

# “The Influence of Life Coaching on Entrepreneurs’ Goal Planning and Attainment”

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which life coaching influences an entrepreneur's behaviour as regards goal planning and attainment. This involves exploring the influence of a coaching intervention on an entrepreneur's goal and planning behaviour, the issues which influence their goals and the measurement of the attainment of goals.

Previous research has indicated that life coaching is about fostering behaviour change in an individual (Grant, 2006). However, there is also much debate that indicates that the claims of coaching relative to behaviour change are largely unfounded and are based on anecdotal evidence. This indicates the need for more research on the effects of life coaching. With these factors in mind the current research focused on exploring the influence of coaching on an individual's behaviour and in particular on goal attainment behaviour of entrepreneurs. To the best of this researcher's knowledge such a study has not been previously explored within an Irish context.

The co-researchers for the current study were entrepreneurs in the early stage of start up, who were divided into an intervention and non-intervention group. Only those in the intervention group received coaching. A qualitative approach was used in data collection with both groups where a series of semi-structured interviews were utilised. This research method was deemed the most appropriate as it gave greater access to the lived experience and behaviour of entrepreneurs and allowed for meanings to be explored in depth.

A number of significant findings materialised from the current study where it was found that life coaching does influence the behaviour of entrepreneurs. This influence was evident in a number of areas amongst the entrepreneurs who received the coaching intervention as opposed to the non-intervention group where no such influence was evident. After the coaching intervention, entrepreneurs in the intervention group had

more specific and manageable goals and were more structured and formal in their goal and planning behaviour. In addition, as a result of the coaching intervention, these entrepreneurs in the intervention group showed that they had extended and refined their measurement of goal attainment.

The current research adds to the body of research on life coaching in general. It also contributes specifically to the emerging area of life coaching and entrepreneurs. The outcome from this research has implications for life coaches, entrepreneurs, enterprise support agencies as well as those who provide training and incubation programmes for entrepreneurs.

*This thesis is dedicated to my husband John,  
whose love and support makes all things possible.*

*No one place is allowed finally to corner or claim the wanderer. A new horizon always calls. The wanderer is committed to the adventure of seeing new places and discovering new things.*

*John O'Donohue*

## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that the material contained within this thesis is entirely my own work and has not been previously submitted to this or any other institution. The author has undertaken this work alone except for when otherwise stated.

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**Mary Lawless**

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# **Chapter 1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Chapter overview**

The current study explored the extent to which life coaching influences an entrepreneur's behaviour in relation to goal planning and attainment. The purpose of this study was to gain new insights to assist in understanding the current goal and planning behaviour of entrepreneurs and the effect of a life coaching intervention on this behaviour.

The initial section of this chapter outlines the rationale for undertaking this study, it then presents the research question and objectives. Following this, an overview of the thesis is outlined. Finally, an outline of the limitations will be given and the benefits associated with the current study will be examined.

## **1.2 Rationale for this study**

Grant (2003a) has indicated that life coaching is at a 'cross-roads'. The reason for this cross roads is that in recent years coaching has evolved in a number of ways. Firstly, as the coaching industry evolves, and matures, those who are seeking coaching are asking questions about its efficacy and effectiveness. Secondly, this is coupled with the fact that within the human resource industry those who are now hiring coaches have rigorous assessment procedures. Finally, there is a growing discontent among those who were trained in schools who practised their own proprietary models of coach training without the foundation of empirically research (Grant and Cavanagh, 2004). Effectively, in general coaching and coaching theory still appears to be in its infancy where more research is needed (Kilburg, 1996; Brotman, Liberi and Wasylyshyn, 1998).

In addition to the above the coaching industry has taken a 'paradigm shift'. Previously those who engaged in the intervention of coaching were perceived as being 'flawed' (Peterson, 2002). However, this perception has changed in recent years. This is indicated by the large number of coaching and personal development books listed by Amazon.com (2008). Coaching has moved from being viewed as a negative concept to playing a positive and proactive role in assisting individuals who want to achieve their goals and make a positive change in their behaviour (Whitworth, Kimsey-House and Sandahl, 1998). In the main however, this view is supported primarily by anecdotal evidence (Carter, 2006).

In the light of the above findings on the absence of empirical evidence in the area of life coaching, as a professional coach the current researcher wished to explore the coaching intervention with entrepreneurs who were actively seeking to achieve their goals. Zimmerer and Scarborough (1998) indicated that the world of an entrepreneur is a dynamic one that is concerned with identifying and realising opportunities. In realising and achieving such opportunities entrepreneurs are identified as single minded and determined as they pursue their goals (see for example O'Gorman and Cunningham, 1997). These goals are varied and range from issues of work-life balance to a desire to have the freedom to make their own decisions (Losocco, 1997; Van Gelderen and Jansen, 2006).

However, in reviewing literature on entrepreneurs, the current researcher noted that in relation to entrepreneurial training needs, the research suggests that a standard one size fits all approach was perhaps an unsuitable training approach (Lean, 1998). Instead a customised approach to training/interventions is considered more appropriate as it would meet the individual specific requirements of entrepreneurs (Walker, Redmond, Webster and La Claus, 2007). This led the current researcher to consider whether the intervention of life coaching would be a suitable learning tool to assist entrepreneurs in achieving their goals. The reasons behind this are two fold; firstly, life coaching is a customised intervention that focuses on supporting an individual to achieve his/her

goals and to make a positive change in his/her life. Secondly, as only limited research is available in relation to coaching, there is a need for further research. In particular there are very few studies which address the area of life coaching and its influence on entrepreneurs. To this end the purpose of the current research is to explore the extent to which life coaching influences an entrepreneur's behaviour in relation to goal planning and attainment.

### **1.3 Research question and objectives**

The research question emanates from the research problem. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003), the setting of the research question is not a straightforward issue, where the researcher should avoid asking questions which will not result in new research findings. Grant and Cavanagh (2004) indicated that there has been little academic research into the area of life coaching. This led the current researcher to formulate the following research question for this study:

Does life coaching influence an entrepreneur's goal planning and attainment  
behaviour?

The research question is the overall purpose of the study. Research objectives however provide a greater degree of specificity than the research question itself (Saunders et al., 2003). The research objectives for the current study are:

- (1) To determine if life coaching affects how entrepreneurs view goal setting
- (2) To ascertain if life coaching affects the extent to which entrepreneurs deliberate in setting goals
- (3) To establish the extent to which life coaching influences the alignment of an entrepreneur's business and personal goals

- (4) To determine does life coaching influence how entrepreneurs measure goal attainment
  
- (5) To establish if life coaching impacts on issues of goal attainment for entrepreneurs

The current research was performed using a qualitative methodology where a phenomenological perspective formed the basis of the research philosophy. The co-researchers were selected from the participants of the South East Enterprise Platform Programme (SEEPP)<sup>1</sup> based in Waterford Institute of Technology, Ireland. These co-researches were subsequently divided into an intervention and non-intervention group. Data collection took the form of a series of three semi-structured interviews which took place over the course of nine months. Chapter Four provides a more detailed description of the methodology utilised.

## **1.4 Structure of thesis**

Chapter Two puts in context the intervention of life coaching which was utilised in the current study. The literature in Chapter Three is divided into four main sections. Behaviour change and models of behaviour change form the initial part of the chapter. Following this, aspects of coaching and goal attainment models are addressed. The literature review then goes on to focus on behaviour change within the life coaching process. This is followed by features of entrepreneurial behaviour and in particular their goal and planning behaviour as well as entrepreneurial attitudes towards interventions and life coaching. Finally, a summary of the main sections of the literature review is provided.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a one-year programme which aims to support entrepreneurs involved in knowledge-based start-ups to develop and accelerate their business concept into a commercial entity.

Chapter Four details the research methodology for the current research. This chapter also presents the research question and objectives, conceptual framework, as well as the research philosophy and selection of the data collection method employed in the current study.

Chapter Five features the findings that have emanated from this study. In order to capture findings over the entire research period these findings are summarised under the main headings of Interview 1, Interview 2 and Interview 3. In addition the following sub headings were utilised; goal and planning behaviour of entrepreneurs, issues that impact on goal attainment for entrepreneurs, and measurement of goal attainment by entrepreneurs.

Chapter Six consists of the discussion of the research findings. In this chapter the main points of interest that emanated from the current study are discussed within the context of the literature reviewed to inform this research.

Chapter Seven contains the overall conclusions and contributions to research that have evolved from this study. In addition it outlines the limitations of this research and concludes with recommendations for future studies.

## **1.5 Limitations of this study**

In any research there are associated limitations. This study engaged participants of SEEPP as co-researchers and as such these entrepreneurs may be different from the general population of entrepreneurs who operate without ongoing business support.

Entrepreneurs self selected themselves into the initial pool of co-researchers and as such may have already been pre-disposed to the intervention of life coaching.

The co-researchers were in the early stages of their business. As they may not have had an established planning behaviour, they may have been more open to influence from an outside intervention.

The current researcher conducted both the interviews and the coaching intervention. This may have had a direct effect on the responses of entrepreneurs. In particular, those in the intervention group were very familiar with the focus of the research at its conclusion. This may have affected their responses to the interview questions. In addition, the influence of the researcher in non-intervention group is viewed as final limitation and may have had a direct influence on the responses of one entrepreneur in particular.

## **1.6 Contribution of this study**

The current study established a number of key benefits for the members of the intervention group namely; the intervention influenced how entrepreneurs viewed goals and how they measured goal attainment. In addition it influenced their goal and planning behaviour. As previously outlined in this chapter there has been limited research into the area of life coaching and in particular little research into life coaching and entrepreneurs. As such the current study contributed to existing body of life coaching research and to life coaching practitioners as it provides an insight into how behaviour change happens in coaching process. Finally, the current study contributes to entrepreneurs who are participants on business incubation programmes and who may not fully appreciate the value of goal planning.

## **1.7 Summary**

This chapter outlined the rationale of the current study and its research question and objectives. The thesis structure was also outlined as well as the limitations and contributions of the current research. Chapter Two provides the context for the intervention of life coaching used in the current study.

## **Chapter 2 Life Coaching**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This focus of this chapter is to put in context the life coaching intervention which was used in the current study. In this chapter the origins of coaching are explored as well as the concept of and definition of coaching. Coaching and existing established theories are then considered as well as the different methods coaching. The process of coaching is then discussed as well as the need for research in coaching. The chapter then concludes with a summary.

### **2.2 Origins of life coaching**

The term coach is a metaphor borrowed from sport and is now widely applied to personal and work domains (Grant, 2001b; Palmer, Tubbs and Whybrow, 2003; Williams, 2003). In the past coaching implied, training, motivation, accountability and partnering with an athlete to encourage their best performance at a particular sport (Williams, 2003; Palmer et al., 2003).

Coaching is now widely accepted in a field wider than sport and has emerged into the arena of personal development. Although the earliest literature in coaching is in the context of an organisational setting and is not directly connected to the current research, it is interesting to note that coaching is referred to as 'psychological consultation with executives' and is described as 'psychology in action' (Glaser, 1958). However, this study lacked scientific integrity as no scientific measurement was available to assess the effectiveness of the intervention (Glaser, 1958). Grant (2001a), nonetheless, acknowledged the significance of this study and the contribution

it made to early coaching research. Leedham (2005) also recognised the contribution made to early coaching research by Gallwey (1975) as forming a valuable foundation for coaching. Gallwey's study indicated that performance improved where there is improved concentration, reduced anxiety, coupled with the ability to overcome mental obstacles.

### **2.3 Concept of life coaching**

Life coaching is a series of conversations facilitated by a coach where the primary aim is to assist coachee's to achieve fulfilling and sustaining results in their lives. These interactions between the coach and coachee are based on mutual respect between the two parties (Edwards, 2003). In these coaching conversations the attention is focused towards the creation of solutions (as opposed to analysing problems), leading ultimately toward the development of the 'solution focused mindset' (Grant, 2006). Coaching therefore focuses on 'possibilities' and gives the coachee full ownership of the outcome of the conversations through a facilitative as opposed to an instructional process (Edwards, 2003). Coaching is promoted as a tool for skills development, performance enhancement and personal development in normal non-clinical populations i.e. those who do not have mental health issues (Grant, 2001a, 2003b, and 2006). Therefore the emphasis in coaching is on viewing clients as 'well and whole' with a focus on 'optimal functioning' of the coachee. (Williams, 2003; Joseph, 2006).

### **2.4 Definition of life coaching**

As it is a relatively new personal development concept, it is essential to define the term life coaching. Ferrar (2004) is cognisant of the difficulties of such a definition but noted that a definition of coaching is to "provide a common stake in the ground, a benchmark, a template to which to conform, a comfortable safety net" (p.54). In defining coaching, Grant (2006) offered a broad definition "coaching is a goal-

oriented, solution-focused process in which the coach works with the coachee to help identify and construct possible solutions, delineate a range of goals and options, and then facilitate the development and enactment of action plans to achieve those goals” (p.156). The International Coach Federation (2007) detailed coaching as a process and partnership between a coach and coachee that is thought provoking. This process in turn inspires coachees to maximise their personal and professional potential. Therefore the central tenet of coaching is an emphasis on a collaborative relationship where the main focus is on constructing solutions for the coachee, while at the same time moving them towards goal attainment (Grant, 2001a).

Du Troit (2007) demonstrated that coaching also greatly supports and enhances the quality of the sense making activities of the individual, while at the same time highlighting that the essence of coaching is “to liberate the full potential of the individual or group of individuals” (p.284). Coaching is also described as a reflective process (Whitworth, Kimsey-House and Sandahl, 1998; Starr, 2003; Jackson 2004). In this reflective process the coachee is invited to look at the way they are feeling, thinking and behaving both in their personal and professional lives. The above highlights the active participation of the coachee in a coaching process which is designed to facilitate greater self awareness. Building on this self awareness, Grant (2001a) viewed coaching as an ‘egalitarian relationship’ between a coach and coachee where “on-going, self-directed learning and personal growth of the coachee” are facilitated (p. 8).

## **2.5 Coaching and existing established theory**

As with any new field of study, coaching draws upon existing established theory and knowledge. As they underpin coaching some of the main psychological theories that are credited as forming the basis of coaching will now be outlined. Positive psychology has provided some structure for the foundation of coaching and is the science at the heart of coaching (Kauffman, 2006). The emphasis in positive psychology is on functional as opposed to dysfunctional behaviours thereby

encouraging resourcefulness and capacity for change, coupled with a focus on optimism, strengths and happiness (Feltham, 2006). The role of the coach in positive psychology is to focus the coachees on using their existing strengths to capitalise on what energises and pulls coachees forward towards goals and ultimately toward optimal functioning (Kauffman, 2006).

Humanistic psychology, founded on an optimistic view of the individual, also plays an important part in coaching (Stober, 2006). According to Stober, “the humanistic theory of self actualisation is a foundational assumption for coaching with its focus on enhancing growth rather than ameliorating dysfunction” (p.18). The key concepts of coaching, namely; the trusting relationship between the coach and coachee and, the acceptance of the coachees as unique individuals, with an inherent capacity for growth, have all evolved from the humanistic perspective. Stober (2006) indicated that it would be difficult to imagine a model of coaching that had not integrated these concepts into its processes.

The contribution of cognitive therapy within the field of cognitive psychology is acknowledged by Auerbach (2006). The main constructs of cognitive therapy are; mood is closely linked to cognitions of the individual; the role of the cognitive therapist is to help individuals identify errors in the way they think and assist them to identify and adopt more useful and productive thoughts. Auerbach (2006) cited Burns (1980) who stated that there is often an irrational element in the way individuals think which may ultimately distort their thinking patterns thereby leading to difficulties in adopting new behaviour. However, through the process of cognitive therapy which seeks to identify and eliminate the irrational and distorted thoughts, the individual's mood and ultimately performance could be improved (Auerbach, 2006). In drawing comparisons between coaching and cognitive therapy, the role of the coach is to assist the coachee to see themselves realistically, and weigh up options to achieve goals which were identified as ‘cognitive coaching techniques’ (Auerbach , 2006).

As can be seen from the above no one psychological theory alone can be taken as underpinning the foundation of coaching, as ultimately “coaching is a derivative of many fields and the innovative thinking of great pioneers” (Williams, 2003, p.5).

## **2.6 Types of coaching**

Overall therefore, coaching is defined as a process that is focused on raising a coachee’s personal awareness through creating solutions and action plans that will enable them to attain their goals. This in turn facilitates maximising the personal and professional development of coachees. There are a number of methods in which coaching is practised which can be categorised under the headings of executive, business, and personal or life skills coaching. These methods are discussed as they are the main ways in which coaching is practiced.

### **2.6.1 Executive coaching**

Zeus and Skiffington (2002) described executive coaching as an individualised approach where in a one-to-one relationship executives are assisted to develop professional effectiveness and performance. Kilburg (1996), in an effort to provide conceptual clarity and a working definition of executive coaching, highlighted the executive as an individual who has managerial authority within an organisation. This manager in turn forms a coaching agreement with a consultant who uses a variety of ‘behavioural techniques and methods’ to help achieve an identified set of goals. These goals focus on improving personal and professional satisfaction and consequently improve the effectiveness of the manager’s organisation. In essence executive coaching is about developing high performance leaders. In addition, Wales (2003) found that in executive coaching it was essential for managers to understand their internal thought processes. This in turn enabled them to operate effectively externally. As the managers self awareness grows, they have a greater understanding of strengths and weakness and how their behaviour impacts externally on those with

whom they come in contact. For Peterson (1996), the emphasis in executive coaching is not exclusively on skill building but on the challenges that face executives in their position as leaders of an organisations as well as looking at options on how to implement a decision once it has been reached. Overall therefore, it can be said that executive coaching has evolved as a professional business/executive development tool (Peterson, 1996 and 2002 ; Wales, 2003; Ascentia, 2005; Carter, 2006). It is now an established part of a development portfolio available to an executive (Fillery-Travis and Lane, 2006).

### **2.6.2 Business coaching**

While acknowledging that the boundaries between executive coaching and business coaching are somewhat unclear, the emphasis in business coaching is on issues of ‘operational mastery’ such as business rejuvenation and growth, and improving the working atmosphere and morale of staff (Zeus and Skiffington, 2002). Business coaching is an interactive collaborative partnership which focuses on reaching personal and professional goals, “business coaching enables the client to understand and enhance his or her role in achieving business success. The business coach helps the client discover how personal characteristics, including a sense of self and personal perspectives, affect personal and business processes, and the ability to reach objectives within a business context” (World Wide Association of Business Coaches, 2008). In general, business coaching therefore, is concerned with organisational objectives and deals with the task or work with which the individual is engaged.

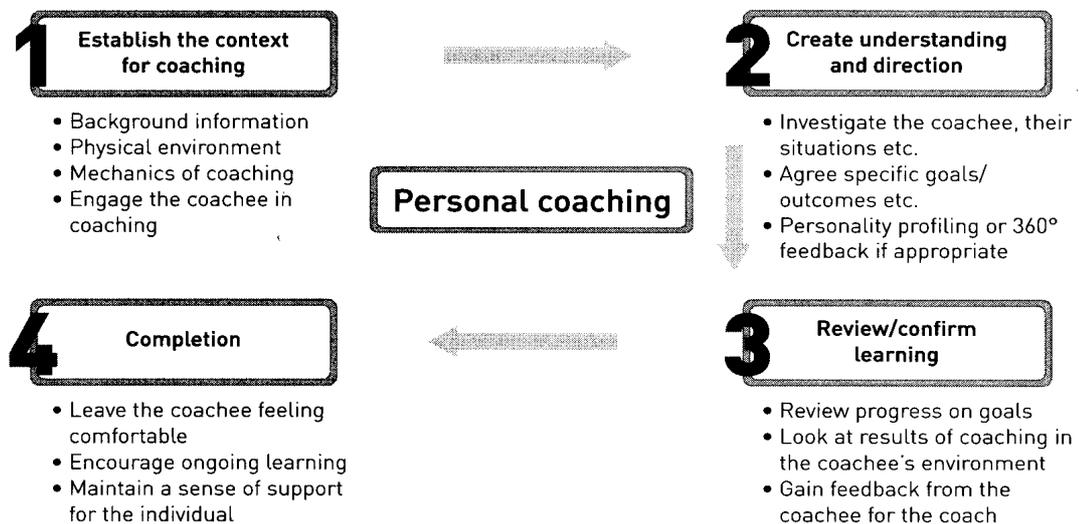
### **2.6.3 Personal/Life coaching**

The emphasis in personal or life coaching is on the individual outside of an organisational context, although there may be an overlap where work concerns are discussed. Personal coaching is a series of conversations that are related to the coachee’s learning and progress in life, which focuses on helping the coachee to create positive change in his/her life (Starr, 2003). For example, an exploratory study by Grant (2003) found

evidence that a life coaching programme facilitated goal attainment, improved mental health and enhanced the quality of participant's life. Therefore, in personal coaching there is an emphasis on improving personal effectiveness, which leads to personal growth in the coachee.

## 2.7 Coaching process

Fillery-Travis and Lane (2006) described the process of coaching as the nature and description of the coaching relationship. To understand this relationship further, Starr (2003) presented a four stage framework of coaching which is described as four developing activities “which once begun are like plates that must be kept spinning” (p.58). Figure 1 outlines the four stages in such a coaching process namely; establishing the context for coaching, creating understanding and direction, reviewing and confirming learning and finally completion. A typical coaching session may move between several stages at the one time. In addition, these stages may take place over a number of coaching sessions and do not always happen in the sequence as outlined below.



**Figure 1 Framework for a coaching assignment (Source: Starr, 2003, p. 100)**

### **2.7.1 Establish the context for coaching**

In the 'framework for a coaching assignment' Starr (2003) noted that in this initial stage it is important that the coach creates a relaxed atmosphere by getting to know the coachee and their background, exploring the areas of his/her life that s/he wants to work on in the coaching sessions and any general goals s/he would like to achieve by engaging in coaching. Furthermore, in this stage the coach makes initial steps towards discovering if the coachee really wants to change his/her behaviour and begins to review possible barriers to successful goal attainment. Through this process of discovery the coachee begins to get a deeper appreciation of what is involved in engaging in coaching in order to achieve behaviour change in his/her life.

### **2.7.2 Create understanding and direction**

Starr (2003) in this second stage indicated that the coach begins the process of engaging the coachee in the coaching process through building clear definable goals and desirable outcomes for the coachee. This ensures that clear direction is maintained throughout the coaching process. In creating such understanding, it is important that the coach facilitates and encourages communication by using open questions which will assist the coach to gauge the level of the coachee's enthusiasm for coaching and encourages self awareness in the coachee. At all times during this and other stages of coaching, the coach must remain flexible and responsive to the needs of the coachee and follow the natural flow of discussion. In addition, in order to ensure movement towards goal attainment the coach must encourage the coachee towards action by setting specific timelines for his/her goals.

### **2.7.3 Review and confirm learning**

Starr (2003) indicated in this third stage of the framework for a coaching assignment that in reviewing and confirming learning, the coach reviews progress towards goals with the coachee. By affirming the coachee's progress, the coachee is made aware of the benefits

of coaching and is encouraged to further develop his/her new behaviour. In addition, the coach also gives feedback to the coachee, “the ability of the coach to give their own views of the coachee constructively is important to the coaching experience” (p.164). In reviewing goals a delicate balance needs to be maintained and should take place only occasionally, as too much emphasis on reviewing may slow progress towards attainment of goals. Further, the coach may also have to address with the coachee whether there is an absence of progress towards goal attainment. In such a situation both the coach and coachee need to explore further the lack of progress and may decide on a different course of action towards goal attainment. In this stage there is also an opportunity for the coach to explore with the coachee what is working well within the coaching assignment and any aspects of the process that could be improved for the coachee.

#### **2.7.4 Completion**

In the final stage of the framework for a coaching assignment, the coaching process is brought to a natural conclusion when the coachee is satisfied that s/he has attained his/her goals (Starr, 2003). In this final stage it is important for the coachee not to experience a sense of withdrawal from the supportive coaching process but to feel that the intervention has been worthwhile and that s/he is positive about the coaching experience. This encourages the coachee not only to build and develop further behaviour change and insights gained during the coaching process, but also leaves the door open for him/her to return should the need arise for further coaching sessions.

Coaching is not a form of therapy, but it is interesting to note that the process in counselling has some similarities with the stages of coaching as outlined by Starr (2003). These similarities are a focus on building a contract between the counsellor and client; hearing the clients story; exploring issues with clients; setting goals; and making a plan for and evaluating action (Egan, 1998; Lynda and Graham, 1996). All these features bear similarities to the coaching process model detailed above.

## **2.8 The need for research in coaching**

Grant (2003b) indicated that the general public has a genuine interest in personal development techniques that hold the promise of improving their life experiences. In line with this contention coaching occupies a large presence in the general print media, supported by the abundance of self-help books available on coaching. To look further at this self-help trend, a general search of Amazon.com (2008) listed 2,788 books on personal coaching. In addition, Grant and Cavanagh (2004) indicated that there has been little academic research on personal or life coaching. However, despite the absence of empirical evidence regarding its effectiveness, individuals continue to be drawn to coaching not only to pursue coaching as a profession but also a means of enhancing individual personal effectiveness.

### **2.8.1 Professional background of coaches**

Coaching has evolved quite quickly since its establishment was influenced by Glaser (1958) and Gallwey (1974). Early practitioners in the field were viewed as 'first generation coaches' (Linley, 2006). Linley, described this first generation as practitioners capitalising on their own talents and experience who initially established and led the profession. Coaches come from a variety of professional backgrounds and in essence no single industry has laid claim to its ownership (Grant, 2007). The professional backgrounds of coaches are varied for example, they are counsellors, psychologists, teachers, and managers (Grant and Cavanagh, 2004). Additionally, finance managers and those from the health and beauty industry are also becoming involved in coaching and taking advantage of the 'term's cachet' (Peterson, 2002).

The diversity in the professional backgrounds has caused some tension within the coaching industry. Each individual coach brings to his/her coaching practice his/her own approaches, theory and methods (Grant and Zackon, 2004). In the past there has been some tension between those who are coaching psychologists, who based their coaching style on psychological theory, and those who do not do so (Grant, 2007).

Coaches who do not have a psychological background are criticised for being involved in an unregulated industry with no barriers to entry. These individuals “engage in a psychological enterprise without a background understanding of the psychology in use” (Fillery-Travis, 2006, p.59). Such coaches go through the coaching process obtaining short term results for their coachees (Brotman, Liberi and Wasylyshyn, 1998).

### **2.8.2 Coaching and evidence based practice**

Arising from the need for evidence of a sound psychological foundation underpinning the principles of coaching, the first generation coaching evolved into second generation coaching. From this second generation comes a demand for a theoretical foundation for coaching. Grant and Cavanagh (2004) described the need for ‘evidence based practice’ as a “need for coaches to ground their practice in a solid theoretical understanding and empirically tested models” (p.1). Therefore in essence “practitioners using an evidence-based approach must be able to evaluate theory and research for applicability and utility in their coaching, integrate this knowledge with their own expertise and practice, skilfully weave this approach with their client’s needs, values and preferences and, finally, assess their intervention’s effectiveness for the client and the coaching relationship” (Stober, Wildflower, and Drake, 2006, p. 2).

Grant and Cavanagh (2004) acknowledged the diverse contexts in which coaching is practised and stated that to have confidence in the efficacy of coaching it is necessary to have well-conducted, peer-reviewed coaching-specific research. Linley (2006) is somewhat in agreement with this and comments that the influence of the academic/practitioner divide in coaching research also emphasises the need to ask the correct question in coaching research. Additionally, in academic research the focus may be on publishing in journals with high impact with an emphasis on serving other academics but this may not translate well into real world applications and meanings (Linley, 2006). Practitioner led research may not be the answer either and has its own limitations and difficulties namely “attempting to perennially balance research fidelity

with the competing demands of business imperatives and timelines” (Linley, 2006, p.3). Overall, Grant (2003b) indicated that to develop integrity, coaching needs to share both a common language and empirically validated research in order to contribute to research on coaching process and practice.

