

## **THE INFLUENCE OF LIFE COACHING SESSIONS ON THE ENTREPRENEURS' BEHAVIOR**

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of life coaching sessions on the entrepreneurs' behavior. The exploratory research used a qualitative method and we used the in-depth interview. For interpreting the results, we used content analysis for the transcripts of the recorded interviews. Data obtained from the in-depth interview were coded and we used conceptual content analysis to obtain frequencies of occurrence. After life coaching sessions the entrepreneurs began to organize their time and priorities differently. Following these sessions, subjects responded that they came to define their objectives more clearly, they came to provide feedback whenever needed and the performance. Various audiences could use these exploratory results - professionals and human resource managers who might be interested in the coaching status of various organizations as well as in the management practices for the implementation of coaching programs.*

**Keywords:** *life coaching, it, entrepreneur, qualitative research, interview.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Life coaching provides solutions that range from slight personal improvements to a complete life overhaul (Bolchover, 2006). So, depending on what an individual seeks, life coaching can effect changes in areas ranging from work performance to changing the workplace altogether and moving to a different field or taking up an entrepreneurial path in a field that the individual has been fond of since childhood. It is very easy for us, human beings, to become confused about life, because we wish for a multitude of things and, thus, we lose sight of what matters, in our race to attain various objectives. Yet, in the absence of such concrete objectives, people will never achieve anything in life, as Gordon (2012) points out, too. There are people who wish to develop their abilities in several fields simultaneously. So, they keep running after several hares, hoping they will catch at least one, but most of them end up catching none, because they fail to focus on a single hare i.e. on a single aspect of life. People would be better off focusing on one single objective and seeking to grow and develop themselves progressively towards that objective. Failure to do so invites panic and chaos in their lives, as well as a sense of disappointment as to their achievements.

So, as Bolchover (2006) claims himself, life coaching sessions teach people to focus their attention. They start seeing things from a just perspective and with greater clarity, learning to discover what really matters to them. Therefore, a life coach plays an important part in an entrepreneur's life, supporting them and developing the skills, resources and creativity that they already possess (Nixon-Witt, 2008). It would be fair to say that, more often than not, entrepreneurs need support in their lives and a life coach is the right person to do it, using specific tools: asking questions, listening and empathising. This way, entrepreneurs may feel that

there is someone who really cares about them and their ideas. This is all the more true given that, according to Drucker (1985), among others, entrepreneurs are the ones who seek change and see it as the healthy norm, but they need encouragement and concrete, solid business objectives that will allow them to put their own ideas and opportunities into practice.

This is why, the moment entrepreneurs start realising that they need to focus on one objective and pursue it, as Prochaska et al. (1992) claim, their efforts to alter their behaviour are clear action indicators for an individual – especially seeing that action is essential in putting objectives into practice (Kalinauckas and King, 1994). In Romania, the number of registered coaches is over 1,000 in more than ten professional coaching associations. In Romania there are no concrete studies to analyze how they contribute with the global community of practitioners. To this effect, our intention is to analyse the way in which life coaching sessions influence the behaviour of entrepreneurs towards better planning and attainment of their business objectives.

## **PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of life coaching sessions on the entrepreneurs' behavior because according to a study conducted by Flash Eurobarometer in 2012, the main fear of 56% of Romanian entrepreneurs is the failure because it is perceived in a negative way by the Romanian society. In this case, we have started from the premise that the fear of failure arises due to the lack of setting goals that will lead to clear expectations. The profile of the Romanian entrepreneur is as follows: a mature individual, male, married with children, having an economical background, with an average of 12.81 years when he is an entrepreneur and having higher education (Jianu și Bâra, 2013).

In this context the exploratory research sample consisted of 12 Romanian CEO Programmer IT entrepreneurs from their own company, private sector, aged between 21-60 years, with a business experience of more than three years. The research method used is qualitative, and we used the in-depth interview. In-depth interviews were applied between January 5, 2015 and July 7, 2017 at the premises of the participants within the timeframe they preferred. The interview guide contained a number of nine questions aimed at describing the following issues: carrying out life coaching sessions, a working day in the life of the entrepreneur, changes produced by life coaching sessions, difficulties faced before the life coaching sessions, perceived advantages and disadvantages of life coaching, the relationship with the life coach, measurement of targets before and after the coaching session.

