Developing and evaluating a strength-based coaching skills training programme for human resource practitioners at a tertiary institution

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It is important to note the following remarks beforehand:

- The editorial style follows the format prescribed by the Publication Manual (6th ed.) of the American Psychological Association (APA). A modified version of this format is used in line with the policy of the NWU’s programme for Human Resource Management. The format and structure employed in the research articles follow the guidelines for authors as presented by the South African Journal of Human Resource Management (SAJHRM).

- The first chapter of the dissertation is constructed from the revised research proposal. Therefore, this chapter differs in focus and structure to subsequent chapters, which report on the actual results.

- The dissertation is submitted in the form of four chapters, which have the following layout: chapter 1 as introduction to the present study; Research article 1 (ch 2); Research article 2 (ch 3); and chapter 4 presenting the limitations, recommendations and practical implications.
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I would like to offer the following recognitions:

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I hereby certify that I have language edited the dissertation, “Developing and evaluating a strength-based coaching skills training programme for human resource practitioners at a tertiary institution”, prepared by Roslyn Lodewyk, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master Artium in Human Resource Management at the North-West University. I am satisfied that, provided the changes I have made to the text are effected, the language would be of a standard fit for publication.

The Rev C. L. Vosloo
Declaration

I, Roslyn Lodewyk, hereby declare that the dissertation titled, “Developing and evaluating a strength-based coaching skills training programme for human resource practitioners at a tertiary institution”, is my own work. The views and opinions expressed in this study are those of the author and relevant literature references are presented in the literature lists.

I further declare that the content of this manuscript will not be submitted at any other tertiary institution for qualification purposes.

R. B. Lodewyk

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Date: ________________
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SUMMARY

**Title:** Developing and evaluating a strength-based coaching skills training programme for human resource practitioners at a tertiary institution

**Key terms:** Human resource practices, human resource practitioners, strength-based, coaching skills, character strengths, tertiary institution

Several changes have taken place in the science of human resource management. Due to this situation, Human Resource (HR) practitioners are expected to manage change and facilitate the processes employees undergo. The mentioned practitioners are usually at the forefront of implementing these changes. Thus, they must ensure such changes are communicated to the different stakeholders, namely their clients to whom the organisation provide a service (Ulrich, 2008). In light of the mentioned changes, HR practitioners must stay abreast of recent developments in the market and workplace. Thereby, they ensure HR functions are relevant to their work environment and will be implemented effectively and efficiently to serve the organisation as a whole (Ulrich, 2008).

The main aim of the present study was to develop and evaluate a strength-based training programme that transfers coaching skills to HR practitioners within a tertiary institution. The study was undertaken based on two research articles.

The first article explores the development of coaching skills in a training programme from a strength-based perspective for HR practitioners of a selected institution for higher education. The results for this article indicated two phases, namely: 1) conceptualising the themes that should be included in a strength-based training programme for HR practitioners; and 2) developing the content and methodology of such a programme. The research approach for this article entailed a theoretical design which focused on themes identified from literature. This was accompanied by a literature review, as a systematic approach that focused mainly on particular theories that could inform the present study. In Article 2 the research was based on a qualitative design, as explained a qualitative research design has allowed the researcher to release the natural settings about the specific impediments within the research environment.

The main findings for Article 1 showed that training HR practitioners in strength-based coaching skills, has helped them identify their own main character strengths and how to apply these strengths
within the workplace. This would enable these HR professionals to function effectively and efficiently and facilitate change within their organisation. Furthermore, the HR professionals discovered how they can impart knowledge to new entrants to the field as well as work proactively within a team to help achieve the organisation’s goals.

Article 2 of this study evaluates the mentioned training programme on coaching skills for HR practitioners. The aim of the study was to evaluate this training programme from a strength-based perspective among such a group of practitioners. This study utilised a qualitative research design, where purposive and key-informant sampling methods were used to select a group of ten participants. The participants attended a workshop after which their experiences of the training were captured through focus group discussions. Afterwards work books were distributed to help HR practitioners practice and inculcate the training on character strengths.

The findings from Article 2 mainly indicated that the participants were able to improve interpersonal relations and became more aware of their own character strengths. In addition, they showed increased self-acceptance and self-confidence when applying these strengths within the work environment.

Through these findings, the present study contributes to the function of HR practitioners. This is done by providing a training programme to facilitate strength-based coaching skills and equip HR practitioners allowing them to function optimally in their profession.

The limitations of the study are noted, and recommendations made for future research in this field.
**OPSOMMING**

**Titel:** Die ontwikkeling en evaluering van 'n sterktegebaseerde opleidingsprogram oor afrigtingsvaardighede vir mensehulpbronpraktisyne aan 'n tersiêre instelling

**Sleutelbegrippe:** Mensehulpbronpraktyke, mensehulpbronpraktisyne, sterktegebaseer, afrigtingsvaardighede, karaktersterktespunte, tersiêre instelling

Verskeie veranderings het binne die wetenskap van mensehulpbronbestuur plaasgevind. Weens hierdie omstandighede word van mensehulpbron- (MHB-) praktisyne verwag om verandering te bestuur en prosesse te faciliteer wat werknemers deurgaan. Hierdie genoemde praktisyne is gewoonlik aan die snypunt waar sodanige verandering ingestel word. Gevolglik moet hulle seker maak dat die veranderings gekommunikeer word aan die onderskeie belanghebbers – die kliënte aan wie die organisasie ‘n diens verskaf (Ulrich, 2008). In die lig van die genoemde veranderings moet MHB-praktisyne tred hou met die jongste ontwikkelings in die mark en werkplek. Sodoende verseker hulle dat die MHB-funksies toepaslik vir hulle werkplek is en doeltreffend en bekwaam ingestel word om die organisasie in die geheel te dien.

Die hoofdoel van die huidige studie was die ontwikkeling en evaluering van 'n sterktegebaseerde opleidingsprogram wat afrigtingsvaardighede aan MHB-praktisyne binne 'n tersiêre instelling oordra. Hierdie studie is op twee navrasingsartikels gegrond.

Die eerste artikel ondersoek die ontwikkeling van afrigtingsvaardighede in 'n opleidingsprogram met 'n sterktegebaseerde perspektief gereg op MHB-praktisyne van 'n geselekteerde instelling van hoër onderwys. Die resultate van hierdie artikel het twee fases uitgelig, naamlik: 1) konseptualisering van temas wat binne 'n sterktegebaseerde opleidingsprogram vir MHB-afrigtingsvaardighede ingesluit behoort te word; en 2) ontwikkeling van die inhoud en metodologie van so 'n program. Die navrasingsbenadering vir hierdie artikel was 'n teoretiese ontwerp wat fokus op aspekte wat in die literatuur uitgeken is. Dit het gepaardgegaan met 'n literatuurondersoek, as sistematiese benadering wat hoofsaaklik die klem laat val op teorieë wat die huidige studie kon informeer. Artikel 2 is gebaseer op 'n kwalitatiewe navrasingsontwerp, soos hier onder verduidelik word.

Die kernbevindings vir artikel 1, het aangedui dat die opleiding van MHB-praktisyne in sterktegebaseerde afrigtingsvaardighede hulle gehelp het om hulle eie hoofkaraktersterkpunte uit te
ken en getoon het hoe om dit binne die werkplek toe te pas. Dit sou hierdie praktisyns help om doeltreffend en bekwaam te funksioneer en verandering binne hulle organisasie te fasiliteer. Daarby het hierdie MHB-deskundiges uitgevind hoe om hierdie kennis aan nuwe toetreders binne die veld oor te dra asook om proaktief binne ’n span te werk en só die onderneming se doelwitte te help verwesenlik.

Artikel 2 van hierdie studie evalueer die genoemde opleidingsprogram in afrigtingsvaardighede vir MHB-praktisyns. Die doel van die studie was om hierdie opleidingsprogram vanuit ’n sterktegebaseerde perspektief vir so ’n groep praktisyns te evalueer. Die studie het ’n kwalitatiewe navorsingsontwerp gebruik en deur doelbewuste en sleutel-mededeler- steekproefneming tien deelnemers uitgesoek. Hierdie deelnemers het ’n werkwinkel bygewoon waarna hulle ervarings deur fokusgroepbesprekings opgevang is. Daarna is werkboeke uitgedeel wat die MHB-praktisyns gehelp het om die opleiding oor karaktersterktles in te oefen en in te skerp.

Die bevindings van artikel 2 het hoofsaaklik aangedui dat die deelnemers interpersoonlike verhoudings beter kon bedryf en deeglik bewus van hulle karaktersterktles was. Daarby het hulle verhoogde selfaanvaarding en selfvertroue getoon het nadat hulle hierdie sterktes binne die werkomgewing toegepas het.

Deur hierdie bevindings dra die huidige studie by tot die funksie van MHB-praktisyns. Dit geskied deur ’n opleidingprogram te voorsien wat MHB-praktisyns toerus met sterktegebaseerde afrigtingsvaardighede sodat hulle optimaal binne hulle beroep kan funksioneer.

Die beperkings van die studie word aangedui en aanbevelings vir toekomstige navorsing in hierdie veld gemaak.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This dissertation is titled: Developing and evaluating a strength-based coaching skills training programme for the human resource practitioners in a tertiary institution. The main objective of the present study was to develop and evaluate a strength-based training programme that facilitate coaching skills for human resource (HR) practitioners working within a tertiary institution. This chapter presents the structure of the study, which consists of the problem statement, the research objectives and the research method as well as an overview of the chapters that will follow.

1.1 Problem statement

Human Resource (HR) practitioners are at the forefront of implementing changes, policies and procedures in the workplace (Ulrich, 2008). It is important when focusing on these practitioners, that a holistic view is followed from the perspective of academic research and a societal stance (Benitez, Cruz-Castro & Sanz-Menendez, 2016). Human Resources (HR) can be defined as a practice that deal with entities within the organisations, who has the ability to achieve goals that the organisation has outlined (Haslinda, 2009). However, it is important to take into account that HR as a practice encounters numerous challenges, seeing that it is difficult to draw, maintain, encourage, and advance individuals who has the required abilities, in case of the present study, the HR practitioners (Grobler, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert & Hatfield, 2002). The challenges which the HR practitioner experience within their work environment generally stem from the organisation (Burke & Ng, 2006) One of the challenges that HR practitioners experience they have years of knowledge with regards to their profession but due to them operating in different levels and being compensated differently within the organisation causes a lot of dissatisfaction among them as a team. Due to a management style that is not consistent, in order to eliminate this injustice that is happening amongst the HR practitioner’s management should review and evaluate their management styles and procedures that ensures them to function effectively as a team. The HR practitioner’s experiences challenges which is, related to work overload, working long hours, working with difficult clients, there is cultural differences, their values and their expectations with regards to the workforce differ and this can cause a lot of strain on the HR practitioners (Burke & Ng, 2006). A concern that is pivotal and that can be linked to the productivity and motivation of the HR
practitioner is salary expectation. Most of them are highly qualified and with regards to salary the institution does not meet the requirement and expectations. Additional concerns with regards to the HR practitioners, they are experiencing challenges within the workforce, opportunities are not made available to them, management does not allow them to partake in the decision making process that can have emotional impact, how the client’s function daily within the institution. These are some of the challenges but many more can be explored but with regards to this study the challenges mentioned is sufficient (Burke & Ng, 2006).

1.2 Human resource practices

HR practices play a vital role within any organisation. These practices can be viewed as the foundation to ensure the organisation reach its targets and determine how it will manage its human capital (Van Rensburg, Basson & Carrim, 2011). Literature indicates that for human resource management to be effective and proficient, it is crucial that individuals involved in this profession understand their roles in conducting themselves ethically and efficiently within the organisation. This is the starting point for individuals who are part of the HR profession (Dixon & Ndlovu, 2006).

Practitioners must have the following values intact when entering the profession or dealing as professionals with clients. Thus, as professionals they must follow standards which is formulated for HR professionals with regards to ethics, how they conduct themselves in an orderly manner as well as display fair-mindedness and responsibility to ensure fair practice (Van Rensburg et al., 2011). In the HR context, practitioners implement labour legislation in the organisation. (Cohen, 2005). In this regard, HR practitioners have a vital role by providing strategic direction to ensure policies and procedures are implemented that manage and sustain people practices (SABPP, 2016).

1.3 Human resource practitioners

HR practitioners have an important function, to implement policies and ensure people within the organisation are managed strategically to achieve the organisation’s set goals (SABPP, 2016). HR practitioners are at the forefront of organisations where changes and strategies have to be implemented. Literature indicates that the HR practitioners’ abilities and skills are critically assessed by management (Van Der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren & Visser, 2003).

In the present study, the HR practitioners found their function the most difficult to handle. This is due to the lack of support from superiors who are supposed to mentor and coach them in the work
place. Furthermore, the HR practitioners felt that insufficient trust is placed in their abilities since the executives do not view them as adequate to perform the tasks for which they have been appointed in the organisation (Van Der Westhuizen, et al., 2003).

It is, however, crucial that the practitioners stay relevant and competent within their field. To accomplish this focus, they need the necessary credibility and competence. The best way to achieve these positive outcomes is to undergo training and develop themselves as individuals to stay on par with the new trends in HR management (Van Der Westhuizen, et al., 2003).

1.4 Strength-based approach

A strength-based approach can be defined as one that strategically structures an institute’s procedures and rules and establishes these as collective values (Rutigliano, 2011). Such values find its theoretical roots in centuries of studying human behaviour, to align an organisation’s conduct and economics with the company’s objectives and goals (Rutigliano, 2011).

Literature demonstrated that a strengths training programme for HR practitioners will help them become aware of their strengths, skills, and talents to be effective and efficient within a work environment (Rutigliano, 2011). The importance, however, is that they retain and apply these skills in their current organisation (Rutigliano, 2011). The mentioned training programme will help the HR practitioners to identify these strength components not only in themselves, but also in other employees. This will occur when occupying the position where they coach employees daily, especially if difficulties arise within the work environment (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

According to Rutigliano (2011), after HR practitioners have identified their strengths, talents, skills and knowledge, they must attract, select, be onboard and maximise their performance. In this way, they will develop, engage and retain not just other employees. They will ensure they as professionals themselves are retained in their current work environment and by being retained within the organisation they can impart knowledge to up and coming HR professionals and by so doing this will increase productivity and the organisation will function optimally due to the programme that the HR practitioners attained by being part of this study.

1.5 Coaching skills

Literature reports that managing people in the traditional manner by coercion and an autocratic approach undermines efficiency in an organisation (Starr, 2004). It is essential when HR professionals find themselves in a work environment that they are trained beforehand and know
how to coach others to be proactive in achieving established goals in the organisation (Starr, 2004). According to Starr (2004), coaching forms an essential part of HR professionals’ skillset. The benefit of coaching is that individuals have to rely less on key individuals, and staff members are inspired by thought-provoking knowledge. This may result in better focused entities who react creatively to conditions and operate effectively within the company. Therefore, the practitioners remain with a company because they feel appreciated. The mentioned aspects promote coaching, an aspect that guided the HR practitioners in the present study. As professionals they were able to understand and evaluate ways to retain and apply the coaching skills within their current work environment.

Literature indicates that coaching promotes an organisation that builds employees’ capacity (Grant, 2010). While partaking in the present study, the HR practitioners were enabled to support changes that are taking place within the organisation. Such assistance may help make the work environment more goal driven and easier to achieve the strategic goals and tasks of the organisation (Grant, 2010). The present study facilitated the development of coaching skills from a strength-based perspective that HR practitioners can apply throughout their careers. Literature distinguished informal from formal coaching, of which both types fall within the scope of the HR practitioners’ work environment.