### **2.8.3 Evolving perceptions of coaching**

As well as the research challenges faced by the coaching industry, coaching has taken on further movement in terms of understanding in the form of ‘a paradigm shift’ (Peterson, 2002). In the past, coaching may have been viewed as a negative concept where those who received coaching were perceived in some way as ‘flawed’ but this perception has now evolved into coaching being viewed as positive and proactive (Whitworth et al., 1998). This evolving perception has led to an increased demand for coaching. However, as highlighted in the introduction coaching is ‘now at a cross roads’ (Grant, 2003a). With an increased understanding of coaching, those who hire coaches are growing more sophisticated in their demands where private individuals seeking coaching are asking searching questions regarding coaching effectiveness. In addition, human resource professionals now have a more informed background on coaching and this is evidenced by their rigorous assessment procedures of coaches (Peterson and Kraiger, 2004; Grant and Cavanagh, 2004). This sophistication is coupled with those who are seeking coach training asking searching questions about the theories underpinning coaching and the validating empirical evidence. This evolving coaching environment now presents an opportunity both for practitioners and researchers to work towards best practice for the entire profession (Grant and Cavanagh, 2004)

### **2.8.4 Regulating the coaching industry**

As evidence of the beginning of a maturation process in the coaching industry there has been some positive moves towards improving the previously unregulated area of

coaching which has a ‘hunger for credibility and credentialing’ (Grant, 2007). The International Coach Federation (ICF) is an organisation founded as a non profit, individual membership organisation and formed by professionals worldwide who practice business and personal coaching. It is the largest worldwide resource for business and personal coaches and exists to build, support and preserve the integrity of the coaching profession. Additionally, in an Irish context the Irish Coaching Development Network (ICDN) has been established through government funding. This organisation was set up to develop the profession of coaching and enhance the credibility of this emerging sector. Its primary goal is to liaise with educational institutions, coach training and coaching associations as well as coaches on the development of a national framework for progression and accreditation of professional coaching in Ireland (ICDN). As a professional coach the current researcher is a member of both ICF and ICDN.

## **2.9 Summary**

Coaching is recognised as a positive intervention that assists in the personal and professional development of an individual and can take the form of executive, business and personal coaching. In this personal and professional development there is focus on a productive partnership between a coach and coachee which has an emphasis on creating solutions for a coachee by raising their awareness of the need to take action through a structured approach so as to attain their goals. In recent years individuals from a variety of backgrounds have been drawn to coaching as a profession where coaching is now evolving and maturing. In this there is a need for coaches to base their coaching practice on sound theory and models which have been tested through empirical research. As a growing industry, the establishment of regulatory organisations worldwide, in particular ICDN in an Irish context, is welcomed as it can only enhance the credibility of coaching as an emerging profession.

The literature informing the current study will now be reviewed in Chapter 3. This literature will be discussed under four main sections; behaviour change, coaching and goal attainment, behaviour change in the coaching process and finally entrepreneurs.

## **Chapter 3 Literature Review**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The aim of this research was to explore the extent to which life coaching influences an entrepreneur's behaviour in relation to goal planning and attainment. The reason for this is two fold; in reviewing the available literature, limited research was found on coaching and its impact on entrepreneurs. Additionally, as coaching is often associated with anecdotal evidence, studies supporting its effectiveness are needed (Grant and Cavanagh, 2004). Research has indicated that coaching is about encouraging behaviour change in the individual as s/he progresses towards his/her goals (Whitworth, Kimsey-House, and Sandahl, 1998; Zeus and Skiffington, 2002; Grant, 2006; Stober, 2008). In light of the above the current chapter presents a review of the literature relevant to this study.

This literature review is divided into four main sections and the current researcher will address these sections as follows. Behaviour change and models of behaviour change form the initial part of this chapter. Following this aspects of coaching and goal attainment models are addressed. This literature review then focuses on behaviour change in the coaching process. Finally, this chapter addresses an entrepreneurs behaviour and in particular their goal and planning behaviour before concluding with entrepreneurial attitudes towards training interventions. The current chapter then concludes with a summary of the main sections reviewed.

### **3.2 Behaviour change**

The behaviour of individuals concerns their actions in response to events within themselves or events which are external in the world in which they live, this does not include their traits or characteristics (Sarafino, 1996). Changes in an individual's

behaviour may be perceived as a once off event but previous research suggests that this is too simplistic a view. Instead, behaviour change is the result of a number of transitions that the individual goes through which ultimately leads to a change in actions and behaviour. The core of this change process is a letting go of past behaviours and taking on of new behaviours and the integration of these new behaviours into the individual's life (Bridges, 1986; Nortier, 1986; French and Delahaye, 1996).

The literature on coaching recognises that changing behaviour is not a straightforward process and is influenced by a number of factors (Grant, 2001a; Zeus and Skiffington, 2002). Central to this change process, the concept of being ready to change is fundamental factor in an individual's ability to change his/her behaviour (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1984). In addition, the individual must feel congruence with his/her core values and the desired change to enable the change to happen (Whitworth et al., 1998). Finally, the commitment to change is recognised as a prerequisite to behaviour change (Fishbein, Triandis, Kanfer, Becker, Middlestadt, and Eichler, 2001; Audet and Couteret, 2005). In summary, behaviour change happens when an individual is ready to change; lets go of outdated behaviours, and feels congruence and commitment with the desired change. This leads to new behaviours being integrated in an ongoing basis into the individual's life.

### **3.3 Models of behaviour change**

Just as there are varying opinions regarding how behaviour change occurs in the coaching process, it is equally matched by numerous opinions in literature on models of behaviour change. Various models of behaviour change will now be reviewed in order to give an understanding of how behaviour change occurs in the individual. How behaviour change happens is important in the context of the current study as research has indicated that coaching is about encouraging behaviour change in the individual as s/he progresses towards the attainment of his/her goals (Whitworth et al., 1998; Zeus and Skiffington, 2002; Grant, 2006; Stober, 2008).

### **3.3.1 Intention Formulation and Protection Model of behaviour change**

Early research in Heckenhausen and Kuhl's (1985) Intention Formulation and Protection Model indicated that behaviour change is influenced by an individual's belief that change can occur. In believing that change can occur the individual must feel that there is **o**pportunity, **t**ime, **i**mportance, **u**rgency and a **m**eans (OPTIUM) for behaviour change to occur in their life. If any of these conditions cannot be fulfilled behaviour change will not be possible for the individual. Through the OPTIUM process the individual moves from wishes to action resulting in behaviour change. Hellervik, Hazucha, Schneider, (1992) noted that this model is regarded as 'a theoretical model' but one that offers some usefulness for understanding behaviour change. This model has never been tested in a coaching context but it may have some limited relevance for the current research as prior to embarking on behaviour change actions towards goal attainment, encouraging a coachee to perform OPTIUM checks to assess the practicality of his/her goals may have an influence of the success or failure of goals.

### **3.3.2 Adaptation to Transition Model in behaviour change**

Schoolsberg's (1981) Adaptation to Transition Model provides a framework for understanding the process of transition in behaviour change. In this model the individual must understand his/her own personal characteristics as well as the environment within which s/he operates. Ultimately, in this model it is not the transition itself that is of importance, but how the individual perceives it. This model bears some resonance with Heckehausen and Kuhl's (1985) model as both models centre on the perception of the individual. To the best of the current researcher's knowledge, Schoolsberg's model has not been tested in a coaching context. However, Grant (2001a and 2006) indicated that Schoolsberg's model may have some limited application in coaching and acknowledged that it may assist coaches to support coachees in understanding the process between transition and adoption of new behaviours.

### **3.3.3 Transition Model towards behaviour change**

Change happens when something starts or stops; however, behaviour change is not as simple as it appears. To understand this change process further, Bridges (1986) Transition Model differentiates between transition and change in behaviour. This model indicates that transition takes longer, is not a one step but rather a three step process, consisting of the ending of old behaviour, the neutral phase and new beginnings. Nortier (1986) disagreed with Bridges simplistic view of change and added additional steps that focus more precisely on what is happening between the before and after stage of change. Nortier pointed out that the initial steps are understanding when the old behaviours were effective (equilibrium), realisation of when the old behaviour is ineffective (separation) and a state of not knowing what to do, leading ultimately to crisis. This crisis phase is similar to Bridges' neutral phase but it is in this crisis that Nortier believes that real change takes place as the individual moves from 'apathy to hope and enthusiasm'. Nortier (1986) critically points out that rather than overlapping phases as is described in the Bridges' (1986) Model, the crisis phase cannot be changed once it starts to happen. Moving on from this phase, re-birth is noted as a delicate phase that must be managed correctly. Yet Nortier (1986) believed the re-birth phase is not the end of the change process as in the final phase a new equilibrium must be maintained for a period of time. In this final stage, the change is effective and evident but the transition which enabled this change to take place is forgotten about. It is interesting to note that this view on the importance of the sustainability of behaviour change has also found support in the literature on coaching (see Brotman, Liberi and Wasylyshyn, 1998; Carter and Connage, 2007). For example, Brotman et al. (1998) indicated that effective coaching should be based on sound psychological principles which in turn will facilitate the coachee in the long term to maintain and sustain the new behaviour even in pressurised circumstances.

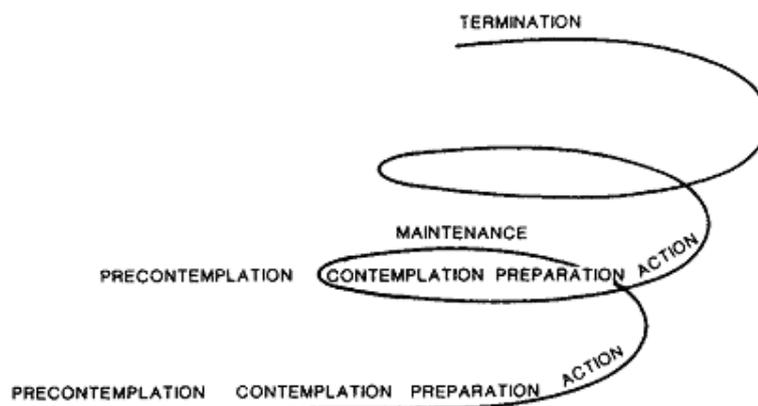
The work of both Bridges (1986) and Nortier (1986) informed the current research as regards insight into how behaviour change happens through the letting go of old behaviours before new behaviours can occur. However, Grant (2001a and 2006) stated

that the work of both Bridges (1986) and Nortier (1986) has limited usefulness in a coaching context, but they do facilitate evaluation of current behaviour of the coachee and the transition involved in adopting new behaviour.

### 3.3.4 Transtheoretical Model (TTM) of behaviour change

A further behaviour change model which facilitates understanding of behaviour change is found in the Transtheoretical Model (TTM) of Change (Prochaska, DiClemente and Norcross, 1992).

Figure 2 demonstrates a spiral pattern of change that indicates how individuals move through the change process. In essence “the transtheoretical model offers an integrative perspective on the structure of intentional change” (Prochaska et al., 1992, p.1102). Movement through the various stages of pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance and termination also facilitates an understanding of how the process of behaviour change can be ‘understood and facilitated’ (Jackson, 2006).



**Figure 2 A spiral model of the stages of change (Source: Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross, 1992, p.1104)**

TTM has been the subject of considerable debate in research on behaviour change and prior to moving onto how useful it is in a coaching context, its general application will first be examined. Strong support for TTM and its stages of change have been found

across a variety of problem behaviours and organisational settings (Prochaska, Velicer, Rossi, Goldstein, Marcus, Rokowski, Fiore, Harlow, Redding, Rosenbloom, Rossi, 1994) in mental skills training programmes (Grove, Norton, Van Raalte, and Brewer, 1999) and in a university integrated service delivery programmes (Levesque, Prochaska, Prochaska, 1999).

However, despite its general popularity in health promotion circles, numerous criticisms were found in the literature of TTM. In particular, Bandura (1997) stated that TTM is not a behaviour change model at all as humans and their behaviour were too complex to be described in stages. A number of the critical views of TTM centre around its lack of rigorous empirical evidence (see Povey, Conor, Sparks, James and Shepherd, 1999; Bunton, Baldwin, Flynn, Whitelaw, 2000b; Sutton, 2001; Riemsma, Pallenden, Bridle, Sowden, Mather, Watt, and Walker, 2002). For example, Sutton (2001) stated that while in theory a model of change that encompasses different stages of behaviour change is in itself a good one empirical evidence in support of it is insufficient. Concerns have also been raised on the use of TTM in health promotion. For example, Povey, et al. (1999) stated that not only is TTM not backed up by rigorous research but it is used out of context and may indeed be distorting the nature of health promotion. Bunton et al. (2000b) agreed with the view that perhaps TTM is indeed 'skewing' health promotion activities. Further, Jackson (2006) indicated that instead of looking at TTM as a change model its value may instead lie in using it as a model to tailor stage interventions.

Coaching is concerned with encouraging behaviour change in the coachee as s/he moves towards his/her goals (Whitworth et al., 1998). In the light of the current study this section reviewed a number of models of behaviour change which served to inform the current study of how behaviour change occurs in the individual. In particular, the literature on coaching indicates that TTM focuses on the processes concerned with the implementation of new behaviour and facilitates the coach to tailor the intervention with the stage of change of the coachee (Grant, 2006). Therefore, the current researcher will return to the TTM model of behaviour change in section 3.5.1. where it will be applied to the stages of the coaching process.

### **3.4 Coaching and goal attainment**

The models of behaviour change bring to light how behaviour change occurs in individuals as they move towards their goals. Life coaching provides a supportive process to support individuals attain such goals (Grant, 2006). It is generally accepted that goal setting is a necessary condition for successful coaching (Grant, 2001a; Green, Oades and Grant, 2006). As evidence of this view Grant (2003b), stated that participation in a life coaching programme can be associated with enhanced goal attainment. Additional research to support the positive influence of coaching on goal setting and attainment has since evolved (Smither, London, Flauttt, Vargas and Kucine, 2003; Gyllesten and Palmer, 2005; Green, Oades and Grant, 2006). Smither et al. (2003) for example, found a positive difference between those who worked with a coach and those who did not, where those who worked with an executive coach were more likely to set more specific rather than vague goals.

Goals are the central part of the goal setting process and as such they are noted as “the intended object or aim of an action” (Locke and Latham, 2002, p.705). The literature on goal setting recognises goals and movement towards them as action oriented processes that have an important focusing component for the individual (Locke and Latham, 1990; Latham and Locke, 1991; Latham, 2003). Therefore goals direct an individual’s attention away from non goal enhancing activities but also provide both challenge for the individual and accomplishment when achieved.

Various models of goal attainment have been developed in the literature. So as to gain an understanding of the way in which people plan and attain their goals and how an individual’s mindset and his/her feelings about a goal affects attainment, the following models will be reviewed; Action Phases, Action Theory and Self Concordance.

### **3.4.1 Action Phases Model towards goal attainment**

The Action Phases model focuses on goal setting from the initiation of thoughts and wishes by an individual to the realisation and attainment of his/her goals (Heckenhausen and Gollwitzer, 1986). Early research indicates that this model analyses goal setting and attainment together whereby the action of an individual follows a pattern of phases; pre-decisional, pre-actional, actional, post action. This framework also uses the metaphor of a 'Rubicon', noting that a mental boundary line is traversed where the individual experiences a change in mindset moving from deliberating about goals to actual goal actions towards attainment. Ultimately, as a result of this crossing of the 'Rubicon' the individual processes goal information differently and thus takes on a different mindset (Heckenhausen and Gollwitzer, 1987). Gollwitzer (1990) is critical of early findings of this model and developed more extensively the concept of an individual's mindset changing, not only in the initial phases as the 'Rubicon' was crossed, but also in each of the subsequent phases of the model. This led Gollwitzer to focus on the goal tasks that needed to be achieved in each phase and the resultant mindsets that ensued. Therefore, the individual moved through corresponding mindsets as s/he moved through the different action phases of deliberative, implementational, actional and evaluative mindsets.

Gollwitzer (1996) subsequent to this in-depth development of mindsets, further discussed the value of mindsets in planning towards goals. In this study it was concluded that an implementational mindset had a positive effect on planning as the more involved the individual becomes in the planning process the more important the implementational mindset. More recent research by Gollwitzer and Bayer (1999) concluded that both the deliberative and implementational mindsets add value to goal pursuit. A deliberative mindset is one in which the individual is aware of competing goals, deals with information in relation to the goal in an impartial way, and does not over or under emphasise negative aspects of the information available (Gollwitzer, 1990). Gollwitzer further indicated that planning to achieve a goal creates an

implementational mindset where the individual is focused on a specific opportunity to act towards his/her goals. The importance of such mindsets was also recognised in coaching literature. For example, Grant (2001a and 2006) indicated that in coaching, successful action planning facilitates the movement in a coachee from a deliberative to an implementational mindset.

The above model is useful in the context of this study as it offers the current researcher an insight into mindsets of individuals as they move towards the attainment of goals.

### **3.4.2 Action Theory Model towards goal attainment**

Frese and Zapf's (1994) Action Theory Model focuses on 'information processing' and is concerned with how individuals collate information relevant to a goal, work on a plan for its execution with inherent influence from feedback on goal progress. This model is included in the current study as it gives the current researcher an insight into how individuals process relevant information as they work towards the attainment of their goals. Aspects of this model were further developed with particular application for entrepreneurs in the more recent Action Theory Approach (Frese, 2007). Frese stated that this theory "attempts to understand how people regulate their actions to achieve goals actively and how this is done both in routine situations as well as in novel situations" (p.152)

Frese (2007) in briefly reviewing Heckenhausen and Gollwitzer (1987) noted that once an individual has made a decision to action on his/her goals h/she will become less rational and will seek only to justify his/her goal decision. Consequently, Frese concluded that the more difficulties that exist after the individual has made a decision the more determined s/he becomes to overcome them. This supports Gollwitzer's (1996) previous view that an implementation mindset had a positive effect on the individual goal setting actions.

Both the Action Phases Model and the Action Theory Model focus on goal actions from the viewpoint of psychological mindsets and how individuals mentally process goal related information. Both of these models, with their emphasis on mindsets and goal actions of the individual, provide some insight for the current study as to how individuals attain their goals. However, they are beyond the remit of this thesis as they are based on micro level psychological considerations. Additionally, previous research on these two models is not very informative regarding the type of goal which the individual sets or how an intervention can be utilised to assist individuals to achieve their goals.

However, Sheldon and Elliott's (1999) 'Self Concordance Model' of goal striving proves more useful as it focuses on the congruence between the individual and his/her goals. The relevance of this model can be seen in the following; firstly, the literature on goal setting and coaching suggests that commitment to a goal is critical for its achievement where there is a strong relationship between commitment, goals, and successful performance (Locke, Latham and Erez, 1988; Locke and Latham, 2002; Stober and Grant, 2006). Commitment to a goal is also central when goals are difficult (Klein, Wesson, Hollenbeck and Alge, 1999). Secondly, goal performance will be affected by the perceived ownership of the goal (Locke and Latham, 1990; Spence and Grant, 2007). With these points in mind, the Self Concordant Model of goal attainment is reviewed in relation to the current study.

### **3.4.3 Self Concordance Model of goal attainment**

Early findings in the research literature on Sheldon and Elliott's (1998 and 1999) Self Concordant Model of goal attainment indicates enhanced results towards goal attainment when an individual works towards autonomous goals. In essence, Sheldon and Elliott (1998 and 1999) found that goals that are personally owned by an individual will receive greater effort and thus ultimately are more likely to be attained. Additionally, the feeling of ownership of goals has a subsequent positive effect on an individual as it enhances his/her well being and progress towards goals.

Subsequent findings have supported the view that goals personally owned by an individual will receive greater effort and are therefore more likely to be attained. (Sheldon and Houser-Marko, 2001; Koestner, Lekes, Powers and Chicoine, 2002; Sheldon, Kasser, Smith and Share, 2002; Judge, Bono, Erez and Locke, 2005). In addition, Sheldon and Houser-Marko (2001) introduced the concept of an individual's values being linked with ownership and successful attainment of goals. In this study Sheldon and Houser-Marko found that those who set goals that reflected their values were better able to attain them.

Goal self concordance and the concept of values has also been recognised in the literature on coaching. Grant (2006) defined goal self concordance in coaching as “the degree to which a goal is aligned with an individual's enduring intrinsic or identified interests, motivations and values” (p.163). According to Whitworth et al. (1998) enhanced results will be achieved in a coaching context where goals are concordant with a coachee's values. A decision made on values focuses on who the client is and as a result will always be more fulfilling. Additionally, knowledge of a coachee's values will assist the coach to identify potential conflict if non-value based decisions are made by a coachee (Whitworth et al., (1998). Grant (2006) agreed with Whitworth et al. (1998) and also supported Sheldon and Elliott (1998 and 1999) while acknowledging that coaches play a definite and dynamic role in ensuring that a coachee's goals are congruent with his/her values. More recent research has also recognised the significance of self concordance in coaching (Burke and Linley, 2007; Spence and Grant, 2007). In particular, Burke and Linley found that coaching can lead to positive changes in goal attainment by enabling a coachee to set more self concordant goals.

There is some similarity between the initial model of Action Phases and the Self Concordance Model and this can be seen in relation to implementational mindsets. The importance of an implementational mindset was emphasised by the Action Phase's Model (Gollwitzer, 1990 and 1996) and (Gollwitzer and Bayer, 1999). In a similar vein the focus on implementation mindset is also of significance in the Self

Concordance model (Koestner et al., 2002). However, in the Self Concordance Model not only are individuals deciding what they want to achieve themselves but also how they are going to achieve it. This has led Koestner et al. (2002) to conclude that self concordance and implementation intentions together will lead to greater goal progress.

The most noted difference between Action Phases and Self Concordance models was acknowledged by Sheldon and Elliott (1999). They indicated that each model begins at a different phase in the goal attainment process. For example the Self Concordance model does not address the decision phase/deliberative mindset phase as is evident in the Action Phases Model. In addition, Sheldon and Elliott noted the focus of the Self Concordance Model is different than the Action Phases Model in that it displayed an underlying assumption that the goal chosen was somewhat flawed if not in keeping with the core values of an individual. Overall, Sheldon and Elliott (1999) promoted self concordance as a factor that encourages a positive outcome towards goal attainment and does not address the different phases towards goal attainment while Gollwitzer (1990) in the Action Phases Model addresses only the different phases towards goal attainment.

However, the Self Concordance Model has had limited application within coaching research with no evidence of a critical evaluation within coaching literature. On the other hand, several researchers have recognised the importance of the congruence of a coachee's values with his/her goals (Whitworth et al., 1998; Grant, 2006; Burke and Linley, 2007; Spence and Grant, 2007).

The focus of the current study is to explore the extent to which life coaching influences an entrepreneur's behaviour through goal attainment. This literature review will now explore the process of behaviour change in coaching and assess the applicability of Transtheoretical Model of Change (TTM – see section 3.3.4) in a coaching context. This model offers an insight into the structure of change within an individual (Prochaska et al., 1992).

### **3.5 Behaviour change through goal attainment and the coaching process**

Previous research has suggested that coaching is about fostering behaviour change in the individual as s/he moves towards his/her goals (Whitworth et al., 1998; Zeus and Skiffington, 2002; Grant, 2006; Stober, 2008). However, there is also a debate that indicates that much of the influence of coaching on the behaviour of coachees remains anecdotal (see for example Kiel, Rimmer, Williams, Doyle, 1996; Audet and Couteret, 2005; Carter, 2006). Research into coaching makes only minimal mention of behaviour change and in the majority of studies the focus is on emphasising the benefits of coaching for the coachee and/or a positive return on investment for the coachee's organisation as opposed to specifically highlighting behaviour change in the coachee. For example, a strong return on investment (in terms of productivity) in an organisation was noted as a benefit of a successful coaching outcome (Olivero, Bane and Kopelman, 1997; McGovern, Lindemann, Vergara, Murphy, and Barker, and Warrenfeltz, 2001; Ascentia, 2005). In addition the benefits of coaching were also noted as having a positive influence on a coachee's stress level, self confidence, assertiveness and overall enhanced personal effectiveness (Paige, 2002; Wales, 2003; Du Troit, 2007; Allan, 2007).

However, the current research has a specific focus on the influence of coaching on behaviour change in goal planning and attainment for the individual and in particular the behaviour of entrepreneurs. To this end in reviewing life coaching literature, two unpublished doctoral dissertations by Thompson (1986) and Peterson (1993) cited by Ballinger (2000) provided an early indication that coaching did have a positive influence on behaviour change in a coachee. Following this early research by Thompson and Peterson, more studies on behaviour change in coaching are slowly emerging. For example, Grant (2003b) found that coaching is valuable in promoting behaviour change by facilitating well being and goal attainment. Further research since Grant (2003b) has indicated similar findings regarding behaviour change (see for example, Smither et al., 2003; Gyllesten and Palmer, 2005; Longhurst, 2006; Green, Oades and Grant, 2006;

Grant, 2008). The majority of these studies looked at behaviour change from a longitudinal perspective. Grant (2008), for example, looked at the impact of coaching on the behaviour of coachees over a twelve week period. This trend of addressing behaviour change over an extended period of time is important as several researchers have indicated that sustained behaviour change is evidence of successful coaching (Brotman et al., 1998; Carter and Connage, 2007). The issue of behaviour change in coaching is summed up in the words of Whitworth et al. (1998):

“People come to coaching for lots of different reasons, but the bottom line is change. They no longer want things to stay the same and they see that coaching can make that change happen” (p.xix)

Answers regarding how the behaviour change process occurs in coaching are not easily found in literature. The coaching change process is diverse, and has also been defined in literature as encompassing a three to ten step process, as well as in terms of a ‘developmental pipeline’ (Kalinauckas and King, 1994; Buckley and Caple, 1996; Landsberg, 1997; Starr, 2003; Laske, 2004; Peterson, 2006; Gyllensten and Palmer, 2007). For example, Laske (2004) on the one hand indicated that supporting the coachee and envisioning new behaviours was important. Peterson (2006) on the other hand advocated the use of a ‘developmental pipeline’ to understand the conditions necessary for behaviour change in coaching. To evolve through this pipeline the coachee must have both internal and external resources available for change to occur. According to Peterson, behaviour change will be impeded if any of the conditions in the ‘pipeline’ are constrained (Peterson, 2006). However, it is clear from previous literature, regardless of how many steps are involved, the underlying principles of the change process are similar. Stober and Grant’s (2006) principles of effective coaching provide a succinct means of drawing together these underlying behaviour change principles. These principles emphasise the role of a solid working relationship between the coach and coachee, raising awareness of behaviour, and the task of responsibility and commitment to action on the part of the coachee which ultimately leads towards change and results. For the purpose of the current research the coaching process as noted by Starr (2003) is viewed as a

suitable model to outline how these principals support behaviour change in a coachee. Starr's model was chosen as it outlines coaching in four straightforward stages which are; establishing the context for coaching, creating understanding and direction, reviewing/confirming learning and finally completion. Before reviewing Starr's model further this literature review will first put in context the most relevant behaviour change model in life coaching namely the Transtheoretical Model of Change (TTM)

### **3.5.1 Transtheoretical Model (TTM) of change and coaching**

As can be seen from section 3.3, both Schoolsberg's (1981) Adaptation to Transition Model and Bridges' (1986) Transition Model are recognised as having limited application to coaching. However, neither model suggests the most effective strategies to adopt at the various points in the change process (Grant, 2001a and 2006). Grant (2001a and 2006) suggests that a more useful model to facilitate this understanding is found in the TTM model of change. Although originally used in the context of addictive behaviours, its significance is nonetheless relevant for the current research as it focuses on the processes concerned with the implementation of new behaviour (Grant, 2006). TTM assists the coach to identify and understand the stage of change of the coachee as s/he moves towards goal attainment. As a result of this understanding the coach is facilitated to tailor the intervention with the stage of change of the coachee (Grant, 2001a; Zeus and Skiffington, 2002; Grant, 2006; Stober, 2008). Stober (2008) summed up the usefulness of TTM in coaching as

“Understanding the different stages of change enables coaches to meet the client where they are in the change process and facilitate their development” (p.75)

Previous research indicates that the main value of TTM in coaching lies in the central point that the coach (therapist) must avoid dealing with all coachees (clients) as if they were ready to take action (Prochaska and Norcross, 2001; Grant, 2006). Furthermore, Prochaska and DiClemente (1984) noted that resistance to change can occur in therapy where the client and therapist (coach) are working at different phases in the change

processes. Consequently, matching the intervention with the stage of change of the coachee will assist in the process of behaviour change and will enable the coach to develop procedures to deal with barriers to change (Prochaska and Norcross, 2001; Grant, 2001a; Zeus and Skiffington, 2002; Grant, 2006; Stober, 2008).

