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Abstract

DOCTORAL THESIS

**The impact of building coaching and
mentoring strategies on the human resources
sustainable development**

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Key words: coaching, mentoring, human resources, QCA, SPSS, coaching and mentoring strategies

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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary society, human resources are considered to be the key factor, the vital resource within organisations. Practically, it can be said that competitive advantage is strictly influenced by the human resources working in an organisation.

Human resources are characterized by uniqueness, as each individual has its own development pace. Management decisions related to human resources are among the most difficult, and some of them refer to investments in their sustainable development.

When referring to human resources investments, two concepts can be considered as being of particular importance: coaching and mentoring. Coaching and mentoring are two particularly valuable tools for developing human resources potential. They work with typical methods that include a set of well-defined tools that have a common goal: the personal and professional development of human resources so that the organisations in which they work can achieve their objectives.

Given the importance of these two activities, we can speak of a real global industry, an industry that is growing year by year, especially in the current context where economic markets are undergoing marked changes caused by various factors: SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, disruption of global supply chains, economic recession, inflationary trends and, last but not least, armed conflicts.

Performance in these areas can only be achieved if there is a united global vision. This has been the basis for the emergence and development of global organisations working in these areas, which are constantly expanding to share their experience.

SYNTHETIC PRESENTATION OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

Mentoring is not a new concept. Informally, this relationship has always existed in organisations. However, the notion began to gain popularity in the mid-1970s - when it was seen as just another training means. In the 1980s, the concept evolved significantly and came to be seen as a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge within organisations from one generation to another. Thus, mentoring came to be seen as a process-oriented relationship, initially seen as a product-oriented model. More specifically, it has evolved from the idea of knowledge transfer to a process involving knowledge acquisition, knowledge application and critical reflection [1].

Olivero, G., Bane, K. D. and Kopelman, R. E., in a study conducted at Barruch College found that training programs increase productivity by 22%. When complemented by coaching programs, productivity increases up to 88% [2].

Within organisations, human resources are being hired, promoted or moved from one position to another all the time. Within organisations, human resources need development as part of a growing career path. Human resources see training programmes as one of the most effective ways of acquiring new skills and tools for working in organisations. These training programmes are just one way of filling gaps in the development process. Acquiring, developing and retaining good quality human resources are recognised by organisations as competitive advantages. Thus, coaching has developed as a powerful discipline through which organizations act to build and retain human resources [3].

In the following analysis, the conceptual model highlighted in Figure 3.1 was taken as a starting point.

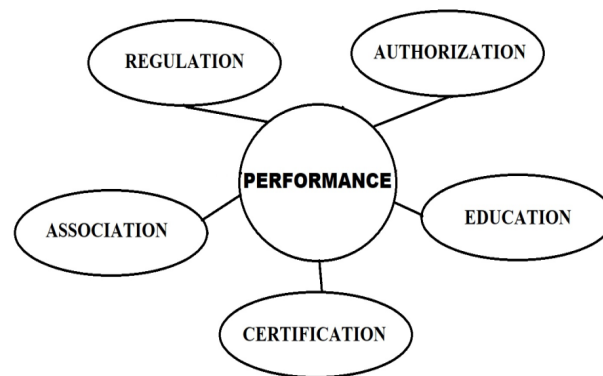


Figure 3.1. Conceptual model for the research conducted in European countries
Source: author's contribution

The following study aims to point out the extent to which certain elements directly influence the perceived performance level of coaches and mentors, but also indirectly influence client satisfaction. Antecedent conditions included: regulation need, licensing and affiliation of coaches and mentors to an expert body or accredited body, education level, certification level and the affiliation to an organisation or association. It is considered that the manner in which these antecedent conditions influence the perceived performance level, which is closely related to client satisfaction, can be tested.

A questionnaire was used to collect the data. Only questionnaires whose respondents have at least 5 years of practice and who spend more than half of their working time carrying out typical activities or studying the field in question were considered.

Results were calibrated by correlating the Likert scale values with scores set in the

fuzzy array range from 0 to 1 (Table 3.1), according to the QCA methodology.

Table 3.1. Likert scale calibration with values belonging to the fuzzy array

Expressed as fuzzy array	Likert scale correspondent
1	Total agreement
0.75	Agreement
0.5	Neither agreement nor disagreement
0.25	Disagreement
0	Total disagreement

Source: author's contribution

Antecedent conditions (Reg, Aut, Edu, Cert, Aso), (Perf) outcome and (Rez) variable were subsequently defined:

- Reg – regulation need,
- Aut – authorisation and affiliation of coaches to a body of experts or accredited body,
- Edu – education level,
- Cert – certification level,
- Aso – affiliation to a professional organisation or association,
- Perf – performance
- Rez – to highlight the calculation result of the antecedent conditions' fuzzy arrays value in the conceptual model by the relation: $Rez = \text{fuzzyand}(\text{Reg}, \text{Aut}, \text{Edu}, \text{Cert}, \text{Aso})$. The fuzzyand function returns the minimum of the analysed variables.

Results' analysis

In order to bridge the gap between the quantitative and qualitative analyses [97], the Qualitative Comparative Analyses (QCA) method was used as a research methodology. Specifically, data were extracted from the questionnaire and then processed using the fsQCA software solution.

Results' analysis for Germany

In the case of the study conducted on the coaching and mentoring market in Germany, out of the 100 distributed questionnaires, after selecting those whose respondents have at least 5 years of experience in coaching and mentoring and who allocate at least 50% of their working time to these activities, 15 questionnaires were validated for research.