Firstly, *formal* coaching was linked to the present study. According to this approach, individuals undergo a training session in which ideas are shared. This may take place in terms of coaching sessions where a performance review will be done. It may also entail, a sounding out after a difficult meeting or even training opportunity within HR. In these sessions HR practitioners are prepared for consultations, a skill that will be imperative for organisations, faculties and departments to consider, especially when it will influence individuals (Grant, 2010). Secondly, *informal* coaching (through conversations) takes place when HR practitioners share ideas with each other to address difficult situations within the organisation. The skill will allow practitioners to solve the problem collaboratively. Thus, by discussing and sharing work-related problems the result is clients/employees who are invigorated and involved (Grant, 2010).

According to Grant (2010), workplace coaching can be understood as a helping relationship formed between an individual with managerial or supervisory responsibility and an employee in an organisation.

Next, the research questions for this study are presented.
1.2 Research questions

The general aim of the present study was to develop and evaluate a strength-based coaching skills training programme for HR practitioners in a tertiary institution. This aim was broken down into the following research questions as they are addressed in chapters 2 and 3:

1. How are coaching skills and a strength-based, coaching skills training programme conceptualised within the literature?
2. What is the content and methodology of a strength-based coaching skills training programme for HR practitioners, according to literature?
3. How is human resource management and strength-based coaching conceptualised within the literature?
4. What was the experiences of the population of HR practitioners within a tertiary institution after undergoing the strength-based training programme for coaching skills?
5. What are the implications for the future training of HR students regarding strength-based coaching skills?
6. What conclusions can be drawn and recommendations made for future research?

1.3 Expected contribution of the study

1.3.1 Contribution to the HR literature

This study aims to address the gap in HR literature about equipping HR staff members with effective coaching skills. These skills enable them to show competencies that can help employees grow and develop within the work environment. A major gap in the literature was found to be a strength-based approach that is rooted in the positive psychology paradigm, a deficiency this study aimed to address.

1.3.2 Contribution to the organisation

This study provided a basis to train HR graduates and practitioners, from a strength-based perspective, especially as coaches. The aim was equipping HR graduates to facilitate processes more efficiently in the workplace. This is to the advantage of organisations since HR practitioners can adopt constructive coaching behaviours and practices.
1.3.3 Contribution to the individual

Through this study, the researcher aimed to equip HR practitioners with coaching skills, knowledge, and competencies necessary to deal with difficult people issues in the workplace. These issues entail implementing changes, assisting troubled personnel, or facilitating and managing onboarding by implementing coaching skills.

1.4 Research objectives

The research objectives for the present study were divided into a general objective which were unpacked into specific objectives.

1.4.1 General objective

The general objective of this study was to develop and evaluate a strength-based coaching skills training programme for human resource practitioners in a tertiary institution.

1.4.2 Specific objectives

The specific objectives of this research were:

- Determine how human resource management, coaching skills, and a strength-based training programme for coaching skills are conceptualised within literature.
- Establish the content and methodology of a strength-based training programme that facilitates coaching skills for HR practitioners, according to literature.
- Explore the experiences of the selected population of HR practitioners within a tertiary institution after undergoing the strength-based, coaching skills training programme.
- Determine the implications for the future training of HR students in strength-based coaching skills.
- Draw relevant conclusions and make recommendations for future research.

Research design

Research approach

The present study utilised a qualitative research design. Qualitative research focuses on capturing and studying the complexity of the natural setting. It is a form of research where researchers
simplify what they observe to ensure these phenomena can provide them with the necessary information for a study based on a qualitative design and qualitative research also focuses on specifying the selection of participants. Qualitative research is a form of research design that is based on the researchers ontological and epistemological perspective, research skills and research practices that can influence the way the researcher collect data (Leedy & Ormond, 2013). According to Leedy and Ormond (2013), an advantage of qualitative research is that researchers can evaluate whether they have been effective by focusing on plans, practices, and advances.

The present study was rooted in the paradigm of social constructivism. Social constructivism can be viewed as the situation where individuals are exposed to a similar phenomenon although each person experiences the phenomenon as his/her own reality. The person’s experience can be influenced by his/her underlying culture, social environment, or history (Wagner, Kawulich & Garner, 2012). Another approach applicable for the present study was based on the phenomenological design. Phenomenology attempts to understand people’s insights, viewpoints, and their understanding of a specific matter (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

1.5.2 Research strategy

This study used a case study as its research strategy. A case study explores a system in a given time, place or context, and could include multiple or single cases (Creswell, 2007). The specific case to be studied, typically could involve an activity, process, programme, event, an individual, or group. The case in the present study was the HR department at a tertiary institution, which included HR practitioners from the various post levels.

1.5.3 Research method

The research method for the present study consisted of the literature review, entrée and establishing researcher roles. The focus also was on sampling, data-collection methods, data recording, and strategies to ensure the data’s quality and integrity. This was followed by ethical considerations, data analysis and reporting style.
Literature review

A complete review of the literature was done by focusing on topics such as: Human Resource practises, Human Resource practitioners, strength-based, coaching skills. A wide range of academic resources were consulted:


1.5.3.2 Research setting

1.5.3.2.1 Entrée and establishing researcher roles

After the researcher obtained ethical approval from the university’s ethical board, entrée to the participants was gained by inviting the HR office from the tertiary institution to form part of the intended study. Clarifying the researcher’s roles is important prior to commencing with a study. This also requires self-reflection from researchers to ensure they are staying on track and simultaneously develop an in-depth understanding of the participants’ experiences. Furthermore, the researcher fulfilled the following roles: planning and executing the research, facilitating the training sessions, interviewing the participants as active listener, and finally, transcribing and interpreting the data (Creswell, 2009).

1.5.3.4 Sampling methods

The present study used a combination of purposive sampling and key-informant sampling methods is a method that allows individuals within a certain social position to form part of a research setting that gives them high-quality information about individuals, methods or activities that is more extensive, thorough or restricted than ordinary and who are therefore particularly valuable sources of information to a researcher, which will be expected within the early stages of a research project (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013)

With regards to this study the participants played an important role, because as a group the researcher could extract important information that will allow the researcher to ensure the research objectives can be met seeing that they have knowledge of their organisation and that they have years of experience as HR professionals (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013). Purposive sampling can be defined as a method that allows the researcher to find the best way and choose the appropriate
subjects for a study that meet the necessary criteria (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013). For this study, the unit of analysis were: full time employed HR practitioners (n = 10), selected from the various post levels at a tertiary institution.

1.5.3.5. Data collection methods
The method to collect data for this study was focus groups. According to Gill et al. (2008), a focus group session can be defined as a group discussion on a particular topic organised for research purposes. This discussion is guided, monitored, and recorded by a researcher (also called a facilitator of the focus group). The function of focus groups is to reveal and gather rich and comprehensive information that will help the researcher gain in-depth knowledge of the data that were collected (Eliot & Associates, 2005).

The researcher was cautious of potential disadvantages related to focus groups. For example, the researcher may create certain expectations amongst participants about the results of the study. Furthermore, during the research process, participants may become uncomfortable with other members since they may not wish to share their opinions openly within the group. Another disadvantage is that the research topic may not interest the participants. Therefore, the researcher employed facilitation skills, which guided the participants to stay engaged during the research process, ensuring that the research goals are reached (Gill et al., 2008).

1.5.3.6 Recording data
The focus group sessions were digitally recorded, the data from these recordings were transcribed to capture the necessary themes. The collected data were stored electronically and a password used to protect the data. The researcher ensured the data were kept manually in a double locked cupboard. The necessary quality control measures were followed to ensure the captured data had a rich quality.

1.5.3.7 Data analysis
Before data collection commences, the researcher must ensure the data is recorded in a systematic manner appropriate to the setting, participants, or both, which will enhance the analysis (De Vos et al., 2005). The researcher should be aware that techniques for recording observations, interactions, and interviews should not intrude excessively on the on-going flow of daily events. It is also
important that the researcher arrange beforehand for the equipment to be used during the research project (DeVos et al., 2005). The data collected through the focus groups were analysed by using thematic analysis. The following steps proposed by Braun & Clark, 2006 were used as a guideline:

- Become familiar with the data: The researcher arranged the data for analysis by transcribing the focus group material, record it and unpack it on an excel spread sheet. It is nonetheless important for the researcher to re-read the transcripts in order to be familiar with the data and to know exactly what has been establish with regards to the data.
- Generate initial codes: Once the data have been sorted and typed it will be important for the researcher to make sure that the data is meaningful and that it is in a systematic manner.
- Search for themes: This refers to the process of reading carefully through the transcribed data it will be important for the researcher to make sure that the themes that will be extracted from the data is it captures the significance of the study.
- Review themes: It is important to review, modify and develop the preliminary themes that can be identified and that can be useful in order to gather together all the data that is relevant to each theme (Braun & Clark, 2006)
- Define themes: This is the step where the researcher will ensure that the themes are refined. To make sure that the researcher understands what the theme is saying and also how the themes interrelate with each other.
- Writing-up: Conclusion are reached by linking the findings from the themes with relevant literature.

It is important to take note that data analysis entails a process that takes place throughout the research project. The researcher continually replicates specific areas as well as associations that relate to the present study (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2018). Data analysis as a process allows the researcher to evaluate the collected information and unpack it into different categories that link with the study of the researcher. In this way, the researcher obtains rich information that will describe minor and important components (Henning, et al., 2018).

By analysing data, the researcher processes subdivisions or components of information, which are structured into classifications obtained primarily from the analysed data (Henning, et al., 2018). Literature underlines the importance that the data, which is being analysed, are structured, compact, and described in such a manner that it is appropriated for this study (Henning, et al., 2018).
1.5.3.8 Strategies to ensure quality data

For qualitative research, four elements must be considered to ensure trustworthy data, namely: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

**Credibility**

Credibility ensures the results and research are accurate and clearly describe the case referred to in the study. Objectivity enhances the credibility of the study through techniques such as co-coding and triangulation (McLeod, 2013). For the present study, credibility was ensured by using a co-facilitator for the focus groups, as well as a co-coder to help sort the data. The data were triangulated by comparing the transcribed material with the facilitators’ field notes.

**Transferability**

Transferability implies that the research can be transferred to another context, a technique also known as generalisability with regards to this study data will only be transferable to HR practitioners within a tertiary institution (Creswell et al., 2016). The researcher focused on giving rich descriptions of the context for the study in case of replication in another study.

**Dependability**

Dependability refers to the scientific accuracy of a study. Dependability is concerned with reliability, ensuring that if the study had to be repeated again within the same context, with exactly the same group the findings will be the same. This describes how the study is planned, implemented, documented and finally, reported (Strydom & Delport, 2011). The researcher rigorously reported the execution of the research plan to ensure dependability.

**Conformability**

Conformability means that the research findings are supported by the collected data. When focusing on conformability, the researcher ensures that the study is conducted with objectivity, in order to be confirmed by other researchers. The researcher take care to remain fair and unbiased during the research study, thus avoid influencing the results of the study by making sure that the researcher does not develop a relationship with the participants which will in this regard help the researcher not to be tempted and miss critical information that can influence the results and ensure there is no conformity from the researcher side (Creswell et al., 2016).
1.5.3.9 Reporting

The reporting style in the present study relied on a qualitative writing approach. A qualitative report is less structured and more descriptive in nature. The results of the findings were provided descriptively to reflect the experiences of the participants (De Vos et al., 2011).

1.5.3.10 Ethical considerations

Firstly, ethical clearance and approval to continue with the present study was obtained from the faculties’ Ethics Board. The proposed study form part of a research project for which the institution’s research board provided clearance and approval (NWU-000084-10-S4).

It was necessary to obtain permission from the Executive Director to whom the HR practitioners report, which allowed them to participate in this study. In addition, informed consent was sought and obtained from the participants prior to the study (ECRC, 2016). Such consent allows the participants to understand the intent of the study, how the programme is arranged, and what the purpose of the study entails (De Vos et al., 2011).

The researcher further took the responsibility to ensure no harm was done to the participants who formed part of the study, and took care that they are respected at all times (ECRC, 2016). The researcher further ensured the data collected during the research remained confidential and anonymous (De Vos et al., 2011). Participation was voluntary. No participant experienced that he/she were coerced to participate in the research project. Participants were also given the option to decide whether they wanted to participate. They could withdraw at any stage during the process, without repercussions (De Vos et al., 2011).

6. Chapter division

The chapters in this dissertation are presented as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction
Chapter 2: Research article 1
Chapter 3: Research article 2
Chapter 4: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations.
References


CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH ARTICLE 1

The development of a strength-based training programme facilitating coaching skills for HR practitioners

ABSTRACT

Orientation: The provision of an effective human resources function to staff members plays a significant role in the success of any organisation and requires specific skills such as communication, interpersonal and coaching skills from the human resource practitioner.

Research purpose: The purpose of the present study was to explore how coaching skills and strength-based training are conceptualised in literature to determine the content and methodology of a training programme for human resource practitioners.

Motivation: From a human resource perspective, staff members can be supported through a strength-based approach which helps practitioners apply their own strengths as coaches in the human resource profession.

Research design, approach and method: The present study was of a qualitative nature and based on a social constructivist and phenomenological approach. The study comprised a theoretical approach of theoretical developments captured from scientific journals and literature.

Main findings: The results indicated that the content of the strength-based training programme in coaching skills should include topics such as helping skills, content on interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, methods to develop a strength-based life, assumptions of a strength-based life, and coaching skills.

Practical/managerial implications: Human resource practitioners play an important role by helping organisations reach their goals and strategies. By implementing a strength-based approach to assist staff members, a positive environment is created for efficient human resource services. The study highlighted the importance that a training programme to teach coaching skills from a strength-based perspective has since HR practitioners often have to nurture and mentor staff members.

Contribution/value-add: The study contributes to the body of knowledge by developing a programme that focuses on the strengths of HR practitioners that could help them deal more effective with daily operations within their work environment. The skills the HR practitioners could
acquire through the training programme, enabled them to show facilitate employees’ growth and development in the work place.

**Keywords:** Human Resource practices, Human Resource practitioners, strength-based, coaching skills
**Introduction**

**Problem statement**

When changes occur or must be implemented in organisations, human resource (HR) practitioners are at the forefront (Ulrich, 2008). HR practitioners need the necessary skills and competencies to ensure changes are implemented effectively and that value is added to the organisation as a whole (Ulrich, 2008). To ensure effective HR practices it is, however, important that an organisation is able to compete with the outside market. The need for a competitive edge will determine the effective function of HR practices (Ulrich, Tounger & Brockbank, 2008).

Human resources can be defined as a section/department of a corporation that focuses specifically on actions involving personnel. These actions usually entail recruiting and employing new employees, aligning and training existing employees, handling personnel benefits, and managing retentions (Lawler & Mohrman, 2003).

Literature indicates that Human Resources as a whole plays a fundamental role in an organisation (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005). It is important to realise that HR departments may differ, however, there are general similarities. Most, departments focus on typical compensation and benefits issues, processes of affirmative action and employment equity, job-analysis programmes, and pre-employment testing (Grobler & Warnich, 2006). The importance is emphasised of HR as key link to ensure the organisation moves towards a strategic purpose that guides the teams or departments (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005).

According to the South African Board for Personnel Practice (SABPP) (2016), HR practitioners should provide direction and measurements for strategic innovation while sustaining people practices. Such practitioners must provide a foundation for an organisation's employment value. They must also establish a framework for the HR element of the organisation’s governance, its risk and compliance policies as well as practises and procedures that will help balance the various needs of the relevant stakeholders. Finally, the practitioners’ function is to determine an appropriate HR structure, allocate tasks, and monitor whether the practitioners are competent to deliver HR’s strategic objectives.