In order to explain fully how (TTM) is a relevant model of behaviour change in coaching, this current researcher will now apply each stage (Pre-contemplation / Contemplation Preparation, Action, and Maintenance/Termination) to the stages of the coaching process as identified by Starr (2003). These stages are noted as establishing the context for coaching, creating understanding and direction, reviewing/confirming learning and completion. By linking the stages of TTM with the four stages of the coaching process this researcher will review how behaviour change occurs in coaching.

### **3.5.2 Pre-contemplation / Contemplation**

Keeping the spiral model of change of Figure 1 (see 3.3.4) in mind, the initial stage in the TTM change process is where the individual sees no immediate need to change (pre-contemplation) or is considering changing (contemplation) in the future (Prochaska et al., 1992). In a coaching context the current researcher considers that this stage can be linked to the initial stage of the coaching change process identified as 'establishing the context for coaching' (Starr, 2003). In reviewing the available literature on coaching it could be suggested that there are three core elements in the initial stage of coaching; engaging the coachee in the coaching process, building a solid trusting relationship between the coach and coachee and addressing ambivalence to change in the coachee (Grant, 2006; Stober and Grant, 2006).

#### **3.5.2.1 Engage coachee in change process**

In engaging the coachee in the coaching process, the literature reviewed indicates that it involves discussion and discovery of who the coachee is, where s/he wants to make a change in his/her life, familiarisation with coaching procedures as well as outlining the

logistics of administration and ground rules such as confidentiality (Kalinauckas and King, 1994; Kilburg, 1996; Whitworth et al., 1998; Bolt, 2000; Peterson, 2002; Zeus and Skiffington, 2002; Starr, 2003). In particular in this initial stage the importance of contracting or designing a working alliance between the coach and coachee is emphasised (Peterson, 2002; Whitworth et al., 1998).

### **3.5.2.2 Build solid trusting relationship**

In the pre-contemplation and contemplation stages of change of TTM, the role of the coach is to develop trust with the coachee, and through this trust encourage reflection about the behaviour in question and raise the coachee's awareness of their current behaviour and how it is perceived by others (Zeus and Skiffington, 2002; Grant, 2006; Stober, 2008). Building rapport with a client is critical in a coaching relationship as positive chemistry in a coach/coachee relationship will lead to a positive outcome (Bolt, 2000; Wasylyshyn, 2003). Once a trusting relationship is formed, the coach will be able to move the coachee out of his/her 'comfort zone' towards action and change (Paige, 2002). In support of this view, Greif (2007) reviewed the results of outcome studies in coaching and concluded that the quality of the relationship between the coach and coachee had a direct effect on the results achieved. In the light of the above literature, it appears to the current researcher that unless the relationship between the coach and coachee is based on transparency and trust the coaching process will be derailed and ultimately will have a negative impact on the outcome of the intervention.

### **3.5.2.3 Ambivalence**

Literature on coaching has highlighted the presence of ambivalence to behaviour change in the pre-contemplation / contemplation stage of TTM (see for example Grant, 2001a and 2006; Grant and Green, 2001; Stober, 2008). This ambivalence is noted as the most enduring state during the contemplation stage which may continue to a certain extent throughout all stages of change (Grant and Greene, 2001). In a later study, Grant (2006)

identified this ambivalence as being similar to the balancing act of a see-saw, where the coachee experiences a conflict between ambivalence and wanting to change. The role of the coach is recognised in previous research as facilitating expression of this ambivalence because moving the coachee to action too soon may be counterproductive (Grant, 2006; Stober, 2008).

In summary therefore to begin the process of behaviour change towards goal attainment in the pre-contemplation/contemplation stage of TTM the role of the coach is to build a solid relationship with the coachee and address any ambivalence to change that may be present, and encourage the coachee to move to the preparation stage of change.

### **3.5.3 Preparation**

Moving on in the spiral model of change in Figure 1 in the preparation stage of TTM, the individual is preparing to take action in the near future and ‘clarifying the vision of change’ through the raising of his/her self awareness (Prochaska et al., 1992). In a coaching context the current researcher considers that the preparation stage also bears some similarities with Stage 2 of the coaching process which is focused on ‘creating understanding and direction’ (Starr, 2003). As part of this focus on direction the coachee sets goals not only for the entire coaching engagement but also within each coaching conversation (Starr, 2003). As previously stated research supports the view that goal setting plays a central role in a coaching assignment (Grant, 2001a; Green, Oades and Grant, 2006). Where behaviour change is recognised as the desired outcome, literature on goal setting emphasises the importance of setting SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Time-framed) (Kalinauckas and King 1994; Locke and Latham 2002; Latham, 2003). Grant (2006) agreed with this view and noted that focusing on outcome goals in the form of achievable steps will encourage progress in the coachee.

### **3.5.3.1 Self awareness**

As noted previously, in the pre-contemplation and contemplation stages of behaviour change the foundation of a strong coach-client relationship is established and forms the initial part of the change process. The literature on coaching suggests that this coach-client relationship in turn is the platform from which a coach raises a coachee's awareness of his/her behaviour and enables him/her to take responsibility for change (Grant, 2006; Stober, 2006).

To understand further the importance of this self awareness in coaching both Wales (2003) and Stober (2006) offered an insight into self awareness. The common elements of both Wales' and Stober's view on self awareness is for the individual to focus on and be open to internal sources of information, and to develop an understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses. In a similar vein, Leedham (2005) indicated that in an individual, internal change such as increased awareness and confidence will lead to external results in terms of a successful outcome for coaching.

McGovern et al. (2001) provide further evidence of the importance of self awareness in coaching; they noted that following a coaching intervention, coachees had heightened self awareness of how their behaviour impacted on their workplace. Critically, Stober (2006) went further to explain how awareness alone is not enough to facilitate change. Such awareness must also be followed by 'doing', leading to action which in itself will further influence a coachee's awareness and insight. This view of the importance of insight and self reflection is also expressed in previous research (see for example Grant, 2003b; Grant, 2006; Peterson, 2006). However, Grant (2003b) also highlighted that an over emphasis on self reflection may not facilitate goal attainment. In a similar vein, Stober (2006) indicated that insight gained from self awareness is not enough on its own to facilitate behaviour change.

In summary therefore, in the preparation stage of TTM, in order for the coachee to move towards behaviour change, the coach has a dual role. First, to raise the coachees awareness of his/her current behaviour. Secondly, to encourage the coachee to move towards action and change by setting goals. Though this awareness and encouragement the coachee is facilitated to move towards the next stage of change which is action.

### **3.5.4 Action**

Efforts to change behaviour are noted as signs of action in an individual (Prochaska, et al., 1992). Therefore, ‘getting down to action’ is central to the implementation of goals (Kalinacukas and King, 1994). The current researcher considers that this stage of action of TTM also bears some resonance with Starr’s (2003) Stage 3 of the coaching process ‘review/confirm learning’. In the action stage there is ongoing enquiry, insight, and development of the coachee with regular reviews of progress (Starr, 2003). The literature on coaching recognises that there are two elements within action in the coaching process, which is noted as commitment and action planning. Through the coaching process the coach enlists the commitment of the coachee to action strategies and behaviour change (Whitworth et al., 1998; Grant, 2006).

#### **3.5.4.1 Commitment**

Action does not necessarily equate with change as considerable effort and commitment is required to maintain the behaviour change over a period of time (Prochaska et al., 1992; Bolt, 2000). Commitment and maintaining action is core to the change process (Prochaska et al., 1992; Peterson, 1996; Whitworth et al., 1998; Grant, 2006). Without such commitment, action planning may be a ‘cerebral activity’ (Whitworth et al., 1998). Therefore the coach not only talks about an action plan with the coachee but must engage him/her to commit to act on goals. In gaining commitment to the action plan the coach moves the coachee from viewing a plan as external and not integral to him/her to making

it internal and part of his/her future actions. By facilitating and encouraging the coachee to commit towards action, the coach facilitates 'self directed change' (Zeus and Skiffington, 2002). Grant (2006) agreed with Zeus and Skiffington and indicates that it is in the action stage that the change process is most evident where individuals are beginning to use new behaviours. The research of both Bridges (1986) and Nortier (1986) (see section 3.3.3) which emphasises the importance of letting go of old behaviours prior to taking on new behaviours, provides some insight into how this transition happens.

#### **3.5.4.2 Action planning**

The role of action planning is recognised in the literature on coaching (Peterson, 2002; Zeus and Skiffington, 2002; Grant, 2006). Action planning for achievement of goals is described as "the process of developing a systematic means of achieving goals" (Grant, 2006, p.159). The recognised role of the coach in such action planning is to assist the coachee to make a plan of action that is both realistic and achievable and to address the values of the coachee and any residual resistance to change that may be present (Zeus and Skiffington, 2002; Grant, 2006). Peterson (2002) emphasised the importance of action planning as perhaps a 'neglected aspect' of coaching because following coaching a coachee may be enthused, but without a relevant plan s/he may get 'sidetracked'. However, Grant (2006) cautions that the coach must be mindful of the coachee's readiness to change. Trying to change too much too soon may derail the process while working with unchallenging plans may also fail to engage the coachee.

There are some indications in the literature that the coach, by means of the action plan, should not rush the client into change but instead should focus on encouraging the coachee to stretch and improve his/her current performance (Bolt, 2000; Zeus and Skiffington, 2002; Grant, 2006). Starr (2003) noted that by developing and discussing the coachee's goals, the coach facilitates a process where the coachee experiences a deeper appreciation of what is involved to make change happen in his/her life. Ultimately, real change in behaviour will occur when the coach will move the coachee

beyond his/her current comfort zone of behaviour toward action and into subsequent behaviour change (Paige, 2002).

### **3.5.5 Maintenance/Termination**

Figure 1 indicates that the next stage of TTM is the maintenance and termination stage where the individual endeavours to maintain the new behaviour before termination of the change process. Maintenance is recognised as a ‘continuation’ and not an absence of change which ultimately leads toward termination of the change process (Prochaska et al., 1992). The current researcher considers the maintenance/termination stage also bears resonance with the final stage (stage 4) (completion) in the coaching process (Starr, 2003).

When individuals are endeavouring to change their behaviour they may not successfully maintain their actions on the first attempt and may indeed recycle back through some of the stages of change before the desired behaviour change is maintained (Prochaska et al., 1992; Grant, 2006; Stober, 2008). Grant (2006), however, mindful of the potential relapse to old behaviours in coachees advised the coach not to give information about relapse too soon as it may give coachee’s an excuse not to change their behaviour.

Sustainability of behaviour change is noted as evidence of a successful coaching intervention, therefore the importance of maintaining new behaviour is recognised as having particular relevance in the context of coaching (Brotman et al., 1998; Wasylyshyn, 2003; Wasylyshyn, Gronsky, and Haas, 2006; Carter, 2006). To encourage sustainable change in coaching, in the maintenance stage, the role of the coach has been recognised as encouraging the coachee to plan for pitfalls and difficulties and to devise more stretching goals that encourage and maintain the change in question (Grant, 2006; Stober, 2008)

At the end of the coaching assignment if the coaching has been successful, the coachee has achieved his/her goals; the rate of behaviour change in the coachee slows down, and the impetus for dealing with new issues decreases (Zeus and Skiffington, 2002). There are some indications in the literature on coaching that as coaching is a personal one-to-one process the coachee may feel a sense of withdrawal once the coaching assignment has ended (Zeus and Skiffington, 2002; Starr, 2003). However, coaching is not a dependent relationship and by its very nature the coachee should be able to continue towards his/her goals without the coach being involved (Kalinauckas and King, 1994). Starr (2003) concurred with this view and emphasised the importance of a coachee being able to operate outside of the coaching process where coaching should begin with this end in mind. Therefore, throughout the coaching assignment the coach should be mindful of additional support mechanisms for the coachee once his/her initial goals have been achieved and the assignment has ended.

In summary, in the final stage of Maintenance/Termination of TTM in the behaviour change process, if the coachee has been successful in maintaining his/her new behaviour s/he may terminate the change process. The role of the coach is to support such maintenance while being mindful of the fact that a relapse may occur where additional support may be needed before the change process is complete.

### **3.5.6 Summary of TTM in coaching**

The value of TTM to the coaching process has been outlined in the above. The current researcher is mindful of the fact that only limited research exists on the applicability of TTM to coaching (Grant, 2001a and 2006; Zeus and Skiffington, 2002; Stober, 2008). With such limited application it is difficult to make generalisation about the suitability of TTM as a relevant model of behaviour change in coaching. In addition, none of the studies above that did apply it in a coaching context offered any critical evaluation of TTM and highlighted only positive aspects of the model. However coachees are drawn to coaching as they want to change their behaviour (Whitworth et al., 1998). While acknowledging the inherent difficulties and criticisms previously stated regarding the

application of TTM outside of a coaching context, it is evident from the above that TTM may be a relevant model that assists in understanding the position of the coachee in the change process and thereby enables the coach to match the intervention with the stage of change of the coachee (Stober, 2008). This understanding facilitates the movement of the coachee through the four stages of the coaching change process towards behaviour change and goal attainment.

The next section of this chapter will review literature on entrepreneurship and in particular an entrepreneur's goal planning and attainment behaviour.

### **3.6 Entrepreneurs**

There has been much discussion and deliberation in the entrepreneurship literature, (some of which overlaps), as to what exactly defines an entrepreneur. Bygrave and Hofer (1991) defined an entrepreneur as an individual "who perceives an opportunity and creates an organisation to pursue it" (p.14). In a similar vein, Zimmerer and Scarborough (1998) stated that without knowing whether the venture will succeed or fail, an entrepreneur is an individual who marshals resources to follow opportunities. There appears to be agreement on what an entrepreneur is focused on, namely finding opportunities and exploiting them (O'Gorman and Cunningham, 1997; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000). Opportunities are defined as "positive external options that a business could exploit to accomplish its mission, goals and objectives" (Zimmerer and Scarborough, 1998, p.41). In pursuing opportunities, entrepreneurs have been described as single-minded, determined and appear to have a particular mindset (O'Gorman and Cunningham, 1997; Thompson, 1999; European Commission, 2003). It has even been suggested that the extent of this determination and mindset may lead those who are looking at entrepreneurs from 'outside' to conclude that it is detrimental to an entrepreneur's well being (O'Gorman and Cunningham, 1997). Based on the literature reviewed the current study adopts the view that an entrepreneur is a distinctive individual with specific interest in and ambitions for facilitating business

opportunities; even though the entrepreneur lacks the evidence and security that an opportunity will be fruitful and advantageous, nonetheless in a single minded way relentlessly pursue his/her goals.

Discord exists in the literature on entrepreneurship as to whether an entrepreneur can be defined in terms of particular traits or personality characteristics. The personality approach is focused on identifying a supposed key trait that is most characteristic of the entrepreneur (Carson, Cromie, McGowan and Hill, 1995). However, on the one hand Rauch and Frese (2007) argued that it is essential that the personality traits of business owners be considered, as ignoring such traits will give an incomplete view of the entrepreneur. On the other hand, others are critical of such a view (Deakins and Friel, 1998; Wickham, 2001; Cope, 2005). For example, Deakins and Friel (1998) noted that the trait approach is limited as it does not make allowances for the fact that through working in their business the behaviour of an entrepreneur will change. In addition, the trait approach has been widely criticised as it denotes an entrepreneur as someone who has 'superhuman qualities' and is a 'generic everyman' (Gartner, 1989; Bhide, 1994). In particular Bhide (1994) stated that due to this perception of the need for entrepreneurs to possess 'superhuman' qualities the view that ordinary individuals would be unsuitable entrepreneurs could emerge. In essence, focusing on personality traits to describe entrepreneurs has led entrepreneur's to emerge "as people who see what others cannot see and do what others would not dare" (Carson et al., 1995, p.50). However, defining an entrepreneur in terms of traits and personality alone is inadequate and seeks to separate individuals from who they are and what they actually do (Gartner, 1989; Howarth, Tempest and Coupland, 2005).

Gartner (1989) stated that instead of a trait and personality approach, entrepreneurs may be best understood in terms of their behaviour as in effect, viewing the entrepreneur from a behavioural perspective does not seek to 'separate the dancer from the dance'. Thus suggesting that it is not an entrepreneur's personality that describes them but rather their behaviour. In support of this view Carson et al. (1995) also highlighted a behavioural approach to understanding the entrepreneur. In essence, this approach focuses on

understanding an entrepreneur's actions, behaviour, attitudes and experiences. A behavioural approach was selected as the most suitable for the current study as it focuses on entrepreneurial actions and how they behave as they seek to capitalise on opportunities identified. It is important to understand the behaviour of entrepreneurs, as from the outset of their venture, such behaviour and the sequence of entrepreneurial activities has an influence on the eventual success of an entrepreneur's venture (Carter, Gartner and Reynolds, 1996)

The following section addresses how an entrepreneur behaves in relation to risk taking, networking, intuition, and adaptability. These areas were chosen as entrepreneurial literature indicates that such issues play a central part in an entrepreneur's behaviour as they capitalise on opportunities identified and work towards goal attainment (Bird, 1988; O'Gorman and Cunningham, 1997; Wickham, 2001). In the light of the current research this literature review will then give particular emphasis to entrepreneurial goal and planning behaviour, and how entrepreneurs measure goal attainment. Finally, an entrepreneurs attitude to training/interventions will be reviewed.

### **3.6.1 Entrepreneurs and risk taking**

The view that an entrepreneur is dealing with the unknown and is a risk taker is a common perception (Wickham, 2001). This risk taking behaviour is evident where an entrepreneur undertakes a business venture without the knowledge of whether it will succeed or fail (O'Gorman and Cunningham, 1997). Shane (2003) cited Sagie and Elizur (1999) who compared students undertaking small business subjects with general business students and found that the former had a greater preference for tasks that were uncertain and contained risks. In addition the small business subject students had a greater preference for entrepreneurial roles. Shane (2003) and Stewart and Roth (2001) supported the contention that entrepreneurs engage in risk taking behaviour where Stewart and Roth found that entrepreneurs have a higher risk taking propensity than managers. However, Miner and Raju (2004) questioned the comprehensiveness

of data used by Stewart and Roth. They indicated that a number of core studies were excluded from Stewart and Roth's research which resulted in a conservative conclusion regarding risk taking.

Other research has also shown that not all entrepreneurs behave in the same way in relation to risk and that their risk taking activities change over time (McCarthy, 2003; Gilmore, Carson and O'Donnell, 2004). McCarthy found on the one hand that while charismatic (idealistic) entrepreneurs were driven by the strength of their convictions and initially assumed extraordinary risks that tempered and changed over time through crisis and experience. On the other hand, they stated that pragmatic (realistic) entrepreneurs were less emotional about their ventures and on the whole undertook low level risks.

Keeping in mind the level of risk that an entrepreneur is willing to undertake, Osborne (1995) in detailing the profile of an entrepreneur stated that entrepreneurs, while being at ease with the outcome of their actions, seek to avoid very high prospects of failure regardless of the rewards and in essence seek to 'calibrate' their risk taking behaviour and their ability to manage it. It appears therefore that some literature indicates that entrepreneurs undertake moderate risks that are within their ability to control (see for example Cunningham and Lischeron 1991; O'Gorman and Cunningham, 1997; Zimmerer and Scarborough, 1998)

### **3.6.2 Entrepreneurs and networking**

An entrepreneur has many contacts with his/her external environment and therefore the view that an entrepreneur is a lone and isolated figure may be deficient (Dollinger, 1985). Some researchers agree that entrepreneurs utilise networking as a means of gathering information so as to alleviate some of their risk taking behaviour and activities (Chell and Baines, 2000; Wickham, 2001; Gilmore, et al., 2004).

In essence networking has been highlighted as facilitating entrepreneurial behaviour (Wickham, 2001). The value of networking for entrepreneurs is evident in the link between networking and successful business performance (Chell and Baines, 2000). The concept that networking is an essential activity for entrepreneurs has been highlighted by several researchers such as Chell and Baines, 2000; Hite and Hesterly, 2001; Witt, 2004; and Hung, 2006. These researchers indicated that networking provides new ideas, information and resources that supports the survival of the entrepreneurial venture. Several studies have stated that as the business of an entrepreneur evolves, networking activities will also change and evolve over time (see for example Hite and Hesterly, 2001; Greve and Salaff, 2003; O'Donnell 2004; Hung, 2006). In particular, Hite and Hesterly (2001) indicated this evolving of networking activities as 'calculative' to meet growing business demands and to intentionally manage networks. Greve and Salaff (2003) stated that the evolution and change in networking behaviour of the entrepreneur is 'phase' dependent. In addition, O'Donnell (2004) indicated that the networking activities of an owner/manager of a small firm matches the needs of his/her business and utilises different types of networking to match the needs of customers and suppliers. Limited networking takes place early on in the process; it increases as the business grows but contracts back to the narrow and more focused networking as the business matures. Overall the literature reviewed suggests to the current researcher that ultimately entrepreneurs must network to achieve their goals and to understand the environment within which they are working.

### **3.6.3 Entrepreneurs and intuition**

Wickham (2001) indicated that there is a view that entrepreneurs are intuitive in their behaviour and the literature reviewed regarding this perception appears to concur with this view. For example, Allinson, Chell and Hayes (2000) found that entrepreneurs did in fact use their intuition and use it more than the general public and those in lower levels of management. In addition, early research by Bird (1988) highlighted the presence of intuitive and holistic thinking by entrepreneurs which has a direct effect on their vision

for the venture. This intuitive thinking by entrepreneurs is seen as a useful 'thinking mode' for entrepreneurs particularly in the early stages of an entrepreneur's business (Olson, 1985; Brouthers, Andriessen and Nicolaes, 1998). As entrepreneurs in the current study were in the early stages of their business concept, it is relevant to include the intuitive behaviour of entrepreneurs in this literature review.

### **3.6.4 Entrepreneurs and adaptability**

Research suggests that an entrepreneur must have the ability to be adaptable so as to move between what is happening in reality in a situation and their mental picture of it (Bird and Jelinek, 1988). An entrepreneur therefore must have a clear vision for their business while at the same time have a flexible approach so that they can be adaptable to encourage firm growth. In addition, Wickham (2001) indicated that entrepreneurs in general are receptive to and will not resist change, implying that they are adaptable and ultimately welcome change instead of resisting it. In the early stages of their business entrepreneurs must be able to shift from function to function and role to role (Bird and Jelinek, 1988). As such it is important that adaptability be included in the current study for two reasons; the co-researchers are in the early stages of their business concept, also in order to achieve their goals they may have to be adaptable and thus change their behaviour to facilitate such attainment.

### **3.7 Entrepreneurs and goals**

An entrepreneur's goals will have a direct effect on the eventual shape of their business (Bird, 1988; Naffziger, Hornsby and Kuratko, 1994). An entrepreneur is recognised as setting both economic and non-economic goals (Cromie, 1987; Greenbank, 2001). Research has shown that entrepreneurial goals are varied and range from; increasing family income, making a satisfactory living, control over their own destiny, autonomy and independence, self fulfilment, personal recognition, balancing family responsibility through greater work/life balance, to flexibility and job satisfaction (Buttner and Moore,

1997; Loscocco 1997; Greenbank, 2001; Wickham, 2001; Van Gelderen and Jansen, 2006). For example, Loscocco (1997) noted that achieving a satisfactory work/life balance is a prominent goal of some entrepreneurs. Additionally, Van Gelderen and Jansen (2006) found that autonomy and freedom to make their own decisions was a primary goal of entrepreneurs where in effect entrepreneurs wanted 'to direct and lead instead of being led'. Greenbank (2001) concluded that entrepreneurs pursue both business and personal goals and as such their goals were varied. However, they had an emphasis on personal objectives to the extent that they were willing to adjust their goals so as to continue to be satisfied with running their business. Naffzinger, Hornsby, and Kuratko (1994) indicated that ultimately, entrepreneurs regard their actions as successful to the extent that they have achieved their goals.

In the light of the current study it is important to understand not only whether entrepreneurs set goals but also how they measure attainment of such goals. However, in measuring achievement of goals, making money is not always centre stage (Wickham, 2001). Money is, instead, recognised as a means of 'keeping score' – a symbol of achievement (Zimmerer and Scarborough, 1998). With this in mind the link between making money and the achievement of goals is not a straightforward matter and may indeed be overstated by previous literature (Jarvis, Curran, Kitching, and Lightfoot, 2000; Aleste, 2008). Numerous researchers have agreed with this view point (Cromie, 1987; Walker and Brown, 2004; Wickham, 2001; Reijonen and Komppula, 2007; Aleste, 2008). For example, Walker and Brown (2004) found that of entrepreneurs', lifestyle measures were more important measurement of goal attainment than monetary measures. In this context the flexibility offered by an entrepreneur working for him/herself was a significant factor in measuring success in business. In a similar vein, Reijonen and Komppula (2007) found that business success was measured primarily by producing quality products that resulted in job and customer satisfaction; success was secondarily linked with making a reasonable living. Both these studies confirm the contention that an entrepreneur's personal and business goals are closely connected (Bhide, 1994; Greenbank, 2001). Finally, Jarvis et al. (2000) indicated that an entrepreneur measures

business performance through a complex mixture of measures that include tangible and intangible results such as financial and non financial measures.

### **3.7.1 Entrepreneurs' planning behaviour**

In the light of the current research it is important to ascertain if entrepreneurs actually plan to make their goals happen. Previous research indicates that there has been significant debate as to the value of planning behaviour for entrepreneurs and the type of planning behaviour that an entrepreneur engages in. The view that planning is beneficial behaviour for entrepreneurs has found some support (see for example Timmons, 1978; Perry, 2001; Delamar and Shane, 2003; Shane and Delamar, 2004). These studies indicate that business planning will help focus on entrepreneurial goals and will facilitate product and venture development as well as ameliorating the possibility that a business will fail. Also, Berman, Gordan and Sussman (1997) indicated that the majority of entrepreneurs did not plan in any formal way but those who did plan had better financial performance. However, Greenbank (2001) noted that entrepreneurs do plan to achieve their goals but may not always perceive the way in which they plan as planning in a strict business sense. Entrepreneurs may not always commit their goals to paper through the medium of a written business plan, instead, entrepreneurs have been noted as adaptive and distinctive in their planning behaviour, and do not adopt a one size fits all approach to their planning. Ultimately entrepreneurs will match their planning behaviour with their business environment (Bhide, 1994; Greenbank, 2001; Gruber, 2007). In other words previous research indicates that the planning behaviour of entrepreneur's is distinctive (Bird, 1988; Bhide, 1994; Greenbank, 2001; Gruber, 2007).

However, planning is also noted as having a negative influence on an entrepreneur's behaviour and may be used for procrastination and lack of flexibility in actions (Carter, Gartner and Reynolds, 1996; Frese, 2007). Additionally, Bird (1988) argued that an entrepreneur's time may best be spent 'doing' rather than 'retrospective sensemaking'. Carter et al. (1996) agreed with this viewpoint when they indicated that instead of planning, an entrepreneur's time may be more productive if they act on their

opportunities. Such viewpoints have been criticised (Delamar and Shane, 2003; Shane and Delamar, 2004), who in their studies noted that planning is not a public sign of venture commitment, but nonetheless it was a valuable activity as planning reduces the possibility of venture failure.