Analysing all the results obtained on the German market, it can be said that the conducted study has definitely not achieved its objective. On the one hand, the low consistency scores perhaps reveal that the research omitted elements that also contribute significantly to the perceived performance level of coaches and mentors. From this point of view, the study is a good one, opening new research horizons in the idea that other antecedent conditions should be identified. On the other hand, the low coverage scores reveal two possible issues: either the surveyed sample is not representative or the respondents' opinions are relatively evenly divided. Given that not all 100 questionnaires were analysed, but a rigorous selection was made on the basis of two factors: experience in the field and time spent on research and study, it is considered that a biased sampling is unlikely. However, in order to obtain a reliable result, the study should be repeated but in a different environment.

Results' analysis for the UK

The sample selected for the analysis consisted of 100 people, according to the working methodology. Also, in order to increase the accuracy of the obtained result, only those questionnaires whose respondents have at least 5 years of practice and who spend more than half of their working time in coaching or mentoring activities were considered for analysis. In the end, 18 questionnaires were validated for processing.

Comparing the results obtained in this case with those obtained in the German market analysis, it can be seen that the coverage results are much better. At the same time, the coverage scores are better in some cases, but in others they are weaker, with relatively minor fluctuations. In conclusion, it can be stated that the factors identified through the causal conditions are defining for the development of the coaching and mentoring market in England. In view of the results obtained it can be stated that the sample analysed has been properly calibrated, so no further analysis is required.

Results' analysis for Italy

In the case of Italy, a similar analysis to the previous ones was undertaken in order to draw a conclusion on the characteristics of the coaching and mentoring market. In this case too, in order to increase the study's accuracy, only those questionnaires whose respondents have at least 5 years of practice and who spend more than half of their working time carrying out coaching or mentoring activities were considered for analysis. Finally, 32 questionnaires were validated for processing.

Analysing the data obtained on the Italian HR market, it can be seen that this market has its own peculiarities. The resulting consistencies for the single influences of each antecedent condition individually are in the range between 0.62 and 0.82, while the result for coverage is in the range between 0.64 and 0.82. The lowest coverage of 0.28 was obtained in the cumulative causality test, but in the context where the best consistency score was obtained.

The only conclusion that can be drawn from this situation is that in addition to the identified causality factors there are other factors that have a significant impact on the performance influence.

Results' analysis for the Netherlands

Out of the total of 100 obtained questionnaires, only those whose respondents have at least 5 years of practice and who spend more than half of their working time carrying out activities or studying the field in question were taken into account, according to the previously established working methodology. In the end, 38 questionnaires were validated for research.

In the case of the study performed by interviewing people working in the HR market in the Netherlands, a consensus has been observed. All hypotheses concerning the influence of antecedent conditions Reg, Aut, Edu, Cert and Aso on the Perf outcome were validated. Both consistency and coverage scores obtained are good. In the case of testing the cumulative influence of antecedent conditions on the result, it is observed that the obtained consistency result is the best, but it was still obtained on the background of a rather poor coverage of only 31%. It is concluded that a coach or mentor operating in this market is very likely to perform well if he or she emphasises the investigated aspects.

Preliminary conclusions and discussions

Table 3.6 summarises the data from the survey carried out using the fsQCA software by interviewing respondents in Germany, England, Italy and the Netherlands. It should be noted that the causal factors considered for the study were identified by observing the overall activity in the studied countries. With regard to regulation, it was found that there are cases where the coaching and mentoring professions are regulated and cases where they are not. The establishment of coaching and mentoring providers as a body of experts was envisaged as beneficial since it would increase the quality of the offered services. Overall, education plays an important role. It was intended to test the influence of education, given

that in all the studied countries, management university education institutions run coaching and mentoring programmes or are involved to a large extent in research. Certification was considered as a criterion, as there is a strong emphasis on this aspect. All prestigious organisations offer certifications at various levels to their members in order to make it easier to highlight their training level. Membership of a professional association is another identified advantage, as it opens up new horizons for members, provides access to new development opportunities and to a wider portfolio of clients.

Table 3.6. Summary of the data resulting from the QCA study

	Germany		UK		Italy		The Netherlands	
	Consistency	Coverage	Consistency	Coverage	Consistency	Coverage	Consistency	Coverage
Rez	0.8888	0.2285	1.0000	0.2727	0.8400	0.2800	0.8500	0.3177
Reg	0.5652	0.7714	0.9210	0.6363	0.6666	0.6400	0.7475	0.7196
Aut	0.6170	0.8285	0.8666	0.7090	0.6590	0.7733	0.8163	0.7476
Edu	0.6666	0.5714	0.9523	0.7272	0.7126	0.8266	0.7653	0.7009
Cert	0.5357	0.4285	0.8695	0.7272	0.6292	0.7466	0.7634	0.6635
Aso	0.5454	0.5142	0.8260	0.6909	0.6470	0.7333	0.7345	0.7757

Source: author's contribution further to summarizing study data

In general, it can be seen that the consistency scores are at least satisfactory as none of them are below the 50% threshold, which would be a critical threshold.

Looking at the results for the cumulative action of the antecedent conditions, the best consistency score was obtained in England - 100%. Again, consistency scores are above 80% which is very good. The problem arises in the case of the coverage scores which are in the range 22.85% - 31.77%. It could be said that the respondents agree that the analysed parameters are more than sufficient, but at the same time it would require the identification of other causal factors that could influence the performance of coaches and mentors.

