MCRA is a tool for evaluating organizational readiness for coaching. Leadership is one aspect of evaluation, but not the only element assessed. There are other organization tools available, but they are not designed for ministry organizations. There are particular situations within faith organizations where the secular assessments just do not fit (Fry, 2023a). The MCRA is designed to provide an assessment of the organization's current reality, so plans can be developed to include coaching in an effort to help the organization thrive. Therefore, understanding what contributes to a healthy and thriving ministry is critical.

Smith (2019) noted eight characteristics in three categories as contemporary ministry evaluation criteria. The first category, *reaching up* – is our relationship with God (dynamic worship and teaching transforming truth). The second category, *reaching in* (is ministry functioning healthily?), is demonstrated by authentic fellowship, every member ministry, and shared leadership. The third category, *reaching out*, encompasses the three characteristics of care for others, looking beyond itself, and having a passion for Jesus (Smith, 2019, pp. 74–75). Smith continued, stating that churches must develop and implement a process by which leaders are raised up (Smith, 2019, p. 81). Leadership

succession planning is necessary in churches and faith-based organizations for sustainability.

Coaching as Part of an Integrated Leadership Development System

While not all ministries are churches, they count as a large number of ministries and as a platform and launch pad for other ministries. Smith (2019) emphasized a point by Ogden that churches must develop and implement a process by which leaders are raised up. Coaching is a viable leadership development tool. In 2023, Dr. Wiater noted that coaching is part of the Golden Trifecta of Leadership Development. This trifecta includes training, mentoring, and coaching – all within a context of experience. The church and other ministries rely upon volunteer or lay leadership. Developing and training these leaders can have the same impact it does in corporate and business environments. That is the impact of coaching on an individual team and organization as leaders reach potential, goals are met, leaders are more engaged, committed, and satisfied.

Creswell (2006) noted that some of the pressures and challenges that ministers face today include postmodernism, lack of leadership, untapped potential, unrealistic expectations, and unworthy goals. She suggested that coaching can help tap into the potential pool. In Creswell's book, *Christ-Centered Coaching: 7 Benefits for Ministry Leaders*, she noted that much of what she lists as benefits for ministry leaders are also benefits for coaching in general. Christ-centered coaching can help you tap into skills, give abilities, and become a key in making things happen God's way. A coach can help you discover insights into yourself. A common question in coaching is "If you were using your full gifts, talents, and abilities, what would that look like where you are?" Creswell asked the question, "If you were using your full Kingdom potential, what would your role in the body be?" Wilburn (2023) explained that "Kingdom principles ignite inspiration that is fundamental to work, strategy, and effective leadership" (p. 31). Understanding what is believed about the Kingdom of God impacts how a person uses their gifts and permeates all aspects of their ministry leadership.

As a Gallup-Certified Strengths Coach, Dr. Wiater is well aware that when people are functioning in their strengths, they are more engaged, satisfied, and committed to the organization. There are countless other individual, team, and organizational benefits of coaching.

In churches in the United States, the median weekly attendance is 65 people. Annual median church income of tithes and offerings is \$120,000 (Thumma, 2021). The smaller churches often have staff that are part-time or unpaid, with many working in another position alongside their ministry role. While churches larger than the median may have

larger budgets and staff, the financial amount dedicated to staff development remains low in most faith organizations.

Benefits of Coaching

Coaching works, but what does that mean and why is it important in the context of supporting the use of the MCRA? Reports and studies show that coaching (a) improves work relationships, (b) increases confidence, (c) improves communication skills, (d) increases employee engagement, (e) reduces procrastination, (f) increases goal attainment, (g) improves well-being, and (h) increases self-awareness.

In presenting the benefits of coaching, Sime (2019) noted that the 2009 International Coaching Federation (ICF) report revealed 86% of organizations reported positive ROI of coaching. Using personal interviews and focus groups with 70 executives who receive coaching, Longenecker and McCartney (2020) found benefits of coaching included improved executive focus, better alignment of key leadership behaviors, candid and ongoing feedback, accountability for appropriate leader behaviors, and improved emotional intelligence among others (p. 22). Mihiotis and Argirou (2016) found that the benefits of coaching in organizations are directly related to the quality of coaching delivered. This directly supports the need for leaders to be trained at a minimum in coaching skills. In a study conducted by Gyllensten and Palmer (2014), participants reported having increased confidence which led to increased effectiveness, leading to improved job performance. “Coaching is a viable leader development tool rising in popularity, and it is expensive. People self-report that they want more of it because they are benefiting from it” (Wiater, 2023, p. 115).

Our conversation around organizational coaching readiness began with attention on ROI. In their research, Gavin and Bernardi (2023) found organizations thrive when employees at all levels are aligned with purpose, values, and culture. Using insights from organization culture experts, Cameron and Quinn and Cameron and McGrath, Gavin and Bernardi (2023) learned that the extent to which organizations benefit from coaching is related to the culture of the organization. The study demonstrated respondents assessed high ROI on coaching in clan and adhocracy cultures. The data demonstrated that organization culture, more than type of coaching, impacted positive ROI. In addition, organizations thrive when there is alignment of purpose, values, and culture; these three dimensions are included in the MCRA.