### **3.8 Entrepreneurs' attitudes towards interventions**

The remit of the current study is to explore the extent to which life coaching influences an entrepreneur's behaviour as they work towards goal attainment. As such it is important to have an understanding about entrepreneurs' attitudes towards interventions and training as it will give an insight into whether or not entrepreneurs are open to and willing to engage in such interventions.

Those with certain business characteristics such as utilising a structured business approach through the use of business plans and goals were found to be likely candidates to possess a positive attitude regarding engaging in training (Webster, Walker and Brown, 2005). However, given that Berman et al. (1997) and Greenbank (2001) previously indicated that entrepreneurs are noted for not engaging in formal planning Webster et al. (2004) does not give a full picture regarding how entrepreneurs in general feel about engaging in training.

Previous research suggests that entrepreneurs may be reluctant trainees and that their training needs are complex (Hankinson, 1994; Billett, 2001). O'Brien (1998) concurred with this view and noted that such reluctance on the part of entrepreneurs perhaps came about from a lack of confidence in their ability in the particular area. In addition Webster et al. (2005) also acknowledged that entrepreneurs may be reticent to engage in training as they have a desire to see immediate results. Further, results from training are not often immediate and as a consequence entrepreneurs may not see training as an attractive proposition. This concurs with early research which suggests that entrepreneurs are 'now oriented' individuals and exist very much in the present (Bird, 1988).

The difficulties of enticing entrepreneurs to engage in training may be compounded by the fact that there is only tenuous research evidence that indicates training has a positive impact on performance (Westhead and Storey, 1996; Storey, 2004). Westhead and Storey highlighted the following as the reasons why there is no direct evidence between training and performance, “the reasons for the absence of impact may be the poor quality of training provided, the fact that it is often over too short period to exert an influence upon the firm, that perhaps some forms of training are more effective than others or that the poor providers dominate the rest” (p.21)

Coupled with above findings on the reluctance of entrepreneurs to engage in training, the value of traditional training for entrepreneurs has been questioned (Lean, 1998; Raffo, Lovatt, Banks and O’Connor, 2000). Lean (1998) for example, advised to avoid using a ‘dogmatic’ and a one-size-fits all approach to training entrepreneurs. Instead, a more flexible approach is appropriate where relevant, context specific training would encourage participation by the entrepreneur (Raffo et al., 2000).

It is apparent therefore that to encourage an entrepreneur to engage in training it will need to be customised, situational specific training (Loan-Clarke, Boocock, Smith and Whittaker, 1999). In support of such a view, more recent research has found that entrepreneurs are willing to engage in training providing that certain conditions are fulfilled. For example the training must be carefully structured and relevant to meet an entrepreneur’s specific needs, with a suitable time of delivery and spacing of training sessions (Walker, Redmond, Webster, La Clus, 2007).

### **3.9 Life Coaching and entrepreneurs**

The intervention of life coaching is an example of a customised and tailored intervention. The coaching relationship is a designed ‘alliance’ focused entirely on the achievement of the coachee’s goals and has a positive effect on goal attainment (Whitworth et al., 1998;

Grant, 2003b and 2006). In the light of the current study this is important as several researchers have indicated that an entrepreneur's personal and business goals are inextricably linked. Additionally entrepreneurs will view their entrepreneurial actions as successful to the extent that they have achieved their goals (see for example Naffzinger, Hornsby, and Kuratko, 1994; Bhide, 1994; Walker and Brown, 2004; Reijonen and Komppula, 2007).

There are however limited studies in the area of coaching and entrepreneurs. For example the 'winning conditions' in coaching entrepreneurs appear to centre around entrepreneurs being open and willing to change where the entrepreneurs themselves hold the source of success (Audet and Couteret, 2005). This study although important regarding the influence of coaching with entrepreneurs has a major limitation in that it appears to have blurred the lines regarding the differences between mentoring and coaching. Alstrup (2000) also noted the central role played by entrepreneurs in the coaching process and indicated that entrepreneurs may fear and dislike losing their sovereignty to an outside intervention. To counteract this reticence and to encourage openness and confidence in coaching such entrepreneurs, the coach must defer to this need, re-assure the entrepreneur that they are still in control of their business while at the same time be mindful of the inherent flexibility in small enterprises where both long and short term issues need to be balanced (Alstrup, 2000)

The value of coaching entrepreneurs has been recognised by Devins and Gold (2000) who found that some entrepreneurs were initially uncertain and guarded about such an intervention. However, Devins et al. found that entrepreneurs (managers) of small firms reported 'a high level of satisfaction' following a coaching intervention which had an emphasis on providing a sounding board, and a problem solving process which in turn led to detailing an action plan. The benefits of this coaching intervention were outlined as providing a framework for getting things done, as well as an impetus for change.

The researcher of the current study considers that coaching is a suitable intervention for entrepreneurs as it is designed as a personalised intervention between a coach and

coachee. As such it may fulfil the need for the call for customised training/interventions for entrepreneurs (Walker et al., 2007). Coaching is also recognised as an intervention which is focused on assisting the coachee to achieve his/her goals (Whitworth et al., 1998; Grant, 2003b and 2006). This is important as an entrepreneur's personal and business goals are closely connected where entrepreneurs will regard their actions as successful to the extent that they have achieved their goals (Naffzinger et al., 1994; Bhide, 1994; Greenbank 2001). There is limited research on the issue of coaching entrepreneurs. In addition the current researcher found that it was difficult to get any clear indication as regards the benefits of life coaching for entrepreneurs. With this in mind it suggests further research is needed.

### **3.10 Summary**

This chapter reviewed the literature informing the current study. As coaching is about fostering behaviour change in individuals as they work towards attainment of goals, this chapter reviewed behaviour change and goal attainment models. This led to the application of the Transtheoretical Model of behaviour change to the stages of the coaching process. This model was chosen as it facilitated understanding of the position of the coachee in the process of change. It also provided an insight into how the coach by tailoring the coaching intervention to the stage of change of the coachee can support and facilitate behaviour change in the coachee as s/he worked towards the attainment of goals. This chapter then reviewed entrepreneurs as the co-researchers in the current study and how they behave with particular emphasis on their goal and planning behaviour. Finally, the current chapter reviewed the literature available on coaching entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs' attitudes towards interventions. This led to the current researcher to suggest that further researcher is needed into the emerging area of coaching entrepreneurs. With this in mind the current study explores the extent to which life coaching influences an entrepreneur's behaviour in relation to goal planning and attainment.

In light of this literature review, the next chapter (research methodology) will highlight the research problem, and objectives and draw attention to the philosophy which forms the foundation of the current study. It then details the particular research design and data collection methods used.

## **Chapter 4 Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter reviewed the literature informing this research. This chapter begins by outlining the research problem, research question and objectives to be investigated and provides a conceptual framework that was used to identify areas of literature relevant for the current study. The layers involved in Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill's (2003) 'Research Process Onion' were utilised to put the research process and design in context. Through this the research philosophy is considered which leads onto the exploration of the phenomenological and positivist philosophical approaches where central characteristics of each paradigm are considered. The research approach is then outlined where both the quantitative and qualitative approaches are reviewed. This is followed by deliberation of the research strategy and method. This leads onto a comprehensive analysis of the chosen data collection method where the researcher provides a rationale for the data collection method for the current study. As this study is conducted over an extended period the implications of conducting longitudinal research is then considered. The choice of method for analysing the collected data in the current research is then discussed before finally concluding with a summary of this chapter.

### **4.2 Research problem**

As previously stated in Chapter 2, evidence exists to indicate that there is growing interest among the general population for personal development techniques resulting in an increased demand for self help books. Closely linked with this interest in personal development is the rapid growth of an emerging life coaching industry, where The International Coach Federation (2007) recently noted that there were in excess of 30,000 coaches worldwide. Notwithstanding this, coaching is at a cross roads where more rigorous evidence based research is needed (Grant, 2003a). Additionally, as a

life coaching practitioner this researcher sought to ascertain if there was research to verify its effectiveness. During a comprehensive search of literature, this researcher noted little evidence to support the effectiveness of life coaching and limited evidence of support for executive coaching. An example of this support was noted in terms of a strong return on investment (in terms of increased productivity) for an organisation (McGovern, Lindemann, Vergara, Murphy, Baker and Warrenfeltz, 2001).

Coaching in essence is about ‘constructing solutions as opposed to solving problems’ (Grant, 2001a). Additionally, it is a goal-oriented process that facilitates the development and enactment of plans to achieve goals (Grant, 2006). Timmons (1978) addressed entrepreneurial goal setting and planning and noted that plans should be “goal oriented rather than activity oriented“ (p.7). However, the planning actions of entrepreneurs do not conform to standard expectations of planning (Bird, 1988; Bhide, 1994; Greenbank, 2001). Greenbank (2001) found that entrepreneurs pursue numerous goals and also may not see the way they plan as an accepted form of planning. Influenced by these findings the current researcher considered that the dynamic world of entrepreneurship was a suitable research area to ascertain the impact of life coaching on goal planning and attainment behaviour.

### **4.3 Research question**

Saunders et al. (2003) stated that the setting of a research question is not a straightforward matter and while its importance cannot be over stated, advised the researcher to avoid at all costs asking questions which will not result in new findings. As previously stated, the impact of life coaching on entrepreneurial behaviour has not been comprehensively addressed. As such the current researcher sought new insights to assist in understanding the current behaviour of entrepreneurs in relation to goal attainment and the subsequent influence of a life coaching intervention. Therefore, for the purpose of the current thesis the research question is:

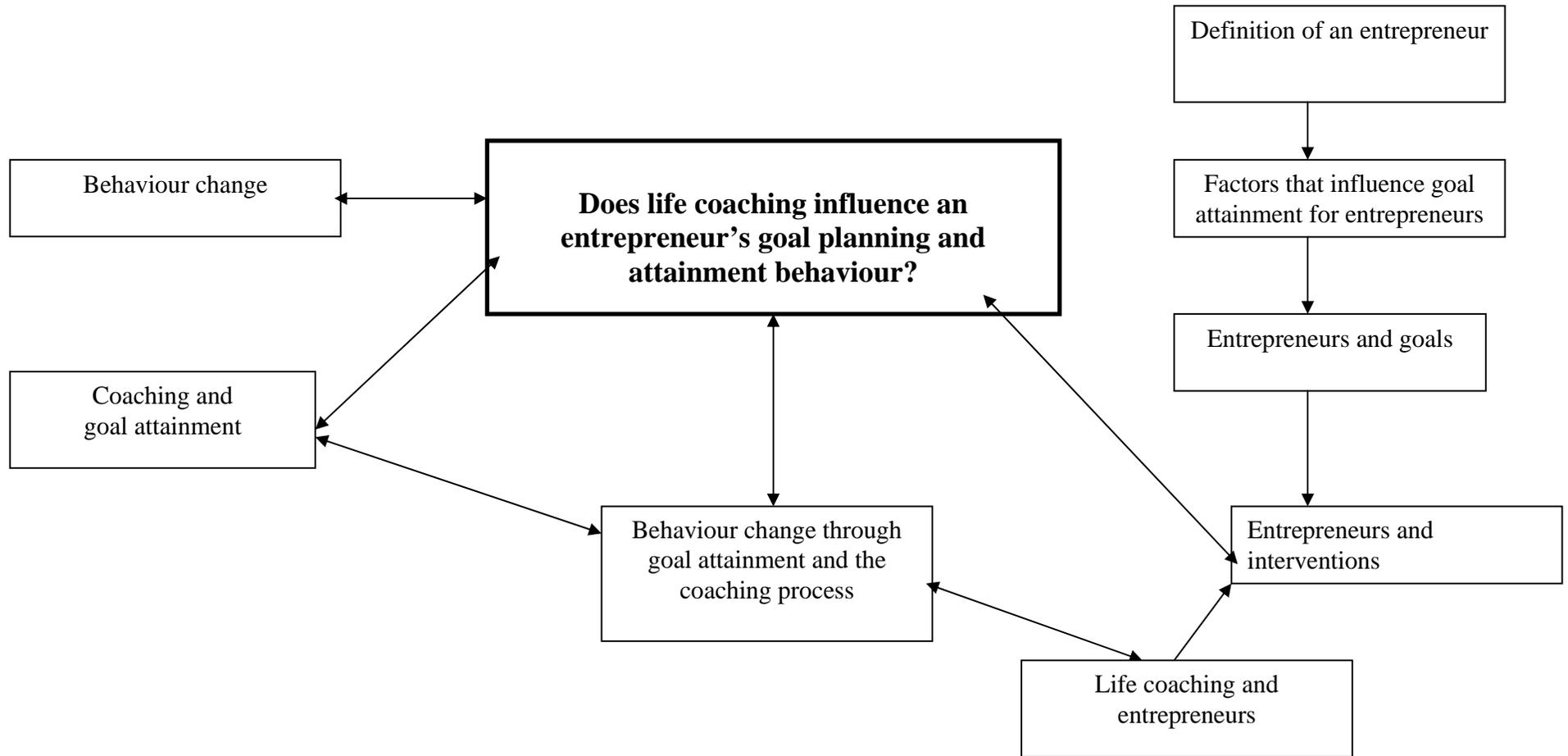
“Does life coaching influence an entrepreneur’s goal planning and attainment behaviour?”

#### **4.4 Research objectives**

Following on from the above research question, it is necessary to identify the research objectives. This will lead to ‘greater specificity’ than the research question (Saunders et al., 2003). With this in mind, the following are the research objectives for the current research:

- (1) To determine if life coaching affects how entrepreneurs view goal setting
- (2) To ascertain if life coaching affects the extent to which entrepreneurs deliberate in setting goals
- (3) To establish the extent to which life coaching influences the alignment of an entrepreneur’s business and personal goals
- (4) To determine does life coaching influence how entrepreneurs measure goal attainment
- (5) To establish if life coaching impacts on issues of goal attainment for entrepreneurs

To assist in identifying areas of literature relevant for this study and with the above research problem in mind, the current researcher designed a conceptual framework (Figure 3), with the research question occupying a central position within this framework.



**Figure 3 Conceptual Framework**  
 (Source: Current Research)

## **4.5 The research process / research design**

In order to achieve its aims the research process and design is concerned with organising research activity, and is a blueprint/action plan to facilitate moving from research questions to answers (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991; Yin, 1994). The significance of the research process as a blue print was emphasised by Saunders et al. (2003) where they cautioned the researcher not to look too far ahead to the central point of research to where the information is going to be collected. Instead careful consideration must be given to the initial steps of research namely, its philosophy.

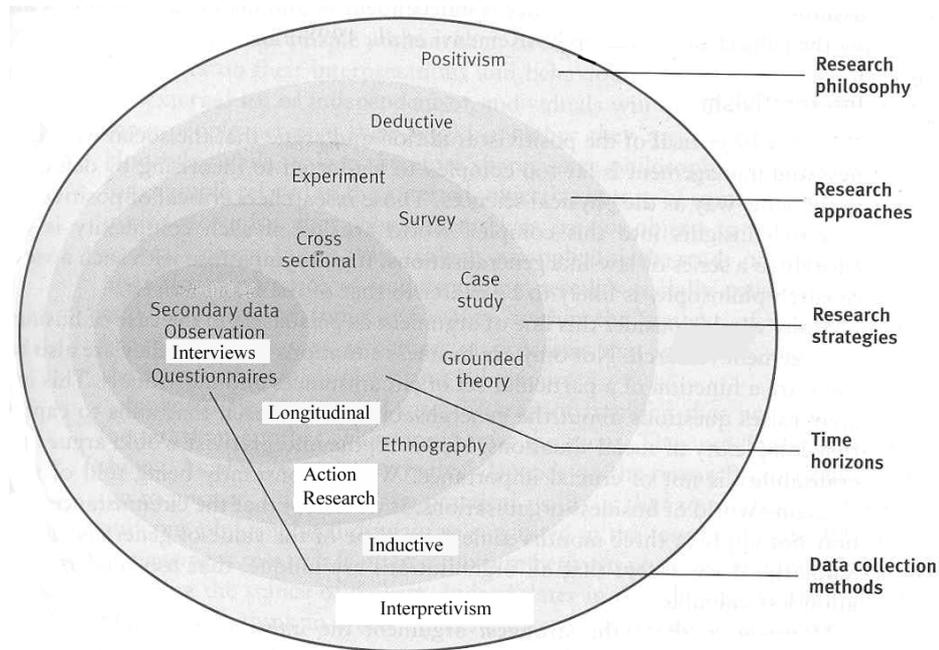
To explain the initial steps in the research process, Saunders et al. (2003) noted the analogy of the 'research onion' where many layers must be 'peeled away' prior to arriving at the central point of data collection. This 'onion' identifies key areas which make up the research process with the central point being the selection of the data collection method.

Figure 4 was used investigate the many layers relevant in the research process where the highlighted areas refer to the current research. The research philosophy as the initial layer of the 'onion' will be the first aspect of the process to be discussed. This is followed by the research strategy and method.

## **4.6 Research philosophies**

There are a number of reasons why the exploration of the philosophy of research design at the outset of research is important; it assists in clarifying the research design and the overall strategy and considers how evidence is to be accumulated and interpreted and how in turn it will ultimately answer the research question. Further it will assist the researcher to avoid unnecessary work by highlighting the limitations of particular approaches. Finally, knowledge of research philosophy will enable the researcher to look at which strategies will or will not work, and pose a challenge to

extend boundaries by identifying and creating designs which may be outside their previous experience (adapted from Easterby-Smith et al., 1991, p.27)



**Figure 4 The research process onion**  
 (Source: adapted from Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2003, p.83)

There are two different although not polar opposite views of philosophy namely positivism i.e. a quantitative collection method and phenomenology i.e. non positive qualitative collection method (Remenyi, Williams, Money and Swartz, 1998). Using the analogy of a still photograph, the phenomenological holistic approach underlines the importance of the nature of the researcher and the characteristics of the setting thus producing a sophisticated photograph. On the other hand, the positivistic approach while producing a similar photograph is not influenced by the researcher or the setting. (Remenyi et al., 1998). Additionally, Saunders et al. (2003) noted that an individual's philosophy depends on the way s/he thinks about the development of knowledge. With this in mind, in a review of the philosophy literature it was noted for the current research that there are relevant philosophies that must be reviewed to enable the researcher to select the one which is most appropriate for the current research.

The following sections will give further information on the positivist and phenomenological paradigms. A summary of the two paradigms is presented in Table 1 which provides key differences between positivism and the non positivist phenomenological approach.

	<b>Positivist Paradigm</b>	<b>Phenomenological Paradigm</b>
Basic Beliefs	<p>The world is external and objective</p> <p>The observer is independent</p> <p>Science is value free</p>	<p>The world is socially constructed and subjective</p> <p>The observer is part of what is being observed</p> <p>Science is driven by human interests</p>
Researcher should	<p>Focus on facts</p> <p>Look for causality and fundamental laws</p> <p>Reduce phenomena to simplest elements</p> <p>Formulate hypotheses and then test them</p>	<p>Focus on meanings</p> <p>Try to understand what's happening</p> <p>Look at totality of each situation</p> <p>Develop ideas through induction from data</p>
Preferred Methods Include	<p>Operationalising methods so that they can be measured</p> <p>Take large samples</p>	<p>Using multiple methods to establish different views of phenomena</p> <p>Small samples in depth or over time</p>

**Table 1 Features of the positivist and phenomenological paradigms (Source: Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991, p.27)**

Table 1 shows that each paradigm has its own characteristics, and outlines the basic beliefs within each approach. The positivist approach emphasises facts where the world is viewed as an external entity while the phenomenological approach focuses on meanings and sees the world as subjective and internal to the observer. Table 1 also indicates that the choice of research philosophy will also influence the method of data collection. The positivist approach will seek to measure through large samples while the phenomenological approach will use numerous methods which may be smaller in size but will be focused on more in depth analysis. However, to select the most

relevant philosophy for the current research each paradigm must be examined in closer detail.

#### **4.6.1 Positivism**

Comte in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century laid the philosophical foundation for positivism. In laying this philosophical foundation there was an emphasis was on “making law generalisations similar to those produced by the physical and natural scientists” (Remenyi et al., 1998, p.32). Positivists therefore believe that causes of human behaviour lie ‘outside of the individual’ (McNeill and Chapman, 2005). Thus, the positivist researcher takes on the role of an ‘objective analyst’ (Saunders et al., 2003). This is one of the main features of positivism as the researcher is viewed as independent of the research and so “neither affects nor is affected by the subject of the research” (Remnyi, et al., 1998, p.33). Saunders et al. (2003) concurred with this sense of removal of the researcher and noted that the researcher in positivism is isolated and thus makes interpretations which are independent. Positivists therefore see society and the world as having greater significance than the individual. Easterby-Smith et al. (1991) also commented that the positivist view is based on the central premise that the social world exists externally and should therefore be measured using objective means. Individuals in the positivist approach are seen as “puppets of society i.e. they are controlled by social forces emanating from the organisation of society” (McNeill and Chapman, 2005, p.15).

However, those critical of positivism argue that greater understanding may be lost if data are reduced to mere general laws (Saunders et al., 2003). Additionally, this approach has also been described as rigid and artificial which has difficulty in lending itself to situations where it is imperative to understand the importance that people attach to their actions (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991).

#### **4.6.2 Phenomenology**

Unlike the positivist approach, the phenomenological stance is one where the researcher is not isolated or removed from the situation. In essence the research goes beyond what is happening on the surface and is focused on what is really happening in a particular situation. Phenomenology must incorporate the reality and subjective distinctiveness of each situation from which meaning will be constructed (Remenyi et al., 1998). Where the core issues are individuals and their behaviour, according to the non-positivist or phenomenological approach, what is felt by the researcher is accepted as more trustworthy than that which is observed. The non-positivist therefore searches for that which is not apparent but “delves below the surface to understand the essence of what is happening” (Remenyi et al., 1998). At the heart of phenomenology therefore is a desire to gain an understanding of a particular phenomenon, where the subjective experience of the individual is paramount (Bryman and Bell, 2003). In the phenomenological or non positivist approach, every incident is studied as unique in its own right where the researcher enters their subjects world in order to fully understand them.

Social constructionism is part of the philosophy of phenomenology where actions of the individual are as a result of their unique subjective interpretations of events (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991). The emphasis in social constructionism is “ to appreciate the different constructions and meanings that people place upon their experience” (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991, p.24). Closely linked to social constructionism is the concept of interpretivism. In this, the essential element that facilitates construction and reconstruction of a situation is interpretation of the situation. This involves reflection of impressions of the reconstructed world and an “integration of action processes in a general context, which will constitute a new unit” (Sarantakos, 2005, p.39). The onus in interpretivism is on the researcher to understand the ‘subjective reality’ of those they are studying, “people not only interact with their environment, they also seek to make sense of it through their interpretation of events

and the meanings that they draw from these” (Saunders et al., 2003, p.84). Therefore, the behaviour of people who are described as ‘conscious purposive actors’ is as a result of ideas and unique meanings attached to experiences (Robson, 2002).

#### **4.6.3 Selection of research philosophy**

The above emphasises the importance of phenomenology in understanding the context of a study from the point of view of the individual. In the current study, each entrepreneur in setting up his/her business has his/her own individual set of experiences and interpretations in relation to goal planning and attainment. The positivist approach with its objectivity and law like generalisations would not facilitate a comprehensive understanding and appreciation of such individuality.

Remenyi et al. (1998) noted that it has become increasingly accepted in research that the phenomenological approach is most suited to situations where the central issues concern people and how they behave. To this end the research philosophy employed in this study will be phenomenology as it has at its heart rich descriptive contexts from which the lived experiences of individuals can be understood. In facilitating delving below the surface, this approach has the ability to support this researcher to appreciate and investigate the individual experiences of the entrepreneurs who are the subject of this study. By taking a phenomenological approach, the first hand experiences of the entrepreneur will inform this researcher regarding the interpretations and meanings which entrepreneurs of this study place on their own subjective reality in relation to goal planning and attainment. It will further enable the current researcher to understand the unique experiences of entrepreneurs and how life coaching impacts on such behaviour.

#### **4.6.4 Research approach**

In relation to the research approach there are two options available to the researcher in the current study namely a deductive and an inductive approach. On the one hand, in

the deductive approach 'data follows theory' (Saunders et al., 2003). It is also described as 'theory verification' and is linked to fixed design research (Robson, 2002). A deductive approach is based on scientific principles and is primarily concerned with gathering data within a highly structured approach that is measured quantitatively (Saunders et al., 2003). Additionally in the deductive approach the researcher is independent, moving from theory to data collection and analysis which leads to generalisation. Those critical of this approach highlight a tendency to ".....construct a rigid methodology that does not permit alternative explanations of what is going on" (Saunders et al., 2003, p.87)

Robson (2002) described the inductive approach as one of 'theory generation'. This is also recognised as theory emanating from data (Saunders et al., 2003). This qualitative approach is primarily concerned with the contexts within which events are happening. Its limitations are that the researcher has to live with concerns that "... no useful data patterns and theory will emerge" (Saunders et al., 2003, p.90). However, it also has an inherent advantage in that it can facilitate the understanding of human meanings which is central to the current study. Therefore as this research is concerned with the lived experience of individuals (i.e. entrepreneurs), the inductive approach is deemed as the most suitable as it has an inherent emphasis on contexts, flexibility and theory generation.

#### **4.7 Quantitative versus qualitative research**

While the preceding detailed the philosophy and approach underpinning the current research it is also necessary to ascertain the most suitable data collection approaches within the chosen research methodology. In research, data are collected both from a quantitative and qualitative perspective. The positivist approach is associated with quantitative data while the phenomenological approach is mainly concerned with qualitative data. As Remenyi et al. (1998) indicated "qualitative evidence uses words to describe situations, individuals, or circumstances surrounding a phenomenon, while

quantitative evidence uses numbers usually in the form of counts or measurements to attempt to give precision to a set of observations” (p.121). Table 2 outlines the different approaches of positivism and phenomenology.

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Concepts</b>	<b>Methods</b>
Positivism	Social structure, social facts	Quantitative, hypothesis-testing
Phenomenological	Social construction, meanings	Qualitative, hypothesis generation

**Table 2 Positivism versus Phenomenological approach (Source: adapted from Silverman, 1993, p.21)**

From Table 2 it is evident that positivism is concerned with certainties and facts while phenomenology is concerned with meanings. The method which both approaches employ is also different in that positivism tests a hypothesis while phenomenology is concerned with hypothesis generation. Quantitative research works within a restricted and defined structure with a prior outlook as to “how a phenomenon is likely to behave” (Remenyi et al., 1998, p.134). In addition, quantitative research has as an advantage in that wide ranging, economical research can be carried out (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991). Further such ‘fixed’ design research has the ability to break down individual differences and “identify patterns and processes which can be linked to social structures and group or organisational features” (Robson, 2002, p.98). In contrast, qualitative researchers provide rich descriptions of the phenomena being studied with an emphasis on descriptive, sometimes trivial, data that is necessary as “behaviour, values or whatever being studied must be understood in context” (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p.295). Such research has a core advantage i.e. an ability to look at change processes over time, and to understand real experiences (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991). Bryman and Bell (2003) stated that the ability of qualitative research to change as the research evolves was an additional benefit. Overall, it can be said that on the one hand positivism is quantitative in nature and is concerned with social facts and the testing of theories. On the other hand, the phenomenological viewpoint is qualitative research methods and hypothesis generation (Silverman, 1993).

The structured approach of quantitative research has an inability to detail descriptive contexts and would not be flexible enough for the current study; however a qualitative approach lends itself well to such descriptive contexts. Therefore the flexible and rich descriptive approach of qualitative research was chosen as the most suitable approach in the current study as it gave greater understanding of the entrepreneur as well as their goal planning and attainment behaviour. Finally, throughout this research it was necessary for the researcher to form a rapport with the co-researchers to facilitate access to rich personal descriptions. A quantitative research approach would not have facilitated such insights.

#### **4.8 Research strategy**

The research strategy “provides the overall direction of the research including the process by which the research is conducted” (Remenyi et al., 1998, p.44). A number of strategies were reviewed by the current researcher to assist in deciding on the most appropriate strategy for this study.