Looking at the results relating to the individual action of each identified causal condition, it may be seen that the results differ widely both from parameter to parameter and from country to country. An earlier statement can now be reinforced - each market has its own characteristics even in this field. It is possible to identify patterns that in some cases perform and in others do not. It would be totally wrong to adapt an existing model in one case to another economic context, believing that the result will be the same. When implementing such a strategy, it is advisable to take into account several factors and to carry out an assessment of a possible expected impact.

The obtained consistency and coverage scores are lowest in Germany and highest in England. It is clear that if the same strategy were implemented in both countries the results would be entirely different. And in the case of Italy and the Netherlands where relatively identical scores were obtained, it would be a mistake to apply the same strategy with the idea that similar results would be obtained. As highlighted above - the low coverage scores in the cumulative influence test indicate that there are several factors that produce more or less significant influences on the outcome that have not been identified.

It can be seen that consistency scores are higher when testing the singular effect of antecedent conditions than when testing their cumulative effect. This indicates that some good criteria were chosen for the grounding of the study. At the same time, respondents are of the opinion that the effect of these antecedent conditions is significant.

The worst consistency scores have been obtained for the Reg (except for England), Cert and Aso antecedent conditions. It can be seen that the trend is similar in all the studied markets, although there are small differences. In the case of each country, with the exception of the Netherlands, the best consistency score was obtained in the case of the Edu test. The result was predictable because it is clear that without proper education, performance cannot be achieved, especially now that there is an increasing emphasis on the idea of continuous training of human resources.

The concept of setting up coaches and mentors in the form of a group of experts is also popular with respondents, given that the impact of the Aut cause is also significant. This is likely to point out a desire, but also a market's failure to provide favourable circumstances for such an organisation.

[Study conducted to design the coaching and mentoring strategy in Romania](#)

In the following, a study will be presented, whose end goal is the design of a coaching and mentoring strategy adapted to the Romanian market. This study is closely related to the previously presented studies that have been carried out on the German, English, Italian and Dutch markets, as it incorporates elements identified on the above-mentioned markets.

In the research, a questionnaire consisting of three sections was used to collect data and was addressed to the following samples: beneficiaries of coaching and mentoring services, providers of coaching and mentoring services and creators/designers of coaching and mentoring strategies. This measure was used because the questionnaire was disseminated online to organisations in Romania whose activity is coaching and mentoring. They are staffed by people who may fall into one, several or all of the above categories.

The questionnaire was designed in Google Forms.

252 people responded to the questionnaire. Respondents were given the opportunity to answer all sets of questions and there was a possibility that they could fit into more than one respondent category. A total of 384 data sets were obtained, divided as follows: 161 from beneficiaries, 161 from providers, 62 from creators/designers.

Analysis of data collected from coaching and mentoring providers

In this case we will work with five causal conditions and one outcome:

- Reg – need to regulate the profession of coach or mentor;
- Aut – authorisation or establishment of coaches and mentors as a body of experts;
- Edu – training level of coaches and mentors;
- Cert – certification level of coaches and mentors;
- Aso – affiliation of coaches and mentors to relevant organisations;
- Perf – the overall influence of the above factors on performance;
- Rez – the variable that highlights the calculation outcome of the fuzzy array values of the antecedent causes by the relation $Rez = \text{fuzzyand}(\text{Reg}, \text{Auto}, \text{Edu}, \text{Cert}, \text{Aso})$.

It should be noted that this function calculates the minimum of the causal variables' values.

In order to be able to determine further directions for strategy development in the questionnaire, an open question was used, in which respondents could offer alternative solutions for increasing project performance. Among the elements that might affect the performance of coaches and mentors are: experience with performance management, intensive practice with a direct effect on the gained experience, increased involvement in the aspect of continuous training, volunteering, i.e. willingness to help, professional experience in other fields and related credentials gained, exchange of experience with other mentors, character and personality. In this case, most opinions referred to experience and practice.

As it appears from the current circumstances that digitisation has become a key concept when discussing the day-to-day running of the business, respondents were asked for their opinion on the need to develop IT solutions allowing easy remote contact between providers and beneficiaries. In this case, 64% of respondents agree that this is beneficial, 28% are undecided and 8% of respondents strongly agree. It is easy to see that the adopted solution would contribute to increasing project performance.

Out of the 76% of respondents who are affiliated to an organisation, 58% think that this aspect has benefited them, 27% fully agree with this aspect, while 15% have a neutral opinion.

One aspect highlighted previously by the analysis performed on the Romanian human resources market refers to the crisis situation. In this case, 96% of respondents believe that the Romanian HR market is undergoing a crisis.

The identified problems refer to: education unadapted to market requirements - 57%, training level - 17%, lack of professional interest - 17%, several factors among those exposed in the question statement - 9%. In this case, respondents were given a choice among several predefined options, but also had the opportunity to express their own opinion. It was found that emigration, salary level, inability to advance in career, access to social services, singularly, are not determinants of the crisis in the HR system.

Respondents were asked for their opinion on a solution to mitigate crisis' effects. 83% think that educational programmes' adaptation to labour market requirements is required, while 17% think that organisational talent management policies should be developed. Reintegration and resettlement of migrants through the development of specific programmes, as well as the import of foreign labour, are not seen as solutions to improve the situation or to overcome the HR crisis.

Analysis of data collected from beneficiaries of coaching and mentoring services

When respondents were asked whether mentoring is beneficial for career guidance, 71% entirely agreed and 29% agreed.

When asked whether the guidance of a coach is beneficial for good development at the workplace, 61% of respondents entirely agreed, 32% agreed, while 7% were neutral in this case.

Analysing the two aspects mentioned above, it can be seen that mentors have a greater impact on the future of human resources compared to people who provide coaching services. Regarding the benefits of mentoring a coach, we notice that there are also neutral people in this respect. This can be seen as a negative aspect. In this case, the coach's inadequate training or the beneficiary's lack of interest might have had an impact.