The task of the HR practitioner can be daunting, and literature indicates that these individuals often feel overwhelmed in the workplace (SABPP, 2016). Dealing with difficult issues, constant change and diversity in the workplace, requires a specialised skillset from a HR practitioner (SABPP,
The SABPP model indicates key competencies that HR practitioners require in this regard, such as leadership and personal credibility, interpersonal and communication competencies, and organisational capability (SABPP, 2016).

In a study done by Wales (2002) the importance of communication skills for managers and HR practitioners is highlighted. In figure 1 below it is clear that effective communication skills has a vast influence on other competencies, such as self-confidence and assertiveness (Wales, 2002) thereby emphasising the importance for HR practitioners to be equipped with these skills.

![Communication Skills Diagram](image)

**Source: Suzy Wales, 2002**

**Figure 1: Communication skills**

Literature indicates that coaching can be viewed as a central role which HR practitioners fulfil, as a specific area of expertise and a core component of HR development (Hamlin, & Beattie, 2008). HR practitioners typically utilise coaching skills while monitoring onboarding, facilitating change in the workplace, and during conflict management, as indicated in literature (Hamlin, et al., 2008).

Literature shows a clear distinction that explains why coaching is important and vital within an HR management environment, with the focus on the practitioners (Wales, 2002).

The challenge is that coaching does not entail a key learning area within the pre-graduate training of HR practitioners. Nevertheless, certain tertiary institutions offer such a module on post-graduate level (Stander, 2016). A study by Jorgensen, Stander and Van Zyl (2016) indicate that effective training in coaching skills impacts the person holistically (including spirituality, emotion and behaviour). In this regard HR practitioners should be aware of the employees' emotions. The practitioners must manage growth and development in employees. This implies the necessary
knowledge and skills to manage these mentioned processes: abilities that are prerequisites for the HR practitioner.

**Purpose**

In light of the discussion above, the present study employed a strength-based model for facilitating teaching coaching skills to HR practitioners. These skills will allow them to manage HR matters efficiently. The general objective of this study was to explore the development of a training programme in coaching skills from a strength-based perspective for HR practitioners within a tertiary institution. The general objective was unpacked into the following specific ones:

- Determine how human resource management, coaching skills and a strength-based training programme for coaching skills are conceptualised within literature.
- Establish the content and methodology of a strength-based training programme that facilitates coaching skills for HR practitioners, according to literature.
- Draw relevant conclusions and make recommendations for future research.

**Literature review**

**Human resource management**

Human resources as entity entails a classification of activities and approaches to focus on and manage the workforce at the various levels in an organisation. In addition, HR practitioners ensure organisational goals are achieved as set out by management (Byars & Rue, 2006)). In this regard, it should be emphasised that employees within an organisation is an asset. They form part of the daily activities that must be rolled out within organisations. It is crucial for employees to be productive and make significant contributions within the organisation as a whole (Byars & Rue, 2006).

According to Byars and Rue (2006), HR has a specific function within an organisation. The focus is on job analysis, job design, strategic planning, and healthcare career opportunities. These functions include the sharing of employees' profits and their enthusiasm, consultations with labour unions and dissolution of employment. The aim is to evolve following future trends in well-being care. Finally, the focus is on recruitment and selection. This includes HR development, which is linked to training and growth of employees. Of further importance is compensation and benefits. This entails management functions to ensure individuals are rewarded for their efforts and input in the posts they have been appointed (Guangrong & De Meuse, 2013). HR practitioners further also often manage safety and health of employees, labour relations issues and the monitoring of onboarding issues.
Guangrong & De Meuse (2013) define onboarding as ensuring the newcomer in an organisation receive the necessary training on “new employee orientation programmes” and socialisation techniques. Onboarding focuses mainly on new employees and how they are hired, orientated, trained, and mainstreamed into an organisation. In this regard, onboarding plays an important role in the HR function and require specific competencies and skills from the HR practitioner (Lofstock, 2008).

The SABPP (South African Board for People Practices) model describes the HR functions and competencies as skills and knowledge that both HR generalists and specialists require to provide an efficient service to the organisation (SABPP, 2016). These mentioned functions and competencies are: leadership and personal credibility, organisational capability as well as creating and implementing solutions. This also entails interpersonal and communication skills as well as coaching (SABPP, 2016).

**Coaching skills for HR practitioners**

Mentoring and coaching is an advanced method to develop individuals within an organisation (Meyer, 2012). This method can be regarded as a profession, seeing that managers have the responsibility to develop individuals in skills and knowledge. Thus, managers should use effective learning programmes to the benefit of both the organisation and individual employees (Meyer, 2012).

Coaching can be defined as a method to advance and improve the outputs that individuals provide within organisations. This entails work performance that empowers individuals and teams to generate results. Such results should improve the individual employees within the organisation by enhancing their performance and abilities (Hamlin, Ellinger, & Beattie, 2008). The drive of coaching for organisations have a mutual function to realise the intent and purpose of HR development for the company and individual employees (Hamlin et al., 2008). Literature indicates that coaching is provided preferably by professionals such as HR practitioners (Hamlin et al., 2008). According to Hamlin et al. (2008), coaching can be divided into three categories, namely: coaching experiences, increasing entry to coaching, and growing superiority of management and human resources.

**Coaching experiences:** entails the increasing the awareness within individuals, which help them obtain skills and knowledge as coaches. They can apply their skills in practice on participants or candidates.
Increasing entry to coaching: is linked to psychology, psychiatry, adult education and change that will help organisations develop further. In this regard, individuals become aware of the skills and knowledge that coaches should have when they are training others (Hamlin et al., 2008).

Growing superiority of management and human resources: the type of coaching necessary for HR practitioners is the ability to lead oneself and others. Such skills will be essential for the organisation to which they belong (Coaching for Human Resource Professionals, 2016).

Coaching training programmes

Literature indicates that the content and methodology of a typical programme to train coaches should contain three basic aspects (Bjorn, 2002):

- **Strategic alignment**: how the training programmes fit into the organisation.
- **Function**: how the programme assists HR practitioners.
- **Assessment**: Transferring learning to develop and measure the necessary skills and knowledge when the HR practitioners are trained.

Limited information was found in previous studies on training HR practitioners as coaches. A study by Klynveld (2014) explored the training of post-graduate HR students in facilitation skills by using a strength-based model. His proposed training programme included competencies such as communication, leadership, and taking control of situations. According to Klynveld (2014) a strength-based approach is also abundance based and solution driven. Therefore, it enhances intrapersonal awareness and psychological well-being by valuing and utilising the use of an individual’s own strength. Literature indicates that people who use their strength have shown increased resonance of self-esteem, self-efficacy, vitality, and well-being (Klynveld, 2014).

Strength-based theory

The theory of a strength-based life was developed by Marcus Buckingham and a team at Gallup organisations. As a team they studied over 2 million people from different occupations and backgrounds. The founder of the strength-based finder, Marcus Buckingham, accentuated the 34-theme or pattern finder. This construct helps identify employees’ strengths that will help them function optimally within their work environment (Buckingham, 2001). Buckingham bases his theory of strength-based life on two assumptions, which is relevant to the present research. The scholar found that each person’s talents last and is distinctive. Furthermore, individuals’ highest progression lies in areas of their utmost strength (Buckingham & Clifton, 2012). A further
important contribution by Marcus Buckingham covers areas within the present study. He identified components of strength such as talents, knowledge, and skills, which are explicated below (Buckingham & Clifton, 2012):

- **Talents**: patterns that occur through individuals’ point of view, emotions and actions. This entails inherent qualities in individuals, in this case, employees (Buckingham, 2012).
- **Knowledge**: obtained through theory or practical experiences in an environment where people are exposed to their related world of work.
- **Skills**: procedures and actions implemented to complete tasks (Buckingham & Clifton, 2012).

(Refer to Figure 2 below).

![Figure 2: Strength-based model diagramme of strength-based finder by Marcus Buckingham](image)

The above-mentioned triad of components are incorporated in Marcus Buckingham’s strength-based finder. The construct differentiates these three items into further aspects that provide the researcher a clearer view on the different applications. Knowledge can be defined further by distinguishing factual from experiential knowledge, which underlines HR’s relevance to the present study (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). These two forms of knowledge can be distinguished as follows:

- **Factual knowledge**: material that has been processed, which is also referred to as “knowledge through teaching” (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).
• **Experiential knowledge**: facts obtained through experiences by the employees, which could also be termed “knowledge through internalising”. In this regard, skills are activities that give structure to experiential knowledge (Buckingham, 2001).

Literature indicates that organisations focus mainly on rectifying shortcomings amongst employees. A survey by Gallop Poll underlined the need to ascertain within organisations when strengths are not used proactively, and weaknesses are overblown. In such instances, employees may become demotivated to perform daily tasks within their work environments (Buckingham, 2001). For the present study the focus should be on equipping HR practitioners to use their strengths in order to combat their weaknesses in their work environment (Buckingham, 2001). Buckingham (2006) and Rath (2007) collaborated and found that employees are more likely to be involved actively in their jobs when organisations are vested in developing them according to their strengths.

Organisations often make the mistake of discouraging employees to strive for competency within areas considered as their direct weaknesses. Thus, the focus is to advance employees’ professionalism. As stated previously, the reason is that each person’s talents are distinctive and long-term. Therefore, by accentuating the employees’ strength they achieve better when placed in the context of their work environment. It should be emphasised that talents are innate to individuals and thus inborn strengths. On the other hand, knowledge and skills are acquired cognitively, according to the strength-based finder (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

To compile the training programme, the researcher focused on a strength-based perspective with the skills and abilities to help HR practitioners function effectively and efficiently within the context of a tertiary institution. Specific methods can be used in a training programme. The Human Resources Social Network (2001) suggests that coaches should be trained through methods such as simulations, on-the-job training, technology-based learning, lectures, group discussions, tutorials, role playing, management games, and outdoor training (The Human Resources Social Network, 2001).

Based on the discussion above, the following research methodology was employed.
Research design

Research approach

In the present study, the research approach was a theoretical review in order to support the structure on which the research for the study was based. According to Grant and Osanloo (2014), a theoretical review consists of the selected theory (or theories), which undergirds one’s thinking with the understanding of and plan for research the topic. This includes the concepts and definitions from the mentioned theory relevant to the topic. In turn Lovitts (2005) states that a theoretical review defines the criteria for developing theory or applying it to the dissertation. In this regard, theory must be appropriate, logically interpreted, well understood and aligned with the question at hand. According to Creswell, et al., 2016 a phenomenological approach is focused on the sober reflections of the lived experience of human existence. This reflection must be sober, that is as much as possible free from theoretical, prejudicial and suppositional intoxications. With regards to this study is was important for the researcher to focus on this approach, because it allowed the researcher with regards to this to focus on the information that was important in order to reach the objective of this research project. A social constructivist approach allowed the researcher with regards to this study to allow the participant of this study to make sense of their world, and that they can understand their world and with regards to this study. It was essential that the HR practitioners understand their world of work and the functioning there of. The HR practitioners with regards to this study and the research approach were assisted, so that they could make meaning and share their expierances with regards to their world of work.

Focusing on the present study, it is necessary to understand the advantages and disadvantages of a theoretical review, which are as follows:

Advantages

1. A theoretical review allows the researcher to obtain information from literature that support the designs within the study.
2. Such a review allows the researcher to establish the requirements, which include a sound theoretical groundwork in a dissertation study.
3. Literature has shown that across disciplines, a clear and explicit identification and inclusion of a theoretical review is crucial for sound research.
4. The theoretical review can be considered the blueprint, with the student and researcher acting as architects. In this process, the supervisor and student decide together how to build and construct the research in order to operationalise the research topic.

Disadvantages
1. According to Bryant and Charmaz (2007), a theoretical review is a theory that is grounded. In this regard, this review underplays the embeddedness of the researcher in the process. Thus, it obscures the fact that the researcher contributed significantly to the construction and interpretation of the gathered data.

2. Theoretical reviews tend to produce large amounts of data. This often makes it difficult to process the extensive data collected by the researcher.

3. A researcher will have to be skilled in using the research method of a theoretical review.

4. There are no standard rules applied, or rather followed, when data are identified and categorised.

Grant and Osanloo (2014) state that for an effective theoretical review, a researcher should ensure the following aspects are noted when using this research method:

- brief statement of the topic;
- introduction to the organisation of the literature;
- identification of the selected theoretical review;
- theoretical principles that must be applied for example, organising the topic around conceptual sub-headings;
- the importance of identifying the gaps;
- ensuring the research connects to the study and literature, which should relate to the discussed topic.

This study falls mainly within the interpretive research paradigm. According to Walsham (1996), there are no “correct” or “incorrect” theories. Instead these are evaluated by the extent to which the theory appeals to the researcher. The aim is to collect information on the construct that are explored by an in-depth examination of the phenomenon of interest. The interest of researchers applying the interpretivist paradigm is not to create new theory but rather to evaluate, and refine interpretive theories (Walsham, 1995). Regarding the present study, an overview will be provided that outlines the advantages and disadvantages of interpretivism. According to Smith and Osborn (1997) the following aspects could be pointed out:

**Advantages:**

1. Interpretivism allows the researcher to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world.
2. This approach allows individuals to interpret particular experiences, events, or conditions that confronts participants.
3. It involves a detailed examination of the participant’s life-world.
4. It allows the researcher to explore people’s personal experience and is concerned with an individual’s personal perception or the account of an object or event.
5. This form of research is an exercise where the researcher plays an active role in the process.

Disadvantages:
1. Interpretivism entails an extended process. Thus, the researcher must be patient and work according to the gathered data.
2. When interviews take place, the researcher constantly should be aware of the most effective structuring of the interview to deliver rich data.
3. Structured and semi-structured interviews are required, where both methods include participants and it is not always a process that take time and this is where the researcher will have to ensure the questions formulated will support in this regard the study.
4. Researchers must construct a schedule for the interviews; the schedule may change depending on participants, which can be time consuming.
5. Question must be constructed to avoid leading participants to provide answers which the interviewer needs.
6. Themes will have to be identified as well as sub-themes. These elements will have to be explained and interpreted, which can be is a tedious process.

Research method
The research method for the present study comprised two phases: dealing with the literature study and developing the training programme.
Firstly, a complete review of the literature was done based on the following topics: Human Resource practises, Human Resource practitioners, strength-based, and coaching skills. A wide range of academic resources were consulted:
- **Academic search engines**: EbscoHost, Emerald Insight, SAePublications, SACaT, PsychArticles, ScienceDirect, Juta, Lexis Nexis, and Google Scholar.
Sampling and data collection

The sample selected for the literature study entailed peer-reviewed research studies published in various scientific articles between 18 June 2012 and 1 March 2018. The selection criteria targeted articles written in English and reported on developing and/or evaluating a strength-based programme that specifically trains coaching skills to HR practitioners. From the selection criteria, approximately 150 articles were reviewed, which delivered the following results:

- 28 publications on coaching skills training,
- 12 publications on strength-based training,
- 28 articles on human resource management focusing on a strength-based training programme for coaching skills.

Secondly, based on the literature, a structure was developed of the content and methodology for the training programme. This was based on specific topics identified from the literature. Furthermore, the method of training was determined from the literature, which led to the development of a manual and facilitators guide for the training programme. Each topic had a specific objective and included the methods applied to present the intervention.

The present study set out to conceptualise the programme for strength-based training of coaching skills and the findings of the conceptualisation is presented in the Findings section.