Before applying the in-depth interview, we conducted a selection questionnaire to filter participants. The questionnaire had two questions, by means of which we verified whether entrepreneurs had benefited from life-coaching sessions, and how many life coaching sessions they have had until the time of the analysis. The selection criteria for entrepreneurs referred to the entrepreneur experience and the turnover of the company. The data related to the experience of entrepreneurs within their companies (company foundation year and the CEO) and turnover are public, and using the websites [mfinante.ro](http://mfinante.ro) and <http://www.listafirme.ro/> we had access to this information. We used the experience of entrepreneurs as filter because after three years from the foundation of the company, the individual is familiar and accustomed to his/her new position, should have learned from their own mistakes and those of others, and had time to measure the set goals. Also, the turnover tells us if the company is on the right track. As a limit, it is necessary to

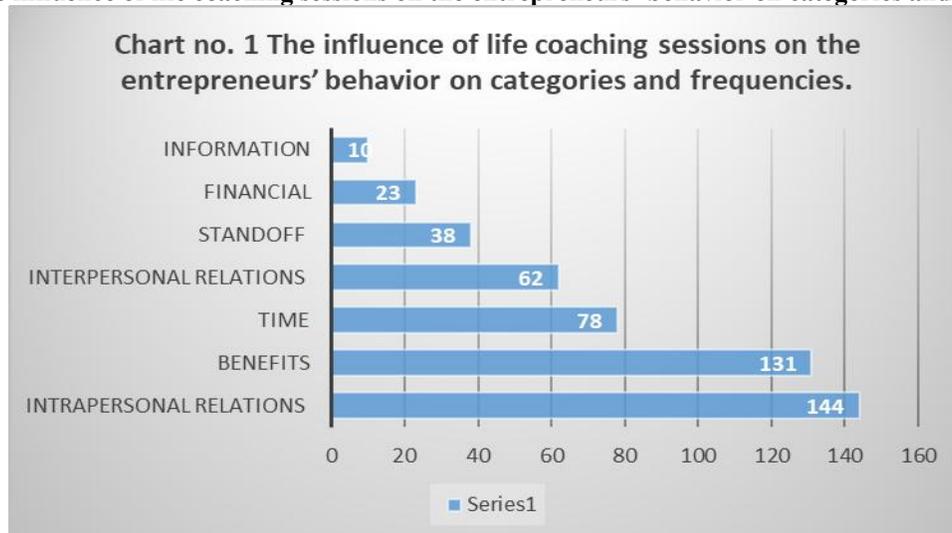
keep in mind that entrepreneurs may not have clearly established and measured their objectives, they might have used their intuition (we worked with statements, without being able to register their real behaviour).

When we asked participants to take part in the interview, they were also informed that their personal data are confidential, that the information received will be used for educational purposes, and that they will be able to receive the results of this study. After the interviews, the subjects were labelled, using capital letters - A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K and L - to be able to achieve more easily the analysis of interviews and not to violate the principle of confidentiality. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the length of the interview. Each interview lasted one hour and thirty minutes, during which we addressed open questions referring to the issues already mentioned in the guide; everything was recorded. For interpreting the results, we used content analysis for the transcripts of the recorded interviews. Data obtained from the in-depth interview were coded and we used conceptual content analysis to obtain frequencies of occurrence.

## RESULTS

A good analysis depends on the understanding of data, so in order to achieve the qualitative analysis, we have read and reread the text and highlighted the text in colours. We have also noted comments on the data. To streamline the time and perform a better analysis and comparison between the results we inserted into an Excel document the categories and subcategories related to the influence of life coaching on the behavior of entrepreneurs to plan and achieve business goals. The program gave us the necessary support for obtaining tables and graphs in order to have a better picture of the results (see Chart no. 1). The terms for each bar are defined in Table no.1 Categories and sub-categories on the influence of life coaching sessions on the entrepreneurs' behaviour on categories and frequencies.