50% of respondents agree that the development of IT solutions to facilitate contact between beneficiaries and providers is beneficial, 32% of people are neutral on this aspect and 18% agree entirely. In this case, the trend towards digitisation is maintained in relation to the current work context.

A proportion of 79% of the surveyed people say they work in the field in which they studied, while 21% work in another field. The responses in this case reveal a rather serious aspect: almost one fifth of human resources do not work according to their qualifications. It is clear that a mentoring strategy needs to be put in place for people who are still in their student years to help them access a qualification that is suited to their own personality and abilities.

As regards the opinion on the possibility of a labour market crisis, 93% of people believe that it exists, while 7% believe that the labour market is not undergoing a crisis. As previously identified, the human resources crisis in Romania is obvious and is felt among the population.

The crisis situation in the HR market is influenced by: education unadapted to market requirements - 56%, employees' training level - 22%, lack of professional interest - 19%, current pandemic context - 3%.

77% of respondents believe that in order to overcome this crisis, education programmes must be adapted to market requirements, 20% of respondents believe that a solution is the proper management for talent development within organisations and 3% believe that the reintegration and relocation of migrants through appropriate policies is necessary.

In view of the two issues analysed above, we believe that, in the absence of major changes in state policies to increase education performance, and in the absence of private organisations to co-invest in human resources, we see that the only solution is to develop an appropriate coaching and mentoring strategy.

Analysis of data collected from designers of coaching and mentoring strategies

This category of respondents is one to which special attention should be paid, as it includes people with a wealth of experience in the field, most of whom are in management positions. The designers of coaching and mentoring strategies are primarily from organisations that are mainly active in manufacturing and services. At the same time, a significant proportion come from organisations in the sector.

At this stage, the QCA analysis was carried out on two more relevant issues: the extent to which the training level and the certification level influence the perceived performance level of coaches and mentors was tested.

A Likert-type scale was used to analyse the data. The results were subsequently calibrated by correlating them with values within the fuzzy array from 0 to 1.

As stated above, in this case we will work with two antecedent conditions and one outcome:

- Edu – training level of coaches and mentors;
- Cert – certification level of coaches and mentors;
- Perf – the overall influence of the above factors on performance;
- Rez – the variable that highlights the calculation outcome of the fuzzy array values of the antecedent causes by the relation $Rez = \text{fuzzyand}(\text{Reg}, \text{Auto}, \text{Edu}, \text{Cert}, \text{Aso})$. It should be noted that this function calculates the minimum of the causal variables.

From the strategy designers' perspective, the development of IT platforms is necessary to increase the performance of coaching and mentoring processes (72% agree and 11% strongly agree). After processing the results, it was found that 17% of respondents were neutral on this issue.

Among the factors that may influence the performance of the coaching and mentoring strategy, we found that respondents identified: the need for coaching and mentoring to be an integral part of the education process, increased promotion and volunteering.

In unison, all respondents were of the opinion that the labour market is undergoing a crisis. Factors that have caused this crisis and lead to its perpetuation include: education unadapted to labour market requirements (68%), training level (19%), lack of professional interest (13%). In order to mitigate the labour shortage crisis, education levels (82%) promotion of organisational policies for talent management (18%) are required.

Designing a coaching and mentoring strategy for sustainable human resource development

The use of the QCA method [97] for analysing the collected data provides a degree of confidence in the results of the study, and this method is complementary to economic statistics tools [167].

At this level a conclusion can be drawn to define some direction of orientation. It was decided to summarize the obtained results by processing the data collected from providers in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1. Summary of results following the analysis of the provider's sample

Variable	Consistency	Coverage
Rez	0.98	0.75
Reg	0.89	0.88

Variable	Consistency	Coverage
Aut	0.84	0.97
Edu	0.78	0.99
Cert	0.85	0.89
Aso	0.94	0.89

Source: author's contribution

It can be seen that all the obtained scores are favourable. This aspect was easily foreseeable, as the testing of the variables on external markets also had a positive result. Internally, given the crisis situation on the labour market, also accentuated by the current pandemic elements, priorities need to be set in order to have a quick implementation result.

Hereunder the data collected from the processing the questionnaires answered by the strategy developers/designers will be analysed. The data have been summarized in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2. Summary of results following the analysis of the creators'/designers' sample

Variable	Consistency	Coverage
Rez	0.98	0.91
Edu	0.89	0.96
Cert	0.98	0.95

Source: author's contribution

In this case, it can be seen that higher scores were obtained for both consistency and coverage. It would be inappropriate to build a strategy based on only two pillars. The principle of diversity is envisaged: the more directions or ideas on which the strategy can be built, the greater the opportunities for development and the greater the chances of success. It is considered that the two sets of results should be combined, with the mention that the values obtained from the analysis of the creators'/designers' sample should take precedence due to the high level of experience. Thus, it was possible to summarize the combined results in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3. Combined summary of results

Variable	Consistency	Coverage
Reg	0.89	0.88
Aut	0.84	0.97
Edu	0.89	0.96

Variable	Consistency	Coverage
Cert	0.98	0.95
Aso	0.94	0.89

Source: author's contribution

Whereas the complete results' overview is now defined, priorities for the development of the coaching and mentoring strategy in Romania can be set according to the impact.

As a first step, criteria for certification of the coaching or mentoring profession should be developed. Previously, sufficient models present in more developed countries have been pointed out so that certain principles can be imported without limiting this action.