Analysis of the data

The data was analysed using thematic analysis. The researcher followed the following steps in order to analyse the data Creswell et al (2016):

1. Planning and preparing the data: The researcher ensure the data to be analysed are recorded by a digital appliance, after which the data are transcribed.
2. Attaining knowledge to the data: In this stage the researcher has ensured a form of structure in the data by sorting the information and typing it in order to understand the data. This helps ensure the data meet the requirements to understand the research topic.
3. Coding of data: In this the stage the researcher ascertain whether the transcribed data are formulated, or rather structured, sufficiently to deliver meaningful analytical units.
4. Describing and reporting the findings: the data are interpreted by the researcher and categorised into themes and subthemes, which provide the participants’ responses.
5. Deduction: Conclusions are usually established when the researcher links the findings to support the research study. It must be ensured the linkage and the findings are supported by literature.

**Strategies employed to ensure data quality and integrity**

To ensure data quality and integrity the researcher focus on the four elements in order to ensure trustworthiness. Credibility ensured that the data is accurate and accurately described for this study. It was important that the Co-facilitator focus on the groups as well as co-coder to code the data. Transferability how the research can be transferred into another context known as generalisation. Dependability was to ensure scientific accuracy with regards to the study, how the study is implemented, documented and reported. Conformability is to make sure that the research support the data and that the study was conducted with objectivity (Creswell, *et al.*, 2016)

**Ethical aspects**

From the outset, it was important that the researcher submit a research proposal for the ethical authorisation and permission from the tertiary institution’s ethical board. The researcher ensured the study adhered to the ethical requirements for a qualitative research (Watson, 2009). The researcher must be competent throughout. For the present study, the researcher had to ensure she had the necessary skills to proceed, including training in the skills needed to conduct a focus group, knowledge and skills on the training programme and competency in conducting research (Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2008).
Findings
The results of the research are reported below according to the two phases of this study: first the core themes namely, coaching skills and strength-based training was conceptualised, then the training programme was constructed train HR practitioners.

Phase 1: conceptualising core themes
The first phase entails conceptualising coaching skills and the strength-based training programme.

Conceptualising coaching skills
The results of conceptualising coaching skills are reported in Table 1 below. These results are ordered by firstly indicating how the various authors defined coaching/and or coaching skills, followed by ways to train/teach such skills. The final column indicates the method employed to train these skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Conceptualisation</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meyer &amp; Orpen, 2012</td>
<td>“Safeguards growth within entities in an organisation.”</td>
<td>Focus on HR development practices where coaching aims to develop career and talents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Developing workplace skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effective personal development plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Succession planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamlin, Ellinger &amp; Beattie, 2008</td>
<td>“… a process to developed and advance the productivities that entities offer inside the work place; effort that empowers entities and groups to produce outcomes that advance entities within the work place with regards to enactment and competence of entities.”</td>
<td>Learning facilitation specialists from different professional backgrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Establish training and development as field and a core function in HR development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitation activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Human Resources Social Network (2001)</td>
<td>“Coaching can be defined as a process that enables entities to attain preparation or rather training from a knowledgeable individual.”</td>
<td>Identify their coaching skills and how they will implement the acquired skills over the years in coaching; determine how the new content from this study can be used to enhance these skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Suggest that coaches should be trained through replications, on-the-job training, skill-based scholarship, allocutions, individual deliberations, lectures, protagonist playing, managing games, and open-air training as practises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales, 2002</td>
<td>“Coaching can be defined as a procedure that is generally implemented and usually accepted in the</td>
<td>Focus on internal development which entails areas such as self-awareness of the individual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
society of managing.”

within the organisation; confidence – if this lacks, the employees will find it difficult to execute their daily tasks.

- External development: focusing on areas such as leadership and management, assertiveness, understanding differences, stress management, work/life balance.

| Cameron & Ebrahimi, 2012 | “Coaching could be defined as a human development procedure that includes an organised, keen interface and the implementation of suitable approaches, system and methods to advance and allow viable transformation for the value of the coaches and possibly for other shareholders in the work environment.” | • Combine coaching with therapy.
• Coaching aims to translate complaints into goals.
• Therapy explores the resistance and negative transfer of behaviour.
• The two combined, allow individuals to predict a positive outcome for themselves in the organisation. |

| Leonard-Cross, 2010 | “Coaching in the workplace can be defined as a huge and growing discipline, with unlimited deal of experience contained by knowledge and growth in an occupation.” | • Focus groups and questionnaires were circulated to determine participants’ evaluation of coaching and of self-efficacy linked to coaching. |

| Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001 | “Coaching can be defined as a form of methodical view of involvement, aimed to develop entities skilled, social mindfulness and individual efficiency.” | • Focus on topics such as motivation of employees, employee growth as well as development and communication.
• Communication entails areas such as active listening and non-verbal techniques, Questions are posed to clarify especially goals and tasks to be executed in the work environment as well as silence. |

| Grant, Curtayne & Burton, 2009 | “Coaching can be defined as an operative revenue of producing a firm, optimistic person when change needs to be implemented.” | • Mentor and coach individuals within the workplace. |

| Zeus & Skiffington, 2006 | “Coaching is mostly seen as evolving individuals, to ensure that they are further in effect, to ensure that they reach their potential within the organisation.” | • Focus groups and interviews are conducted to evaluate the importance of coaching in the workplace.
• Coaches within organisations are also interviewed to ascertain the importance of their roles. |

| Grant & Cavanagh, 2004 | “Coaching can be defined as all-inclusive in nature in order to contain homebased and work-life balance professional matters.” | • Coaches within organisation are also interviewed to establish the importance of their roles.
• Developmental coaching that looks holistically at the individuals in the workplace in terms of their various dimensions and relationships. |
From Table 1 above it is evident that for Meyer and Orpen (2012) mentoring and coaching can be used to develop individuals within the organisation. According to Hamlin et al. (2008), HR practitioners are professionals who also must apply the skill of coaching since they work with clients daily (Hamlin et al., 2008). Furthermore Table 1 shows that coaching can be defined as a method to advance and improve the outputs that individuals provide within the organisation. This entails work performance that empowers individuals and teams to generate results that improve performance and capabilities of individual employees within the organisation (Hamlin et al., 2008).

**Conceptualising strength-based training**

For the present study, various authors indicated how the strength-based training programme is conceptualised in literature. Table 2 below summarises the findings that rendered effective definitions and the conceptualisation of the strength-based training programme.

**TABLE 2: Conceptualisation of strength-based training programme**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Conceptualisation</th>
<th>Method/analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Buckingham &amp; Clifton, 2001)</td>
<td>“A strength is the ability that an individual has to consistently produce a positive outcome through near perfect performance in a specific task.”</td>
<td>• Strength-based finder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buckingham &amp; Clifton, (2001)</td>
<td>“To have the knowledge, talents and skills to be able to work effectively in the organization. Knowledge on a strength-based life with regards to talents, knowledge and skills” (Buckingham, 2001)</td>
<td>• Experiential learning techniques skills and information is acquired by physical participation. In this regard, the practical work book addressed activities related to the topic under research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Experiential learning techniques skills and information is acquired by physical participation. In this regard, the practical work book addressed activities related to the topic under research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Factual learning: obtaining knowledge on the content of the subject.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buckingham &amp; Clifton</td>
<td>“Components of strength include skills, knowledge and talent. These components are important to a strength-based life and career.” .</td>
<td>• Strength finder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Buckingham & Clifton, 2001 “Assumptions of a strength-based life focuses on interpersonal and intrapersonal skills that is important within the HR profession.”

Baumgarten & Roffers (2003) “Helping skills are a requirement for any qualified person working with people. This is also true for the HR profession.”

From Table 2 above it is clear that a strength-based programme for skills training can be conceptualised as an individual’s ability to produce a positive outcome in a specific task consistently through near perfect performance (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

Other definitions from Table 2 shows what the importance of a strength-based finder is especially relevant for professionals within the work environment. Buckingham & Clifton (2001) indicate that the strength-based finder is a method that can be used to stimulate awareness of strengths in an
individual. Schein’s conceptualisation (2009) focuses on the importance for HR professionals to keep improving their knowledge about the strength-based finder. The mentioned strengths are: be careful throughout, stay in touch with current reality, access your ignorance, everything you do is an intervention, it is the client who owns the problem and the solution. Further strength-based insight: go with the flow, timing is crucial, be constructively opportunistic when confronted by interventions, everything is a source of data, errors are inevitable – learn and, when in doubt, share.

Knowledge of the above-mentioned skills will help HR practitioners to be more focused and deliver optimal service to the organisation (Schein, 2009). Table 2 above indicates further that other definitions included in the present study focus mainly on the strength-based training programme. From Tables 1 and 2 above, the researcher identified main themes to include in a strength-based training programme for coaching skills. The themes for these tables were identified and topics captured that could be included in such a programme. These topics are discussed subsequently.

**Theme 1: Helping skills**

From the themes that has been identified above, two concepts emerged compounded as helping skills:

- *Intrapersonal*: skills that are establish within the individuals.
- *Interpersonal*: skills noticeable to others and entail the competence of an individual to interpret and manage his/her own feelings, actions or motivations as well as those of others within social contexts.

The theme that has been identified ensures these skills are applied practically. This provides an in-depth understanding of such skills. Furthermore, this knowledge will help HR professionals deal with clients and even senior managers in an HR work environment.

**Theme 2: Developing a strength-based life**

A second theme for the research was inferred from the results in Tables 1 and 2. This was namely, the development of a strength-based life for HR practitioners. In this regard, a strength-based theory helped the present study evaluate and discover strengths that have been developed by Buckingham (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).
Theme 3: Assumptions of a strength-based life

The third theme provides the basis on which the concept must be understood. Thus, when the training process is implemented, the organisation will know how to manage, retain, and understand the strengths that has been discovered. This will help the organisation focus on the HR practitioners’ function to select, measure, transform and especially, develop the human capital of the company according to the discovered strengths (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

Theme 4: Components of strength

The fourth theme provides a structured view enabling the HR practitioners to differentiate between the components of strength. This helps them apply prior knowledge about talents, knowledge and skills in the workplace (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

The researcher’s aim was utilising the training programme to coach the HR practitioners enabling them to use components of strength. This could help them improve and develop in the working environment based on Marcus Buckingham’s construct of these components. HR practitioners should gain insight into applying such strengths effectively within their working environment. In this regard, the HR practitioners could be assisted to develop a strength-based life and career (Buckingham, 2001).

Theme 5: Coaching skills

The fifth theme, coaching skills, is crucial for HR practitioners. According to Meyer and Orpen (2012), mentoring and coaching help develop individuals within the organisation. The HR practitioners are professionals who also must apply the skill of coaching in their work with clients daily (Hamlin et al., 2008).

Theme 6: Strength-based finder

The sixth theme captured from the data is that of the strength-based finder. It was important that the researcher use this method to help HR practitioners understand and apply the construct of the basic strengths finder (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). HR professionals should understand strengths and how it can benefit them in the field, or more specifically, their profession. It is important to understand that individuals are born with talents. However, they can acquire skills and knowledge – as explained previously (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

During the training session the HR practitioners identify their talents and how they can use the strength-based finder to capitalise on areas where they may lack as HR professionals. This will help them improve their skills in their interaction with clients whom they service within the organisation
(Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). Such coaching will thus make these practitioners more focused to deliver optimal service to the organisation (Schein, 2009).

From the discussion above, the content for a strength-based programme that trains coaching skills is presented in Table 3 below.

**Phase 2:** The content and methodology of a strength-based training programme that coaches skills for HR practitioners.

**TABLE 3: Strength-based programme for training coaching skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Helping skills</strong></td>
<td>Basic understanding of helping skills; basic skills such as listening or paraphrasing.</td>
<td>The HR practitioners must be able to provide basic assistance and help employees within their work environment.</td>
<td>Workshop where topic is discussed. Focus on understanding the fundamentals of helping skills</td>
<td>1 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(interpersonal skills)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Activity 1:</strong> Practical workbook where the exercise deals with the topic, namely interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, which were discussed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Activity 2:</strong> Group discussion on helpings skills and how the content has developed the HR practitioner.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Helping skills</strong></td>
<td>Basic understanding of helping skills by growing and developing as a helper.</td>
<td>The HR practitioners must be able to function on an optimal level intra-personally.</td>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td>1 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(intrapersonal skills)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Activity 1:</strong> Practical workbook: Focus on the activity that deals with interpersonal skills.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Activity 2:</strong> Group discussion on helpings skills and how the content has developed the HR practitioner.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The strengths principle</strong></td>
<td>This part of the training programme helped the facilitator understand the HR practitioners should be able to understand and apply</td>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td>Developer focusing on</td>
<td>1 hr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
concepts of knowledge on a strength-based life. The facilitator also coached the HR practitioners during this section of the workshop. This enabled them to grasp cognitively the reason they have to develop on a personal level.

---

**The components of strengths-based approach**

The facilitator coached the HR practitioner on the components of strength. There were found to be three categories, namely talents, knowledge, and skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The facilitator coached the HR practitioners to understand and apply the strengths principle in their lives.</th>
<th>The HR practitioners should be able to understand and apply the strengths principle in their lives.</th>
<th>Workshop</th>
<th>1 hr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitions on the three categories. Individual activity that focuses on talents, skills, and knowledge. Group discussion: Their views on the three categories.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Strength-based training**

The HR practitioners were guided to understand how to apply the four criteria (spontaneous reactions, yearnings, rapid learning, and satisfaction). This helped them identify their character strengths.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The HR practitioners should be able to apply the four criteria to identify their own character strengths.</th>
<th>Workshop</th>
<th>1 hr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34 themes were discussed by the facilitator. Activity on the strengths of the HR practitioners. Group discussion on the strength-based training between the groups.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Knowledge can be distinguished in terms of two types.**

The facilitator coached the HR practitioners to understand the two concepts (factual and experiential knowledge). This was done to develop and build on the strengths the HR practitioners discovered during the training programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The facilitator coached the HR practitioners to understand the two concepts (factual and experiential knowledge). This was done to develop and build on the strengths the HR practitioners discovered during the training programme.</th>
<th>Workshop</th>
<th>1 hr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lecture on the distinction between experiential and factual learning and why these are incorporated in the content. Activity on experiential and factual learning. Group discussion after the information was presented: Their assessment of the concepts.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The HR practitioners had to complete an exercise where they apply their skills to solve a difficult problem. (In their working environment they follow the process daily.) It was important for the facilitator to observe how they use their skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills and how it encourages a strength-based life</th>
<th>Workshop</th>
<th>1 hr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity that explains the skills is and how HR practitioners should consider it in practice.</td>
<td>Group discussion on skills and how to encourage a strength-based life.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 3 above, it is clear that specific topics could be distilled from the findings. These are expounded below.

**Topic 1: Helping skills**
The objective of this topic is to enable the HR practitioners to function at an optimal level in the intrapersonal and interpersonal sphere. The method to train this topic include a workshop on helping skills coupled with group discussions. Furthermore, after discussing each topic, a practical workbook is used for an exercise that reflects the topic concerned.

**Topic 2: Interpersonal and intrapersonal skills**
The following topic include distinguishing interpersonal from intrapersonal skills and understand the importance to apply these skills as HR professionals. The method includes a presentation by the facilitator to demonstrate the difference between the types of skills to the HR practitioners. After the presentation, practitioner’s complete exercises in a practical workbook, after which a group discussion is held. This could help ensure the HR practitioners understand the concepts in-depth.

**Topic 3: Personal development**
The aim of Topic 3 is to ensure the HR practitioners experience the training programme would help them develop on a personal level. Thus, it is important that the facilitator guide the HR practitioners to understand why they require knowledge of a strength-based life and career. In the present study, the facilitator will conduct group discussions that could help the group as a whole understand the importance of this topic. The suggested method includes a presentation accompanied by a practical workbook, which could assist the HR practitioners implement the concept in practice and develop on a cognitive level.