The current research involved a series of semi-structured interviews. Saunders et al. (2003) recognised that interviews come within the remit of surveys. However, surveys have an inherent disadvantage in that there is a threshold as to number of questions that can be asked in a survey approach where the questions may be long and complex (Robson, 2002). For the current study it is important that the experiences regarding the co-researchers goal planning and attainment behaviour are explored in depth. Therefore a structured survey approach to the research interviews was deemed inappropriate by the current researcher.

An alternative strategy for the current study was experiment. Such strategies are normally associated with quantitative research (Robson, 2002). However, Sarantakos (2005) indicated that a ‘non quantitative experiment’ can also take place but highlights

that this may also be viewed as a contradiction in terms as such experiments are normally concerned with measurements and objectivity. In the light of the importance of the words and subjective experiences of entrepreneurs regarding their goal planning and attainment behaviour, experiment was not an appropriate research strategy for the current study.

Additional flexible design studies considered by the current researcher also included an ethnographic study, grounded theory and case study. Robson (2002) and Saunders et al., (2003) noted that each strategy was time consuming and indicated observation was one of the main ways of data collection in these strategies. As such they were deemed inappropriate as interaction and not observation with the co-researchers formed a core part of the current study.

Finally, the strategy of action research was considered. This strategy comes from a belief that the most beneficial way to learn about an organisation or social system is through attempts to change it which in turn should be the underlying objective of action researcher (Easterby-Smith, et al., 1991). Action research is also known as 'practitioner research' where the practitioner does more than merely collecting data and enquiring into their own practice, but also involves reflection on the data that have come from the action (McNiff and Whitehead, 2001). Action research provides a focus on change, as well as evaluative monitoring of the process with the additional benefit of practitioner involvement (Saunders, et al., 2003). As a result of its insider knowledge "action research involves the development of knowledge and understanding of a unique kind" (Somekh, 2006, p.7).

Having indicated that none of the above research strategies are appropriate for the current study, the current researcher views the strategy of action research as the nearest most appropriate strategy in this study because prior to the start of the coaching process each entrepreneur was interviewed regarding their goal planning and attainment behaviour. Following this in the initial coaching session with the intervention group each co-researchers approach to goal planning and attainment was

discussed and individual action plans for the chosen goals were generated. Implementation steps were then undertaken by each member of the intervention group between coaching sessions. At the beginning of each individual coaching session the effects of the implementation steps undertaken by the co-researchers were monitored and evaluated. Progress made (or not) towards goals was reflected upon, and where necessary revisions were made to the entrepreneur's actions and additional action steps were identified and implemented. This process was repeated for the duration of coaching with the intervention group. Following the final coaching session and again four months later further interviews took place to ascertain if any change had occurred in the co-researchers goal planning and attainment behaviour. The research strategy of action research is deemed the nearest most appropriate strategy as the current researcher as a life coaching practitioner was involved in and reflected on the data collected in research interviews which resulted in findings which are unique to the goal planning and attainment behaviour of entrepreneurs who took part in this study.

#### **4.9 Research method**

Remenyi et al. (1998) stated that the choice of method is influenced by the importance of the area of research, the research question and the influence of time. With this in mind Figure 5 depicts the research method involved in the current study. During stage one of the current study this researcher drafted questions for the interview process and following this in stage two conducted a pilot interview with three entrepreneurs with a view to fine tuning the interview questions for stage five of the research process. In stage three, 15 entrepreneurs took part in a brief workshop on life coaching facilitated by the current researcher. Part of this presentation included the Wheel of Life Exercise (Appendix 2). Following this the current researcher gave a brief outline of the research. This was followed up by a brief question and answer session. At this point in the presentation a request was made for volunteers to take part in the current research. During stage four (attended by nine entrepreneurs) a briefing meeting took place to outline further details of the research, and in particular the difference between

the intervention and the non-intervention group. During this stage the current researcher also highlighted that those in the non-intervention group would also have the option of five coaching sessions at a future date once the current study was written up and submitted for examination. The Research Consent form was also discussed (see Appendix 1). Although all nine entrepreneurs indicated that they were willing to take part as co-researchers ultimately only eight returned the signed consent form to this researcher.

In stage five to establish their current behaviour in relation to goal planning and attainment, each co-researcher in the intervention and non-intervention groups was asked a series of questions through an individual semi-structured interview which was conducted and subsequently transcribed by the current researcher (see Appendix 3 for list of all interview questions). In stage six, the current researcher gave a brief presentation on goal setting to both the intervention and non-intervention groups. Following this, each co-researcher was asked to self select two goals which could be achieved within a ten week time frame.

During stage seven the intervention group was coached by the current researcher in relation to their chosen goals. This took the form of five, 45 sessions over a period of ten weeks. At the end of the five coaching sessions in stage eight this researcher again interviewed each member from both the intervention and non-intervention group. Each person was asked a series of questions to establish their current behaviour/views in relation to the research objectives. To enable comprehensive analysis these interviews were fully transcribed. During stage nine there was no contact with either the intervention or non intervention group. Finally, in stage ten through a final individual semi-structured interview the current researcher met with both the intervention and non-intervention groups. To establish if long term behavioural change took place this interview was conducted four months after stage ten.

See Appendix 4 for a more comprehensive description of each of the above stages.

### **4.9.1 Pilot interviews**

Pilot testing was important for this research and is essential not only to ensure reliability, but to obtain feedback that will display whether or not the questions were interpreted correctly and that the desired data has come from answering the interview questions (Remenyi et al., 1998). To this end the current researcher conducted three pilot studies with two male and one female entrepreneur. Following the conclusion of the interview, the interviewees were asked to voice their general opinion on the interview itself and to give feedback on the interview questions. As a result of feedback received the current researcher modified questions where appropriate

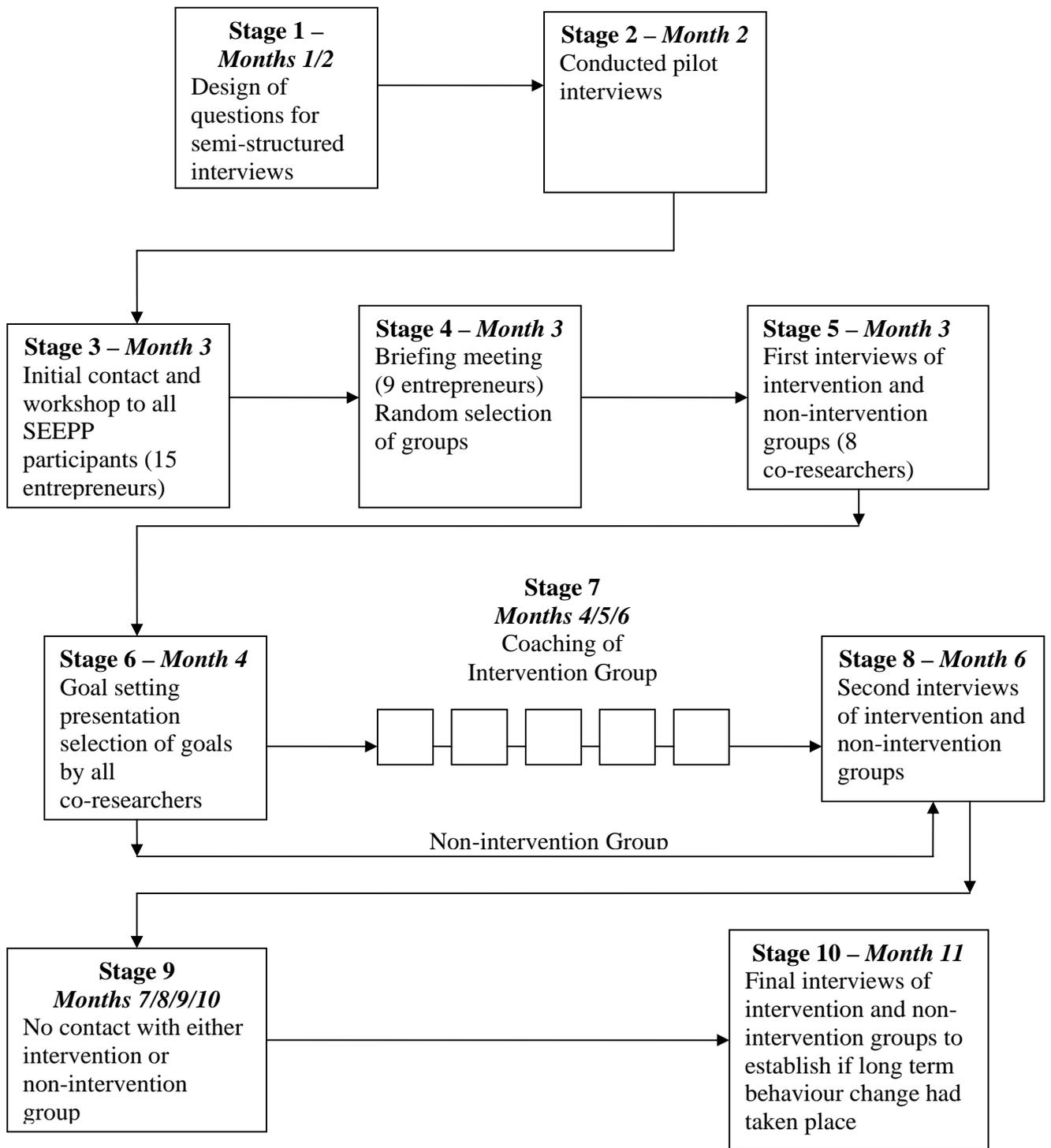
### **4.9.2 Sample selection**

Trying to identify a random selection of entrepreneurs for the current research was not an easy task as neither Enterprise Ireland<sup>2</sup> nor Waterford County Enterprise Board<sup>3</sup> has a comprehensive database of start-up entrepreneurs (McHugh and O'Gorman, 2006; O'Gorman and Bowe, 2006). For the purpose of the current research it was important to find entrepreneurs who were not long in business and were in the early stages of business development. The reasons for this are two fold; firstly, such entrepreneurs would not have been established in their entrepreneurial behaviour and secondly, given the fact that entrepreneurs in the early stages of their business operate in a changing environment they may be open to a behaviour change intervention such as life coaching.

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<sup>2</sup> Government agency responsible for the development and promotion of the indigenous business sector in Ireland.

<sup>3</sup> Facilitates the establishment, development and growth of micro-enterprises in the Waterford County.



**Figure 5 Stages of research in the current study (Source: Current research)**

The current researcher decided that participants on the South East Enterprise Platform Programme (SEEPP)<sup>4</sup> – 2007/2008 (based in South East of Ireland), fulfilled the above requirements of a purposeful group of individuals for the current research.

As there was one female in both the intervention and non-intervention group ‘s/he’ and ‘his/her’ will be used when describing individual entrepreneurs in order to protect the anonymity of the respondents. INT 1, INT 2, INT 3, INT 4 will be used to denote those in the intervention group and NI 1, NI 2, NI 3, NI 4 will indicate those in the non-intervention group. Selection of participants for the intervention and non-intervention groups was achieved by means of random selection. In such an approach, no account is taken of personal preferences or characteristics of the co-researchers but was chosen by the current researcher as it “has the least bias and gives the most generalisability” (Sekaran, 2000, p. 271).

Hakim (2000) noted that using a control or comparison group is a well accepted concept in longitudinal studies. In a situation where an impact needs to be tested ‘experimental control’ involves deciding what group will be subject to the experience or intervention. The selection and division for each group therefore is paramount, as if participants are allowed to volunteer or to self select, those who do so will be different at the outset from those who do not volunteer (Hakim, 2000). The allocation of participants to both the intervention and non-intervention groups was therefore done randomly and resulted in the demographic breakdown as indicated by Table 3. The original sample size was fifteen from which eight entrepreneurs volunteered to be part of the current study.

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<sup>4</sup> This is a one-year incubation programme which aims to support entrepreneurs involved in knowledge-based start-ups to develop and accelerate their business concept into a commercial entity.

<b>Intervention</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Type of business</b>
1	Female	41	Product Consultancy
2	Male	35	IT
3	Male	48	IT
4	Male	26	Software Services

<b>Non-intervention</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Type of business</b>
1	Female	35	Web 2.0
2	Male	39	Animal Feeding Products
3	Male	44	Consumer IT Service
4	Male	37	Consumer Goods

**Table 3 Demographics of intervention and non-intervention groups (Source: Current research)**

#### **4.10 Data collection methods**

Once the selection of the co-researchers was completed, this researcher reviewed the most suitable way to carry out the current research and to answer the research question. Before deciding on a data collection method, a number of methods were evaluated as to their suitability for the current research. Observation, content analysis and semi-structured interviews were reviewed as they are all a means of collecting qualitative data.

##### **4.10.1 Observation**

Bryman and Bell (2003) stated that observation is an alternative data collection technique to survey and questionnaire based methods and involves observing individuals within a particular context. In essence the strength of observation lies in its directness (Robson, 2002). However, structured observation is not without its difficulties, namely in the main the subjective meaning which a researcher may imply to particular situations (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Additionally, Robson (2002) noted that the required detachment of the observer may have a detrimental effect on those

being observed. In the current research the subjective views of the co-researchers are important. With this critical point in mind, observation is not a suitable data collection method for the current research as in order to access such subjective views it is necessary to have direct interaction between the researcher and co-researchers.

#### **4.10.2 Content analysis**

In this data collection method, wide ranging data are used to understand the phenomenon being studied (Robson, 2002). Such data are noted as documents, magazines, letters and TV programmes. Its advantage lies in the fact that it is unobtrusive and low cost and lends itself to longitudinal analysis (Robson, 2002; Bryman and Bell, 2003). However, “content can only be as good as the documents on which the practitioner works” (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p.208). Robson (2002) also acknowledges this fact and notes that one of the main disadvantages of content analysis is that the data that is being used for analysis may have been written for some other purpose and this may lead to distortions in the research.

For the purpose of the current research, content analysis is an unsuitable data collection method as it is the current lived experience and behaviour of entrepreneurs that is in focus. Archival evidence or secondary data that is the core of content analysis is not a suitable data collection method for the current study.

#### **4.10.3 Semi-structured interviews**

As this research is taken from a phenomenological qualitative approach where meanings are important, the semi-structured interview is viewed as the most appropriate data collection method. A semi-structured research interview has been defined as “an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (Kvale, 1996, p.5-6). The purpose of conducting interviews in the current research

was to explore the influence of the life coaching intervention on entrepreneurs' goal planning and attainment behaviours.

In order to conduct such an interview, the interviewer must be aware of his/her own subjectivity and recognise that s/he has a heavy responsibility to understand real meanings in what is being said by the interviewee. In this there is a heavy onus on the researcher to interpret descriptions and meanings i.e. what is being said 'between the lines' so as to fully understand what the interviewee is saying (Kvale, 1996). Yin (1994) also recognised an inherent difficulty of interviews in that it is not a straightforward process and is subject to problems of "bias, poor recall, and inaccurate articulation" (p.85). However, despite difficulties associated with interviews, this data collection method was chosen and in particular semi-structured interviews were selected as the most suitable data collection method for a number of reasons which are outlined below.

The interview is recognised by many as a flexible, targeted, insightful and valuable method of data collection (Yin, 1994; Remenyi et al., 1998; Robson, 2002; Bryman and Bell, 2003). In a semi-structured interview a guide can be used to provide structure for the interview (Remenyi et al., 1998; Bryman and Bell, 2003). Additionally, the semi-structured interview also gives the researcher the freedom to ask additional questions based on responses from the interviewee and encouraged openness (Bryman and Bell, 2003; Gillham, 2005). In using interviews as a data collection method its structure allows the interviewer to further explore issues with an interviewee where the use of prompts may result in additional information being obtained rather than if single questions were asked (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991; Gillham, 2005). A final benefit of qualitative semi-structured interviews is that it allows for meanings to be explored in depth (Arksey and Knight, 1999). This is of significance for the current research as each participant is interviewed several times over a protracted period regarding their goal planning and attainment behaviour. Given that a defined number of co-researchers (eight) will be involved in the current study, the size of the research group lends itself to utilising interviews as a data

collection method. Finally, the use of interviews also enabled this researcher to correct any ambiguity regarding the interviewee's answers at the time of data collection, thus ensuring clarity about what the interviewee meant in the subsequent transcriptions.

#### **4.10.3.1 Recording the interview**

All interviews for this research were recorded on audio tape. The current researcher decided to use audio taping as there are limitations in remembering an interview with additional difficulties of 'selective memory' in recalling the interview at a later time (Kvale, 1996). However, using a tape recorder can be fraught with difficulties, that are influenced by concerns of the interviewee regarding confidentiality and the subsequent use of the information recorded (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991). The current researcher decided to use tape recording as it gave freedom to listen and concentrate exclusively on what the interviewee was saying without the need to take copious notes. In effect, using a tape recorder gives the interviewer substantial freedom both in terms of focus and dynamics of the interview (Kvale, 1996). Listening is imperative in an interview and "...active listening – i.e. the interviewer's ability to listen actively to what the interviewee says – can be more important than the specific mastery of questioning techniques" (Kvale, 1996, p.132). As a result of this focus and 'active listening', the researcher was able to ask additional follow up, in depth, questions based on the interviewee's responses. All answers were later transcribed thus giving a full and comprehensive unbiased report of what was actually said. Finally, the decision to use the tape recorder was also influenced by the amount of questions asked. Additionally, taking detailed notes for such a length of interview (approx. 1 hour) would have been very distracting for the interviewee. The issue of recording the interview was raised in the research consent form (see Appendix 1). All eight co-researchers gave permission to record their interviews.

#### **4.10.3.2 Interview protocol**

It is important to recognise and acknowledge the influence that the behaviour of an interviewer has on the interviewee (Remenyi et al., 1998). This influence includes body language and tone of voice, where adapting a neutral but not uninterested response to the interviewee helps to avoid biasing the data (Saunders et al., 2003). Coupled with this is a 'delicate balance' between putting the interviewee at ease and excessive friendliness of the interviewer which in turn may influence the interviewee's answers (Bryman and Bell, 2003). With the above influences in mind, it is essential that the researcher displays professionalism, enthusiasm, and confidence (Sekaran, 2000).

Kvale (1996) indicated that "the first minutes of an interview are decisive" (p.128) as it sets the tone for the entire interview. It is thus essential for the interviewer to obtain the interviewees trust, as unless this is achieved the interviewees may tell the interviewer what they want to hear rather than giving their own personal views (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991). To allay any fears or misconceptions of the interviewee and to lay a foundation for trust, Kvale (1996) recommended a 'briefing'. In line with this, at the outset of interviews in Stage 5 of the current research this researcher gave the co-researchers an opportunity to ask questions regarding any concerns that they had about the research. Additionally, in order to facilitate a more productive relationship and to put answers in context before starting the interview proper, it was noted that in interviews with small business owners having an initial brief conversation with them about their business was beneficial (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991). With the above in mind this researcher (at the start of each interview) had a short conversation with each interviewee regarding their business. This ensured that they were relaxed and focused for the subsequent interview. Also, the end of each semi-structured interview was followed by a 'debriefing' as recommended by Kvale (1996). The debriefing allayed any tension and anxiety that the interviewee may have

experienced, with a final reflecting back by the interviewer on the main points learned from the interview regarding entrepreneurs' goal planning and attainment behaviour.

Once the interviewee left the room, this interviewer spent some time in quiet reflection, noting impressions, body language, and tone of voice. Subsequent to this the taped interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after the interview. This ensured that memory is fresh and to assist in making sense of the content while still current in the memory (Gillham, 2005).

#### **4.11 Longitudinal research**

A longitudinal study is described as a method that is similar to a 'diary' perspective and provides information regarding those in the study process over a period of time (Taris, 2000; Saunders et al., 2003). The main strength of a longitudinal approach is its ability to study change and development over a period of time and its ability to develop an in depth understanding of the subject matter (Arksey and Knight, 1999; Saunders et al., 2003). However, difficulties may arise with sample attrition which is greater the longer the study continues; additionally poor planning, could have an effect on the overall research results (Robson, 2002; Bryman, 2004).

Taris (2000) drew comparisons between longitudinal and cross sectional analysis; namely that the latter addresses only one particular point of time during the research while longitudinal research is concerned with information during a series of 'time points' namely; seconds, days or even years apart. It appears therefore that even a short amount of time is of significance in longitudinal research. With this in mind it is relevant to note that the current research was conducted over a period of nine months. In addition, Robson (2002) indicated that in addressing change in an individual, longitudinal designs can be utilised where interviews are carried out on more than one occasion during the research period. In the current research three interviews took place over the period of the study.

Given that the time involved in the current study is nine months, the current researcher concludes that this is a sufficient period of time over which to conduct a longitudinal study. A longitudinal study was considered the most suitable approach for a number of reasons; the focus of this study was to ascertain not only if behaviour change as regards goal planning and attainment had taken place but also to establish if this change was maintained on a long term basis. This could not have been achieved through a short term study and thus necessitated a longitudinal approach. Additionally, such an approach facilitates an in depth understanding of the goal planning and attainment behaviour of the co-researchers.

#### **4.12 Analysing the data**

The computer package NVivo 7 was used to manage data from research interviews. Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) supports the handling of text so that it can be analysed (Gibbs, 2002). Richards (1999) noted that NVivo provides tools for handling data and information thus facilitating ease of use, recording and linking of ideas as well as facilitating and supporting both connection and reflection of the data by the researcher. In essence NVivo “helps you to manage and synthesize your ideas” (p.4). Additionally, Saunders et al. (1997) noted the following advantages of using computer software for data analysis:

“Qualitative analysis software is a tool rather like a washing machine. It performs tedious and time consuming operations, thus releasing you and your brain for creative thinking and ideas” (p.358)

Keeping the above in mind, the central point of analysing text therefore still rests with the researcher who still has the responsibility of understanding its meaning, and to read and re-read the text to correctly interpret it (Gibbs, 2002). In the current research, NVivo 7 was used as it enabled the current researcher to manage and store the high volume of data involved in the longitudinal interviews and further supported comprehensive data

management. In this research, free nodes were used to identify the key concepts arising from the interview texts. Tree nodes were also utilised to facilitate the understanding of relationships between nodes. Having analysed all the interviews the following key themes emerged from the data; goal and planning behaviour of entrepreneurs, issues that impact on goal attainment for entrepreneurs and finally measurement of goal attainment for entrepreneurs.

In addition to using NVivo 7, this researcher initially utilised excel spread sheets but later decided to design a complex system of tables to gain a thorough understanding of the key themes of this research and the longitudinal behaviour changes that had taken place. The current researcher designed a system whereby the key themes that were identified through using NVivo 7 were further explored. Additionally, this process also made it possible to see the similarities and differences in behaviour change that emerged between each group as a whole. As a result of utilising the process of tables and NVivo 7, this researcher examined the long term behaviour changes that took place in both the intervention and non-intervention group between Interview 1 and Interview 3.

#### **4.13 Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to outline and justify the methodology used by the current researcher for this study. The chapter commenced by describing the research problem and objectives and then addressed the research process. The positivist and phenomenological approaches were then considered which led to the selection of a qualitative phenomenological approach. The research strategy chosen was action research and the chosen data collection method was semi-structured interviews. Finally, this researcher considered the implications of conducting the current research over a period of time as well as the use of NVivo 7 and tables to analyse the interview data.

Chapter 5 presents the research findings involved in this study. In this chapter the findings from interviews 1, 2 and 3 for both the intervention and non-intervention group will be outlined.

## Chapter 5 Overall Research Findings

### 5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was two fold; namely, to ascertain the goal planning and attainment behaviour of entrepreneurs involved in the current research and to establish whether the coaching intervention had an impact on this behaviour. The co-researchers for this study were eight participants on the South East Enterprise Platform Programme (SEEPP) of 2007/2008. Figure 5 (p.74) depicts the research method involved in the current study. Table 4 (Interview Timeline) has evolved from Figure 5 and depicts the timeline for the current study. The research started in month 3 where co-researchers were allocated on a random basis to an intervention and non-intervention group. Following this allocation, individual interviews took place which established the current goal planning and attainment behaviour of the entrepreneurs in both groups. The members of both groups then participated in a brief workshop on goal setting. After this workshop the co-researchers self selected goals towards which they would work in the coming ten weeks. In months 4, 5 and 6 the intervention group was coached for five sessions over a ten week time frame. In month 6 the second individual interview of all entrepreneurs in both groups took place. Four months later in month eleven of the current research the final interview of all co-researchers in both groups took place. As stated in Chapter Four the methodology employed for the current research was a qualitative approach and the research tool utilised was semi-structured interviews.

In this chapter the findings from interviews 1, 2, and 3 are presented separately for both the intervention (INT) and non-intervention (NI) groups under the following themes:

- The goal and planning behaviour of entrepreneurs
- Issues that impact on goal attainment for entrepreneurs
- Measurement of goal attainment by entrepreneurs.

<b>Interview 1 Month 3</b>	<b>Coaching Intervention Months 4/5/6</b>	<b>Interview 2 Month 6</b>	<b>Interview 3 Month 11</b>
<p>After random allocation of eight entrepreneurs to intervention and non-intervention groups, the initial interview took place at the start of research process.</p> <p>The workshop on goal setting and self selection of goals by entrepreneurs took place after this interview.</p>	<p>The four entrepreneurs in the intervention group were coached for five sessions over a ten week time frame.</p>	<p>Following coaching of the intervention group, the second interview of all eight entrepreneurs took place.</p> <p>This occurred three months after Interview 1.</p>	<p>The final interview took place at the end of the research process.</p> <p>This occurred four months after Interview 2.</p>

**Table 4 Interview Timeline (Source: Current Research)**

As there was one female in both the intervention and non-intervention group ‘s/he’ and ‘his/her’ will be used when describing individual entrepreneurs in order to protect the anonymity of the respondents. INT 1, INT 2, INT 3, INT 4 will be used to denote those in the intervention group and NI 1, NI 2, NI 3, NI 4 will indicate those in the non-intervention group.

## **5.2 Goal and planning behaviour of entrepreneurs**

In order to ascertain the current goal and planning behaviour of the entrepreneurs involved in this study, this researcher addressed the following areas; the difference that planning made to an entrepreneur’s business, scheduling of planning, whether or not entrepreneurs set goals and the types of goals they set, the goal actions of entrepreneurs, and whether or not s/he revisited, evaluated or compared results with the expectations of his/her goals. Finally, this researcher addressed whether entrepreneurs in this study used intuition, were flexible/adaptable or were distracted in their goal and planning behaviour. The individual goal and planning behaviour of entrepreneurs in the intervention group for all interviews can be seen in Table 5.

	Interview 1				Interview 2				Interview 3			
	INT 1	INT 2	INT 3	INT 4	INT 1	INT 2	INT 3	INT 4	INT 1	INT 2	INT 3	INT 4
<b>Does planning make a difference</b>	Prevents over reacting	Gives control	Gives focus	Helps towards profit	Makes business a reality	Sets delivery deadline	Critical for success	Gives focus	Gives focus	Helps to prioritise tasks	Critical for success	Gives focus
<b>Scheduling of planning</b>	Informal	Formal	Informal	Informal	Formal	Formal	Informal	Formal	Formal	Formal	Informal	Formal
<b>Set Goals</b>	Product profile	Sales	Sales	High profile clients on board	Business plan	Work from home	Business plan	Trial product	Launch product	Launch free IT product	Increase sales	Finalise website
<b>Goal Actions</b>	Look at strategic path	Break things into manageable pieces	Put on paper/project management software	Put pressure on self to get things done	More realistic with time frame	Hit milestone by end of week	Put on paper/project management software	Narrow goals down / putting dates	Set date for achievement of goals	Break down time, plan with team, set milestones for goals	Starts in head, put on paper/project management software	Set goals and work back from there
<b>Revisit Plans</b>	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing but more critical	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing but more critical	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
<b>Evaluate plans and goals</b>	No regrets	Ongoing	Ongoing	No system	More critical	Ongoing	Not at moment	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
<b>Compare what has been achieved with expectations</b>	Ongoing	Infrequently	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing, but more goal focused	Ongoing	Ongoing but more critical	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
<b>Use intuition</b>	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
<b>Adaptable/Flexible in plans and goals</b>	Always	Always	Always	Always	More goal focused	More goal focused	More goal focused	More goal focused	Goals always in mind	Goals always in mind	Need to remain focused on goal	Goals always in mind
<b>Distracted by</b>	New Ideas	Issues in business	Issues in business/new ideas	New ideas	Issues in business	Issues in business	Issues in business	Issues in business	Thinking about product	Issues in business	Everything + issues in business	Everything + issues in business

**Table 5 Intervention group - goal and planning behaviour of entrepreneurs (Source: Current Research)**

### **5.2.1 Intervention group - goal and planning behaviour of entrepreneurs - Interview 1**

All entrepreneurs in this group indicated that goal setting and planning made a significant difference to their business. Planning prevented over-reaction to daily events, and put entrepreneurs in control of what was happening within their business. In scheduling planning, three members of the intervention group planned informally. INT 1 used 'creative planning' in thinking about his/her goals said, "I would call a lot of what I do creative planning and just thinking about how I am going to achieve my goals".