In a study on the effectiveness of coaching conducted at the Cleveland Clinic, more than 95% of their executives reported that training, coaching, and creating a plan positively impacted their growth as a leader, as well as growth in their professional performance (Mustafa et al., 2019). In addition to the impact on the executives personally, 60% indicated a positive impact on the results of their respective organizations due to this

experience. This underscores the connection of a leader coaching experience to organizational impact.

About the Instrument

The purpose of the MCRA is to assist faith-based, nonprofit organizations that are interested in creating or growing a coaching culture to obtain an overview of their current situation. This assessment tool is based on the understanding that organizations engaged in coaching improve the effectiveness of their staff members, which positively impacts the overall work environment, as the insights gleaned from coaching are transferred to their daily work (Rekalde et al., 2017). When staff members are more effective in their roles, the organization benefits, which impacts the Kingdom work of faith-based groups. As stated earlier, coaching is not a replacement for other leadership development tools but is used in tandem with them.

The MCRA examines several areas of readiness throughout the organization to assess which ones need attention before a coaching initiative is implemented. The seven categories of (a) values and beliefs, (b) cultural support, (c) structural readiness, (d) leadership readiness, (e) participant readiness, (f) resource allocation, and (g) sustainability are all examined in this assessment. By using these categories, the readiness of an organization to implement or grow a coaching initiative is reviewed from several different perspectives.

Values and Beliefs

This category is specific to the value, belief, conviction, and commitment first of leadership development and then of coaching. The questions and statements in this category pertain to the leader.

Sample assessment statement:

The leadership team and key stakeholders believe that ministry coaching can significantly enhance the effectiveness of the organization and their ministries.

Culture/Support

In its most raw form, culture is the way things are done around here. It is the mindsets, patterns of behavior, artifacts, and stories of the organization. In this category, the assessment has statements and questions around such aspects as environment, teachability, improvement, change, psychological safety, and equipping.

Sample assessment statement:

The ministry undertook a new initiative within the last four years.

Structure Readiness

Structure readiness is the foundation upon which effective coaching programs are built. It involves having a designated person or team responsible for program coordination, clear communication plans, established processes for coaching matches, ongoing financial support, methods to measure impact, and a means to share the lessons learned.

Sample assessment statement:

The ministry has a designated person or team responsible for overseeing and coordinating the coaching program.

Leadership Readiness

Leader mindset is foundational in this category. Leaders model the way by being coached, appointing a point person, and generally being open to coaching through heart, attitude, and action.

Sample assessment statement:

Senior leaders of the ministry are personally committed to participating in the coaching program and setting an example for others.

Participant Readiness

Organization members, staff, and volunteers are prepared and desire coaching. Commitment to their current role and willingness to partner for personal growth are key aspects of this category.

Sample assessment statement:

Ministry workers desire personal growth and development.

Resource Allocation

Finances, time, personnel, facilities, decision-making, and priority efforts contribute to the elements in this category.

Sample assessment statement:

There is a budget allocated for training coaches and providing coaching materials and resources.

Sustainability

Impact of effort, duration of initiative, and commitment to growth are part of the determination of sustainability. Becoming an integral part of the culture and lasting through leadership changes are signatures of sustainability.

Sample assessment statement:

There is a strategy for maintaining enthusiasm and engagement in the coaching initiative over the long term, even as other priorities arise.

Each category contains several statements that the respondents will evaluate based on a sliding scale. These responses will produce an average score, which the consultant will use to engage with the leadership team.

The readiness of individuals, the values and culture of the organization, potential resources, and future sustainability are all areas that this assessment provides insights into for the decision-makers. The consultant will take note of potential barriers to initiating, implementing, or expanding a coaching initiative. For example, a potential barrier is the misunderstanding of what coaching entails and the purpose of coaching. When key stakeholders lack knowledge of what coaching is, this impacts the readiness of individuals and organizations to move forward (Kretzschmar, 2010). Trained consultants will work with the ministry organizations to interpret the results of the MCRA and develop a plan to move forward.

Dr. Wiater and I are really hoping to extend help to faith organizations in a broader context, so that they are able to implement coaching initiatives that are not only impactful, because we all understand the importance of coaching, but also are sustainable. (Fry, 2023b)

Next Steps

A comprehensive training and certification program is under development for consultants, which will equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to administer and interpret the results of the MCRA. Consultants will also receive training on how to assist organizations in creating a plan if a decision is made to move forward with a coaching initiative. By undergoing this training and certification process, consultants will become proficient in the MCRA and gain knowledge on how to facilitate the process with a ministry organization. Interested consultants are encouraged to join the waitlist to receive updates on the assessment and the certification program. Access the waitlist at <https://www.expandingleaders.com/mcra>.

