



## KETS DE VRIES INSTITUTE

### THE ROBOCOACHES ARE COMING....

HOW COULD AI ENHANCE THE OUTCOME OF EXECUTIVE COACHING?

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During a coaching forum senior coaches discussed the potential impact of technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) on executive coaching. Most in the room dismissed the thought: “We are a people-based industry!”; “We couldn’t be replaced by machines!” The resistance came from the belief that coaching is fundamentally based on human relationships, and that what makes coaching so successful is the working alliance between coach and coachee. There was a sense that as an industry, coaching is somewhat untouchable.

Yet is coaching really untouchable? Many people scoffed at coaching ever being done via any method other than face-to-face, however as a colleague pointed out, using via video conference is now the norm. Moreover, whether we like it or not, online coaching and apps using chatbots are already available via services such as coach.me<sup>i</sup> and emoquo.com<sup>ii</sup> (both of which are worth exploring if you haven’t experienced them).

Many people would agree that to be successful the human aspect of coaching is critical. One could also argue that as well as the relationship itself, other aspects play an important part on the outcome of coaching: finding the right coach, having the right data to trigger insights, being able to provide regular check-ins to ensure momentum is maintained.

Thus perhaps the question to ask ourselves is does any discussion on the role of Artificial or Virtual Intelligence within coaching have to be so binary? Is only considering human-less coaching (in the way we can imagine driverless cars making the need for human drivers obsolete) a naive or even dangerous position to take?

What if instead we imagine a world of coaching where we harness and combine the strengths of both humans and AI? As Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft points out “...rather than thinking in terms of human vs. machine, we want to focus on how human gifts such as creativity, empathy, emotion, physicality, and insight can be mixed with powerful AI computation to help move society forward.”<sup>iii</sup>

Suppose we envisage how we could *integrate* AI and technology into our executive coaching work? Blending our human gifts of curiosity, reflection and empathy with the intelligence, knowledge and speed of machines. How could we as a sector embrace AI to improve the service we provide for our clients?



Here are a few of our thoughts on how this integrated coaching could manifest:

- Finding the right coach more quickly and effectively: Taking cues from dating apps where “AI matchmakers, which sound like Siri, ask you questions for a week before sending you matches”<sup>iv</sup>, imagine an app to help coachees find the right coach, where you are connected based on particular experience, approach, accreditations, geography, or expertise, thus facilitating and enhancing chemistry sessions and the overall coaching relationship.
- Develop and practice new skills: Use simulations in Virtual Reality for the development of a new skill in a real-life, dynamic environment and analyse ‘results’ in coaching sessions.<sup>v</sup>
- Provide data points to trigger reflections: a new form of 360-degree feedback, using personal wearable technology to have real time data on how a coachee interacts with their boss and co-workers. In essence a coaching Fit-Bit designed to measure behaviours in the workplace, and nudge the wearer when needed.<sup>vi</sup>
- Checking-in and following up: Based on keywords from coaching sessions and action plans, apps and chat bots could automatically follow up on coaching goals, give reminders, trigger and record reflections, and provide further sources of reading material on focus areas.<sup>vii</sup>

It is inevitable that AI will continue to enter the executive coaching space. The question then becomes how as an industry can we embrace and assimilate the opportunities it can create. Disruption will happen, and when it does any developments are likely to come from tech organisations who initially invent the base technology for a completely different purpose. After all, Uber wasn't created by a taxi firm, nor AirBnB by the hotel trade. Our role will be to recognise that coaching is not untouchable, and that we should work to unlock and seize the opportunity to integrate AI and technology to create the right ethical and effective tools to provide an improved outcome for our clients.

What fantasies do you have about the future of technology-enhanced coaching? What is your reaction to the idea of working alongside, or even being replaced by, AI? We are keen to hear your thoughts on this emotive topic.

## REFERENCES

<sup>i</sup> <https://www.coach.me>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.emoquo.com/>

<sup>iii</sup> Nadella, S (2017) Hit Refresh

<sup>iv</sup> <https://mashable.com/article/future-online-dating/>

<sup>v</sup> <https://virtualitytech.ae/how-can-vr-be-used-in-executive-coaching-2/>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www2.deloitte.com/insights/us/en/focus/signals-for-strategists/wearable-devices-in-the-workplace.html>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://learningsolutionsmag.com/articles/2197/a-mobile-coach-can-help-elearning-stick>