

MACHINE COACHES • ROBOT MENTORS • AI ASSISTANTS • S.T.E.M. VS. S.T.E.A.M.

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TECHNOLOGY &

AI

*Will it support or replace
human coaching?*

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WILL IT SUPPORT
OR REPLACE HUMAN
COACHING?

What is artificial intelligence (AI), and how does it impact coaching? Where does AI exist now in the coaching profession? Is it helping or hurting the impact? Should coaches fear or welcome AI? Can AI replace person-to-person coaching? Join us as we explore the ways in which AI affects coaching now, and what the future holds.



THE ROLE OF AI IN COACHING: A NEW FRONTIER

As AI adoption continues to grow, coaches and consultants may wonder if it will be their number one competitor or their ally, but it's worth exploring the potential of advanced AI models, such as GPT, to enhance coaching through dialogue, domain-specific expertise, and continuous improvement.

By **Andrea Paviglianiti**



Last year, I was watching a French black comedy called *Bigbug*. Set in 2045, it is the tale of AI-powered robots leading an uprising, confining humans in their homes for good. Clearly, the message was about how dependent on technology we have become, and the risks that tech addiction might bring. However, what really struck me was a domestic robot called Einstein, whose main function was the ability to start a conversation using dialectics and philosophical conundrums. And such ability could be adjusted in a range of levels of intelligence, from basic to luminary.

Surprisingly, not even one year after I watched that movie, the world is learning about the wonder of advanced AI, in the wake of technologies like GPT models. Designed to understand and generate human-like language, this innovative type of AI answers questions as if they were given by another person, and even engages in a chat conversation. Unlike traditional chatbots, the

December, reaching the 100 million active users in February 2023.¹

Given the potential economic benefits promised by AI adoption² and the ease of use of this more advanced tech, it comes as no surprise that businesses around the world are adopting it, if not building around it. As a consequence, professionals around the world once more linger in anxiety, wondering how soon the job they do will be replaced by machines.

Of course, that is going to affect the coaching business, too. AI in coaching involves using machine-learning algorithms and natural language processing (NLP) to analyze data and provide insights to coaches. The question is no longer whether it will perform, but rather how. The numbers testify that we are already past the initial period of diffidence, shifting to the next phase where anyone could seek well-rounded answers to their problems at relatively little cost (in terms of both effort and money). But we must look at all of the pros and cons to determine whether AI is going to be the coach's number one competitor.

Artificial intelligence can simulate conversation and even engage in a dialogue. This in turn can help coaches in training to better understand core competencies, and reframe powerful questions for different contexts and scenarios.

advanced language model used in its design provides outputs that are not as stiff, and they even improve by the day.

As technology advances, AI is increasingly becoming a buzzword in the business world, and its role in coaching is growing in importance. AI is being utilized in a wide range of industries. Now, this new technology is also being incorporated into coaching, allowing coaches to improve their performance and enhance their human connection with clients.

Suddenly, I saw a potential Einstein-like AI coming to life. And so did other people. ChatGPT, currently the most popular on the internet, grew its number of users exponentially since last

My belief is that GPT models and other forms of AI can help coaches to do a better job in serving their coachees. In the form of machine-learning algorithms and predictive models, AI is already widely used in the learning industry – and by coaches and consultants alike – to get tailored insights and propose more fitting solutions to clients. That being said, I will take a step away from the industry perspective and focus on coaching as a skillset and lifestyle.

Coaching is, among many things, a form of dialogue. Ideally, it's a communication flow between two individuals, or a group facilitated by one person, with the intent of provoking thoughts and calling to action. It is also a process

feature

of transformative learning because it stimulates self-awareness through reflection and critical thinking. It means challenging clients' existing beliefs and assumptions, encouraging them to reflect on their experiences, and facilitating their personal growth and development.

This benefits both the coachee and the coach, due to the intrinsic features of constructive dialogue between human beings – like social intelligence and tacit knowledge – but also because of the abilities upon which the coach builds their mastery in connecting with other people, such as observation, empathy and situational awareness.

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locutors may, in fact, speak technically. A focus on leadership skills does not account for the technical subtext embedded in the thoughts and even purposes of our coachee, making it challenging to find common ground as our attention drifts away.

AI comes in handy to explain concepts that are hard to understand, rephrase them, and even make examples using natural language and relatable situations. Doesn't this accelerate learning and support our efforts of building eminence?

So far, artificial intelligence is already in use in many industries to make businesses more efficient, though this use is mostly related to non-human interaction and aimed at automating critical, but otherwise unimportant, tasks. This new AI, capable of a less

– even unconsciously or when they are not paying attention – in a continuous feedback-feedforward cycle.

Therefore, we cannot take AI output for granted as absolute truth; we must actively and critically double-check our facts. In doing this, we shift to a different task – from researching *any* source to critically assessing target information, according to our aim.

Second, AI may eventually replace coaching *as a job*, similar to the role that the Einstein robot was designed for in the movie. Does that mean that the coaching industry is doomed? We come to think that, since the day wheel was invented, innovation and technology has made our lives easier, allowing us to complete a task with less effort, or to spend more time on activities of self-realization as opposed to those that satisfy primary needs.

Likewise, if coaching “for performance” as a business is one day replaced by virtual assistants, human coaches will find themselves more focused on higher purposes, with coaching itself becoming a core competence in serving individuals and society.

In conclusion, it is more likely that AI will gradually integrate with coaching rather than replace it, helping with simulation training, encouraging critical revisions, and accelerating the learning experience. And surely it will not replace dialogue. The market landscape is about to change again, but human non-technical skills will be more required than ever.

Critical thinkers will prove fundamental in a more AI-driven world, ensuring that virtual outputs are checked and fine-tuned for the good of all people. ●

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in training to better understand core competencies, and reframe powerful questions for different contexts and scenarios. This would positively impact the learning curve, because coaches could actively focus on learning about the other features of the dialogue, like non-verbal behaviors and emotional intelligence.

Even more curious is that AI can also learn from mistakes, by “retraining” on more correct data (which in our case, comes in the form of feedback). Consequently, coaches should learn how to effectively interact with AI – something that lands in a gray area between technical and non-technical skills – fine-tuning coaching-dedicated AI models in a Kaizen fashion (namely, a philosophy of continuous improvement).

AI also provides coaches with the opportunity to gather domain-specific expertise more easily. While coaches do not necessarily need to be industry experts, it is also true that our inter-

stiff degree of interaction compared to business chatbots, has huge potential to accelerate discovery, research and training of professionals, to educate people and provide deeper insights from the increasingly heavy load of data collected by organizations across the world. This, however, does not come without risk.

First, the performance of AI is only as good as the data on which it is trained. We must account for the quality of the input, as well as human bias³ and (un)ethical decision-making⁴ that propagates in the records used. If unchecked, artificial intelligence could be detrimental to our performance and personal growth instead of being an ally. This is the case when it fed misinforming sources and single points of view.

The truth is that AI cannot “think” critically. Not in the way we do, at least. A training set is somewhat static: it does not change until new data is provided. Humans, on the other hand, keep learning and assessing their views

NOTES:

- ¹ businessofapps.com/data/chatgpt-statistics/
- ² financesonline.com/machine-learning-statistics/
- ³ mckinsey.com/featured-insights/artificial-intelligence/tackling-bias-in-artificial-intelligence-and-in-humans
- ⁴ washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/11/21/facebook-algorithm-biased-race/