

ICF Saudi Arabia Chapter - ICW 2026

AI Coaching: Where Are We, Where Are We Going?

Session Title	AI Coaching: Where Are We, Where Are We Going?
Speaker	Olivier Malafronte
Event	International Coaching Week 2026 - ICF Saudi Chapter
Date & Time	Friday, May 15, 2026 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM (KSA Time)
Language	English
Primary Theme	AI Coaching, Ethical AI, Coaching Technology, Human Augmentation, Digital Coaching Practice

YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/kua-kdrtXZ4>

1. Executive Summary

This session explored the current state and future direction of AI coaching through a balanced lens: practical use cases, emerging research, ethical safeguards, and the role of human coaches in a rapidly evolving digital landscape. Olivier Malafronte positioned AI not as a replacement for coaching, but as a way to democratize access to coaching knowledge, support reflection, and augment human capability when used responsibly.

The speaker introduced AI coaching as a field that has moved from experimentation into early evidence-based practice. He shared examples of AI-supported preparation, self-supervision, transcript analysis, client follow-up, coaching simulations, customized AI agents, and future immersive experiences through avatars, augmented reality, and virtual reality.

A central message was that AI coaching can provide structure, emotional stabilization, first-level reflection, goal framing, and wider access. However, human coaching remains essential for deeper relational work, embodied presence, nuanced empathy, lived experience, cultural sensitivity, and ethical judgment. The strongest invitation to coaches was to become informed, transparent, reflective, and ethically disciplined when integrating AI into their practice.

2. Best Highlights from the Session

- **AI is already part of coaching practice:** Coaches are using AI for marketing, content creation, meeting preparation, session simulation, transcript analysis, note-taking, research, and client follow-up.
- **Clients are also using AI:** The conversation is no longer only about whether coaches use AI; clients and organizations are already experimenting with it before, between, and after coaching engagements.
- **AI can support access and scale:** AI coaching tools can help more people access coaching knowledge, especially early-career audiences, underserved groups, and organizations with limited access to human coaches.
- **AI coaching is different from human coaching:** It may emulate parts of coaching practice, but it does not provide the same warmth, human depth, embodied presence, and lived relational experience as a human coach.
- **First-level reflection is a strong AI use case:** AI can help people frame goals, express emotions, name situations, reflect, reframe, and begin organizing their thinking.
- **Human coaches create deeper transformation:** When the conversation requires deeper human meaning, relational sensitivity, cultural understanding, and lived experience, human coaches bring a distinctive value.
- **AI can augment human capabilities:** The speaker shared that AI coaching tools may enhance competencies such as communication, empathy toward others, confidence, work organization, and priority setting.

- **Ethics must be designed in:** Transparency, informed consent, confidentiality, privacy, data handling, bias awareness, and compliance with coaching frameworks are not optional add-ons; they are core requirements.
- **Specialized coaching platforms add ethical layers:** The session contrasted generic AI tools with coaching-specific platforms that can offer anonymization, pre-testing, privacy choices, and framework-based compliance audits.
- **The future is hybrid:** The emerging direction is not AI versus coaches, but a mixed system where human coaches can use AI agents to extend, support, and enrich their practice.

3. AI Coaching Use Cases Discussed

For Coaches

- Marketing and sales support, including content creation and automation of selected business processes.
- Preparation for upcoming meetings or coaching sessions by simulating client scenarios and clarifying possible approaches.
- Coaching simulations for novice coaches or coaches learning a specific coaching approach.
- Meta-positioning sessions, where the client begins with an AI coaching agent for 15-20 minutes while the coach observes, then the human session begins with a debrief.
- Self-supervision and feedback, using anonymized transcripts to reflect on what went well and where the coach can improve.
- Note-taking, transcription, and session analysis to support learning, supervision, and quality improvement.
- Creation of customized AI agents based on the coach's framework, knowledge, language, tools, and preferred coaching protocols.

For Coachees / Clients

- Preparation before a coaching session by identifying topics, framing goals, organizing ideas, and clarifying desired outcomes.
- Useful follow-up after sessions to reinforce protocols, reflect on action steps, and continue learning independently.
- Practice between sessions, especially for communication, emotional regulation, priority setting, and decision preparation.
- Access to coaching knowledge when a human coach is not available or when the person needs a first step of confidential reflection.
- Potential future immersive practice through avatars, augmented reality, virtual reality, and visualization-based exercises.

4. What the Research Discussion Suggested

- **Definition of AI coaching:** The session referenced AI coaching as a machine's ability to help a person define and attain goals, mobilize resources, and emulate elements of a coach's knowledge.
- **Goal-attainment support:** Research examples indicated that AI coaching agents can help users define and work toward goals in structured contexts.
- **Competency-related potential:** One reviewed study suggested that an AI coaching agent, evaluated by coaching experts, could perform between ACC and PCC levels in a specific goal-attainment context.
- **Emotional stabilization:** The speaker's research suggested that AI coaching conversations can help users move toward a more stable emotional state, enabling problem solving and solution creation.
- **Human augmentation:** AI coaching tools may augment human capabilities when the tool is well designed, the user understands its purpose and limits, and the technology adapts to human needs.
- **Relational orientation:** AI coaching conversations may reveal whether users relate to others and to the AI tool instrumentally or as partners in reflection and action.
- **Context matters:** The speaker was careful to note that findings are contextual and should not be generalized blindly across all sectors, cultures, modalities, or coaching purposes.