**Chart 1 The influence of life coaching sessions on the entrepreneurs' behavior on categories and frequencies.**



Source: The author.

From the Chart 1 The influence of life coaching sessions on the entrepreneurial' behavior on categories and frequencies and from the Table no.1 Categories and sub-categories on the influence of life coaching sessions on the entrepreneurs' behavior, we can see the identified seven categories together with their subcategories. The category called Information will not be considered for further analysis because the frequency is very low and it is not significant. For each category, we have identified a number of subcategories. They were distributed according to main connotations and categorizing principles (mutual exclusiveness). For the codification of both categories and subcategories we have assigned either the initial or initials corresponding to the term required (eg. for example for Time category - coding is T, for subcategory time management- coding is T-TM) or we have chosen the identification prefix (for example for Interpersonal relations category the code is R INTER).

For the final encoding of subcategories, we used the following procedure: any subcategory reflects the initial chosen for the category to which it belongs followed by the initials specific to each subcategory. The texts were coded on categories and subcategories, using an emerging coding procedure (see Table 1).

**Table 1 Categories and sub-categories on the influence of life coaching sessions on the entrepreneurs' behavior**

Name	Frequencies
Time (T)	
time management T-TM	16
deadline T-De	12
time investing T-TI	4
time availability T-TA	16
time quality T-TQ	14
timing T-Ti	16
Information (I)	
lack of information I-LI	3
documentation I-Do	2
information I-In	5
Financial (F)	
lack of money F-LM	4
the financial availabilities F-AF	19
Benefits (B)	
applicability B-Ap	12
setting goals B-SG	36
measurement of objectives B-MO	12
achieving results B-AR	8

writing objectives B-WO	12
feedback B-Fe	11
performance B-Pe	11
focus B-Fo	8
free session B-FS	8
planning B-PL	9
investment B-In	4
<b>Intrapersonal relations R INTRA</b>	
awareness R INTRA – Aw	26
agitation R INTRA –Ag	14
new ideas R INTRA –NI	24
offering details R INTRA –OD	20
accommodation R INTRA –Ac	20
individualism R INTRA –Indi	5
indecision R INTRA –Inde	2
multi-tasking R INTRA –MT	13
responsibility R INTRA –Re	20
<b>Interpersonal Relations R INTER</b>	
momentum R INTER –Mo	8
partnership R INTER-Pa	14
team R INTER-Te	11
motivation employees R INTER-ME	14
relationships with others R INTER-RO	15
<b>Standoff St</b>	
private life neglect –St – PLN	3
bankruptcy St-Ba	3
discouragement St-Di	6
neglect of relations with others St-NRO	7
problems St-Pr	19
Respondents total	12
Items total	486

Source: The author.

From the total number of 486 items, 41 subcategories emerged for life coaching perceived influence on the behavior of entrepreneurs to plan and achieve business goals. We find that in the case of the category “Intrapersonal relations”, the subcategory awareness occurs with

a frequency of 26 times, followed by the subcategory new ideas (with a frequency of 24 times), and last we have individualism and indecision (with a frequency of 5 and 2 times). After the life-coaching sessions, subjects answered that they had realized that before they did not have clear objectives that could be measurable and achievable, and these sessions helped them organize themselves better, also following some blockages subjects no longer made certain connections to further develop new projects, and after the session they realized what they had to do and now they have new ideas to bring projects forward.

The “Benefits” category contains the most common subcategories: setting goals (with a frequency of 36 times), applicability, measurement of objectives and writing objectives (with a frequency of 12 times) feedback and performance (with a frequency of 11 times), and last investments (with a frequency of 4 times). In a study conducted in 2002, it was found that feedback with coaching sessions contributes to an increase in leadership efficiency by up to 60% (Thach, 2002). Coaching focuses on goal setting (Garvey, Stokes and Megginson, 2009) which helps people establish clear expectations (Yukl, 2010).