The second phase is closely related to the first. The two can be achieved more or less simultaneously, in the sense that there must be entities whose business is certification. It is therefore necessary to develop a framework to facilitate the growth of the number of entities such as associations, foundations, etc. working in this field. At the moment, two main entities have been identified that also offer certification: EMCC Romania and ICF Romania. Diversification of the certification offer will certainly produce beneficial results in the future.

The third and fourth phases may be analysed simultaneously, given the possibility of simultaneous implementation, but especially the fact that they have achieved identical consistency scores. Although a lower coverage score was obtained in the case of the regulatory analysis, it is considered that this strand should be prioritised over education, due to the faster possibility of implementation. However, education remains the foundation for the development of any activity, although the time horizon for achieving results is quite long.

The fifth development direction concerns the licensing of the coaching and mentoring professions. Subjectively analysing the importance of this aspect, it can be said that it should be one of the main development pillars, as the authorisation processes within a body of experts are rigorously designed. Thus, beneficiaries have the certainty of quality. An objective analysis shows that in this case the lowest consistency score was obtained and the coverage score, which is the highest, only confirms the trend resulting from the survey. It is possible that this development criterion scored the lowest because to some extent it can be replaced by certification.

As pointed out earlier in the design of the coaching and mentoring strategy, measures can also be proposed to integrate coaching and mentoring elements into the education process, to promote it appropriately and to establish a volunteering system. Given that these measures were proposed by respondents, the impact on the strategy cannot be quantified unless a new study is carried out that addresses these factors as well.

Developing a strategy always implies the need for resources, the basic resource being the budget. Ideally, a strategy should be developed based on all the pillars outlined above, but this study does not address costs. Since the decision was made to design a strategy that would cause major impacts, its adaptability to smaller budgets should also be envisaged. For this reason, the impact of the factors studied but analysed in different narrow combinations will be analysed below. Thus, the extent to which a limited number of factors can lead to a favourable outcome can be determined. This analysis supports the situation where, due to objective limitations, not all five proposed measures can be applied. It is well known that each area or administrative territorial structure has its own specificities. There are geographical areas or counties where certain measures can be developed on a larger scale than others or not at all. To this end, the Subset/Superset Analysis function was used on the results obtained from the survey of coaching and mentoring service providers.

Table 5.4. shows the results produced by aggregating all causal conditions, grouped in pairs of four. It can be seen that the best result can be obtained by applying case 1 or case 3. In both cases identical scores were obtained for both consistency and coverage. The second option would be case 5, where a consistency of 0.97 was obtained. For cases 2 and 4 an identical consistency score was obtained, but the distinction is made according to the higher coverage score, in which case 4 takes precedence.

Table 5.4. Results obtained following the cumulation of four antecedent conditions

Case	Cumulation of variables	Consistency	Coverage	Combined score
1	Reg*Aut*Edu*Cert	0.98	0.75	0.88
2	Reg*Aut*Cert*Aso	0.96	0.79	0.86
3	Reg*Edu*Cert*Aso	0.98	0.75	0.88
4	Aut*Edu*Cert*Aso	0.96	0.81	0.89
5	Reg*Aut*Edu*Aso	0.97	0.82	0.90

Source: author's contribution

Table 5.5 analyses the results produced by cumulating antecedent conditions grouped in pairs of three. Cases 8 and 9 have implementation priority, where both consistency and coverage obtained identical scores. The second consistency score is obtained by case 3. For this reason, it becomes the next highest priority. The next case to be considered is case 5 and immediately case 1. For both cases, the consistency score is identical, but the coverage score is the tie-breaker. Next comes case 10 with a consistency score of 0.95, case 6 with identical consistency but lower coverage, and immediately cases 7 and 2, the latter two having identical consistency scores - 0.94. Finally, the case producing

the lowest yield is case number 4, which obtained the lowest consistency score, namely 0.91.

Table 5.5. Results obtained following the cumulation of three antecedent conditions

Case	Cumulation of variables	Consistency	Coverage	Combined score
1	Reg*Aut*Cert	0.96	0.79	0.88
2	Reg*Edu*Cert	0.94	0.80	0.88
3	Reg*Cert*Aso	0.97	0.75	0.86
4	Aut*Edu*Cert	0.91	0.87	0.92
5	Aut*Cert*Aso	0.96	0.81	0.89
6	Edu*Cert*Aso	0.95	0.82	0.90
7	Reg*Aut*Edu	0.94	0.87	0.92
8	Reg*Aut*Aso	0.97	0.82	0.90
9	Reg*Edu*Aso	0.97	0.82	0.90
10	Aut*Edu*Aso	0.95	0.89	0.93

Source: author's contribution

Table 5.6 illustrates the results of combining the causal factors in pairs of two. The analysis of the results reveals that the most favourable case is number 7. Cases 9 and 4 obtained similar consistency scores - 0.95, but the separation is based on the coverage score. Next, cases 10, 1 and 5 should be considered, for which the consistency score of 0.94 was obtained. Case 6 efficiency comes next, with a consistency score of 0.92, closely followed by case 2. Finally, the worst cases are 3 and 8, which obtained the worst coverage scores: 0.86 and 0.85 respectively.