Planning was therefore important for entrepreneurs in this group and all set goals for their business. As can be seen in Table 5, examples of such goals included sales targets as well as getting high profile clients on board. The goal and planning actions of entrepreneurs to achieve his/her goals were varied. Three entrepreneurs appeared to have definite actions; for example INT 3 put actions on paper or used project management software. However, the goal and planning action of INT 4 was to 'put pressure' on him/herself to get things done. Once a goal had been decided upon all entrepreneurs in this group revisited plans on an ongoing basis and questioned decisions made. Table 5 highlights that as well as revisiting goals, two entrepreneurs in this group also evaluated their goals and plans. Interestingly, INT 1 did not evaluate as s/he "did not see regretting decisions as being very beneficial". Although the businesses of entrepreneurs in this study were at an early stage, the majority of entrepreneurs stated that they did look back on an ongoing basis and compared what they had achieved to date in their business with their expectations.

The entrepreneurs in the intervention group did not have full information in relation to their plans and goals and as a result were aware of relying on intuition on an ongoing basis. For instance, INT 3 stated that s/he needed a certain amount of information and knowledge before s/he made a decision. At the same time, s/he was conscious of the need not to let an opportunity pass him/her by and so relied on intuition to guide his/her actions. All entrepreneurs in this group were adaptable and flexible in relation to plans

and goals and this was evident in the comments of INT 4 who stated that s/he was now working on version three of his/her original idea.

However, as can be seen in Table 5, all entrepreneurs were also distracted by various issues such as new ideas and demands within his/her business. An example of this was INT 2 who was distracted by 'housekeeping duties' i.e. general business administration, both legal and otherwise that distracted him/her and said "There are a lot of legal obligations to be fulfilled when you have your own company and I am continually conscious of the need to keep on top of these issues"(INT 2).

### **5.2.2 Intervention group - goal and planning behaviour of entrepreneurs – Interview 2**

Interview 2 took place after the coaching of the intervention group. The focal point of the coaching interventions was to raise each entrepreneur's awareness of their current behaviour in relation to their goals and plans. It additionally challenged them to see where improved results could be achieved by focusing on their inherent resourcefulness and personal strengths. The format of the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview was the same as for interview 1 but the focus was on ascertaining whether following the coaching intervention there was any change evident in the goal and planning behaviour of entrepreneurs. An overview of these changes can be seen in Table 5 (for example INT 1 had changed from an informal planning schedule to a formal planning schedule).

In this interview, planning continued to make a significant difference to all members of this group. INT 2 noted that planning was critical in that s/he had to be able to tell his/her customers when s/he could deliver the finished product. Without planning, the delivery date would be impossible to calculate. INT 1 also stated that planning was important as it helped to make things concrete and real. The goals of two entrepreneurs (INT 1 and INT 3) in this interview had evolved and they were now working on their business plans. This is a change from interview 1. Table 5 indicates that in working on their goals both INT 1 and INT 4 indicated that they were aware of changing how they scheduled time for

planning and now engaged in more formal planning. For example, INT 4 stated that s/he spent a large amount of time (eight hours) planning in the previous week. The goal and planning actions of three members of the intervention group had also changed and can be seen in Table 5. An example of this can be seen in the actions of INT 2 who previously indicated that s/he was aware of working on what s/he felt was important for a large number of goals. Now following the coaching intervention, s/he focused on his/her short term goals and had specific actions and milestones to achieve by the end of each week. In the same vein, INT 1 and INT 4 now had a time frame for their goals which were now more narrow and realistic. However, in revisiting plans and goals, Table 5 indicates that INT 1 and INT 4 had a more critical approach. INT 1 stated that this new critical approach was concerned with the 'interconnectivity' of all the pieces of his/her plans and goals which now had a better focus. As well as a change in revisiting plans and goals two entrepreneurs (as can be seen in Table 5) also indicated that since the coaching intervention they were aware of having a different approach in how they evaluated their goals. This is evident from the comments of INT 1 who previously would have allowed things to happen "organically". Following the coaching intervention s/he was more critical of results achieved and asked why things had not happened.

In this interview all entrepreneurs in the intervention group continued to compare what they had achieved to date with their expectations. However, Table 5 indicates that in a change from Interview 1, INT 4 stated that initially his/her plans had no strategy. Following the coaching intervention s/he felt more in control and had put in place real and more refined steps towards his/her goals. INT 3 still evaluated on an ongoing basis, noted the importance of time and stated that there is always the frustration of things not happening quickly enough. S/he needed time, courage and determination to achieve his/her expectations and said, "I realised that nerves of steel with more time and longer and deeper pockets are needed to get into business at a level where you are employing people" (INT 3).

As shown in Table 5, entrepreneurs in the intervention group still used their intuition on an ongoing basis. Further, all entrepreneurs in this group were still flexible in relation to

their plans and goals but were now more goal focused. The reasons for this were varied; entrepreneurs' products were now more developed and thus the entrepreneurs were clearer and more aware of their goals; additionally some entrepreneurs felt that a particular amount of revenue had to be generated and felt that they could not be flexible about it. However, entrepreneurs were still distracted in their businesses. INT 4 who was distracted by general business issues however noted a change in that s/he was now more focused. In this s/he had either stopped writing down new business ideas completely to concentrate on current goals or put ideas into a notebook at home away from his/her business.

### **5.2.3 Intervention group - goal and planning behaviour of entrepreneurs - Interview 3**

This interview took place four months after the final coaching sessions with the intervention group and was of a similar format to previous interviews. As shown in Table 5, planning was still of significance for the members of this group. INT 2 still planned formally, but stated that since the coaching intervention his/her goals drove everything in his/her business. In this there was an 'extra level of planning and prioritisation' that s/he felt made him/her more effective. Although s/he did not work any harder than previously since the coaching intervention, s/he was aware that his/her level of effectiveness had increased. Interestingly, the coaching intervention did not have any lasting effect on INT 3 who still felt the same about planning as stated in previous interviews. S/he commented that while the coaching intervention initially did make him/her think about goal setting and planning in his/her company, this however appeared to have been short lived. Although s/he was 'awake to new ways of doing things' it appeared to be a temporary measure as is indicated by the following comment, "I found that I tended to revert back after the coaching sessions to old habits that have served me well in the past and perhaps there is no need for radical change in my planning" (INT 3).

It was also evident from Table 5, that in this interview two members of the intervention group namely INT 2 and INT 4 still planned formally; but as a result of the coaching

intervention INT 4 commented that s/he was now more aware of the need to plan out of office journeys so that a number of customers could be visited in the one day. INT 1 felt that the coaching sessions were focused on what s/he needed to do to push his/her goals forward and so gave him/her a focus for daily planning activities. As can be seen in Table 5, the goals of entrepreneurs in the intervention group in this interview ranged from launching a free IT product, to getting websites finalised. To make these goals happen, the use of the new goal setting actions following the coaching intervention was evident from the responses of INT 1, INT 2, and INT 4. INT 4 originally stated that his/her prior goal setting action was to put pressure on him/herself to get things done. Following the coaching intervention, s/he experienced a change and stated that his/her goal setting actions were focused on setting a goal and working backwards from that point. Additionally, INT 1 set milestones and INT 4 had priorities to achieve. The changed goal setting actions of INT 2 were now to work with his/her team on his/her goals so that progress towards them could be measured by the team.

In this interview, entrepreneurs in the intervention group continued to revisit and question their decisions on an ongoing basis. Table 5 indicates that originally, both INT 1 and INT 4 did not evaluate their planning and goal setting. However, now in the third interview for example, INT 1 stated that s/he found the coaching intervention helpful in evaluating not only when his/her goals worked out but also when goals did not work and said, "I found the coaching really useful in evaluating why I did not do X and why did X take longer than it should have or why I was avoiding a particular aspect of my goal" (INT 1). All entrepreneurs continued to compare his/her expectations with what they set out to achieve and in comparing such expectations INT 4 spoke of how 'airy fairy' his/her ideas were in Interview 1. S/he had experienced a change in that s/he was more focused and realised now that it was possible to get around problem issues in his/her business and felt that as a consequence the product was far superior than previously expected.

As shown in Table 5, in the third interview all members of the intervention group continued to trust their own judgment and intuition when planning and goal setting.

Additionally, as in previous interviews all the members of the intervention group continued on an ongoing basis to be adaptable and flexible in making a change to plans and goals. INT 4 found that s/he sometimes got emotionally attached to issues but felt that if s/he had to change a plan or a goal s/he certainly would. This emotional attachment was also evident in INT 3 who noted that in the past s/he may have been stubborn about making a change. Now s/he realised that it was also sometimes necessary to pursue his/her ideas and it was beneficial not to give up at the first attempt. For all entrepreneurs in this group distractions were still evident in the final interview where no change was evident since interview 1. INT 4 stated that s/he was distracted by ‘just about everything’ in his/her business when s/he was not really focused.

From the above findings it was apparent that change took place in the goal and planning behaviour of the intervention group. This was evident in how planning time was scheduled, in their goal setting actions, evaluation of goals and in comparing expectations with what was achieved to date. These changes were most evident in INT 1 and INT 4 with INT 2 indicating less change. Only INT 3 appeared to be unchanged in all aspects of his/her goal and planning behaviour following the coaching intervention.

#### **5.2.4 Non-Intervention group - goal and planning behaviour of entrepreneurs**

In a similar layout to the intervention group, the individual goal and planning behaviour of each entrepreneur in the non-intervention group is detailed in Table 6. From this table it can be seen that entrepreneurs in the non-intervention group were similar to the intervention group in their responses. However, the main difference was that the non-intervention group were more formalised in scheduling planning time at the outset and that the majority in this group did not evaluate plans and goals.

	Interview 1				Interview 2				Interview 3			
	NI 1	NI 2	NI 3	NI 4	NI 1	NI 2	NI 3	NI 4	NI 1	NI 2	NI 3	NI 4
<b>Does planning make a difference</b>	Critical for success	Gives focus	Gives focus	Gives focus	Gives focus	Critical for success	Gives focus	Critical for success	Gives focus/structure	Critical for success	Gives focus	Pushes goals forward
<b>Scheduling of planning</b>	Formal	Formal	Informal	Informal	Formal	Formal	Informal	Formal	Formal	Formal	Informal	Informal
<b>Set Goals</b>	Test product	Grow Co.	Support Family	Sales	Pilot product	Test product	Get partners	Online shop	Launch product	Sell product	Launch website	Fine tune website
<b>Goal Actions</b>	May not do things in date order	Align sales calls into a funnel to yield sales	Look at options	Separate now and not urgent tasks	Work out actions with Business partner	Writes down tasks to be completed - sales funnell	Looks at options	Separate now and not urgent tasks with list	Work on specific issues to achieve goal	Align sales calls into a funnel, review progress, write to do list	Looks at options	Occasionally writes to do list
<b>Revisit Plans</b>	Ongoing	No regrets	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Infrequently	Infrequently	Ongoing	No regrets	Ongoing	Ongoing
<b>Evaluate plans and goals</b>	Ongoing	No regrets	Not specifically	Not specifically	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	No regrets	Ongoing	Ongoing
<b>Compare what has been achieved with expectations</b>	Ongoing	Infrequently	Too soon	Infrequently	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Too soon
<b>Use intuition</b>	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing – more confident	Ongoing – more confident	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
<b>Adaptable/ Flexible in plans and goals</b>	Always	Always	Always	Always	Always	Always	Moderated by product focus	Always	Always	Always	Always	Always
<b>Distracted by</b>	Personal life	New ideas	New ideas/ personal life	Issues in business	Personal life	New ideas	New ideas/ personal life	Issues in business	Everything - personal life, getting lost in small tasks	Everything - personal life, self, mobile phone, e-mail, ideas	Issues in business	Everything

**Table 6 Non-Intervention group - goal and planning behaviour of entrepreneurs (Source: Current research)**

### **5.2.5 Non-Intervention group - goal and planning behaviour of entrepreneurs - Interview 1**

Similar to the patterns in the intervention group, planning made a significant difference for all the entrepreneurs in the non-intervention group. For example, NI 2 noted that without planning s/he got lost in the day to day work load of his/her business and with planning s/he had more focus. In scheduling planning time there was an equal divide between those who planned formally and informally. For example, on the one hand the plans of NI 1 evolved during the week. On the other hand, NI 4 noted that s/he planned at 6 am in the morning as s/he lay awake. In planning, all entrepreneurs set goals for his/her business such as a particular target of product sales per month. From Table 6 it is apparent that entrepreneurs' planning actions were varied such as NI 4 separating issues that needed to be done now from those that are not urgent and NI 2 'aligning sales calls into a funnel'. In this, NI 2 made many phone calls to prospective customers which narrowed down into a small number of sales.

Three of the entrepreneurs in the non-intervention group revisited plans and goals on an ongoing basis and questioned decisions they had made. However, NI 2 stated that s/he never procrastinated and once a decision was made s/he would go with it and not look back. However, although the majority revisited plans and goals, three of the entrepreneurs in this group also stated that they did not evaluate plans and goals, or that they evaluated only in hindsight if there was a difficulty in execution. NI 4 gave the following insight and stated that s/he evaluated only in a self depreciating way and felt that more planning was needed, "I evaluate only to the extent that I beat myself up about the need to sit down and plan more" (NI 4).

When entrepreneurs in the non-intervention group were asked if they compared expectations with what they set out to achieve there was a mixed response. NI 2 compared expectations infrequently, and NI 3 felt it was too soon to do so in the development of his/her business. Interestingly, NI 2 stated that s/he was somewhat disappointed that his/her goals had yet to be fully achieved and that his/her product did

not take off faster. S/he did, however, realise that in the long run the time spent on pilot trials and adjusting the product would be very beneficial.

Similar to the intervention group intuition and adaptability were seen as part of the goal and planning actions of all entrepreneurs in the non-intervention group. NI 4 commented that s/he was willing to live with a degree of uncertainty and so was happy to trust his/her own judgment and intuition. In goal setting and planning all entrepreneurs were distracted either by themselves or issues within their businesses. An example of this was in the comments of NI 2 who, from an early age, found it difficult to focus and bring projects to a conclusion. S/he commented, "Even when I was in school, I was always going off track. The big problem is how to channel everything into one area so that when you get to the end you have the product finished instead of having lots of ideas half started" (NI 2).

#### **5.2.6 Non-Intervention group - goal and planning behaviour of entrepreneurs - Interview 2**

Similar to the intervention group this interview took place three months after interview 1 and following the coaching of the intervention group. From Table 6 it is evident that planning still appeared to be part of the behaviour for all the members of this group. Of note is NI 1 whose planning schedule was still the same but s/he now included his/her business partner in planning activities.

It was also evident in this interview that the goals of the non-intervention group had evolved. In particular, NI 1 noted that his/her product needed to be piloted as it was now going to be available on an international basis much sooner than anticipated and this resulted in a more aggressive approach to goals. In this interview there was an equal divide between those who revisited their plans on an ongoing basis and those who revisited them infrequently. As can be seen from Table 6, this is a change from the previous interview. NI 4 was aware that s/he did not have a formal review such as setting

aside formal time to do so and said, “I do review internally to a large extent, but I am on my own in the business so there is no formality to it” (NI 4).

In Table 6 all entrepreneurs indicated that they evaluated plans and goals on an ongoing basis, and all now compared expectations with what they had set out to achieve. This is a change from interview 1 for NI 2, NI 3 and NI 4. Although some members of this group now commented that they were more confident in using their intuition, and still used it on an ongoing basis. NI 3 was the only entrepreneur who also said that although s/he was still as adaptable, s/he was now more product focused as s/he was more familiar with his/her business and products and said, “I have now identified my direction more clearly and as a result I have more of a defined route that I want to focus on and maintain” (NI 3).

All entrepreneurs also continued to be as distracted as previously with his/her plans and goals since Interview 1. An example of this can be seen in the comments of NI 2 who stated that s/he was always thinking of something else and therefore found it difficult to focus on the task in hand.

### **5.2.7 Non-Intervention group - goal and planning behaviour of entrepreneurs - Interview 3**

At the end of this research process it is evident from Table 6 that planning continued to make a difference to all in this group. NI 4 noted that planning helped him/her to push goals forward and helped to focus on difficult issues. In this interview, entrepreneurs still planned in the same manner as they indicated in Interview 1 and 2, namely two formally and two informally. These are the same two people in each interview. Additionally, the goals of the non-intervention group had evolved from simplistic macro goals to micro goals. For example, an initial goal was to support their family with a profitable business. Now the goals were micro ones such as launching a website or commercialising products. The goal setting actions of all entrepreneurs in the non-intervention group remained largely the same throughout Interview 1, 2 and 3. The same three entrepreneurs continued

to revisit and question decisions regarding plans on an ongoing basis. As shown in Table 6, the final entrepreneur in this non-intervention group, namely NI 2, was consistent in stating throughout this research process s/he never revisited his/her plans. Again NI 2 was the exception when it came to evaluating goals and plans and did not do so and felt that 'what was done was done'. NI 4, who originally compared expectations infrequently, now in interview 3, stated that when s/he set up the business, s/he had no idea if s/he would sell millions of his/her product or if his/her business would 'crash and burn'; however, reality and expectations were now beginning to change and s/he had a better idea of what was achievable and now would be able to realistically compare expectations in the future. All entrepreneurs in this group as before continued to rely on intuition and used their adaptability on an ongoing basis. Finally, entrepreneurs were as distracted as before in business. For example NI 2 consistently indicated throughout this research that s/he was distracted as his/her 'brain went off in a tangent'.

In summary, therefore, it is evident that limited change took place in the goal and planning behaviour of the entrepreneurs in the non-intervention group. The only changes that were evident at the end of the research process was that the majority in the non-intervention group now evaluated their plans and goals in addition to comparing what was achieved with expectations.

### **5.3 Issues that influence goal attainment and planning of entrepreneurs**

As well as addressing the goal and planning behaviour of entrepreneurs this researcher also addressed the issues that influenced goal attainment and planning for those involved in this research; namely, use of previous experience, reasons for business enthusiasm, ownership of goals, networking and work/life balance. These are all issues that have been identified as assisting towards goal attainment for entrepreneurs.

	Interview 1				Interview 2				Interview 3			
	INT 1	INT 2	INT 3	INT 4	INT 1	INT 2	INT 3	INT 4	INT 1	INT 2	INT 3	INT 4
<b>Use previous experience in planning and goal setting</b>	Mgt. of people and projects	Mgt. of people and projects	Mgt. of people and projects	New to business world	Ensures goals are realistic and achievable	Mgt. of people and projects	Need to take action against competition	Enables control of goals with realistic plan	Need to get ahead of competition	Helps to get to essence of what is important	Need to get ahead of competition	Facilitates being more realistic
<b>Reasons for business enthusiasm</b>	Changing the way people think	People, making a deal, technology	Meeting people/ technology	Giving new opportunities through product	Interested in financial side of business	People/ technology	People, technology	Technology	Financial strategy, making money	Technology, strategy for business, sales and marketing, people	Vision, leadership, strategy, sales	People using latest technology through dev. of product
<b>Feel ownership of goals</b>	Complete	Moderated by board of directors	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Infl. by sub. contracting of product	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete
<b>Does networking influence business</b>	Critical for business success	Critical for relationship building in industry	Needs to be very focused	Critical for business success	Critical for business success	Critical for business success	Critical for business success	Infl. by mentors in industry	Critical for business success	Critical for business success	Needs to be focused	Critical for business success
<b>Work/Life Balance</b>	Balanced	Balanced	Unbalanced towards work	Balanced	Balanced	Balanced	Unbalanced towards business	Balanced	Balanced	Balanced	Unbalanced towards work	Unbalanced towards work

**Table 7 Intervention group - issues that influence goal attainment and planning for entrepreneurs (Source: Current research)**

### **5.3.1 Intervention group - issues that influence goal attainment and planning of entrepreneurs - Interview 1**

It was evident from the findings that prior experience was an important factor for entrepreneurs and its significance was highlighted by three entrepreneurs in this group. As s/he had not been in business before, INT 4 was the only entrepreneur who did not use his/her experience when setting goals. As shown in Table 7, all entrepreneurs indicated that they felt enthusiastic about a variety of issues in their businesses. Examples of such business enthusiasm ranged from giving people new opportunities in employment to changing the way people think about particular products. As well as being enthusiastic about various elements of their business, all entrepreneurs felt complete ownership of their goals. Interestingly, INT 2 felt ownership even though there was the constraint that his/her board of directors had set some of the goals for the business. As a means of attaining their goals the intervention group also realised the value of networking and making contacts external to their business. All entrepreneurs in the intervention group, felt that business was all about networking and that contacts made were invaluable to their goal planning and attainment. In the long run it saved time and allowed them to build up significant contacts. INT 2 utilised networking to develop multiple contacts within a company and said, “In selling I have to build up a very good relationship with the various parts of the company that are buying my product. No one person makes a decision to buy it ” (INT 2).

Entrepreneurs in this group were also aware of the pull of their business on them as they worked towards their goals. However, at the same time they were mindful of not wanting to make huge sacrifices in their personal life, and that their business would not be all consuming. As shown in Table 7, only the life of INT 3 was unbalanced towards work; s/he stated that although s/he may be at home, s/he was still thinking and talking about work.

### **5.3.2 Intervention group - issues that influence goal attainment and planning of entrepreneurs - Interview 2**

Table 7 indicates that in this interview experience still played a key role in the business of entrepreneurs in the intervention group. For example, INT 4 (who was the only entrepreneur in interview 1 who did not use his/her experience) now stated that experience had shown that having a realistic plan is a better system for getting things done. This is similar to a comment from INT 3 who knew from experience that sitting back and waiting for his/her competition to make a move would not be a wise decision and so experience had shown him/her that s/he needed to take action and said, "...experience plays a huge role, it has taught me that if I sit back my competition could hurt me, so instead I am pre-empting their move" (INT 3). Two members of the intervention group experienced a change in their business enthusiasm since Interview 1. For example, with increased experience in the sector, INT 4 stated that s/he was now more enthusiastic about the technology part of business.

Three entrepreneurs in the intervention group indicated that they continued to feel ownership of their goals as evidenced in Table 7. However, in a change from Interview 1, INT 4 stated that when s/he was waiting for someone else to deliver on a particular aspect of his/her product, it had an effect on ownership of his/her goals. Essentially, s/he was concerned that late delivery from a supplier could have an effect on his/her good business name. There was no change in the value of networking for the members of this group.

The personal life of all entrepreneurs in the intervention group continued to influence their business plans. Additionally, there was no change in work life balance issues for any of the entrepreneurs in the intervention group since Interview 1. The business of INT 3 was also a core part of his/her life and so his/her work life balance continued to be tilted toward business.

### **5.3.3 Intervention group - issues that influenced goal attainment and planning of entrepreneurs - Interview 3**

From the beginning of this interview process the majority of entrepreneurs were aware of using their previous experience when setting goals and this was also evident in the final interview as indicated in Table 7. INT 3 and INT 1 stated that experience had shown them that even though their product may be incomplete, in order to prevent their competition getting into the market ahead of them they needed to get the product to market as soon as possible. In this interview entrepreneurs also stated additional reasons for their business enthusiasm. An example of such is INT 3 who was now enthused both by the vision and leadership of his/her business.

As shown in Table 7, there was no change in the ownership of goals for all entrepreneurs in the current interview, who as before, felt ownership of their goals. For example, INT 4 stated that his/her goals were in his/her ownership 'whatever happens in the businesses'. However, INT 3 stated in interview 2 that ownership of his/her goals was indirectly affected when s/he was waiting for someone else to deliver on a particular aspect of his/her product. By the third interview this issue still 'frustrated the hell' out of him/her but s/he now realised that most people did not have the same emotional attachment and ownership to his/her goals as s/he had. Table 7 indicates that networking continued to have an influence on the business of all entrepreneurs in this group. In a similar vein to previous interviews, INT 3 stated that focused networking was essential for him/her. Additionally, INT 2 stated that networking was a particular feature of entrepreneurial success where those who had previously started businesses had enhanced networking skills.

In relation to the influence of the entrepreneur's personal life and its effect on work/life balance, INT 1 stated that his/her personal life did influence goal attainment and planning and was an advantage in his/her business. Additionally, INT 2 stated that as before his/her personal life was the reason for his/her hard work and gave the following insight, "my personal life drives everything. The reason I work so hard is to succeed and generate enough income and hopefully free time so that I can have a good personal life.

The main driver is to have the weekends free”. However, in a change from all previous interviews, Table 7 indicates that there was now an equal divide between members of the intervention group in relation to having a balanced or unbalanced work/life. INT 4 now also stated that s/he also was unsatisfied with his/her work/life balance. This was not evident in previous interviews. The personal life of this entrepreneur was now becoming more of an issue in that s/he did not have the money to do what s/he wanted to do. However, INT 1 noted that as before, the shift from business to family life was an advantage. S/he stated that his/her family life was very supportive and a good influence and s/he said, “If you were doing that entrepreneurial thing of eating, drinking and sleeping your business, you would just get jaded. Whereas I find the shift from family life to my business makes each of them more interesting” (INT 1)

Overall it can be concluded from the above that limited change occurred in issues that influenced goal attainment and planning for the members of the intervention group. In one instance business experience had become more important for INT 4. Additionally, INT 4 experienced a negative change in his/her work life balance. Also, the reasons for business enthusiasm saw limited change for the group as a whole and the influence of all other issues such ownership of goals and networking remained unchanged.

#### **5.3.4 Non-Intervention group - issues that influence goal attainment and planning of entrepreneurs - Interview 1**

Similar to the intervention group, experience and business enthusiasm were also part of the issues that impacted on goal attainment and planning for the members of the non-intervention group. Table 8 gives an overview of such issues for the non-intervention group across the three interviews.