**Topic 4: Components of strength**
For the present this study, the components of strengths were found to be talent, knowledge, and skills. Thus, it was important for the facilitator that the practitioners are cognisant of differences between these concepts and how it relate to them as HR professionals. The method chosen to introduce these concepts is a presentation by giving clear illustrations to the HR practitioners. Thereafter, a group discussion will be held to ensure the programme for strength-based training of coaching skills has covered the necessary content.

**Topic 5: Character strengths**

According to Topic 5 the HR practitioners are guided to identify their character strengths. This means that each practitioner focus on these concepts and understand how they as individuals can identify their own character strengths. The method utilised here will include a presentation to help the individual HR practitioners understand the concept and its connection to their own character strengths. Thereafter, exercises from the practical workbook will be completed to ensure the HR practitioners understand the content and the concepts that will be dealt with in the workshop.

**Topic 6: Two types of knowledge**

The findings showed that knowledge can be divided into two concepts, namely factual and experiential. Thus, it is important that the HR practitioner distinguish these two concepts and understand the relevance these types of knowledge hold for them in their current work environment. The method will again include a presentation to demonstrate the differences in these concepts. Practitioners are also shown how to apply the new-found knowledge in the practical workbook as well as provide experiential learning opportunities such as role-playing.

**Topic 7: Strength-based life and career**

The skills that encouraged a strength-based life and career, point to a crucial topic that underlines the ultimate aim of the present study. Skills must help HR practitioners develop and have the capacity to address difficult situations within the work environment. They must also be able to deal with difficult clients in this environment. The method includes exercises done in a practical workbook to determine whether the participants can apply these skills in practice. A group discussion to ascertain how the team view the new concepts will be included.

As mentioned previously, Tables 3 and 4 indicate how the training on a strength-based finder has improved the functioning of HR practitioners within their organisation. This indicates why a
strength-based life and career may enhance the HR practitioners’ profession. Such an approach gives them insight into their natural strengths, which they can apply to be more effective and alert within the work environment (Brook & Brewerton, 2016).

A strength-based life could ultimately help HR practitioners build values of commitment and quality. Ultimately the aim is that such training will allow the HR practitioners to improve the capacity, attraction, and retention of staff members.

**Discussion**

The aim of the present study was to develop a strength-based training programme that facilitates coaching skills to HR practitioners within a tertiary institution. The first specific objective was to develop such a training programme. According to literature, a strength is the ability of an individual to produce a positive outcome consistently through near-perfect performance in a specific task (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

The second specific objective of the training programme was ensuring the content and methodology of a strength-based programme for HR practitioners are in accordance with guidelines from literature. Literature indicated that such a programme should include the following topics: understanding helping skills, grasping the process of helping skills, and understanding how to differentiate between these skills in the context of human resources. Literature also focused on personal development, components of strength, criteria to help the HR practitioner identify character strengths, and two types of knowledge as well as applicable skills for a strength-based life and career.

The results of the present study indicated that the programme incorporated the topics which it set out to do in the objectives. This is in accordance with previous studies in this field. A literature review captured specific topics that support this study and the strength-based training programme on coaching skills for HR practitioners. These topics are explicated below.

**Topic 1:** entails helping, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. According to literature, helping skills are imperative for professionals who work with different people, especially within the HR management profession. Focus was placed on this profession as context for this study (Baumgarten & Roffers, 2003). Thus, it was important that the HR practitioners understand why they should
acquire and apply these skills, for which the programme was developed (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

Furthermore, literature highlighted the so-called “soft” skills. According to Vijayalashmi (2016), soft skills can be categorised in terms of interpersonal and intrapersonal types. *Interpersonal* skills are noticeable to others and entail individuals’ competence to interpret and manage their own feelings, actions, and motivations as well as that of others within social contexts. A sense of self-management is the basic aspect of interpersonal intelligence. *Intrapersonal* skills are those found within the individual (Marlow-Ferguson, 2002). These concepts were relevant to the present study. Thus, it was necessary to include this topic in the study since HR practitioners can be trained to implement these skills in their work environment (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

**Topic 2:** focuses on developing a strength-based life. This topic allowed the researcher to focus on the guidelines which supported the development of such an approach for the HR practitioners (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). The strength-based theory informed the development of the training programme. This illustrated how the HR practitioners can identify strengths by using the training programme for strength-based skills and coaching (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). Marcus Buckingham (2001) proposed this model to help HR practitioners develop on a personal level in order to function and thrive within the working environment (Buckingham, 2001).

**Topic 3:** describes assumptions of a strength-based life. By focusing on these assumptions, the training programme could help HR practitioners understand that it is necessary for the organisation to approach HR professionals as different individuals with unique strengths. Thus, management can focus on developing the HR practitioners according to these assets (Buckingham, 2001). This insight will help the organisation select, measure, transform and specifically develop the HR function by optimising these strengths within the work environment (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

**Topic 4:** outlines components of strength. This topic provided the HR practitioners a structured view on how to differentiate between the components of strength and apply their prior knowledge about their talents, knowledge, and skills. Whereas individuals generally are cognisant of such inner abilities, the training programme helped the HR practitioners understand these components in depth (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). The researcher coached the practitioners to use the components of strength, to improve and develop in the working environment. This approach is based on Marcus Buckingham’s view regarding these components of strength and how practitioners can implement
these in their work environment. The programme that the present study developed helped the HR practitioners forge a strength-based life and career (Buckingham, 2001).

**Topic 5:** focuses on identifying character strengths. This topic dealt with the various criteria for character strengths. According to literature, character strengths can be conceptualised as areas that focus on the mechanisms of decent personality functioning as the extent that it advances consciousness of specific differences, which allows people to function optimally (Harzer & Ruch, 2012). During the workshop, HR practitioners had to identify these strengths and write it in their practical workbook. This helped them develop skills to understand their own character strengths. The participants pointed out the following strengths: spontaneous reactions, yearnings, rapid learning, and satisfaction. By identify these strengths, they also understood how these concepts can help them forge a strength-based life.

**Topic 6:** describes two types of knowledge. Literature indicated that knowledge can be divided into two types, namely factual and experiential. According to Buckingham & Clifton (2001), factual knowledge refers to the content of a subject, whereas experiential knowledge entails skills and information that individuals acquire by physically performing an activity. The aim of the present study was that the HR practitioners obtain the necessary knowledge.

**Topic 7:** focuses on a strength-based life and career. According to Buckingham & Clifton (2001), it is important for individuals to excel in the field that they have chosen. They will need to find lasting satisfaction in doing so, and become adept at finding, describing and applying their strengths, leading to refinement and continuous practice. This will help the HR practitioner obtain a strength-based life and career. Regarding the present study, the training programme ensured the HR practitioners establish and maintain a strength-based life and career to function optimally within their current work environment (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

Literature indicated that when organisations or any institution undergoes transition, the HR practitioners are at the forefront to implement these changes (Ulrich, 2008). It is paramount that HR practitioners have the skills and abilities to implement the necessary changes effectively in an organisation (Ulrich, 2008). Therefore, it was important that the present study develop the mentioned training programme to assist the HR practitioners.

Several studies were found that cover HR professionals and their function in the work place. However, to date, no study was conducted that focused on the HR department of a tertiary
in institution. Thus, the present research’s focus was unique due to the context of such an institution. This allowed the researcher to identify the problems and address the gaps by developing a strength-based training programme that facilitates coaching skills to future HR practitioners.

Limitations

Human resource practitioners play an important role in helping organisations reach its goals and strategies for the present study, certain limitation will be discussed that is relevant to this study.

Firstly, It is important to take into consideration the main aim of this study was to develop and implement a training programme with the focus on a strength-based and coaching training programme. Coaching is an important tool with regards to the HR practitioners. Over the years being specialist in their profession because of the workload they have lost their drive and passion for their profession. It was important for the HR practitioners to obtain training but this training as stated by the result could only assist them to certain point as professionals.

Secondly, This training will allow them to develop on a personal level, but when they go back to the environment of work the after care needs to be done so that they don’t loose or forget about the skills they obtained in the programme which will allow them to be effective and ultimately achieve the goals of their organisations.

Thirdly, The training will allow them to be able to support and impart knowledge to individuals that are at the entry level of human resource management profession. The limitations will be will the working environment be conducive for them to coach and impart knowledge to the new entrants in this specific profession.

Fourthly, The HR practitioners as a group felt that senior management don’t realise their potential, their value as professionals to the institution and that growing in their profession is limited in their current working environment. That is why this study could just address a fraction of the problems that the HR practitioners are dealing with that is why it was important to develop the programme to ensure that problems with regards to the HR practitioners can be dealt with gradually.
Recommendations for future research

The most important focus of this study is to ensure that the programme that has been developed ensure growth within the HR practitioners. The programme needs to redirect them to the crux of their profession so that they don’t lose focus when matters within the organisation gets difficult within their current work environment. They need to understand what do they as HR professionals want to achieve in their current work environment.

The needs to reflect on things that are currently happening within their work environment, the need to evaluate what can they do, to change their situations in their current work environment and the need to make a mind shift, they need to ensure that they become more strategic and place themselves more strategically within their current work environment. The programme that has been developed will ensure to develop them in this regard.

Firstly, by implementing a strength-based approach that assist staff members, a positive environment was created for efficient HR services. In this regard, the present study highlighted the need for even senior management to nurture and mentor the HR practitioners.

Secondly, these practitioners should understand their strengths and the skills they developed and be guided to retain these skills.

Thirdly, it will be important for senior managers from the HR department in an organisation to obtain the same training to ensure the skills that the practitioners have obtained with regard to the training programme is retained. Senior managers will fulfill a role where they will act as mentors and coaches in order to support and ensure that the skills the HR practitioners obtained during the training will be retained. And developed as their career progress and evolve.

Fourthly, With regards to this study it will be important to ensure that the researcher do follow ups on the progress of the participants. The researcher will be limited in this regards as the HR practitioners are currently experiences dramatic changes within the work environment. Time is important for them as they have interviews schedules, meetings and demanding clients.

Conclusion

In conclusion regarding the training programme, this will ensure that the practitioners are sustainable and that they can be used efficiently and effectively within their current environment. The programme has assisted them to see as participants that they can impart knowledge to the new entrants of the work force and ensure these new entrants can be mentored and coached in order to function effectively within a team and function independently within their organisation.
Contribution/value add

The present study’s main contribution to the body of knowledge is the development of a strength-based training programme. This programme could help HR professionals use the skills they acquired to facilitate growth and development among employees. The present study addressed a gap in the literature, which relates to the strength-based approach. This approach was linked to positive psychology informed by the paradigms that this study has identified about the various research methods that has been used to support the results of the current study.
References


CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH ARTICLE 2

The evaluation of a strength-based coaching skills training programme for HR practitioners

ABSTRACT

Orientation: The aim of the present study was to evaluate a coaching skills training programme from a strength-based perspective that would help human resource (HR) practitioners function optimally in the workplace.

Research purpose: The purpose of this study was to develop and evaluate a strength-based training programme that facilitate coaching skills to HR practitioners in a tertiary institution and how they experienced the training programme as participants of this study.

Motivation: Literature indicated that coaching has emerged as a rapidly growing practice domain, however there is still limited scientific research done on the training and development of coaches. Furthermore, from literature it can be deduced that coaching education recently became more prevalent and must be part of the focus on training coaches to be competent.

Research design, approach and method: This study employed a qualitative research design, which investigates phenomena that occurs within a natural setting. The sample size for the study was 10 participants. The participants involved in this study attended a workshop after which they were exposed to a focus group in order for data to be collected for this study. The research design that was used is qualitative research, which streamlines what the researcher has observed and helps the researcher identify certain occurrences that provide important information relevant to the study.

Main findings: Evaluation of the strength-based coaching skills showed that, after the training, the selected participants had improved. They were inclined to relate better to others and enabled to identify and develop their own and others’ strengths. In addition, they were more aware of their strengths and demonstrated increased self-acceptance and self-confidence.

Practical/managerial implications: The results and findings obtained in this study, indicated that the HR practitioners could use the training and develop a strength-based life. This will assist them and make them relevant within their field of work.

Contribution/value-add: This study contributes to the function of HR practitioners at large by helping them discover their strengths through the training programme on strength-based coaching.
skills. They will be able to impart the knowledge gained through the training programme. Thus, as HR practitioners, they will be able to assist new entrants in the field by coaching and mentoring new entrants to the field of Human Resource Management.

**Keywords:** Human Resource practices, Human Resource practitioners, strength-based, coaching skills
Introduction

Employees are encouraged constantly to improve productivity and correct weaknesses, as an effort to achieve success in organisations (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). There are several ways to uncover employees’ strengths, seeing that these are strengths that are unique to individuals, which they perform repeatedly to perfection. Buckingham and Clifton (2001) explain that any activity that people can perform well repeatedly, whilst enjoying themselves, can be considered a strength.

The ideal would be encouraging employees to practice their strengths in the workplace. A first step would be to identify these strengths, followed by capitalising on these assets, which allow the organisation to be successful and sustainable. A way to identify and understand strengths is through a training programme, such as was provided in the present study. Human Resource (HR) practitioners were encouraged to identify their strengths and utilise these during coaching sessions with employees. Such a process allows these practitioners to function optimally by developing a strength-based life and career (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). The HR practitioner plays a vital role in any organisation, as was emphasised by the Human Resource Development Strategy of South Africa (HRDSA) 2010-2030.

Literature review

Human resource management

Literature indicates that human resource manages to facilitate employees in such a way that the organisation’s strategic objectives can be reached (Stone, 2008). According to Warnich, Carrell, Elbert and Hatfield (2015), the HR practitioners’ function typically include aspects such as job analysis and design, recruitment, selection and orientation, training and development, labour relations as well as information systems. Effective HR practitioners must incorporate several skills, knowledge, and competencies in their skills set. Meyer (2012) reports that the South African Board of People Practices (SABPP) identified a model which suggests various competencies important for the HR practitioner. These entail: leadership and personal credibility, organisational capability, creation and implementation of solutions, interpersonal and communication skills, and sustainable citizenship of the future.

According to literature, during unstable economic conditions, it is crucial to focus on training HR professionals regarding coaching skills within a tertiary institution. Abu Teir and Zhang (2016) point out that when higher education institutions focus on human resource management (HRM), the practitioners are important role-players. They help implement HRM as full strategic partners who
function optimally in collaboration with tertiary institutions. As HR practitioners, their role is ensuring departments and faculties are placed in a position to function effectively in response to the market needs outside the institution.

The HR practitioner, in this regard, will function as the change agent. Another area on which HR practitioners focus is the social, cultural, and economic growth of the institutions. Their policies and procedures must be implemented to ensure efficient and optimal functioning of the faculties and departments (Abu Teir & Zhang, 2016). Literature emphasises the importance of HRM in any institution – in the case of the present study, tertiary institutions. In this regard, the HR functions can become the utmost, valued source inside the national economy (Abu Teir & Zhang, 2016).

According to Abu Teir and Zhang (2016), HR practitioners in tertiary institutions must ensure the following functions run smoothly within the institution:

1. Member aids: Considers the benefits associated with health, dental, medications, worker’s compensation and other members’ benefits to ensure employees’ well-being.
2. Uniformity in the place of work: Entails policies, programmes, and activities that promote a harmonious environment in the workplace.
3. Inclusive HR: Comply with rules and laws implemented within the South African context.
4. HRM: Incorporates practical policies, and procedures as well as processes that are important to the functioning of the institution.
5. Enactment metrics: Describe a comprehensive range of metrics in the main HR programmes.
6. Recruitment/selection/termination: Entails procedures for acquiring, interviewing, and recruiting quality employees as well as assuring minority recruitment.
7. Risk management, safety and health: Provides advice on occupational health, environmental protection, and in the area of safety and risks.

