WBECS 2019
CMI Article- Coach vs. Bot

WORLD BUSINESS AND EXECUTIVE COACH SUMMIT

Coach versus bot:
How do they compare?

The issue of coach versus AI became one of the hot topics in coaching for 2017 and looks set to continue to generate interest, debate and – hopefully – some research. As yet, there is little evidence that existing coaches have been given the sack and replaced by a bit; nor of coaches working closely with bots in an integrated practice. This is likely to change over the course of 2018 and 2019

Our take on the topic, from the evidence that is available, is that, while simplistic coaching is under threat, truly developmental coaching can be greatly enhanced by partnerships between coaches and AI. Indeed, we can go further and say that it is in the coaching profession's best interests actively to encourage such integration.

The tables below provide what we hope are practical descriptions of the strengths of human and AI coaching, both separately and combined. The first table looks at the coach/AI issue from the perspective of the four modes of learning: information, knowledge, skills and wisdom. The second explores the same issue from the perspective of what coaches do and how they do it.

Modes of learning:

Mode	Coach-Mentor	AI
Information	Limited depth, high breadth	High depth, limited breadth
Knowledge	Limited depth, high breadth	Moderate depth and breadth, depending on what databases linked to
Skills	Observation and feedback, plus motivation	Potentially higher levels of observation (faster and more comprehensive, including micro-movements and tonal analysis)
Wisdom	Mentor draw on narratives and values important – the parable as source of learning	Currently beyond the scope of AI

Tasks, skills and qualities of a coach

The first part of the table below is based on coaching at its simplest – an expanded view of the GROW model. The more complex the relationship and the nature of the change intended, the less effective an AI will be. However, the AI can continue to add value in partnership with a coach at each level of complexity.

The rest of the table looks at the skills and qualities coaches and AIs bring to the coaching relationship and conversation.

Tasks	Coach	AI	Coach & AI together
Establish purpose and goals	Effective coaches work with context and values before agreeing goals	Focus on the goal and routes to achieving it. Unable to work easily with evolving goals	Deeper exploration of context and purpose, Able to look beyond initial goals
Building client self-awareness	Uses diagnostics alongside intuition to guide the client towards self-insight. Builds on insights to shape new horizons	Uses standard tools and questions to help the client become more self-aware. Stops at the point of potential i nsight. Unable to check how deep the insight has been.	Identify new avenues to explore. When bot brings the client to an insight, it creates the platform for the client to explore it more deeply with the coach
Decision-making & critical thinking	More creative, but more susceptible to failures of reasoning and decision-making traps	Follows logic and decision-making processes more closely. Unable to include tacit knowledge or "unknown knowns"	Better at finding solutions that are both/and rather than either/or
Generating options	Intuitive understanding of client of possibilities in light of cultural variables and values; and of what does and doesn't work	Offers both "liner t hinking" (obvious) options and "way out" options	Coach can moderate and add to AI suggestions to create a wider palette of options. Capacity to be genuinely innovative

Tasks	Coach	AI	Coach & AI together
Motivating	The Pygmalion Effect – motivating power of one person's belief in what another can achieve	Client has to generate own motivation	Combining intrinsic and extrinsic motivation
Follow-up	Coach acts as a conscience to the client. Difficult to keep reminding the client without appearing to nag and taking responsibility from the client to the coach	More rigorous at reminding	Easier to monitor progress and give continued support without seeming intrusive

Skills	Coach	AI	Coach & AI together
Listening	Has wider store of mental associations to aid sense-making May filter out important data	Has large, but narrow store of associated algorithms and data to draw upon. May pay too much attention to irrelevant data	Shifts focus more towards how the client makes sense of their issue

Skills	Coach	AI	Coach & AI together
Questioning	Intuitive recognition of the "right" question Intuitive understanding of when not to ask a question	Able to draw upon a large database of questions from previous conversations. Difficulty in deviating from the "script".	Coach spends less time worrying about the next question, knowing that, if they don't have one, they can fall back on the AI
Rapport building	Building deep trust enables the client to delve further into issues and face their fears	AI can seem less judgemental, but can only build "transactional trust"	A big unknown! However, rapport with a coach may be undermined, if the client suspects "collusion" between coach and AI. Transparency is vital
Giving feedback	Coach gives feedback both on aspects previously agreed and on other things they notice	AI gives feedback only on what it is programmed to do. Can make comparisons with other people in its database, to provide a sense of proportion. (E.g. 83% of people fall into this category...)	Automating multirater feedback and analysis can put ownership of the process firmly in the client's hands and suggest topics to discuss in coaching

Skills	Coach	AI	Coach & AI together
Use of self	In Gestalt mode, the coach is able to use their own feelings and associations to generate new avenues of enquiry	AI lacks a sense of self and can only draw upon observation or comparison with other similar conversations	Coach can use AI's observations to check their intuitions. (E.g. when the coach a sense of discomfort, does the AI observe relevant changes in the client's tone or micro-expressions?)
Being a role model	More an aspect of being a mentor than a coach	N/A	N/A

Qualities	Coach	AI	Coach & AI together
Credibility	Combination of who the coach is and the experience they bring - leads the client to place more weight on their guidance	The Wikipedia effect – generally helpful but not to be trusted!	Likely to increase client confidence – but needs research to verify
Compassion	Feeling for the client and understanding their perspective	Rudimentary understanding of the emotions people generally in this situation may feel	May help the coach avoid over-sympathising and losing their objectivity

Skills	Coach	AI	Coach & AI together
Curiosity	The instinctive desire to learn more and to follow a conversational path wherever it may lead	Algorithms require AI to follow the mist logical path	May make explorations more thorough. High potential to ensure that the conversation comes back to "parked" issues that might otherwise be forgotten
Courage	The instinct to do or say what feels right	N/A	AI could potentially act as the coach's own conscience, prompting them to reflect on their own motivations both during coaching sessions or in reflection afterwards

If this content is valuable to you, be sure not to miss David in his live online coach session at **WBECS** in June, 2019. The **WBECS** Pre-Summit is a month-long, free learning experience taught by carefully hand-selected speakers covering the most important topics of 2019 in a variety of coaching disciplines.

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