	Interview 1				Interview 2				Interview 3			
	NI 1	NI 2	NI 3	NI 4	NI 1	NI 2	NI 3	NI 4	NI 1	NI 2	NI 3	NI 4
<b>Use previous experience in planning and goal setting</b>	Worked in a similar area	Stock control system	Previous systems re: risk evaluation	Things take longer to do than anticipated	Utilises feedback from product	Utilises confidence gained from customer/product contact	Uses previous systems to evaluate risks	Need margin for financial gain	Realises value of social media	Utilises confidence gained from customer/product contact	Utilises Time mgt. systems	Utilising confidence gained from customer/product contact
<b>Reasons for business enthusiasm</b>	Flexibility	Product	Being on forefront of new technology	Product	Internationalisation of product	Making killer sale	Being at forefront of new technology	Product development /online shop	Seeing product grow from zero, helping to solve work life balance issues	Research & development of product, sales	Mgt. of business. all pieces coming together to make product with new technology	Designing products
<b>Feel ownership of goals</b>	Complete	Complete, but difficult being on own in business	Complete, but must not impact on family	Complete	Positive influence of business partner	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete
<b>Does networking influence business</b>	Critical for success	It's who you know in business	New concepts needs contacts	Critical for success	Critical for success	Referrals invaluable	Critical for success	Critical for success	Critical for success	Critical for success	New concept needs contacts	Feedback invaluable External opinions on PR
<b>Work/Life balance</b>	Balanced	Balanced	Unbalanced towards home	Balanced	Balanced	Balanced	Unbalanced towards home	Balanced	Balanced	Balanced	Balanced	Balanced

**Table 8 Non-Intervention group - issues that influence goal attainment and planning of entrepreneurs (Source: Current research)**

From Table 8 it is evident that all entrepreneurs in the non-intervention group used prior business experience in setting goals and were enthusiastic about a variety of issues such as flexibility and being on the forefront of new technology with their product. Similarly, all entrepreneurs in the non-intervention group indicated complete ownership of goals with one entrepreneur indicating that such ownership was what s/he wanted but that at times being in businesses on his/her own was difficult. Networking also had a significant influence on entrepreneurs. This can be seen in the comments of NI 2 who stated that s/he was a firm believer in the value of networking in making essential contacts and gave the following insight, “I feel that it is who you know and not what you know that leads to business success” (NI 2).

The pull of personal life against working life was also strong for this group and all except one entrepreneur had a balanced work/life. NI 3 in particular, stated that although his/her work/life was unbalanced towards his/her family, it was the most significant factor in his/her life and as a result was content with that situation.

### **5.3.5 Non-Intervention group - issues that influence goal attainment and planning of entrepreneurs - Interview 2**

In this second interview, experience still played a key role in the business of entrepreneurs in the non-intervention group. NI 4 indicated that experience had shown that if s/he was considering a business proposition where margins were low s/he would now need to know that there was room for financial gain. As shown in Table 8, three members of this group experienced a change in business enthusiasm. For example, NI 1 noted a new enthusiasm in the internationalisation of his/her product. In this interview ownership of goals was still as strong as previously for all entrepreneurs. The business partner of NI 1 had returned to the business and they were now ‘both passionate’ about their goals. This passion was also evident in the response of NI 2 who stated that s/he got a “buzz from making a killer sale” to someone who understood and appreciated his/her product.

Again in this interview, all entrepreneurs still realised the value and significance of networking outside of his/her immediate business. In particular, NI 2 stated that referrals and networking made his/her business much easier; s/he indicated “I could spend two months trying to make an appointment with someone but if I could get a referral and introduction it makes business much easier” (NI 2).

The personal life of the members of the non-intervention group continued to influence business plans and there was no change in their work-life balance. Two members of this group however indicated that this may soon change. For example NI 4 stated that while s/he was not feeling any immediate pressure at the moment suggested that a change might soon be over the horizon and was becoming visible. NI 1 also stated that an issue in his/her personal life may, in the future, have implications for the amount of time s/he will be able to spend on his/her business.

### **5.3.6 Non-Intervention group - issues that influence goal attainment and planning of entrepreneurs - Interview 3**

In this interview the use of experience was still evident in the members of the non-intervention group. As can be seen in Table 8, in this interview all entrepreneurs continued to identify with and be enthusiastic about their business product and some stated additional reasons than previously for their business enthusiasm. For example, NI 3 stated that s/he was now enthusiastic about managerial aspects of his/her business.

As shown in Table 8, following on from the above enthusiasm, was the continued and consistent ownership of goals by entrepreneurs in the non-intervention group throughout the research process. Interestingly, regarding in this ownership, NI 2 had a ‘hands on’ approach and indicated that s/he wanted to ensure that the employees of the business understood what was expected of them and so led by example, “I tend to lead from the front, if I am not driving it, who else will? I sit down with my staff and show them that X units are possible in a day“ (NI 2)

Networking also continued to be of critical importance for all entrepreneurs in this group. For example NI 1 (who had an online business) utilised 'budgetless marketing'. As a result of this s/he used a different type of networking i.e. online networking through social media networking groups. In contrast, NI 2 noted that 'organised networking' did not have great value for him/her, but making contacts and feedback from customers who were happy with his/her product made a significant difference. As in previous interviews the business lives of all entrepreneurs in this group continued to be influenced by their personal lives. For example, NI 4 did not feel financial pressure from his/her personal life to continue in his/her business. However, NI 4 felt his/her personal life did influence the type of work that s/he was prepared to undertake and said, "My business is a great motivator to work hard and to achieve success. Otherwise I would have to get a job doing something remarkably boring" (NI 4). Finally, as shown in Table 8 all the members of this group had a satisfactory work/life balance. This is a change in balance for NI 3. Also it is relevant to note that in Interview 2, NI 1 stated that an issue in his/her personal life would have implications in the future and unbalance his/her work/life balance. This issue did not materialise and as a result, his/her work and home life was unchanged and continued to be balanced.

From the above it can be said that during this research the non-intervention group experienced very little change in issues that influenced their goal attainment and planning. NI 1, NI 2, and NI 3 indicated additional reasons for business enthusiasm. NI 3 also indicated that his/her work/life balance had changed and that it was now evenly balanced.

#### **5.4 Measurement of goal attainment by entrepreneurs**

The final issue to be addressed by this researcher in the current study was the measurements used by entrepreneurs to indicate goal attainment. In this the following areas were addressed; what motivated entrepreneurs to keep going in their business and how entrepreneurs measured goal attainment. These measurements can be seen in Table 9.

	Interview 1				Interview 2				Interview 3			
	INT 1	INT 2	INT 3	INT 4	INT 1	INT 2	INT 3	INT 4	INT 1	INT 2	INT 3	INT 4
<b>Motivation to keep going</b>	Being known as expert in field	Watching success in business	Next sale	See product finished	Idea could really work, make money	Watching business success	Achieving something I have set out to do	Prove product works	Chance to succeed, loves work, sense of respect from public for business	Loves tech. work, potential for wealth, satisfaction of watching business success	Creation and evolving of product	Imminent launch of product and proving it works
<b>Achieved goals measurement</b>	Tangible - see it e.g. first prototype done	Tangible - see it e.g. creating company	Tangible - see it e.g. sales	Tangible - see it e.g. feedback on product	Tangible - see it e.g. Negative/Positive Feedback	Tangible - see it e.g. sales/product going live	Tangible - see it e.g. Sales	Tangible - see it e.g. Partners on board , system successfully tested	Tangible - see it e.g. successful business negotiations	Tangible - see it e.g. locking down partners, customers etc.	Tangible - see it e.g. customer happy with purchased product etc.	Tangible - see it e.g. feedback from recognition of product

**Table 9 Intervention group - measurement of goal attainment by entrepreneurs (Source: Current research)**

#### **5.4.1 Intervention group - measurement of goal attainment by entrepreneurs - Interview 1**

Table 9 indicates that entrepreneurs in this group had various reasons that kept them motivated in their businesses and they also appeared to have various measurements of goal attainment. For example being known as an expert in his/her field was an important motivator for INT 1 while sales of the product itself motivated INT 3. Actual achievement of recent goals by the intervention group was measured in terms of feedback on products and sales. INT 4, for example, commented that goal measurement and attainment for him/her would be feedback from customers proving that his/her product works.

#### **5.4.2 Intervention group - measurement of goal attainment by entrepreneurs - Interview 2**

In this interview various factors motivated entrepreneurs to keep going in business. For example, INT 4 who stated that proving his/her product was worthwhile was central in keeping him/her going, while watching the success of the business motivated INT 2. As can be seen in Table 9, feedback was an important measurement for INT 1 even where goals were not attained and there was negative feedback. Although s/he was involved in a particular project that failed to come to fruition nonetheless since the coaching intervention s/he focused on positive aspects of the outcome. INT 2, INT 3, and INT 4 all indicated that tangible issues of sales and the product going live continued to indicate achievement of goals. For example, INT 2 noted that his/her goals were either attained or not and s/he needed to see a definite end result. His/her measurement of goal attainment was indicated by the following, “my product is either going live or not. We made X amount of sales and X amount of money or not” (INT 2).

### **5.4.3 Intervention group - measurement of goal attainment by entrepreneurs - Interview 3**

As can be seen in Table 9 the motivation to keep going in their business had changed and evolved for all in the intervention group. Of note was INT 3 who had moved from being motivated by the sales of his/her product to the creation and evolution of it. Although it was taking longer than expected s/he had a sense that his/her product was getting there as can be seen from the following comments, “I now know that there is a market for my product but I need to sell enough of the product without everything else falling apart. So what keeps me going is its creation, and the drive to succeed now is based on pure doggedness” (INT 3).

As shown by Table 9, measurement of goal achievement for all members of the intervention group was the same as before i.e. by tangible issues and feedback. An example of tangible issues was the release of business products onto the market. Although measurements were the same as in previous interviews, the third interview indicated a maturity in such measurement by the entrepreneurs. For example, it was evident in discussions with both INT 2 and INT 3 that they now measured many tangible things in the achievement of goals. INT 2 had partners, contracts and customers that s/he needed to ‘lock down’. Additionally, s/he also saw a technical release of a product as well as the sale of it, as an achievement. In Interview 1 and Interview 2, INT 3 noted the significance of sales as a measurement of goal attainment. Now in Interview 3 in a similar vein to INT 2, INT 3 noted several aspects of goal achievement and appeared to measure it from several view points as can be seen in the following comment, “So I measure not only in terms of positive feedback but also making the sale, delivering the product and after a couple of months that the customer is delighted with the end result. I suppose you could say that it was sales that mark the achievement but it is all those things that really give it the thumbs up” (INT 3).

At the end of this research process, the change that was most evident in the measurement of attainment of goals by entrepreneurs in the intervention group, was in what motivated

them to keep going in their business. Following the intervention these entrepreneurs had more factors which motivated them in their business.

#### **5.4.4 Non-Intervention group - measurement of goal attainment by entrepreneurs**

Measurement of attainment of goals by the non-intervention group will now be described in the same manner as the intervention group. An overview of the individual attainment of goals for this group is presented in Table 10. It is evident from this table that measurement of attainment of goals for the non-intervention group was quite similar as that for the intervention group.

#### **5.4.5 Non-Intervention group - measurement of goal attainment by entrepreneurs - Interview 1**

Some of the reasons outlined in this group as motivating them towards their goals were, waiting for internet sites to go live and working on products that have to be proven and finished. For NI 2, it was the hard facts of sales and payment for goods which were indications of goal measurement and achievement; s/he said “get someone you never met in your life to give you €4,000 for your product, that is something you can measure” (NI 2).

#### **5.4.6 Non-Intervention group - measurement of goal attainment by entrepreneurs - Interview 2**

As shown in Table 10, in this interview additional reasons such as product sales (NI 2 and NI 4) now motivated entrepreneurs. In contrast, NI 3 indicated that it was the challenge of proving that the product was worthwhile that kept him/her going. In this case monetary gain was not an important issue, s/he said, “it is certainly not money that keeps me going in my business, but the challenge of proving the product as well as the steps that get me to an end result” (NI 3).

	Interview 1				Interview 2				Interview 3			
	NI 1	NI 2	NI 3	NI 4	NI 1	NI 2	NI 3	NI 4	NI 1	NI 2	NI 3	NI 4
<b>Motivation to keep going</b>	Can't wait for site to go live	Likes the work and making own decisions	Working on something that has to be proven	See product finished	Site going live, growing business	Sales, making own decisions	Challenge of proving product	Sell product, make money	Idea that business will be a success	Own boss, people	Creating a new concept and using it, social responsibility	Prove managerial ability and product
<b>Achieved goals measurement</b>	Tangible - see it e.g. feedback on website	Tangible - see it e.g. sales	Tangible - see it e.g. sales	Tangible - see it e.g. product moving on	Tangible - see it e.g. feedback on website	Tangible - see it e.g. sales, feedback on product	Tangible - see it e.g. sales	Tangible - see it e.g. product moving on	Tangible - see it e.g. getting recognition and feedback on website	Tangible - see it e.g. recognition, sales	Tangible - see it e.g. developed software	Tangible - see it e.g. recognition of product

**Table 10 Non-Intervention group - measurement of goal attainment by entrepreneurs (Source: Current research)**

In the second interview the goal attainment measurements of the non-intervention group had not changed and were still measured in terms of tangible issues such as being able to see results from their hard work. In particular this is evidenced in the comments of NI 1 and NI 2 who stated that they still measured attainment of goals in the same way as they had previously.

#### **5.4.7 Non-Intervention group - measurement of goal attainment by entrepreneurs - Interview 3**

Similar to the patterns for the intervention group, in this interview the motivation to keep going in business had changed for this group. This is illustrated in Table 10, where for example NI 3 had moved from being motivated from working on something that had to be proven and the challenge of his/her product to realising that at this stage in his/her life, business was not just about making money. Instead it was also about his/her product being of service to someone and as such social responsibility was a great motivator for him/her. In this his/her product must be of genuine use to his/her customer.

Finally, in Table 10, it can be seen that throughout Interview 1, 2 and 3 those in the non-intervention group continued to measure achievement of goals through tangible measures. For NI 4, achieving a goal was still measured in tangible signs such as the recognition of his/her product which had proved that the risk taken had been worthwhile.

NI 1 stated that, following a recent pilot test, s/he had measured (through feedback from surveys) achievement of his/her goals. Equally though, s/he noted that the tangible issue of being recognised as an expert in the field was a further measurement of goal attainment in his/her case. This recognition was also a significant measurement of achievement of goals for NI 1, NI 2, and NI 4. One entrepreneur in particular gave the following insight, “my product was recognised by a man who was well known in the field who could appreciate its usefulness and value. This indicated

success to me it as it was my product and he could understand and appreciate it for what it was really worth” (NI 2).

At the end of this research process it can be said that the only change that was evident in the measurement of goal attainment for those in the non-intervention group was the change in what motivated them in their business.

### **5.5 Summary of findings across interview themes**

In reviewing Table 11 which examines changes from Interview 1 to Interview 3 at the end of the interview process, it is apparent that the intervention group had made the most changes from Interview 1 to Interview 3. This change was apparent in a number of areas. In goal and planning behaviour the members of this group made noticeable changes in the way they scheduled planning time and in their goal setting actions. Those in the non-intervention group did not experience any change in this area. In the evaluation of plans and goals, there was an equal divide between both the intervention and non-intervention group with each making similar changes in how they evaluated. However, those in the non-intervention group made slightly more changes in relation to comparing their expectations with what they set out to achieve.

From Table 11 it is evident that both the intervention and non intervention group made significant changes in relation to issues that impacted on goal attainment. INT 4 in particular at the start of this research process did not use his/her experience but at the end of this research process and following the coaching intervention this had changed which resulted in all entrepreneurs both in the intervention group and non-intervention group recognising the value of their experience. Additionally, entrepreneurs in the non-intervention group experienced the majority of change in reasons for their business enthusiasm.

	Changes in goal setting and planning behaviour				Changes in issues that impact on goal attainment			Changes in measurement of attainment of goals
	Schedule of planning time	Plan and goal actions	Evaluate plans and goals	Compare expectations	Use experience in planning and goal setting	Reasons for business enthusiasm	Work/Life balance	Motivation to keep going
INT 1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1
INT 2	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
INT 3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
INT 4	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1
NI 1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
NI 2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
NI 3	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1
NI 4	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1

**Table 11 Changes from Interview 1 to Interview 3 (Source: Current research)**

0 = No change in behaviour    1 = Change in behaviour

Table 11 indicates that there was also evidence of change in the work/life balance of entrepreneurs both in the intervention and non intervention groups. Interestingly, at the end of this research process half of the intervention group stated that they had an unbalanced work/life and this was not in evidence at the outset in Interview 1. However, all those in the non-intervention group at the conclusion of the research process now had balance in their work/life and this was also change from Interview 1. Furthermore, both groups experienced changes in what motivated them in their business.

Finally, at the end of this research process, both the intervention and non-intervention groups were similar in how they measured goal attainment. Entrepreneurs needed to be able to see their achievements in order to measure them and to this end, tangible measurements were central. However, those in the intervention group had extended their indications of goal attainment at the end of this research process in comparison to those of the non-intervention group.

Overall as shown in Table 11, those in the intervention group made the most changes in their actual goal and planning behaviour. The members of the non-intervention group experienced less change in this area and in particular made no change in how they scheduled their planning time nor in their goal and planning actions. The extent of this change in behaviour was not as evident in issues that impacted on goal attainment. In this case entrepreneurs in both groups made limited changes, the most prevalent of which was in increased reasons for business enthusiasm. Finally, entrepreneurs in the intervention group appeared to have several more indications of goal attainment (i.e. not only in selling their product but also locking down partners, customer satisfaction, feedback etc) than the non-intervention group. Therefore, this researcher has concluded at the end of this research process that the intervention group overall experienced more changes in their goal and planning behaviour than the non-intervention group.

Chapter 6 discusses the research findings presented in this chapter.

## **Chapter 6 Discussion of Findings**

### **6.1 Introduction**

Chapter Five presented the findings in the current study on the extent to which life coaching influences an entrepreneur's behaviour in relation to goal planning and attainment. The current chapter discusses these research findings in the context of the relevant literature. The current research findings indicated that following the coaching intervention, the members of the intervention group experienced more changes in their goal and planning behaviour and in the way they measured goal attainment compared to those in the non-intervention group.

The discussion of the current findings is presented in this chapter as follows; goals of entrepreneurs which include discussion on their business and personal goals as well as indicators of goal attainment. The factors that influence goal attainment for entrepreneurs are then considered which leads onto a discussion on the influence of life coaching on entrepreneurs. Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary of discussion findings.

### **6.2 Entrepreneurs and goals**

In the current study it was found that the coaching intervention affected how entrepreneurs viewed goal setting. The literature on goal setting suggests that goals provide focus for the individual in terms of encouraging goal enhancing activities (Locke and Latham, 1990; Latham and Locke, 1991; Latham, 2003). In addition, the literature on coaching indicates that engaging in a coaching intervention has a positive effect on a coachee's goals (Grant, 2003b and 2006). In the view of the current researcher, support for the above literature regarding goals and the positive effect of engaging in a coaching intervention was found amongst some of the members of the intervention group only.

INT 1 and INT 4 indicated that the coaching intervention helped to provide focus and assisted in narrowing down goals so that they were more manageable and specific. Additionally, INT 2 stated that since the coaching intervention there was 'an extra level of planning and prioritisation' to goals which made him/her more effective. The coaching intervention facilitated this focus as within each coaching intervention both the coach and coachee continually reviewed progress towards goal attainment.

Findings in the current research were also consistent with the views of Smither, London, Flautt, Vargas and Kucine (2003); they found that those who worked with a coach were more likely to set more specific rather than vague goals. In the current study as a result of the coaching intervention the members of the intervention group had specific goals and narrow goals to achieve. This can be seen for example in INT 1 who had goals to achieve by a certain date and by INT 4 who set timeframe for goals and worked backwards from that point. The literature, both on goal setting and coaching, also emphasised the importance of setting SMART goals to achieve behaviour change (meaning Specific, Measurable, Attainable and Time-framed) (Kalinauckas and King, 1994; Locke and Latham, 2002; and Grant, 2006). In the view of the current researcher the coaching intervention facilitated the setting and attainment of SMART goals by discussing and setting specific time framed goals that each entrepreneur in the intervention group could work towards, in addition to the goal focused actions through which these goals would be attained.

The coaching intervention was focused on raising co-researchers' awareness of their current plans and goals and highlighted where improved results towards goal attainment could be achieved. To this end the above findings regarding the increased goal focused actions of INT 1, INT 2 and INT 4 indicate to the current researcher that the coaching intervention affected the extent to which these entrepreneurs deliberated in setting goals. These members of the intervention group indicated that following the coaching intervention they had more manageable goals. In contrast the issue of specific or manageable goals was not raised by the members of the non-intervention group.

### **6.2.1 Entrepreneurs' business and personal goals**

Findings from the current study indicated that the coaching intervention did not affect the type of business goals set by the entrepreneur. Regardless of whether entrepreneurs were in the intervention or non-intervention group the business goals of entrepreneurs in the current study were similar in that they were product focused. However, these goals evolved and changed in both groups during the current study. For example, the business product of INT 1 was a new concept in Ireland and as a result s/he had an initial goal of developing the product. This goal evolved into the goal of launching the product at the end of the current study. In a similar vein, NI 1 initially wanted to test his/her product and at the end of this study s/he was also ready to launch it.

In relation to personal goals, at the outset of the study NI 3 wanted to support his/her family with a profitable business but at the end of the current study s/he was focused on developing his/her product. INT 2 was also product focused but had the additional goal of wanting to work from home. As NI 3 and INT 2 were the only co-researchers who indicated both personal and business goals, these findings provide limited support for previous research which stated that entrepreneurs have both economic and non economic goals (Cromie, 1987; Greenbank, 2001).

Greenbank (2001) also suggested that entrepreneurs may also adjust their goals in order to remain satisfied with their business. Limited support was found for this view in the current research, as this was evident in only one entrepreneur in the intervention group. Although INT 2 was driven by sales of his/her product, in effect his/her personal life drove everything. No evidence of such adjustment of goals was found in the non-intervention group.

Loscocco (1997) noted that balancing family responsibility and achieving a satisfactory work/life balance was a prominent goal of some entrepreneurs. At the outset of the current study many members of both the intervention and non-intervention group

expressed satisfaction with their work-life balance. However, at the end of this study the findings suggest that the coaching intervention did not have a positive influence on the alignment of an entrepreneur's personal and business goals. Throughout the period of the current research, those in the non-intervention group expressed satisfaction with his/her work/life balance. However, INT 4 moved from being happy with his/her work life balance at the start of the current study to being unhappy with it at the end of the research process. In addition, the work/life balance of INT 3 was continually unbalanced in the direction of work. Therefore, at the end of the current study, two members of the intervention group had an unbalanced life between work and home thus indicating that the coaching intervention did not influence the alignment of an entrepreneur's personal and business goals. A suggested reason for this lack of influence of the intervention on INT 3 was that s/he did not compartmentalise his/her life and as such when s/he was at home s/he was still talking about work. It is possible that this behaviour continually tilted his/her work life balance towards work. Furthermore, perhaps the imbalance of work/life for INT 4 may have been due to the fact that as his/her business evolved, his/her time and money was taken up with business issues which left no time for a personal life.

### **6.2.2 Indicators of goal attainment by entrepreneurs**

The current study established that the life coaching intervention influenced how entrepreneurs measured goal attainment. Jarvis, Curran, Kitching and Lightfoot (2000) noted that entrepreneurs measure goal attainment through a complex mix of measures that are both financial and non financial. This view is supported in the current research by some members of the intervention group who had numerous indicators of goal attainment. In addition, the members of this group also appeared to have been influenced by the intervention in terms of their awareness of how they measured goal attainment. This awareness raising seems to have had the additional effect of helping these entrepreneurs extend and refine the ways in which they measured goal attainment. The current researcher considers that the intervention achieved this influence in indicators of goal attainment by focusing not only on the end result of goal attainment but on all

progress and movement towards goals by the coachee as s/he worked towards final attainment.

Prior to the coaching intervention INT 2 saw measuring attainment of goals by the creation of his/her company. In a similar vein INT 3 previously noted sales figures as a measurement of goal attainment. However, following the coaching intervention INT 2 and INT 3 indicated that they had numerous indications of goal attainment. INT 2 saw locking down business partners, contracts, customers, release of products and sales as all being involved in measuring goal attainment. In a similar vein, INT 3 not only measured goal attainment in terms of sales but also in terms of delivery of products, customer feedback and satisfaction. The measurements of goal attainment appeared to be more limited in the non-intervention group. For example NI 1 was consistent in stating throughout the current research process that feedback was a measurement of goal attainment. In a similar vein NI 2 consistently stated that sales was a measurement of goal attainment. Due to the fact that the additional goal attainment measurements are evident only in the intervention group, the current researcher concludes that it was the intervention of life coaching that influenced their measurement of goal attainment.

#### **6.2.2.1 Financial rewards**

In measuring attainment of their goals, previous research indicates that making money is not a central issue for entrepreneurs (Cromie, 1987; Walker and Brown, 2004; Wickham, 2004; Reijonen and Komppula, 2007; Aleste, 2008). Limited evidence of supporting this contention was found in the current study. In addition, the coaching intervention did not appear to have any impact on this financial measurement as throughout the period of this research some members of both the intervention and non intervention group indicated that sales of their products and ultimately profit would indicate goal attainment. However, the comments of NI 3 in particular indicate that making money was not a primary focus for him/her. Instead, s/he was concerned about his/her social responsibility

and that his/her product would be of genuine service to customers in their everyday lives. As NI 3 was the only entrepreneur to hold this view, it is evidence of limited support for the above contention that in measuring attainment of their goals making money is not a central issue for entrepreneurs.

#### **6.2.2.2 Feedback**

Feedback from customers regarding products rather than financial outcomes was an important measurement for some members of both the intervention and non intervention group. As this measurement was continually highlighted by both groups it appears that the coaching intervention did not have any impact on this aspect of goal attainment measurement. The importance of feedback was emphasised for example by INT 4 who noted that positive feedback from customers would prove that the risk taken with his/her product was worthwhile. Additionally, INT 4 and the majority of members in the non-intervention group (NI 1, NI 2 and NI 4) felt that the recognition of their product was a tangible sign of goal attainment for them. This supports previous research findings by Reijonen and Kompulla (2007) who noted that getting recognition for quality products and satisfied customers was an important measurement of business success for entrepreneurs.

#### **6.2.3 Factors that influence goal attainment for entrepreneurs**

The main factors which influenced goal attainment for entrepreneurs in the current study were networking, intuition and adaptability. The current study also established that coaching had a limited impact on only one of these factors, namely adaptability.

### **6.2.3.1 Networking**

Previous research on entrepreneurship suggests that, in general, entrepreneurs use networking to attain their goals (Chell and Baines, 2000). The current study concurs with this view as entrepreneurs in the current study used networking throughout the research process, regardless of whether they were assigned to the intervention or non-intervention group. The continual presence of networking also not only implies its importance but also indicates that the coaching intervention did not have any influence on how entrepreneurs viewed and used networking in their business.

Several researchers have indicated that the networking activities of entrepreneurs change over time (see for example Hite and Hesterly, 2001; Grief and Salaff, 2003; O'Donnell 2004; Hung, 2006). Limited support was found for this viewpoint in the current study in the networking activities of NI 2. At the beginning of this research process, NI 2 indicated that, in general, business was all about networking and contacts made through organised networking events. By the end of the current study, NI 2 stated that "I could spend two months trying to make an appointment with someone but if I could get a referral and introduction it makes business much easier". This indicates to the current researcher that over the period of this study, networking activities were still as critical as ever for success for NI 2. However, it further indicates that his/her networking activities had changed in that s/he realised general organised networking did not hold great value for him/her. Instead, specific contacts and referrals made from satisfied customers made a significant difference to his/her business.

Overall, the coaching intervention did not have any impact on the networking activities of the co-researchers as throughout the current study entrepreneurs were unanimous in stating that networking was critical for success in business.

### **6.2.3.2 Intuition**

Using intuition has been highlighted as useful for entrepreneurs particularly in the early stages of an entrepreneur's business (Olson, 1985; Brouthers, Andriessen and Nicolaes, 1998; Chell and Hayes, 2000). This is of relevance for the current study as entrepreneurs both in the intervention and non-intervention group were at the early stages of their businesses. Throughout the current study the co-researchers indicated the ongoing use of intuition in that they did not have to have full information to make a decision but instead trusted their 'gut instincts'. As such this researcher concurs with the above findings that entrepreneurs use intuition as they engage in their business activities.

However, it was also found in the current study that the coaching intervention did not have any impact on the use of intuition. This is evidenced by the fact that intuition was present on an ongoing basis in both the intervention and non-intervention group.