Table 5.6. Results obtained following the cumulation of two antecedent conditions

Case	Cumulation of variables	Consistency	Coverage	Combined score
1	Reg*Cert	0.94	0.80	0.88
2	Aut*Cert	0.91	0.87	0.92
3	Edu*Cert	0.86	0.88	0.90
4	Cert*Aso	0.95	0.82	0.89
5	Reg*Aut	0.94	0.87	0.92
6	Reg*Edu	0.92	0.88	0.92
7	Reg*Aso	0.97	0.82	0.90
8	Aut*Edu	0.85	0.97	0.94

Case	Cumulation of variables	Consistency	Coverage	Combined score
9	Aut*Eso	0.95	0.89	0.93
10	Edu*Aso	0.94	0.89	0.93

Source: author's contribution

As can be seen, a complex coaching and mentoring strategy was previously designed. It is based on several development axes, but at the same time alternatives could be developed that can be adapted in different environments.

Designing an IT platform to facilitate the contact between providers and beneficiaries

According to the study mentioned above, the successful implementation of a coaching and mentoring strategy requires the development of an IT solution to connect beneficiaries and providers remotely in order to facilitate the learning process. 72% of the providers consider that this solution brings considerable benefits to the strategy, 68% of the beneficiaries agree and 83% of the designers agree.

In the light of the obtained results, it was decided to design an IT platform through which coaching and mentoring providers could directly contact beneficiaries. The platform is called CMPD and is accessible at www.cmpd.ro. It can be accessed by anyone who wants to find out more about coaching and mentoring, but also by those who want to take part in programmes specifically tailored to their needs. From an investment point of view, the development of the platform involved an expenditure of 3500 lei. The incurred expenditure covers the design, the purchase of hosting space for one year and the purchase of the name. Subsequently, platform maintenance involves annual costs of between 2000 and 3000 lei which relate to: content improvements, hosting space and name maintenance.

In the short term, the platform aims to immediately inform human resources about the benefits of coaching and mentoring programmes and especially the changes that such programmes can bring about professionally. Interested human resources can also find solutions to their immediate problems at work by purchasing a subscription.

In the long term, the platform aims to support a community of coaches and mentors on the one hand, but also of services beneficiaries on the other. The goal of the experience exchange between the community members is the participants' continuous development.

In order to support the platform's activity, human resources who wish to benefit from qualified consultancy can opt for several investment plans. The first investment plan concerns the purchase of a 2-hour session at a cost of 100 lei. The second plan involves

an investment of 250 lei and includes the purchase of 3 sessions of 2 hours each. The third plan involves an investment of 350 lei and includes the purchase of 5 sessions of 2 hours each. For organisations, a tailored offer is required depending on the number of beneficiaries and how sessions are organised: in groups or individually. Individuals who make an annual investment of 1000 lei as well as beneficiaries who belong to organisations that have accessed the platform's services are automatically included in the cmpd.ro community where they can exchange information with other members.

Initially, the platform's impact will be small, as it has been found that there is not enough media coverage of the benefits of participating in coaching and mentoring programmes. Platform services may be advertised in two directions. The first involves direct contact with organisations interested in investing in their human resources. The second direction involves a monthly investment of between 2000 and 3000 lei in online marketing. Subsequently, platform is expected to have a significant impact at the thought that it will contribute to the development of the coaching and mentoring industry, but could also trigger the emergence of other initiatives with a similar purpose.

The desire is that the team of coaching and mentoring service providers operating on the platform will be made up of people who have expertise in the field and who have the capacity to pass on their knowledge: experienced coaches and mentors, active parts of academia - PhD students, academics and researchers, people who want to contribute to community development.

Project beneficiaries may include both individuals who want to improve their professional performance and organisations which want to improve the professional performance of their human resources.

Analysing the shortage of human resources identified above, the project should be permanently ongoing.

Given that the aim is also to make a profit, intensive promotional activity is required, the costs of which will be amortised over time. As identified above, profitable businesses based on similar initiatives exist abroad.

As coaching and mentoring in Romania need to develop, it is considered that the CMPD platform can be implemented in the design of the coaching and mentoring strategy outlined above. Collaboration with other entities working in this field can also be developed in order to increase the visibility of coaching and mentoring on a national level, but also to improve working processes.

The sections that can be accessed on the platform are: about CMPD, activities, resources, members, contact. A brief description of the concept is provided in the "About CMPD" section. The "Activities" section brings to the visitors' attention the results of the research carried out by the team so far. General information on coaching and mentoring can be found in the "Resources" section. The "Members" section is reserved for people who want to benefit from coaching and mentoring services. Through this section, beneficiaries can purchase subscriptions and can be put in direct audio-video contact with a provider. The "Contact" section facilitates the connection between visitors and the platform team.

Quantitative statistical analysis using SPSS software

Quantitative analysis can be used to describe the behaviour of a population in relation to a problem. Through the quantitative analysis statistical methods a representative sample can be analysed and then the measured results can be extended, thus defining the entire studied population [170].

The SPSS software solution was used to perform this analysis. It has been used since 1986 and today it is widely used in marketing, because along with other similar applications it works with a complete package of statistical functions [171].

In this case statistical tests were performed using the following methods: ANOVA, Chi-Square test, regression, Pearson R and Spearman. The aim was to test several hypotheses to reveal the correlation between the respondent's opinion, according to hierarchical level, and the antecedent conditions previously used in the QCA analysis, which influence the perceived level of performance. It should be noted that SPSS analysis was only used for the sample of coaching and mentoring providers. The analysis was unsuitable within the beneficiaries' sample because most of the respondents are performers and the obtained results would have been uniform. Also, following the same reasoning, the sample of strategy designers could not be analysed because most of the respondents are managers. In the two excluded cases the values of the independent variable (respondent profile) are strongly concentrated on either the execution or management area. Therefore, a quantitative analysis whose results could be extrapolated to the entire sample mass was not substantiated.