Additional HR functions include areas such as administration of wages and salary, employee compliance, employee relations, information systems and technology, employee leave and holidays, payroll, retirement as well as training and developing employees. These mentioned areas may be applicable to the HR profession. However, the researcher selected certain functions that are deemed relevant to the research focus, namely training HR practitioners attending a strength-based and coaching skills training programme, within a tertiary institution.
According to literature, HR practitioners’ role is to implement and ensure behavioural change within the workplace (Pieterse & Rothmann, 2009). Such changes can be implemented by focusing on a strength-based approach. Buckingham (2006) found that employees are six times more likely to engage in their jobs when energy is invested into developing their strengths.

**Strength-based skills**

Character strengths can be defined as an individual’s capability to perform and excel in tasks and simultaneously enjoy doing it for a living (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). According to Park and Peterson (2009), character strengths play a key role in the professional development of employees. These scholars found that participants’ self-esteem increases when they become aware of their individual character strengths. The Gallup Organization undertook a study that included 198 000 employees. The results showed that employees are sent to special training programmes not to expand their strengths, but to rectify weaknesses. Thus, the true potential of employees is often neglected. Similarly, Peterson and Park (2006) point out that individual character strengths are generally overlooked and could be an important resource to help develop an organisation.

On the other hand, Peterson and Park (2006), found that employees who focus on their character strengths, experience higher levels of engagement. This is because they are more satisfied with their lives, more content, resilient and healthier – aspects which ultimately increase productivity. Buckingham and Clifton (2001) identify two assumptions of a strength-based life: each person’s talents are enduring and unique; and the most room for improvement lies in areas of an individual’s greatest strength. The components of a strength-based programme should thus include skills, knowledge, and talents. The latter would include talents that are considered dominant, supporting, and lesser (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

HR practitioners often must deal with difficult issues, workplace changes, and diversity – aspects which require a specialised skillset (SABPP, 2016). Therefore, a strength-based approach would suit the HR practitioner, seeing that the SABPP model underlines key competencies as the necessary knowledge, skills, and behaviour to facilitate people processes (SABPP, 2016). The SABPP particularly highlights the functions and competencies of coaching (SABPP, 2016).
Coaching skills for HR practitioners

Jorgensen, Van Zyl, and Stander (2016) report that coaching has emerged as a rapidly growing practice domain, in which limited scientific research is done on the training and development of coaches. These scholars point out that coaching education recently showed increased influence. Therefore, it should be part of the process that prepares coaches to be competent. Odendaal and Le Roux (2016) indicate that, worldwide, it is becoming increasingly important to apply coaching in a diverse workforce as well as across national boundaries.

Simpson (2014) emphasises that an efficient coach could facilitate a transformative experience in the workplace. Essentially, coaching is about tapping into a person’s innate potential and achieving goals by making trust a vital part of the relationship. Furthermore, effective coaches focus on their skills to challenge the status quo, help clients approach goals with clarity, and establish a framework according to which the client can succeed. In this regard, trust as the first principle of coaching is vital since it facilitates sound communication based on openness and honesty.

Simpson further identifies potential as another vital principle, where it is assumed that each person has the potential to grow and develop. The task of a coach is to develop character and competence. These aspects can be explicated as follows:

- **Character**: refers to personal integrity and includes characteristics such as honesty and modesty.

- **Competence**: entails skills based on sound communication, namely the ability to facilitate change and build rapport, listening, responding, questioning, posing challenging questions, and having interpersonal attributes such as showing empathy (Lai & McDowell, 2016).

Literature indicates that coaching skills compliment other so-called “soft” skills and can be used to refine or build on the existing skills and knowledge the individuals have acquired on coaching (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004). Coaching is a process aimed at developing and advancing the productivity of entities within the workplace. These efforts empower the entities and groups to produce outcomes that help them enact the skills and enhance their competencies (Hamlin, Ellinger & Beattie, 2008). Several professions regard coaching as important. These include the fields of psychology, adult education as well as organisational change and development, of which the latter
is relevant to the present study in particular, and the HR profession in general (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004).

In the field of HR, new and innovative solutions are necessary to address the difficult challenges and situations presented within an organisation (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2010). Therefore, the specific contribution of this study was to evaluate the impact of character strengths on the coaching skills of a group of HR practitioners.

**Research objectives**

From the discussion above, a general as well as specific research objectives were compiled.

**General objective**

The general objective of the present study was to implement and evaluate a strength-based coaching skills training programme for HR practitioners in a tertiary institution

**Specific objectives**

The general objective was unpacked in terms of the following specific ones:

- Determine how human resource management, coaching skills and strength-based coaching skills training programme are conceptualised within literature.
- Establish what the content and methodology are of a strength-based coaching skills training programme for HR practitioners according to literature.
- Explore the experiences of the selected population of HR practitioners within a tertiary institution after undergoing the strength-based coaching skills training programme.
- Determine the implications for the future training of HR practitioners in coaching skills.
- Draw relevant conclusions and make recommendations for the future.

**Research design**

**Research method**

The reported research method consists of the literature review, entrée and establishing the researcher’s role. The method also focuses on the sampling, collection, and recording of the data, which include strategies to ensure its quality and integrity. This is followed by ethical considerations, data analysis and reporting style.
Research approach

This study utilised a qualitative research design, which focuses on phenomena that occurs within a natural setting. The chosen design helps the researcher capture and study the natural setting in its complexity. In other words, researchers simplify their observations, ensuring the identified phenomena provide the necessary information for their qualitative research (Leedy & Ormond, 2013).

Advantages

The choice for a qualitative design holds various advantages as expounded below:

- **Description:** According to Leedy and Ormond (2013), predictions are focused, or rather placed, on a firm basis that entail the following: conditions, situations, procedures, affiliations, structures, or society. These are the aspects the researcher aims to interpret and deal with, regarding the collected data.

- **Formulation:** This creates new ideas and concepts about phenomena to support the study.

- **Verification:** Allows the researcher to test and ascertain whether theories and assumptions are valid.

- **Evaluation:** The researcher can assess whether the plans, practices and advances were effective.

Disadvantages

Despite the mentioned advantages, qualitative research also has disadvantages.

- **Structure:** Often such a design lacks a strategy and even plan in place to deliver effective research (Vos et al., 2011).

- **Generalisation:** It is often difficult to generalise the findings to the larger context such as society as a whole.

- **Calculations:** Due to the process, results cannot be provided in percentages but rather as exact numbers.

- **Comparisons:** It is extremely difficult to make systematic comparisons. The reason is that the researcher has to deal with a wide range of responses, which can also be subjective.

- **Bias:** The research results can be influenced by the researcher’s own pre-conceived ideas and view of the situation.
• **Skillset:** The research depends on the skills of researcher. Where specific skills (e.g. interviewing) are lacking, questions may be asked of the research (Vos *et al.*, 2011).

*Proposed corrective*

As possible corrective, social constructivism can provide unbiased practicality. This design is linked to the researcher’s reality and constitutes how the research subject can be constructed socially and personally. This implies the researcher’s active involvement in the research process (Vos *et al.*, 2011). Criticisms and misunderstandings arise when this central fact is misinterpreted and the researcher divert from the mentioned research subject. It is crucial that the researcher distinguishes data on the subject under research (Vos *et al.*, 2011). In addition, the study followed a phenomenological approach. Such an approach attempts to understand individuals’ insights, viewpoints, and their understanding of a specific matter (Leedy & Ormond, 2013).

*Research strategy*

The present study used a case study as its strategy. Such an approach allows the researcher to explore an occurrence or certain phenomena. The use of a case study thus provides various explanations or information bases (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This helps the researcher explore an issue not just through a single lens but through various lenses, where the multiple features of the phenomena are revealed and understood (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

A descriptive case study was utilised to obtain the data relating to the phenomenon investigated in this study (Yin, 2003, cited in Fouche & Schurink, 2011). Focus groups were used to execute the case study strategy and required of the researcher to be involved on a personal level as facilitator. The specific population of the HR practitioners at the training institution were the case that were investigated. According to Creswell (2009), the purpose of a case study is to gather information which is related to a specific context. Regarding the present study, the context was provided by a specific population at the training institution.

*Research setting*

The training took place in a conference room with the necessary equipment which the participants needed. The training was in the form of a workshop, where the participants acquired the necessary information about this study. The method of training was through lectures. Such a setting was convenient since it allowed the participants to be in an environment where training is conducive,
and learning is active. As part of the workshop, participants were given a practical workbook. This helped them understand the content that was covered.

**Entrée and establishing researcher roles**

The researcher requested and received ethical approval from the University’s ethical board. Entrée to the participants was obtained by inviting the entire team of the HR office from the tertiary institution to form part of the intended study. In clarifying the basis of the research, self-reflection was important to ensure the researcher stays on track with the study at hand (Creswell, 2009).

The final method was using extended time, to develop an in-depth understanding of strategic aspects of the HR practitioners’ function (Creswell, 2009). This meant the researcher had to undertake an additional role, apart from planning and executing the research. The focus was also on roles as interviewer, active listener, and transcriber of the data (Creswell, 2009).

**Sampling**

The methods used for the study were purposive and key-informant sampling this form is sampling focuses on the social positions in a research setting. Key-informant sampling allows the researcher to focus on high-quality information about individuals, practices and proceedings (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013). Purposive sampling can be defined as a method that provides researchers the best way for a study and helps them choose the relevant subjects to meet the necessary criteria necessary. By selecting the entities of this study, the researcher obtained the most information, which can be classified as rich data to ensure the findings is accurate and of a high standard (Guest, Namey & Mitchell 2013).

For the present study, the unit of analysis was full-time employed HR practitioners at the tertiary institution. The population for this study consisted of HR practitioners (n=10) who are specialists and generalists in their field of work. Most of the participants have 10-30 years of experience as professionals. However, a number are on entry level where they have 2-4 years of experience in their profession, which is human resource management (HRM). It is evident that those entry-level participants are able to evaluate what they were taught at university and link this knowledge with the HR practice in the workplace.

Table 1 below provides an overview of the research participants’ characteristics.
Table 1 indicates that 10 participants took part in the study. The research sample consisted of male (30%) and female (70%) participants. Most of the population was from 25 to 30 years old, with 70% of the group represented by this age category. The selected participants were Afrikaans and Setswana (60%) speaking.

**Data collection methods**

The method to collect data for the present study was focus groups. According to Gill *et al* (2008), a focus group can be defined as a group discussion on a particular topic organised for research purposes. This discussion is guided, monitored and recorded by a researcher (also called a moderator or facilitator). The function of focus groups is to reveal and ensure rich and comprehensive information providing in-depth insight into collected data (Eliot & Associates, 2005).

The method of focus groups may entail certain disadvantages:

- **Expectations**: The researcher may raise expectations amongst participants about possible results for the study, which may not be reached since the researcher may be focusing on a certain aspect of the research.
• *Interaction:* During the research process, participants may become uncomfortable with each other because they may shy away from sharing their opinions within the focus group.

• *Interests:* It may happen that the topic of interest for the researcher may not resonate with that of the participants.

It was thus important for the researcher to keep participants engaged since ultimately, the researcher’s goals must be reached (Gill *et al.*, 2008).

The HR practitioners who participated in the research formed part of the focus group. After the discussions, a training programme was presented to gauge their experiences of the strength-based coaching.

**Focus group questions**

The following questions were posed to the participants during the focus group sessions:

1. How do you define coaching skills for HR practitioners?
2. How important do you think coaching skills are for HR practitioners?
3. How will coaching skills assist you in your current job?
4. How do you think you will utilise your character strengths during a coaching situation in the workplace?
5. How will this training programme allow you to be more strategic when it comes to you as a specialist/generalist in your field of work?
6. How will you use your strengths to improve your work environment?
7. What was your experience of the training programme?
   a. In your experience, how will training in a strength-based coaching skills training programme assist you in your job performance?
   b. What was your experience of the content of the strength-based coaching skills training programme?
   c. What was your experience of how the strength-based coaching skills training programme was presented?
8. What recommendations do you have to improve the content of the programme?
Data recording

The focus group sessions were recorded digitally, and the data on the digital recorder transcribed to obtain the necessary themes. The collected data were stored electronically, and a password used to protect the information. The researcher also ensured data were kept manually in a double-locked cupboard. The necessary measures were followed for quality control to ensure rich-quality data. For the present study, it was important to following the method of thematic data analysis to process the gathered information. To ensure data were analysed in a professional manner, certain steps were followed, as expounded below.

Data analysis

The data of the study were analysed according to themes by following the steps described by Creswell (2009):

1. After the focus groups were conducted, the data were organised and prepared for analysis. The focus group discussions were transcribed and placed onto an Excel spreadsheet.
2. The researcher read through the data to capture the essence of the overall meaning and gain an understanding of the participants’ views.
3. The analysis with a coding process followed where data were arranged into categories.
4. Thereafter, coding was used to obtain a description of the data and to capture categories or themes for analysis. A co-coder was involved to ensure the validity of the data.
5. The researcher presented the findings through a qualitative, narrative approach.
6. Finally, the researcher drew conclusions and interpreted the meaning of the data, ensuring the findings was in accordance with relevant literature.

Strategies to ensure data quality and integrity

For qualitative research, various techniques and methods can be employed to ensure trustworthy data. Trustworthiness in qualitative research comprises four elements, namely credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. These elements as explicated below.

Credibility: This implies the results and research are believable when focus is placed on qualitative research. However, it is important that the collected information must be data-rich, in other words, comprehensive with sufficient detail. Thus credibility ensures the findings are compatible with reality. To be believable, it must be confirmed that the reader will trust and be certain of the outcomes (Creswell et al., 2016). It explores the initial understanding of the participants and ensure
progress in the knowledge that was gained. This also takes place through structured, purposive sampling and detailed data-collection methods (Creswell et al., 2016).

Transferability: Entails the extent to which the research can be transferred to another context. According to Creswell et al. (2016), transferability considers human interaction which represents a segment of the individuals’ life-world.

Dependability: Allows the researcher to record information as well as comprehend the research methods and their value. Dependability entails a demonstration based on investigation. This ensures the collected data are implemented accurately and function correctly, resulting in the insightful appraisal of projects. It also means the research project may change due to new information or data that have been captured and will enhance the study (Creswell et al., 2016).

Conformability: This element confirms that the research findings are duly supported by the collected data. Conformability requires that the researchers admit their own susceptibility. As researchers interact with the participants of a study, their bias or conformability about the output may increase. This may influence the results the researcher aims for at the end of the research project (Creswell et al., 2016).

Findings
In this section, the findings of the study are presented. Firstly, the strength-based training programme that was developed are discussed briefly. This is followed by the discussion of the experiences of the HR participants after undergoing this training programme for coaching skills.