### **6.2.3.3 Adaptability**

Bird and Lelinek (1988) and Wickham (2004) suggest that entrepreneurs are adaptable in their behaviour. This suggests that entrepreneurs are flexible in their focus and receptive to change in their business. Findings in the current research concur with this view. Throughout the current research, adaptability and flexibility were evident in the behaviour of entrepreneurs regardless of whether they were in the intervention or non-intervention group. However, it was noted that while the coaching intervention did not actually influence the adaptability of entrepreneurs in the intervention group, it did support and encourage it and this influence can be seen in the comments of INT 3 and INT 4. For example, INT 3 commented that s/he was always adaptable in his/her business. However, the supportive influence of the intervention can be seen where INT 3 noted that while s/he was very adaptable, s/he also realised that it was important not to give up at the first attempt if difficulties arose as s/he worked toward his/her goals. In the opinion of the current researcher this comment, which was made following the coaching

intervention, indicates that the intervention did not change how adaptable s/he was but it did support his/her adaptability. The coaching intervention encouraged him/her to focus on his/her inherent resourcefulness and strengths and thus facilitated him/her to look for additional ways of attaining his/her goals when the first goal attempt was not successful.

Additionally, INT 4 also stated at the start and at the end of the current research process that s/he was very adaptable. However, at the end of this study there was a subtle difference regarding the adaptability of INT 4. At the start of this study s/he did not recognise that s/he got emotionally attached to issues regarding his/her goals and plans. However, at the end of the current study, INT 4 was aware of his/her emotional attachment to goals and its influence of goal attainment. It is the view of the current researcher that this was as a result of the coaching intervention, as this intervention was focused on raising an entrepreneur's awareness on how his/her current behaviour was impacting on the attainment of his/her goals.

### **6.3 Influence of life coaching on entrepreneurs**

The current study established that the coaching intervention influenced goal planning and attainment behaviour in some entrepreneurs in the intervention group. This change can be seen in entrepreneurs planning and goal setting actions. The literature on goal setting indicates that entrepreneurs do not plan in a formal way (Berman, Gordan and Sussman, 1997; Greenbank 2001). As four of the co-researchers at the outset of the current study planned informally, support for this contention appeared to exist and concur with this view. However, at the end of the study, two entrepreneurs in the intervention group appeared to have changed behaviour from informal to formal goal and planning behaviour.

Previous research has indicated that coaching influences behaviour change in a coachee (Grant; 2003; Smither, London, Flautt, Vargas and Kucine, 2003; Gyllesten and Palmer, 2005; Green, Oades and Grant, 2006; Longhurst, 2006; Grant, 2008). In particular, Grant

(2008) stated that coaching provides an impetus for change and a framework for getting things done. Findings in the current study support these viewpoints, as following the coaching intervention, the current researcher noted that while the goal setting actions and schedule of those in the non-intervention group (NI 3 and NI 4) were still informal, both INT 1 and INT 4 had evolved from being informal in their planning and goal setting to a more formalised structured approach. It is the view of the current researcher that the coaching intervention influenced behaviour change in INT 1 and INT 4. This was achieved in the coaching process by assisting the intervention group to focus on their current behaviour in relation to plans and goals and highlighted where improved results towards goal attainment could be achieved through changing their behaviour.

Research also suggests that entrepreneurs engage in risk taking behaviour (see for example, Cunningham and Lischeron, 1991; Wickham, 2001). Initial findings in a number of areas in the current research appear to concur with this view. Regardless of which group they belonged to, at the start of the current study some entrepreneurs did not engage in formal planning, did not evaluate plans and goals or compare what has been achieved with their expectations. However, at the end of the current study INT 1 and INT 4 had moved to formal planning, as well as evaluating and comparing plans and goals with expectations. This change was also evident to a limited extent in INT 2. However, NI 3 and NI 4 also indicated a similar change in behaviour in relation to evaluating plans and goals and comparing expectations. It appears to the current researcher that this finding indicates that these entrepreneurs, by engaging in formal planning and evaluating and comparing expectations, were seeking to adjust the level of their risk taking behaviour. This finding supports the view that entrepreneurs seek to calibrate their risk taking behaviour (Osborne, 1995). The above findings of the presence of change in this area by both the intervention and non-intervention group also implies that the coaching intervention did not have an influence on the risk taking behaviour of entrepreneurs in the current study.

### **6.3.1 Absence of influence of life coaching on entrepreneurs – commitment**

All members of the intervention group did not experience a change in their goal and planning behaviour. It is evident from the current research findings that the behaviour of INT 3 saw minimal change overall with no change evident in his/her goal actions and scheduling of planning. This entrepreneur was the only member of the intervention group who did not change his/her goal actions and planning scheduling. In the view of the current researcher, a number of factors may have contributed to this absence of behaviour change in INT 3. The literature on coaching acknowledges that for behaviour change to occur, the coach must address the coachees ambivalence and commitment to change (Peterson, 1996; Whitworth et al., 1998; Grant, 2001 and 2006; Grant and Green, 2001; Stober, 2008). Further, there is a strong relationship between commitment, goals and successful performance (Locke, Latham and Erez, 1988; Locke and Latham, 2002; Stober and Grant, 2006).

Audet and Couteret (2005), when dealing with the issue of coaching entrepreneurs, highlighted similar findings where the entrepreneurs themselves and their commitment to the process hold the key to the success of a coaching intervention. In the absence of behaviour change in INT 3, the findings in the current research support Audet and Couteret and suggest that INT 3 may not have been committed to change. The fact that INT 3 made the following comment after the coaching intervention confirms this view. “I found that I tended to revert back after the coaching sessions to old habits that have served me well in the past and perhaps there is no need for radical change in my planning”. This comment by INT 3 highlights two issues for the current researcher. Firstly, INT 3 saw no need to change his/her behaviour. This comment can be compared with the pre-contemplation stage of change in TTM (Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross, 1992). In the pre-contemplation stage, the individual sees no immediate need to change. Secondly, the above comment also indicates that INT 3 was ambivalent about changing his/her behaviour. Ambivalence to changing behaviour is recognised in the literature on coaching (Grant and Green, 2001; Grant, 2006; Stober, 2008). These studies

recognised that it is the role of the coach to facilitate the expression of such ambivalence and this may not have happened within the coaching intervention with INT 3.

Further, although INT 3 did not change his/her goal actions and scheduling of planning, s/he did comment that s/he 'was awake to new ways of doing things'. This, perhaps, suggests to the current researcher that following the coaching intervention although s/he had an awareness of what s/he needed to do in order to change behaviour, s/he did not follow through with relevant behaviour change actions towards goal attainment. This is consistent with research that insight and self awareness on their own are not enough to facilitate behaviour change but must be followed by action (Stober, 2006).

Finally, the Transtheoretical Model (TTM) of behaviour change suggests that the coach should match the intervention with the stage of change of the coachee (Norcross, 2001; Grant, 2001; Zeus and Skiffington, 2002; Grant, 2006; Stober, 2008). If mismatching of the intervention with the stage of change of the coachee does occur, the therapist (coach) and client (coachee) will be at different stages of the change process and resistance to change will occur (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1984). In the light of this absence of change by INT 3, these findings are consistent with the views of Prochaska and DiClemente on the mismatching between the stage of change of the therapist (coach) and client (coachee) where the coach should not assume that all clients (coachees) are ready to take action towards behaviour change and may indeed still be in the earlier stages of the change process. The current researcher contends that in the case of INT 3 perhaps the coaching intervention did not match his/her stage of change and was focused on goal attainment actions while INT 3 was still in the pre-contemplation stage of change. This may have been a contributory reason for the lack of change in this entrepreneur.

## **6.4 Summary**

The above discussion has explored the extent to which life coaching influences an entrepreneur's behaviour in relation to goal planning and attainment. This influence was

evident in a number of areas in the intervention group and was absent in the behaviour of the non-intervention group. The current researcher found that as entrepreneurs in the current study worked towards goal attainment, the coaching intervention affected how they viewed goal setting. This was evident in that the coaching intervention assisted entrepreneurs to narrow down and focus on their goals. In addition, the intervention influenced the extent to which entrepreneurs deliberated in setting goals as at the end of the research process the entrepreneurs in the intervention group highlighted that they had more manageable goals, in comparison to the non-intervention group. The current study also established that the coaching intervention did not have a positive effect on the extent to which an entrepreneur's business and personal goals were aligned but did influence how they measured goal attainment. The intervention also had an indirect influence on the adaptability of entrepreneurs as they worked towards goal attainment. Finally, the current study indicated that following coaching, several members in the intervention group changed their goal and planning behaviour with the end result that they were more structured in their goal and planning actions as they worked towards goal attainment compared to the non-intervention group.

This chapter discussed the findings presented in Chapter 5. The next chapter will outline the overall conclusion and contribution of the current research. It will also outline a number of limitations associated with the current study and detail recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 7 Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The aim of this research was to explore the extent to which life coaching influences an entrepreneur's goal planning and attainment behaviour. This research therefore sought to gain an understanding of the influence of life coaching with members of the intervention group as they worked towards goal attainment. It further compared their response with data gathered from the members of the non-intervention group who did not receive such an intervention.

The purpose of this chapter is to present conclusions from both the findings and discussion chapters. The limitations associated with this study are also identified before finally concluding with recommendations for future research into the area of life coaching and entrepreneurs.

### **7.2 Conclusions**

Overall the current research indicated that life coaching does influence an entrepreneur's behaviour. Following coaching of the intervention group, a number of changes were evident in the behaviour of the members of this group that were either not evident at all in the non-intervention group or were present to a limited extent only.

Entrepreneurs in this study had both personal and business goals. The effect of coaching on the members of the intervention group was that it influenced how their goals were set. This was evident in the fact that the coaching intervention assisted entrepreneurs to narrow down goals to be more specific. In addition, the coaching also influenced the

extent to which entrepreneurs deliberated in setting goals. At the end of the research process entrepreneurs in the intervention group highlighted that they now had more manageable goals, which coupled with the way in which they now set goals gave greater focus as they worked towards goal attainment.

Interestingly, overall the coaching intervention did not affect the main issues that influence goal attainment and planning for entrepreneurs which were identified as networking, intuition and adaptability. However, it can be concluded that the coaching intervention may have indirectly influenced the adaptability and flexibility of some members of the intervention group. As such, it emerged that following coaching, some members of this group now were aware of the need to persevere if their first attempt towards goal attainment was unsuccessful.

In the current study it also emerged that the coaching intervention did not have a positive effect on the extent to which an entrepreneur's business and personal goals were aligned. This was evident in the fact that at the start of the research process most of the members of the intervention group had a satisfactory work-life balance. However, by the time the research process had ended this imbalance had reached the point where an equal number of entrepreneurs within this group had an unbalanced work-life.

It also became apparent in the current study that the coaching intervention influenced how entrepreneurs measured goal attainment. At the conclusion of the research process those in the intervention group had more indications of goal attainment than the members of the non-intervention group. In the intervention group measurement of goals had been extended and refined and included such issues as locking down partners, contracts, as well as delivering products and receiving feedback from satisfied customers.

Finally, the current study also demonstrated that following coaching, several members in the intervention group changed their goal and planning behaviour. At the beginning of the research process most of the members of the intervention group were informal in their goal and planning behaviour coupled with unstructured goal attainment actions.

However, at the end of the research process most of the members of this group were more structured and formal in their goal and planning actions as they worked towards goal attainment.

### **7.2.1 Contribution of this study**

Grant and Cavanagh (2004) indicated that there has been little academic research into the area of life coaching and highlighted that well conducted coaching-specific research is needed. The current study has answered the call for such research by comprehensively exploring the influence of life coaching of goal planning and attainment for entrepreneurs. With the above conclusions in mind the current study has made contributions to the existing body of research in the following research areas; life coaching, life coaching practitioners and trainers, and finally research on programmes for entrepreneurs.

The contribution made by the current study to life coaching research is noted by findings from this study which indicate that life coaching does influence an entrepreneur's goal planning and attainment behaviour. In addition, the current study also contributes to research for life coaching practitioners and those who train coaches. Grant and Cavanagh (2004) indicated that there is growing discontent among those who were trained in schools which practise their own proprietary models of coach training without the foundation of empirically research. Whitworth, Kimsey-House and Sandahl, (1998) indicated that coaching is about fostering behaviour change in the individual. Therefore, the current study contributes to coaching research for coaching practitioners and trainers as it provides an understanding as to how behaviour change occurs in the coaching process.

The final contribution of the current study is noted in the emerging area of life coaching and entrepreneurs. In particular it has relevance for those who are participants on programmes for entrepreneurs and who may not understand and fully appreciate the value of goal planning. Smither, London, Flautt Vargas and Kucine (2003) indicated that those who worked with a coach were more likely to set specific rather than vague goals. The

current study supported this finding and highlighted the positive influence of life coaching on entrepreneurs goal planning and attainment behaviour.

### **7.3 Limitations**

This researcher has identified that the current study has a number of limitations. The initial limitation identified was that although participants of the current research were randomly selected, those who were open to the concept of coaching may have self selected themselves into the initial pool of volunteers. This is viewed by the current researcher as a limitation as if this initial pre-disposition existed then it would have influenced the responses of co-researchers.

One of the main limitations in this research was that the co-researchers were a select group of entrepreneurs. By virtue of the fact that this group was part of an organised programme for entrepreneurs, these co-researchers may not have been typical of the general population of entrepreneurs, who sets up a business on his/her own without the support and guidance that the SEEPP participants received on an ongoing basis throughout the current study.

A further limitation was identified in the fact that the entrepreneurs in this research were at various stages in the growth and maturity of their businesses and as such this may have affected their individual approach to goal setting and planning. In addition, during the period of the current research, entrepreneurs both in the intervention and non-intervention group were working on their business plans. This may have had a direct influence on their goal and planning behaviour. During this time entrepreneurs may also have been more open to life coaching as it offered additional support and encouragement as they worked towards goal attainment.

Primary data was gathered for the current study through the use of semi-structured interviews. Each entrepreneur, both in the intervention and non-intervention group, was

interviewed three times. In addition, the members of the intervention group received five life coaching sessions. The current researcher conducted both the data gathering through the semi-structured interviews and the intervention of life coaching. This researcher concludes that by the time the third interview took place, the intervention group in particular, was very familiar not only with the focus of the intervention but also with that of the research interviews. This may have had a direct influence on their responses to interview questions.

It is interesting to note that during the current research process that of the members in the non-intervention group, NI 3 made the most changes in his/her goal planning and attainment behaviour. This change can be seen in a number of areas (for example evaluation of goals and plans). Such changes were not as evident in the other members of the non-intervention group. This was a surprising finding for the current researcher who concludes that it was the influence of the researcher which led to these changes. The reasoning behind this view is twofold; firstly, it was difficult to arrange a mutually suitable time to interview NI 3 who on two occasions during the research process failed to attend a pre-arranged interview. This may suggest that NI 3 wanted to drop out of the research process but when questioned regarding this s/he stated that s/he was quite happy to be interviewed. Secondly, NI 3 was not an easy candidate to interview. This led the current researcher to tightly focus him/her to answer the question at hand and this resulted in bringing him/her back to interview questions numerous times during each interview. Nonetheless this researcher considers that given the apparent reluctance of NI 3 to be interviewed and the subsequent tight focusing of interviews with him/her, this researcher may have added bias to the research instead of remaining independent. This bias may have had a direct influence on NI 3's answers to interview questions and resulted in him/her indicating that s/he had changed goal planning and attainment behaviour when perhaps this was not the case.

## **7.4 Recommendations for future research**

The above limitations highlight for the current researcher a number of recommendations for future research. Primarily, it is proposed that similar research be undertaken with entrepreneurs who are not part of an entrepreneurship programme and who do not have access to the facilities and support offered by agencies such as SEEPP. This would ensure that those in the study were more typical of the general population of entrepreneurs who do not engage in training and support interventions.

The participants in the current programme self selected themselves into the initial pool of co-researchers. A proposal emanating from the current study is that for future studies such self selection should be avoided. This would ensure that those who had a pre-disposition towards the intervention would not self select.

The current study was conducted with a group of entrepreneurs who were at various early stages of their businesses and who may or may not have had an established pattern of planning behaviour. Future studies on the influence of life coaching with more established entrepreneurs who are several years in business would explore further the influence of coaching on an entrepreneur's goal planning and attainment behaviour.

The limitation of the current researcher conducting both the interviews and intervention has been highlighted previously. It is suggested that further studies be carried out where the researcher would not conduct both the interviews and interventions. In facilitating co-researchers to disassociate the research interviews from the intervention, it may have a supplementary effect on responses to interview questions and in the long run be more accurate and benefit the research outcome.

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## Appendix 1 Research Consent Form

My name is Mary Lawless and I am undertaking research examining the impact of life coaching on entrepreneurs.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research.

Please note the following:

- Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from it at any time
- You are free to refuse to answer any question
- All interactions with the researcher will be used for the purpose of research only and will be strictly confidential.

The volunteers for this research will be divided into two groups:

(1) The coaching group – will be interviewed three times between January and August 2008 and additionally will receive five life coaching sessions over a ten week period.

(2) The non coaching group - will be interviewed three times between January and August and will not receive any life coaching sessions at the time of research but will receive coaching following completion of the research. The purpose of this non coaching group is to facilitate a comparison between those who have received life coaching and those who have not received coaching.

The research interviews will be taped, however, if you would like to stop the tape at any point during the interview you are at liberty to do so. The tapes will be destroyed once the research has been analysed. The data generated from the research interviews will be used only to make general statements as regards the research objectives and no identifying statements will be utilized.

The life coaching sessions with the coaching group will not be taped. No information from these conversations will be passed either directly or indirectly to any third party. Please sign below to indicate that you have read this form and that you understand and accept its contents.

*Please tick as appropriate:*

I understand that I am part of the coaching group

I understand that I am part of the non coaching group

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Printed: \_\_\_\_\_

### Participant

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Printed \_\_\_\_\_

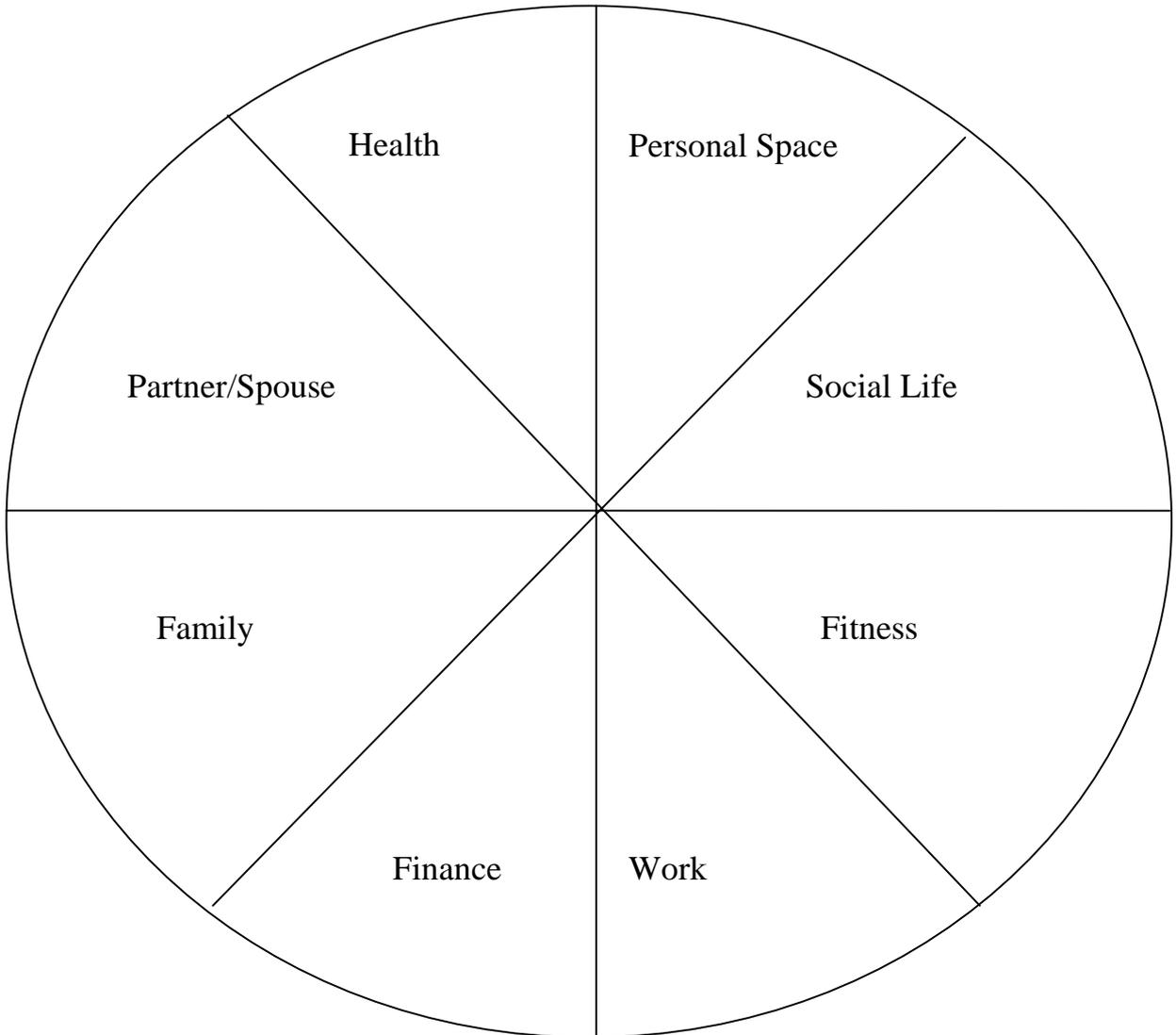
### Researcher

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Should you have any questions about this research my contact information is as follows:*Desk 19, Luke Wadding

Library, WIT Tel: 086 1089641 e mail: [mLawless@wit.ie](mailto:mLawless@wit.ie)

**Appendix 2 Wheel of life**



Please rate between 1 and 10 your satisfaction in the above areas of your life:

- (1) Today, (inside circle)
- (2) What you would like it to be (outside circle)

### **Appendix 3 Interview Questions**

#### **Interview 1 and 3 - Goal and planning behaviour of entrepreneurs**

Does planning make a difference to your business?

Do you stick to a schedule when planning? Example

Do you plan and set goals for your business?

What goals or plans do you have at the moment?

Are your plans short or long term?

Once you have started planning and goal setting - what actions do you take next?

Do you revisit and question your decision once you have your plan decided?

- Example

Do you evaluate your planning and goal setting?

- Example

Do you ever compare what you set out to achieve with your expectations?

Do you feel that you have to have all the answers to your plan before you commit to it or do you trust your own judgment and intuition?

How adaptable are you to making a change to your plans and goals? - Example

What if anything distracts you from concentrating on your plans and goals? - Example

## **Interview 2 - Goal and planning behaviour of entrepreneurs**

Does planning continue to make a difference in your business?

Has there been any change in how you schedule time for planning?

What goals do you have at the moment?

Have your short/long term goals changed?

Have your planning and goal setting actions changed in any way?

Do you revisit and question your plans more or less now than you did before?

Is there any difference in the way you evaluate your plans now than previously?

In what way do you now look back and compare what you have achieved to date with your expectations? - Example

To what extent do you now rely on your intuition?

Are you still as flexible regarding your plans and goals as previously?

Are you more or less distracted in relation to your plans and goals than you were previously?

### **Interview 1 and 3 - Issues that impact on goal attainment for entrepreneurs**

Do you use your experience in setting goals?

What parts of your business do you identify with and are enthusiastic about?

Do you feel ownership of your goals?

Does networking have any influence on your business?

Does your personal life have any influence on your business plans?

- Example

Do you feel that you have a balance or an imbalance between your personal and business life?

- Example

## **Interview 2 - Issues that impact on goal attainment for entrepreneurs**

What role does your experience now play in your planning and goal setting?

Can you identify any change in the parts of your business that you are enthusiastic about?

- Example

Do you continue to feel ownership of your goals?

Has there been any change in the value of networking to your business?

What way does your personal life currently affect your business?

Is there any change between the balance between your work and home life?

### **Interview 1 and 3 - Measurement of goal attainment by entrepreneurs**

What keeps you going in your business?

Can you give me an example of a recent situation where you achieved something in your business?                      How did you measure it?

### **Interview 2 – Measurement of achievement of goals**

What measurements in terms of motivation in business are now important to you?

Is the way you measure achieving a goal now different than it was previously?

- Example

## **Appendix 4 Stages of Research**

**Stage 1 (Months 1/2)** - During this time the current researcher drafted questions for the interview process. This involved several drafts before the final interview questions evolved.

**Stage 2 (Month 2)** - The current researcher conducted a pilot interview with three entrepreneurs with a view to fine tuning the interview questions for stage 5 of the research process. As a result of feedback received a number of questions were amended for the interviews with the co-researchers from the SEEPP programme.

**Stage 3 (Month 3)** - During this stage the current researcher gave a brief presentation on life coaching to 15 entrepreneurs. Part of this presentation included the Wheel of Life (Appendix 2). Here entrepreneurs were asked to complete an exercise where they rated (out of ten) their current satisfaction with various areas of their life (e.g. Finance, Health, Work, etc.). This exercise was utilised as it gave entrepreneurs an individual snapshot of his/her satisfaction with the main areas of his/her life. The scores inside the Wheel denoted current satisfaction and the scores outside the Wheel highlighted the future aspirations of entrepreneurs. Following this the current researcher explained what was entailed in the research. This was followed up by a brief question and answer session. At this point in the presentation a request was made for volunteers to take part in the current research. A total of 9 individuals volunteered and gave their e mail addresses as contact points. To facilitate the arrangement of a research briefing meeting, permission was requested and received to contact the volunteers in the near future.

**Stage 4 (Month 3)** - A briefing meeting of 9 entrepreneurs took place where this researcher outlined further details of the research and in particular the difference between the intervention and the non-intervention group. During this stage the current researcher also highlighted that those in the non-intervention group would also have the option of five coaching sessions at a future date once the current study was written

up and submitted for examination. Additionally each entrepreneur was given a copy of the research consent form and its contents were discussed. At the end of this meeting each entrepreneur was given a stamped addressed envelope to return the completed form to the current researcher.

In the interests of transparency, following the above briefing meeting and at a different location, all volunteer names were put into an envelope. A fellow research student picked names from the envelope and alternating between two envelopes marked 'intervention' and 'non-intervention, randomly selected participants for each group in the research. The selection was also independently witnessed by another research student. This researcher then contacted each volunteer indicating which group they were assigned to. This enabled volunteers to state on the consent form that they understood which group they were in and freely gave their consent to it. Note that on this consent form the groups were named as coaching and non coaching groups. This was later amended to read intervention and non-intervention. See Research Consent Form Appendix 1 attached.

**Stage 5 (Month 3)** - To establish their current behaviour in relation to the researcher objectives each co-researcher in the intervention and non-intervention groups was asked a series of questions by the current researcher through an initial semi-structured interview. After each interview, tapes were fully transcribed and were subsequently analysed to extract their full meaning.

**Stage 6 (Month 4)** - Following the initial interviews this researcher gave a brief presentation on goal setting to both the intervention and non-intervention groups. This was done so that members of both the intervention and non-intervention would have the same information about goals and how to achieve them. At the end of this presentation each co-researcher was asked to self select two goals which they felt could be realistically achieved within a ten week time frame.

**Stage 7 (Months 4/5/6)** - During this stage the intervention group was coached by the current researcher in relation to their chosen goals. This took the form of five, forty five minute sessions over a period of ten weeks.

**Stage 8 (Month 6)** – At the end of the five coaching sessions, by means of a second individual semi-structured interview both the intervention and non-intervention group were asked a series of questions similar to those asked in Stage 3 but with a different focus i.e. to ascertain if any change in behaviour had taken place in relation to the research objectives. To enable comprehensive analysis these interviews were fully transcribed.

**Stage 9 (Months 7/8/9/10)** - This stage was four months in duration and during this time there was no contact between the current researcher and the members of the intervention and non-intervention groups.

**Stage 10 (Month 11)** - To ascertain if any long term behavioural change had taken place, in a final individual semi-structured interview the current researcher met both the intervention and non-intervention groups four months later and asked the same question as in Stage 3.