Even in the case of the sample of coaching and mentoring providers, in the first phase, out of the total of 161 respondents, 91% were managers and 9% executives. In order to be able to analyse the data using SPSS, a new questionnaire was circulated only to respondents with a performer profile. This resulted in an additional 73 data sets. In the end, 147 datasets provided by managers and 87 provided by performers were available for

analysis. With a relatively balanced sample in terms of respondent profile, quantitative analysis was started using SPSS, the conceptual model is highlighted in Figure 5.1.

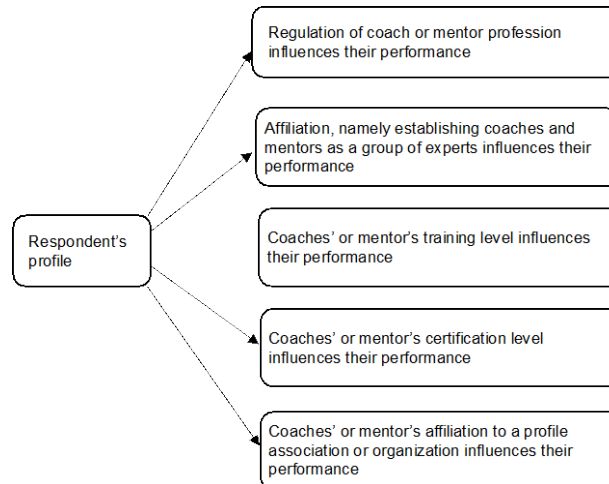


Figure 5. 1. Conceptual model in the case of SPSS analysis

Source: author's contribution

In the previous approach, the created hypotheses were tested using different functions of the SPSS statistical analysis software. As observed, for the same hypotheses, the results are not always uniform enough to define a trend. Moreover, sometimes the results obtained when testing the same hypothesis are even opposite. From this perspective, it is necessary to define two directions to follow: either hypotheses need to be tested with other functions in order to create a concrete opinion, or the observer needs to change his interpretation to a more profound one that also takes into account how one result influences another, trends, etc.

In conclusion, in order to make a more accurate statement of the situation, the results obtained have been centralised in Table 5.37. This makes it easier to see the variation in indicators for each hypothesis.

Table 5.7. Summary of results obtained following the use of SPSS functions

Indicator	Hypothesis 1	Hypothesis 2	Hypothesis 3	Hypothesis 4	Hypothesis 5
Asymptotic Chi-Square Significance	0.061	0.002	0	0	0
Pearson Chi-Square	7.367	14.763	35.734	27.255	27.041
Pearson R	0.127	-0.098	-0.346	0.044	0.31
Spearman	0.136	-0.056	-0.306	0.001	0.315
R	0.127	0.098	0.346	0.044	0.310
R ²	0.016	0.01	0.12	0.002	0.096
ANOVA asymptotic significance	0.053	0.137	0	0.507	0

Indicator	Hypothesis 1	Hypothesis 2	Hypothesis 3	Hypothesis 4	Hypothesis 5
Asymptotic regression significance	0	0	0	0.507	0
Conclusion	Validation to a very small extent	Requires additional testing	Validation to a small extent	Not to be validated	Validation to a small extent

Source: author's contribution

As can be seen, Hypothesis 1 is validated to a very small extent. The Chi-Square test results are outside the permissible limits, but not by much. Once the testing is deepened, a recovery is observed, so it can be considered that the decision made in the case of this hypothesis is well substantiated.

Hypothesis 2 raises some interpretation problems. The results are contradictory. It starts with a Chi-Square test that returns favourable results, then it goes to the Pearson-Spearman test that returns unfavourable results, and then it goes to regression analysis, where contradictory results are obtained. It is precisely the regression analysis that enhances the idea of volatility. Therefore, the only solution is to make additional tests to find a majority.

The next hypothesis, the third, is validated to a small extent, with results slightly above those obtained in Hypothesis 1. The results of the Chi-Square test improved, as did those of the Pearson-Spearman test as well as those carried out to establish the regression equation.

Next is an unvalidated hypothesis - Hypothesis 4. It starts with a test that returns favourable results - Chi-Square, but the next test - Pearson-Spearman - returns invalidating results, and the trend is preserved by the regression test that invalidates the hypothesis as well. The last hypothesis, Hypothesis 5 is validated to a small extent, a similar case to Hypothesis 3, with almost identical results. The Chi-Square test gives perfect validation results, while the Pearson-Spearman test returns weak validation results. In the first part of the regression test the validation is not confirmed, but in the end the results become concrete with respect to validation.

Final conclusions and personal contributions

The objective of the thesis was to design a coaching and mentoring strategy with the aim of achieving sustainable human resources development that would contribute to improving competitiveness of the Romanian labour market. This objective has been achieved through theoretical research and scientific research that involves the approach of a specific methodology.

The personal contribution from a theoretical point of view is that a material was achieved by studying several bibliographical resources presenting essential information in the addressed field. Moreover, a unified vision has been drawn up based on the ideas presented by several researchers. An attempt was made to compress a large volume of information that was accumulated over a significant time period. This was done in order to give more space to scientific research, which defines the work's value and imprints novelty. Without going back over the theoretical aspects presented in the first part of the thesis, the scientific nature of the work will be discussed below.

Scientific research, through the methodology specific to each field, is the core of a doctoral thesis. The approach to this aspect provides important clues to the author's ability to collect, manipulate and process data. From a certain perspective, it can be considered that it is not the importance of the data collected that is paramount, but the processing methods used, and above all, how they are interpreted.

To begin with, the fact that an initial study was made, which was minimal but defining in order to create an opinion on the coaching and mentoring market in European countries with some tradition in the field, should be envisaged. Subsequently, a documentation was carried out to substantiate the human resources crisis in Romania, which is visible at any level of the Romanian economy.