The strength-based training programme
Table 2 below outlines the process that was followed in the training programme to facilitate coaching skills to HR practitioners.
### TABLE 2: The strength-based coaching skills training programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workshop exercise</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exercise 1</strong></td>
<td>Basic understanding of helping skills</td>
<td>HR practitioners must be able to help and assist clients within their work environment.</td>
<td>• Activity 1 Practical workbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exercise 2</strong></td>
<td>The helping process and how it can be differentiated within an HR environment</td>
<td>HR practitioner must distinguish interpersonal from intrapersonal skills.</td>
<td>• Activity 2. (8 activities for the section of the helping process) Practical workbook • Pen and paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exercise 3</strong></td>
<td>How the training programme helped the HR practitioners to develop on an individual level (personal development)</td>
<td>This part of the training programme allowed the facilitator to understand the concepts of a strength-based life and career and coach the HR practitioners to cognitively grasp the reason why they must develop on a personal level.</td>
<td>• Practical workbook • 1 Activity • Pen and paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exercise 4</strong></td>
<td>The components of strength</td>
<td>The facilitator coached the HR practitioners to understand the components of strength. These entail three categories, namely: talent, knowledge, and skills.</td>
<td>• Practical workbook • Pen and Paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exercise 5</strong></td>
<td>The criteria to help the HR practitioners identify their own character strengths</td>
<td>HR practitioners were facilitated to apply the four criteria (spontaneous reactions, yearnings, rapid learning, satisfaction), which helped them identify their character strengths.</td>
<td>• Practical workbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exercise 6</strong></td>
<td>Knowledge can be divided into two types</td>
<td>The facilitator coached the HR practitioners to distinguish the two concepts (factual and experiential knowledge). This was to develop and build on the strengths the participants discovered during the training programme.</td>
<td>• Lecture • Pen and Paper • Practical workbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exercise 7</strong></td>
<td>Skills and how it encourages a strength-based life and career</td>
<td>HR practitioners had to complete an exercise by applying their skills to solve a difficult problem. (In their work environment they undergo the process daily.) It was important for the facilitator to observe how they utilise their skills.</td>
<td>• Practical workbook.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 above indicates that the training programme used in this study provided seven exercises. First the helping process was emphasised, which includes inter- and intrapersonal skills and ways in which HR practitioners can apply this knowledge in their work environment. The components of character strengths were included in the training. This helped the participants understand how these components (talent, knowledge, and skills) enhance a strength-based life and career.

Experiences of HR participants

Below, the findings are discussed of the HR practitioners’ experiences after undergoing the strength-based coaching skills training programme. The results of the focus group sessions were analysed thematically and arranged into three categories comprising themes and sub-themes, along with the direct quotations to support the findings.

The findings are provided in the order the questions were posed to the participants during the interviews. The responses could be captured in certain categories, which are presented in successive tables below:

- **Table 3** – Category 1: Experiences of the *coaching skills* as part of the strength-based training programme.
- **Table 4** – Category 2: Experiences of the *character strengths* as part of the training programme.
- **Table 5** – Category 3: Recommendations for the *strength-based coaching skills* and training programme.

Category 1: Experiences of the coaching skills as part of the strength-based training programme

The first category of the findings identified the participants from specifically the coaching-skills section of the training programme. The extracted data could be segmented into two themes, which provided seven sub-themes. The data for this category are presented in Table 3 below.
TABLE 3: HR practitioners’ experiences of the coaching skills as part of the strength-based training programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific coaching skills</td>
<td>Listening and communication skills</td>
<td>“Excellent listening skills, someone who won’t listen with the intent to respond and also good communication skills.” (Female, 26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“An effective helper in problem solving, to listen actively and use open-ended questions to gain clarity.” (Female, 48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Having excellent people skills, being a strategic thinker and being emotionally intelligent.” (Male, 38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Problem-solving skills in order to help clients and also mentoring skills and how to develop interpersonal skills.” (Male, 26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td></td>
<td>“I can say someone who is willing to help the job get done and understanding individuals in the team.” (Female, 36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Relationship building for effective team work; some people find it difficult to separate work and personal matters.” (Female, 22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict management</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Good conflict-resolution skills, good communication skills, and analytical thinking skills.” (Female, 30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Being good conflict resolute and having good decision-making skills. Being task driven and being diplomatic.” (Male, 29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional competence</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>“One who has the problem of trusting or even distrusting in the fact that myself as a HR professional could assist them as my fellow colleagues.” (Female, 33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Clients undermine you. Clients who think that they know everything due to feeling senior to me as the practitioner.” (Female, 44).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural diversity</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Someone who is competent in their work, who understands individual differences and someone who has interest for relationship and built them and understand cultural diversity.” (Female, 24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Clients that are racist; clients that do not follow policy. Due to change they don’t want to follow policy and procedure. A client can’t be trusted. Clients that are not open to change.” (Male, 26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Problem-solving skills in order to help clients solve difficult HR functions and also mentoring skills and how to develop interpersonal skills to assist clients proactively.” (Male, 38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“To assist with insight, knowledge, someone who has strategic solutions and always delivering and influencing the team.” (Male, 29)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 above indicates two distinct themes: specific coaching skills and professional competence. These themes were unpacked into several sub-themes.

Theme 1: Specific coaching skills
Firstly, participants identified specific coaching skills, which they viewed as part of their role as HR practitioner. This theme was divided into the sub-themes explicated below.
1. **Listening and communication:** HR practitioners mentioned these skills, seeing that they deal with clients daily and must communicate the correct information to them. This applies especially when managing staff members or when policies and procedures must be implemented in the clients’ departments or faculties. Participants stated that a person showing excellent listening skills does not listen with the intention to respond. Instead, it is someone willing to listen effectively and communicate with the staff members. In this way, the organisation’s objective is reached, which means that sound communication skills were applied.

2. **Interpersonal skills:** HR practitioners deemed it important to portray effective interpersonal skills when dealing with difficult clients. They explained that employees are from different cultures and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it is crucial that HR practitioners have interpersonal skills that help them deal with a diverse group of people within their current work environment.

   A participant mentioned that having excellent people skills, being a strategic thinker, and being emotionally mature, demonstrates that an individual has effective interpersonal skills. Another participant added problem-solving skills (to help clients) and mentoring skills, both to help develop interpersonal skills.

3. **Teamwork:** This sub-theme deduced from specific coaching skills was extremely important to the HR practitioners. They believed that to be effective in their organisation and their profession, they must work effectively within a team.

   A participant remarked that she views teamwork as someone willing to help the job get done and who understands every individual within the team. Another participant understood teamwork as a form of relationship building to be effective when working within a team. This participant explained that she has discovered the importance to work within a team although other individuals may be unable to separate work and personal matters. This is the case especially when the team must achieve an objective, but individual members may prevent the team from moving forward.

4. **Conflict management:** The environment in which HR practitioners operate, is prone to conflict. Thus, it is important for these practitioners to manage conflict effectively within their work environment. A participant pointed out that effective conflict-resolution skills would help them manage conflict in any shape or form. Another participant stressed the importance for an individual to develop effective conflict-resolution skills as well as sound decision-making skills and being
goal- and task-driven. These assets help individual employees reach the objective of the organisation and provide them skills to be diplomatic when conflict must be handled effectively and efficiently.

**Theme 2: Professional competence**
The second theme captured from the data, was professional competence from which three sub-themes were identified.

1. **Trust:** The participants indicated that they often found that employees do not necessarily trust them. The researcher discovered that HR practitioners at times not only distrust each other but also the clients to whom they render a service. One of the participants remarked that clients undermine them. Certain clients may feel they know more about the HR practitioners’ profession due to these clients’ seniority within their field and areas of work.

**Cultural diversity:** Participants stressed the importance to understand individual differences and focused on building relationships to understand diverse cultures. Certain participants reported that they experienced racist behaviour from certain clients.

**Problem-solving skills:** These skills were also indicated as vitally important for the field of HR practitioners. A participant explained that problem-solving skills were necessary to help clients. Coupled with mentoring skills, these assets helped him to deal with different people and thus develop interpersonal skills. Another participant remarked that problem-solving provides insight and knowledge; such individuals have strategic solutions and are continuously delivering and influencing the team.

For the purpose of the present study, it is crucial to understand the importance of coaching. Therefore, the themes extracted from the data were analysed to inform the training programme aimed at developing coaching skills of the HR practitioners.

**Category 2: HR practitioners’ experiences of the character strengths as part of a strength-based training programme**
The second category describes the participants experience of the character-strengths section of the training programme. The extracted data could be divided into two themes, which resulted in four sub-themes. The data from this category is presented in Table 4 below.
TABLE 4: HR practitioners’ experiences of character strengths as part of a strength-based training programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conceptualise character</td>
<td>Inherent</td>
<td>“It is the innate ability that I have discovered within myself. I realised that one of my strengths is perfectionism. I realised it can be and positive and a negative into how I tackle a task in the work environment.” (Male,38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strengths</td>
<td></td>
<td>“A strength forms part of skills you have developed over the years.” (Female, 44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>“To communicate and build good relationships with colleagues and clients, I’ve got the theoretical knowledge which helps me to deliver the service. So, that for me it’s a strength.” (Female, 26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply character strengths</td>
<td>Reach objectives</td>
<td>“My strengths help me to reach and accomplish my goals and objectives.” (Male, 26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“By using my character strength, it has allowed me to become a better communicator. In my current work environment, communication is very important because we work with policies and procedures and when changes occur as we as HR professional need to speak with each other.” (Female, 36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Create structure</td>
<td>“Using my character strength has helped me to develop structure and provide an organised working environment for individuals who are new and who may need a bit of help.” (Female, 48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“My character strength is being organised and structured and help me to improve my world of work, especially when structure needs to be implemented.” (Female, 30)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants were requested to conceptualise the term “character strengths” in their own words. From Table 4 above it is clear that most participants viewed character strengths as an integral part of the identity of their profession. Participants indicated that their strengths are innate and play a major role within their work profession. This also provided Category 2’s first main theme, which is expounded below.

**Theme 1: Conceptualise character strengths**

From this theme, a number of sub-themes could be extracted:

1. **Inherent nature:** A participant specified that he views a character strength as an ability he have discovered within himself, and which has been part of his life set-up – in this case, his
Another participant stated that a strength forms part of the skills that she developed over the years.

2. Interpersonal skills: A participant explained that character strengths could be conceptualised as interpersonal skills and to build a sound relationship with colleagues and clients. Other participants remarked that they have theoretical knowledge, which helps them deliver to clients in a professional and efficient way. They mentioned that they discovered this as their strength during the training. Another participant identified his strength as observing people. This allows him to understand people more, especially their behaviour and why this has a negative or a positive effect on them in their work environment.

Theme 2: Apply character strengths

The participants also mentioned how they applied the character strengths in their workplace. This was extracted as the second main theme and presented in Table 3 above. From this theme, two sub-themes could be deduced.

1. Reach objectives: Participants stated that their strengths have helped them reach and accomplish goals and objectives, which made them more task driven and goal directed. Another participant remarked that by applying her character strength, she has become a better communicator. In her current work environment, communication is paramount since they work with policies and procedures. Thus, when changes occur, the HR professionals must communicate to each other as a team.

2. Create structure: The participants explained that using their character strengths has helped them develop structure. This provided an organised working environment for new entrants who need assistance. Participants further mentioned that they apply their strength by being organised and structured since it seemed to improve their world of work.

Category 3: Recommendations for the training programme

The final category entails the recommendations the participants suggested to enhance the training programme. The extracted data portrayed one theme, which could be broken down into three sub-themes. The data for Category 3 are presented in Table 5 below.
TABLE 5: HR practitioners’ recommendations for the training programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive enforcement</td>
<td>Increased self-confidence</td>
<td>“What the training provided, it pointed out that we are strong individuals and I took that with me to say: ‘You know what? I am a strong individual and I know what I am doing in my field of work.’” (Male, 38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased self-awareness</td>
<td>“The training assisted in the process of emotional intelligence; you need your strengths and weaknesses in order to have an effect on other people. The training allowed me to be more aware and know my strengths and weaknesses and how to work with people” (Female, 36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased exposure</td>
<td>“The programme has helped me to identify my strengths and how it has allowed you to set yourself up in the office.” (Male, 29)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The main theme for Table 5 is the HR practitioners’ experience of the training programme. From this theme, three sub-themes were captured:

1. **Increased self-confidence**: Participants indicated that they experience this improvement since they felt they understood their role and field of work.

2. **Increased self-awareness**: Certain participants felt that the training programme helped them become emotionally more aware of where they needed their strengths and weaknesses to impact other people. One participant remarked that training allowed HR practitioners to be more aware and know their strengths and weaknesses and how to work with people, as she discovered through training. A participant stated that the programme has helped him identify his strengths. He understood how this strength helped him establish a more strategic approach of being more structured and focused on delivering tasks and achieving goals in his HR function.

3. **Increased exposure**: Participants considered the training as productive while the information helped them improve themselves and think more strategic. Most participants felt that the training should be presented on a continuous basis. The training has made participants more aware of their importance as HR professionals. They mentioned further that the training has allowed them to be mentored and coached. Therefore, the practitioners realised the importance of having mentors (i.e. senior managers) who will sustain and help them retain the insight from the training session. Furthermore, since they have interns working under them, they understood the need to mentor these young adults, helping the latter develop in their role as HR professionals.
Discussion
The general objective for the present study was to develop and evaluate a strength-based training programme that transfers coaching skills to the HR practitioners within a tertiary institution. In this study, the mentioned training programme helped these practitioners identify their own strengths by following a strength-based approach. This also entailed coaching them as a team and facilitate understanding of ways they can apply these assets for a strength-based life and career. This general objective was unpacked into specific objectives, which are discussed below.

Specific objective 1
The first specific objective was to determine how human resource management (HRM), coaching skills and a strength-based training programme are conceptualised in literature. According to literature, it is important for HR professionals to have coaching skills, combined with a strength-based approach. This will help them improve their work environment by focusing on a strength-based career and life (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004). For the present study it was crucial that coaching skills form an integral part of the HR practitioner’s function. The literature pointed out that coaching helped HR professionals develop as individuals. In this regard, they also acquire knowledge to implement their individual skills effectively in coaching. Thus, these coaching skills enable them to function strategic by being more goal orientated and task driven (Chalofsky, 1996).

Furthermore, literature reported that a strength-based life that focuses on coaching helped HR practitioners identify their unique, individual talents. Through these distinct talents, the training programme helped the HR practitioners develop and discover their primary strength (Buckingham & Clifton, 2012). When applying this strength, HR practitioners will function optimally within their world of work. They will be more productive and creative in dealing with difficult processes or entities within their work environment. The HR practitioners as a team will foster values of commitment and excellence through which they serve the clients with whom they deal daily (Buckingham & Clifton, 2012).

By utilising their strength as identified during the training programme, the HR practitioners could implement their skills in the workplace. This will help them function more robust, self-assured, and help increase the confidence amongst the team members as well as the entities working within the
organisation. Being trained in coaching skills and a strength-based life and career, HR practitioners will have a constructive impact on the workplace. They will be able to bring about modification as well as retain staff and draw the correct individuals to the organisation as a whole (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

**Specific objective 2**
The second specific objective was to establish, according to literature, the content and methodology of a strength-based training programme that transfers coaching skills to HR practitioners.

A workshop developed by Lodewyk (refer to chapter 2 of this dissertation) was held to train HR practitioners as coaches from a strength-based perspective. Literature on specific skills indicated aspects to be included in such a training programme. These are helping skills, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, and personal development within a stressful environment. Literature proposes further that a training programme in coaching skills based on character strengths should include the strength principle. Through this section of the training programme, the facilitator helped the HR practitioners understand the concepts of a strength-based life and career. The HR practitioners were coached to apply cognitive thinking which helped them grasp the mentioned concepts (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

Another area that was addressed is the components of character strengths. HR practitioners were trained to apply and understand what is meant by talents, knowledge (divided into sub-focus areas of factual learning and experiential learning) and skills (encouraging a strength-based life and career) (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). The mentioned areas form an integral part of coaching within a strength-based training programme. This also helped HR practitioners understand why a strength is important for them to function optimally within the workplace.