Following these sessions, subjects responded that they came to define their goals more clearly, they came to provide feedback whenever needed and the performance of both the coached personnel and of employees improved. We note that after the life coaching sessions entrepreneurs seem to have recovered and started to establish SMART goals and organize their time and priorities differently. "I started to set SMART goals, which did not happen before and I found that I can organize my time and priorities differently according to these objectives, which is extraordinary for me. I realized that the specificity and measurability of goals are vital, because without them, the goals are much less useful. A clear, quantifiable objective, offers opportunities to create values that measure not only progress but also motivate and inspire employees."

It is very important for entrepreneurs to establish clear benchmarks for what they have performed, to give and receive feedback, written and verbally, about the activities and goals that they set because as one of the respondents said “it boosts the company’s morale and team members are able to accomplish the company's objectives. I establish criteria, now I have a set of rules and procedures on how to measure performance.” For the “Time” category we notice that the subcategories appearing most frequently are: time management, time availability and timing (with a frequency of 16 times), followed by time quality (with a frequency of 14 times). Subjects referred to the fact that after life-coaching sessions they have more time for the others, compared to before, when their life was more chaotic. After life coaching sessions they began to organize their time and priorities differently. The vast majority of subjects responded that they worked overtime: "I worked overtime, I was thinking about all sorts of ideas to implement, about developing new applications, etc., I wanted to start as many activities as possible to have an active life." This means that entrepreneurs did not set SMART goals (specific, measurable, easily attainable, achievable and timely) which made their life chaotic both personally and professionally. When one gets involved in too many activities aimlessly, without setting goals, there is a risk not to carry out any activity or to have mediocre results in such activities.

The category “Interpersonal relationships” has as sub-categories the relationship with others (with a frequency of 15 times), partnership and motivation employees (with a frequency of 14 times). Subjects thought that the relation with others improved after the sessions and that both they and their employees felt more motivated. Subjects believed that the relations with

others improved, that they focused better on what they had to do, that there was life after work: "Now I am more careful with myself, my relationship with the others improved, I have more time for them and in terms of my own business now I have faith I can rely on my staff when I need a break."

From the "Standoff" category we find big subcategories as problems, with a frequency of 19 times, and then last positions are held by private life neglect and bankruptcy (with a frequency of 3 times). Before starting the life coaching sessions, subjects said they faced many problems, such as for example the neglecting of their private life, of their relationship with others or some blockages occurring on the spot, but after these sessions they realized how important the relationship with others was.

In the "Financial" category, we find the financial availabilities with a frequency of 19 times. They referred to the fact that they did not regret the money they had paid, because they had gained many things from the sessions. The coaching sessions were contracted for one year, and the life coaching sessions cost varied between € 2250 and € 2500 per the one-year package.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

We noticed that life coaching supports entrepreneurs in improving their relations with others, helps entrepreneurs establish their SMART goals (specific, measurable, easily attainable, achievable and timely), and helps entrepreneurs increase performance. Following the life-coaching sessions, entrepreneurs have come to better focus on what they have to do, because they learned to establish clear benchmarks. Thus entrepreneurs learned to give and receive feedback, written and verbal, on the activities and goals that they established.

According to a study conducted in 2001 it was found that the factors in the coaching process are of great help in reaching their own goals. These factors referred to: performance / outcomes, a different perspective, self-awareness / development, feedback / support, objective person, as well as coaching and coaching relationships (Kampa-Kokesch, 2001, p.179). We observed that, according to the interviewees, during life-coaching sessions coaches are concerned with helping entrepreneurs find their own way, take responsibility for their learning to get on the right track. As the theory says, life coaching has proved to be a tool that assists entrepreneurs in achieving their objectives. We noticed that life coaching supports discovery and relies primarily on awareness, asking the right questions in the right way and listening actively to the subjects' answers.

## **ORIGINALITY/VALUE**

The study is relevant from a managerial point of view, because it provides valuable insight into how life coaching can change the behaviour of entrepreneurs for planning and achieving objectives.

## **PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Various audiences could use these exploratory results - professionals and human resource managers who might be interested in the coaching status of various organizations as well as in the management practices for the implementation of coaching programs.

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