The scientific approach to the subject continued with the drafting of a questionnaire in order to collect working data. The aim was to highlight existing development patterns in the studied markets. Due to the existing limitations, but also due to the rigorous calibration of the samples, with a low volume of available working data, the QCA analysis method was used, which reduced the gaps between qualitative and quantitative, a method that is suitable for processing a low volume of input data.

In order to maintain the idea of research unity and continuity, the same method was used to formulate the strategy for the development of coaching and mentoring in Romania. Specifically, data were also collected through a questionnaire. The differences, however, are worth mentioning: the questionnaire was much more elaborate, a more detailed sampling of respondents was carried out, and a significantly larger volume of data was collected. The methodological approach to data processing is the same - the same fsQCA software was used, only in this case a larger number of job functions was applied, as evidenced by the restricted combination of antecedent conditions and the measurement of their effects on outcome.

Referring to the methodology, in the end it was felt that the thesis would not have been complete without also conducting a quantitative survey. As the data initially collected on the Romanian market did not meet the requirements for the application of quantitative

analysis methods, a new questionnaire was circulated to increase the target sample for analysis. Subsequently, functions specific to quantitative statistical analysis, available in the SPSS software, could be applied.

To close the discussion on the methodological approach, it is considered that the interpretation of the data using the two software solutions - fsQCA and SPSS - is relevant, which fits into the working methodology. However, it is obvious that only the practical implementation of the proposal made by this thesis and the measurement of the results can fully validate the presented reasoning.

If previously the thesis completeness was brought into the discussion, it is necessary to continue the discussion in this direction, which is why the idea of creating an information platform - CMPD.ro - emerged. This is intended to ensure an easier connection between providers and beneficiaries. Taking into account the present circumstances, but also the development trends, it can be said that the project is sustainable in the context of rapid digitisation, but also in the context of the current pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus and other similar situations.

The originality of the thesis lies in the fact it presents a study that results in a model designed following the research on development trends present in mature European coaching and mentoring markets. Initially, various factors influencing the quality of coaching and mentoring services were identified, and then, based on the opinions of stakeholders in the concerned field, a main strategy and alternative options were designed. The research was completed by applying the qualitative comparative research method (QCA) with the help of fsQCA software and by applying typical quantitative statistical analysis procedures with the help of SPSS software.

The obtained results can be useful at the macro level, the study aiming to design a strategy that can be implemented at national level in order to become a driver for the development of the coaching and mentoring industry, with the aim of sustainable human resource development.

At the same time, the obtained results have enabled the outlining of an ideal portrait of the coaching and mentoring service provider, with the possibility that the study could be the development basis for the career of coaches and mentors, through the directions it offers to increase the performance of services.

Respondent's opinions are representative, as they are active in the field of coaching and mentoring and therefore have expertise in the field of the study.

In the end, it can be stated that the elaborated thesis has achieved its objective. Through the performed research, a coaching and mentoring strategy and ancillary variants have been elaborated, which are designed based on a limited number of development

directions. The impact on human resources resulting from the elaboration of these strategies is very clear: the development of the coaching and mentoring industry produces direct effects on human resources ensuring their sustainable development.

Managerial implications

Whether treated as an educational discipline or as a science, human resources management theoretically implies the same functions, concepts, objectives and principles. However, depending on economic development and organisational culture, it differs from country to country and from organisation to organisation.

Certainly, the quality of human resources has been, is and will be one of the most important issues organisations worldwide are facing. Coaches and mentors can have an immeasurable influence on human resources so that they perform much better in their work. To achieve this goal, coaches and mentors need to prove that they have the high-quality skills enabling them to pass on knowledge to their beneficiaries. In addition to theoretical and practical knowledge, providers must also possess communication skills as well as skills related to the field in which their clients work.

This paper also supports managers in organisations to familiarise them with coaching and mentoring issues. The product is also a marketing tool to promote the benefits of implementing coaching and mentoring programmes in organisations. At the same time, the work can also be an effective guide to choosing a coach or mentor that resonates with the human resources in the organisation.

At the macro level, the paper can become part of a possible master plan that aims to increase human resources competitiveness through their continuous development following the integration of coaching and mentoring programmes.

Research limits and further research directions

It can easily be assumed that like other subjects, the one analysed in this thesis is subject to change over time due to development trends. Countries' economies are constantly developing, and so are coaching and mentoring. Therefore, their constant attuning to the national, regional and global economic context becomes necessary. Human resources' requirements are constantly changing, so it is again obvious that the results obtained in this study need to be adapted at certain periods of time. In conclusion, in the case of the proposed strategy's implementation, a monitoring programme must be ensured in order to quantify the results and define future development directions.

From a technical point of view, the study has limitations because it was difficult to identify representative samples, which were quantitatively limited. The small number of respondents is to some extent related to the lack of interest of the target group to which the questionnaire was disseminated. Another impediment was the fact that at national level it was difficult to identify entities active in the field of coaching and mentoring, as few such organisations are active on the market.

As far as further research directions are concerned, several aspects need to be considered. If reference is made to the identification of the sample of beneficiaries, it was constituted with the help of providers and strategy designers, by circulating the questionnaire to their own clients or collaborators. A more extensive survey may be considered as required, which should be sent directly to the organisations whose human resources have benefited from the coaching and mentoring programmes in order to eliminate possible biases. In this case, there is a possibility to retransmit the questionnaires to parties who are easily influenced or who resonate in terms of opinion with the concerned providers.

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