In the study, specific themes were captured that describe the focus of the strength-based training programme (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). These themes are: specific coaching skills, professional competence, conceptualising character strengths, and applying character strengths. Hamlin et al. (2008) define coaching as a process to improve and ensure effective performance of entities within institutions. This requires a labour routine that permits entities and groups to produce outcomes, which improve their performance and enhance the abilities of employees within the establishment. Literature identified the content and method necessary for a distinctive programme to develop coaches. Such a programme should contain the following elements: tactical orientation, gathering
information to assist HR practitioners, and evaluation. The aim is to transfer knowledge and skills to the HR practitioners (Bjornberg, 2002).

Specific objective 3
The third specific objective was to explore the experiences of the participants after they underwent the strength-based training programme for coaching skills. The findings revealed three categories, which are discussed below.

Category 1: describes the experience of the participants after the training programme. Participants attested that they gained specific coaching skills. These they viewed mainly as listening and communication skills, interpersonal skills, teamwork, and conflict management. The findings indicated further that the participants understood coaching skills as professional competence, which entailed aspects such as trust, cultural diversity, and problem-solving skills. These findings are in accordance with that of Meyer (2012) who reported that the South African Board for People Practice (SABPP) view certain competencies as important for the HR practitioner. These include creating solutions as well as interpersonal and communication skills.

The first category indicates another theme that was linked to professional competence. The findings showed that the participants view the following as important competencies for HR practitioners: trust, cultural diversity, and problem-solving skills. For the researcher, trust as competency was an insightful finding since this corresponds to the finding of Simpson (2014). According to Simpson (2014), trust is not only the first principle of coaching. Trust is also vital since it facilitates sound communication based on openness and honesty. He adds that an efficient coach can facilitate a transformative experience in a diverse workplace, which confirms that cultural diversity as a competency is meaningful for the HR practitioner.

According to Hamlin et al. (2008), the coaching experience means increasing the awareness within individuals and helping them acquire skills and knowledge as coaches which they can impart to others through training.

Category 2: The second category shows that character strengths were conceptualised and applied during the training programme. While conceptualising character strengths, the findings showed that the HR practitioners viewed these as an integral part of their profession. The findings also revealed that from interpersonal skills, one can conceptualise character strengths, which is necessary to build a constructive relationship with colleagues and clients. This finding is in accordance with Simpson
who confirms that an efficient coach should demonstrate competence such as the ability to facilitate change and build rapport. In this regard, Lai and McDowell (2016) add the following to their skill set: listening, responding, questioning, asking challenging questions, and interpersonal attributes such as showing empathy.

Furthermore, it was evident from the findings that participants found it important to apply the character strengths in their workplace. The findings showed that HR practitioners’ strengths help them reach goals and objectives and create structure for an organised working environment. In the same vein, Simpson (2014) points out that an efficient coach has the ability to achieve goals.

Category 3: The third category focuses on the participants’ recommendations for the training programme. An interesting finding is that when the participants were required to make recommendations, they indicated that after the training they felt positively enforced which led to an experience of increased self-confidence and self-awareness amongst the participants. The participants indicated that the training helped them feel emotionally more aware of where they needed to apply their strengths and weaknesses to make the best impact on other people. This finding is in accordance with that of Jorgensen et al. (2016), namely that after a coaching training programme for students, the participants experienced increased self-confidence in their coaching ability and showed a development focus. Similarly, the results by Klynveld (2014) indicate that after a character-strengths training programme, the participants were inclined to relate better to others and able to identify and develop their own and others’ strengths. Furthermore, these students were more aware of their strengths, and showed increased self-acceptance and self-confidence.

Finally, the participants of the present study suggested that the training should be presented on a continuous basis. This would allow them more time to practise their coaching skills from a strengths-based perspective. This finding links to the fourth objective of the present study, namely determining the implications for the future training of HR practitioners in coaching skills. Thus, it can be deduced that future training in such a coaching and strength-based programme for HR practitioners should be presented and developed continuously.

Practical implications
The strength-based training programme focused on developing coaching skills. This allowed the HR practitioners to implement the skills they have gained in their working environment. As a result, HR practitioners have a skillset available to assist their clients from a growth and development perspective. Thus, HR practitioners are trained to focus first on their own growth as a coach and
become more self-aware. In this way, the practitioners gain more confidence to facilitate a coaching session from a strength-based perspective presented to diverse employees.

**Contribution, limitations, and recommendations**

This final section focuses on the contribution of the research and points out the limitations. Thereafter, recommendations are suggested for practice and future studies.

**Contribution**

The training programme was developed to help HR practitioners better themselves individually by focusing on their unique strengths and the ways to utilise these during a coaching session. Only one previous study could be found that investigated a strength-based approach, however, this applied to post-graduate students in Human Resource Management. Given these examples, the present study is unique due to its focus on a specific homogenous group, namely HR practitioners, within the tertiary institution.

**Limitations**

Despite the contribution and gains, the present study had to factor in certain limitations, which are pointed out and discussed below.

*Firstly*, as was mentioned above, to date, this is the first training programme for coaching skills involving HR practitioners specifically at a tertiary institution. Since no prior studies focused on this context, no comparative research was available to assess the successful application of the strength-based approach in this regard.

*Secondly*, it was evident that the HR practitioners were overstretched with schedules and by assisting various clients through interviews and meetings. As a result, the researcher found it difficult to set up meetings, hold the focus group discussions, and even commence the workshop, which the practitioners had to attend to be trained in coaching skills.

*Thirdly*, the small sample size can be viewed as a limitation since the ten selected participants in the study were limited exclusively to the staff members of the tertiary institution’s HR department. Therefore, it may not be possible to generalise the findings to other settings.

*Fourthly*, the participants were limited in terms of language and race. English was chosen as suitable language to accommodate the various participants. This language approach was deemed
appropriate during all stages of the research. The race entailed mostly African and coloured participants.

Recommendations for practice

Marcus Buckingham (2005) identifies areas on which to focus for the HR practice. These aspects are also relevant as recommendations to enhance the present study.

Firstly, the facilitator must modify roles continuously to capitalise on the individual’s strength. It is thus important to identify each employee’s unique strength. HR practitioners can apply these strengths within the organisation to provide professional assistance to the clients. In this way, the HR practitioners will function optimally by applying the skills, which they acquired through training, effectively in the workplace.

Secondly, the facilitator should focus on the triggers that activate individuals’ strength. HR practitioners in the organisation will appreciate public recognition for their achievements. Other employees will also be more compliant if they are rewarded with incentives. This may encourage them to perform optimally and reach their goals as set by the organisation. It should be remembered that HR practitioners are at the forefront of conflicting interests in the workplace. There may be clients who undermine them or are unwilling to follow the professional advice which the practitioners provide.

Thirdly, the coaching must be tailored to an individual’s learning style. When focusing on HR practitioners, there are diverse styles, for example: the analyser, doer, and watcher or observer. These individuals must be treated differently and coached according to the mentioned learning styles. In this way, they will function optimally as HR professionals in the work environment.

The recommendations above will enhance the practice and help the HR practitioners function more effectively. This is especially the case when senior managers are trained to be mentors and coaches to the HR entity in an organisation.

Recommendations for future research

Firstly, a clear recommendation for future studies is that other tertiary institutions undergo the same training programme. Secondly, future research can focus on including interviews as data collection method combined with focus groups. It is thirdly recommended that senior management are trained as mentors and coaches for the incoming HR professionals in the organisation.
Conclusion

In the present study, it was found that a strength-based training programme for coaching skills is of the utmost importance to HR professionals. They deal daily with a diverse group of people in stressful situations. Thus, for these practitioners to function effective and efficient, they will require this form of training. Essentially such a strength-based training programme will encourage individuals to grow within themselves by discovering their inherent potential. This will help them achieve their objectives by ensuring that reliance and resilience forms an integral part of their work environment and their HR profession.

Furthermore, as HR practitioners, they must learn to focus on their skills, which will help them challenge a deficient status quo in the work environment. In this way, the practitioners may help clients approach goals with clarity and creativity.
References


CHAPTER 4
CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 4 provides conclusions from the present study. These conclusions are drawn from the literature review and the findings in accordance with the study’s research objectives. In addition, the limitations of the research are discussed, followed by recommendations made for future research.

4.1 Conclusion
The general objective of the study was to develop and evaluate a strength-based coaching skills training programme for human resource (HR) practitioners in a tertiary institution. The objective of this study was achieved by compiling two research articles each with a set of specific objectives, which are expounded below.

**Article 1: Developing a strength-based coaching skills training programme for human resource practitioners at a tertiary institution.**

The general objective of the first article from this dissertation was to explore the development of coaching skills within a training programme from a strength-based perspective. The research focus was HR practitioners within the context of a tertiary institution.

The results revealed two phases, namely conceptualising the themes that should be included in a strength-based training programme transferring teaching coaching skills to HR practitioners. Secondly, the article focused on developing the content and methodology of the training programme based on a literature review.

Figure 4 below provides a summary of the above-mentioned phases with the main themes obtained from the findings (indicated on the following page).
To follow, conclusions are drawn on the specific objectives for Article 1.

**Specific objective 1: Determine how human resource management, coaching skills, and a strength-based training programme for coaching skills are conceptualise within literature**

The *first objective* of this study was to conceptualise a strength-based programme that train coaching skills in accordance with literature.
From literature it was evident that a strength consists of three components, namely talents, knowledge, and skills (Buckingham & Clifton, 2012). Talents refer to the inherent qualities of individuals, while knowledge are obtained from the environment in which the individual works, and skills are the actions taken by the employee.

Literature indicated further that a programme to develop character strengths should link to the relevant content by focusing on the participant’s knowledge, skills, and talents. This is to ensure participants understand these concepts independently in order to apply and implement the discovered skills in the workplace (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

According to literature, coaching, which is included in the study’s training programme, can be defined as a method to advance and improve the outputs that individuals provide within the organisation. This entails work performance that empowers individuals and teams to generate results that improve the output and capabilities of individual employees within the organisation (Hamlin, Ellinger & Beattie, 2008).

**Specific objective 2: Establish the content and methodology of a strength-based training programme that facilitates coaching skills for HR practitioners.**

Regarding the second objective of this study, literature indicated that a typical training programme should include the following topics: defining helping skills, understanding how to differentiate between these skills in the context of human resources, personal development, components of strength, and criteria to help the HR practitioner identify character strengths for a strength-based life (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

The above-mentioned aspects were categorised into several topics that were presented by means of a workshop method. The following topics were developed:

- **Topic 1** presented helping and interpersonal skills. These skills help the HR practitioners improve their interactive skills with employees (Baumgarten & Roffers, 2003).
- **Topic 2** focused on developing a strength-based life and provided the principles of character strengths to the participants (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).
• Topic 3 postulated the assumptions of a strength-based life to create awareness of the inherent and innate strengths that participants have discovered as individuals (Buckingham, 2001).

• Topic 4 outlined the components of strengths. This topic was practical and helped individuals apply the skills they have obtained during the training programme (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

• Topic 5 focused on identifying character strengths of each participant to understand how these strengths can be applied within a coaching setting.

• Topic 6 referred to specific knowledge, firstly how the content will be used to teach participants, and secondly to stimulate individuals cognitively.

• Topic 7 presented a strength-based life and career by determining how the participants in the workplace will use the training that they have obtained and apply the skills they have acquired (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

Recommendations for future research are discussed later in this chapter.

Article 2: The evaluation of a strength-based coaching skills training programme for HR practitioners

The general objective of Article 2 was to evaluate a strength-based training programme that facilitated coaching skills to HR practitioners in a tertiary institution. From the findings three categories emerged, from which various themes and subthemes could be extracted. The findings from Article 2 are discussed briefly in accordance with the objectives of the study:

Specific objective 1: Determine how is human resource management, coaching skills and strength-based coaching skills training programme conceptualised within literature.

Regarding the first specific objective, the researcher obtained an understanding of coaching skills and a strength-based training programme for the HR practitioners (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004). According to literature, HR practitioners should facilitate an organisation’s processes in such a way that the company’s strategic objectives can be reached (Stone, 2008). Literature points out that strength-based training is indispensable for HR professionals (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004). According to Buckingham and Clifton (2001), employees should be encouraged to improve their strengths
rather than correct weaknesses. For the present study, coaching was used as skills to facilitate HR processes in the workplace more efficiently. Odendaal and Le Roux (2016) emphasise that coaching has become increasingly important to apply in a diverse workforce as well as across national boundaries.

Specific objective 2: was to establish, according to literature, the content and methodology of a strength-based training programme that transfers coaching skills to HR practitioners.

The content included in the workshop entailed the following aspects: the helping process, inter- and intrapersonal skills, components of character strengths, and focus on a strength-based life and career. The training programme was presented to the participants and the following specific objective focused on the experiences of the participants after the training.

Specific objective 3: Explore the experiences of the selected population of HR practitioners within a tertiary institution after undergoing the strength-based coaching skills training programme.

The findings revealed three categories, which are summarised in Figure 5 below.
FIGURE 5: A summary of the categories and themes for the evaluation of a strength-based coaching skills training programme for HR practitioners
The categories that emerged from the findings linked to the third specific objective, are expounded below.

**Category 1:** describes the experiences of the *coaching skills* as part of the strength-based training programme. The themes showed that HR practitioners experienced enhanced knowledge of particular coaching skills. Another main theme extracted from the results was *professional competence* where trust, cultural diversity, and conflict management were identified as sub-themes. The findings showed that participants considered the following skills as important: managing conflict with clients and maintaining sound relationships. The South African Board of People Practises (SABPP) indicates that it is crucial for HR professionals to develop personally through training if they were to remain relevant in their discipline. Training allows HR professionals to develop competencies such as conflict management, which will help them compete in the market for human resource management (SABPP, 2016).

**Category 2:** related to the experiences of *character strengths* as part of the training programme. For the first theme, the participants conceptualised character strengths from which the sub-themes indicated that they experienced the strengths as inherent to themselves. Interpersonal skills were experienced as an important part of applying character strengths, which allows the HR practitioner to function effective and efficient within the workplace. Furthermore, team work and conflict management were revealed as relevant to character strengths. The second theme focused on the *application* of character strengths. The participants indicated that the strengths helped them reach their goals and objectives. In addition, applying their character strengths helped them develop structure and organise their work environment.

**Category 3** focused on the recommendations for the *strength-based coaching skills* and training programme. It was significant: when the participants were requested to make recommendations, they indicated that they felt positively enforced by the training. In this regard, they reported increased self-confidence and improved understanding of their role and field of work. The participants felt that the training programme helped them become emotionally more aware of areas where they needed their strengths and weaknesses to impact other people. In addition, the participants recommended that the training programme should be presented more frequently.
4.2. Limitations

In the course of the present study, certain limitations came to the fore. The most noticeable was the sample size of the study. The entire HR working group of a single tertiary institute was used, where other universities should be included in future studies. Thus, the results may not be representative for similar HR groups in other tertiary institutions. Further exploration at more training institutions from other provinces may provide a better indication of the findings’ transferability. Another limitation emerged during data collection. It became apparent that the HR practitioners found it difficult to attend the focus group sessions. Therefore, the researcher had to apply different approaches for effective time management to accommodate the participants.

4.3. Recommendations

As indicated previously, the final specific objective of the articles relates to the recommendations for future research.

This study made available a strength-based coaching and training programme for HR practitioners. For the future it will be helpful if HR professionals across tertiary institutions could obtain this form of training. This will help them realise the importance of their roles as coaches within their organisations. Future studies can also focus on training senior management as mentors and coaches from a strength-based perspective. They could create an awareness that employees must be supported and equipped by focusing on their strengths rather than attempting to address only their weaknesses.

In conclusion regarding this study, it was of the utmost importance to ensure HR practitioners understand and realise that they have an important role within the department. This training allowed the HR practitioners to realise that that they are significant role players when focus is placed on the functioning of departments and faculties that have a need for human resource management practices.
References