Looking ahead, we recognize the importance of ongoing research and refinement of the MCRA. The assessment statements and methodology will continue to receive evaluation and adjustments. We anticipate conducting research to gather insights and feedback from leaders, ministries, and consultants who have engaged with this assessment. Improvements to the assessment will continue based on the feedback received from participants, so this tool will meet the needs of faith-based organizations.

About the Authors

Sally V. Fry, DSL, holds the role of leadership development specialist at a nonprofit faith organization and also serves as the founder and president of Expanding Leaders, a company specializing in training and coaching. As a clergy member, she provides coaching and training to ministry leaders, engages in church consultations, and teaches seminars on resolving conflict in a biblical way. Sally is certified in the use of the MBTI, SDI, and True Colors personality assessments. Her previous experience includes working in higher education within student affairs divisions and as an adjunct faculty member. She earned a Doctorate in Strategic Leadership from Regent University with a focus on leadership coaching.

Diane M. Wiater, Ph.D., served as the chair of the 2023 Regent University School of Business and Leadership Professional Coaching Roundtable. With more than 25 years of experience in training and teaching coaches, Dr. Wiater is a coaches' coach and leader in developing Christian coaches. Dr. Wiater is a certified Gallup® Strengths Coach and is certified to administer the MBTI. She is a trusted strategic partner, profitable business manager, and effective leader developer. Her passion is seeing leaders grow, thrive, and lead well! Dr. Wiater earned her Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership from Regent University, a Christian academic faith community where she continues to serve as adjunct faculty in the School of Business and Leadership.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Sally V. Fry at sally@expandingleaders.com and/or Dr. Diane M. Wiater at dianwia@regent.edu.

References

- Barna Group. (2017, March 1). The aging of America's pastors. Barna. <https://www.barna.com/research/aging-americas-pastors/>
- Barna Group (2022, April 27). *Pastors share top reasons they've considered quitting ministry in the past year*. Barna. <https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-quitting-ministry/>
- Creswell, J. (2006). *Christ-centered coaching: 7 benefits for ministry leaders*. Chalice Press.

- Fry, S. V. (2023a). Followership, submission, and self-efficacy. In K. Patterson & B. E. Winston (Eds.). *The nature of biblical followership: Vol 1. Christian faith perspectives in leadership and business* (pp. 237–252). Palgrave Macmillan.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-37085-4_12
- Fry, S. V. (2023b, November 2). *Introducing the ministry coaching readiness assessment* [Panel discussion]. Regent University Roundtable, Virginia Beach, VA, United States.
- Gavin, J., & Bernardi, N. F. (2023). Are certain types of coaching more beneficial within different organizational cultures? The coach's perspective. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 21(1), 50–66.
<https://doi.org/10.24384/z52p-6042>
- Gyllensten, K., & Palmer, S. (2014). Increased employee confidence: A benefit of coaching. *Coaching Psychologist*, 10(1), 36–39.
<https://doi.org/10.53841/bpstcp.2014.10.1.36>
- International Coach Federation. (2009). *ICF global coaching client study*. International Coach Federation.
- Kretschmar, I. (2010). Exploring clients' readiness for coaching. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring*, 4, 1–20.
- Longenecker, C., & McCartney, M. (2020). The benefits of executive coaching: Voices from the C-suite. *Strategic HR Review*, 19(1), 22–27.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/SHR-06-2019-0048>
- Mihiotis, A., & Argirou, N. (2016). Coaching: From challenge to opportunity. *The Journal of Management Development*, 35(4), 448–463. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMD-10-2014-0139>
- Mustafa, S., Farver, C. F., Bierer, S. B., & Stoller, J. K. (2019). Impact of a leadership development program for healthcare executives: The Cleveland clinic experience. *The Journal of Health Administration Education*, 36(1), 77.
- Rekalde, I., Landeta, J., Albizu, E., & Fernandez-Ferrin, P. (2017). Is executive coaching more effective than other management training and development methods? *Management Decision*, 55(10), 2149–2162.
- Sime, C. (2019, March 28). How does coaching actually help leaders? Forbes.
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/carleysime/2019/03/28/how-does-coaching-actually-help-leaders/?sh=4b1f9ea21645>

- Smith, P. J. (2019). Biblical and historical criteria for evaluating a ministry organization, *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, 13(1), 72-88.
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl/vol13/iss1/8>
- Thumma, S. (2021). *Twenty years of congregational change: The 2020 faith communities today overview*. Hartford Institute for Religion Research.
- Wiater, D. M. (2023). Coaching as a leader and follower development tool. In K. Patterson & B. E. Winston (Eds.), *The nature of biblical followership: Vol. 1. Christian faith perspectives in leadership and business* (pp. 105-119). Palgrave Macmillan.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-37085-4_6
- Wilburn, S. L. (2023). Empowerment and followership: Nine pivotal values that shape effective followers. In K. Patterson & B. E. Winston (Eds.), *The nature of biblical followership: Vol. 1. Christian faith perspectives in leadership and business* (pp. 275-293). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-37085-4_14