5. AI Coaching vs Human Coaching: Practical Distinctions

AI Coaching Can Be Strong For	Human Coaching Remains Critical For
Initial reflection, topic framing, and goal clarification.	Deeper human meaning, identity work, and complex relational dynamics.
Helping users name emotions and begin organizing their thinking.	Embodied presence, intuition, warmth, and real-time relational sensitivity.
Providing a neutral-feeling space for people who are hesitant to disclose vulnerabilities to another human.	Holding discomfort, silence, ambiguity, and emotionally charged moments with wisdom.
Scaling coaching knowledge to larger populations and underserved groups.	Tailoring the work to unique context, culture, values, lived experience, and non-verbal signals.
Supporting follow-up, practice, self-reflection, and short 10-15 minute insight cycles.	Deep transformation, ethical judgment, accountability, and partnership over time.
Systematizing proven methods without necessarily standardizing every human experience.	Protecting the distinctiveness, creativity, and responsiveness of professional coaching.

6. Ethical and Professional Considerations

The session made ethics a central part of the conversation. The speaker’s message was not simply “use AI,” but rather: understand the tool, define the use case, disclose the use, protect data, ask for consent, and remain reflective about bias and impact.

- Understand the tool before using it:** Review the provider, the information available, the tool’s purpose, its limits, and whether it is appropriate for the coaching context.
- Clarify when and why AI will be used:** Ask where AI adds value, what part of the coaching journey it supports, and whether the client benefits from that use.
- Be transparent with clients:** Explain that an AI tool will be used, how it will be used, what data may be involved, and what choices the client has.
- Request informed consent:** The client should have the right to ask questions, accept, refuse, or set boundaries around AI use.
- Protect privacy and confidentiality:** Avoid exposing personal, confidential, or identifiable client information in generic tools unless appropriate safeguards are in place.
- Check bias and cultural fit:** Reflect on data bias, method bias, cultural bias, societal bias, and whether the AI tool has been adapted to the client’s context.
- Use standards and scoring tools:** The speaker referred to ICF AI coaching standards and tools that can help coaches assess AI coaching solutions.
- Pre-test AI agents before client use:** Agents should be tested for audience fit, behavior, privacy, and compliance before they are used commercially or with real clients.

7. Key Insights

- **Insight 1 - AI changes access, not the essence of coaching:** AI may distribute coaching knowledge more widely, but it does not remove the need for professional coaching judgment, ethics, presence, and partnership.
- **Insight 2 - Coaches need AI literacy:** The profession cannot respond to AI only through fear or excitement. Coaches need practical literacy to make grounded decisions.
- **Insight 3 - The real question is use case quality:** AI is not good or bad in general. Its value depends on the purpose, design, data handling, context, and the level of human oversight.
- **Insight 4 - Neutrality can feel safer for some users:** Some people may disclose more easily to an AI tool because they do not feel judged by another human being.
- **Insight 5 - AI can support emotion work without “having” emotion:** AI may not possess human empathy, but a well-designed coaching agent can help users reflect on emotions and communicate with others more empathetically.
- **Insight 6 - Human coaches are pushed to raise their standard:** AI’s progress invites coaches to sharpen their competence, supervision, reflective practice, and ability to create depth that technology cannot replicate.
- **Insight 7 - Data protection is part of coaching ethics:** Confidentiality cannot be separated from technology choices. Coaches must know what happens to client data.
- **Insight 8 - The future is co-created:** The speaker positioned AI coaching as a field that coaches can shape by embedding their knowledge, frameworks, culture, and standards into responsible tools.

8. Practical Takeaways for Coaches

- Map your current coaching workflow and identify where AI could support preparation, documentation, reflection, or follow-up without compromising confidentiality.
- Differentiate between generic AI tools and coaching-specific platforms with privacy, anonymization, testing, and compliance features.
- Create a clear client disclosure statement explaining whether, where, and how AI is used in your coaching practice.
- Never upload identifiable client data into an AI tool without explicit consent and a clear understanding of how the data will be processed.
- Use AI as a reflective assistant, not as an authority that decides what the client needs.
- Experiment first with low-risk use cases such as drafting session reflections, creating learning prompts, or role-playing generic coaching scenarios.
- Build AI agents around defined coaching protocols only when you are clear about the objective, boundaries, and ethical risks.
- Use AI-generated insights as hypotheses for reflection, not conclusions about the client.
- Continue investing in supervision, mentoring, and human coaching mastery. AI can support practice, but it should not replace professional development.
- Stay updated on standards, regulations, and professional guidance related to AI coaching.

9. Participant Questions and Responses

Question / Theme	Response Highlight
Is AI coaching text-based or voice-based?	The research discussed was mostly based on written chat transcripts, although some tools may include voice options. Voice, body language, and facial expression were not the main data source in the research discussed.
How was emotional stability measured?	The speaker explained that the studies used transcript-based sentiment analysis, labeling positive and negative emotional language from the conversation text.
Did the human coaches in the study have experience?	The human coaches referenced had mid-to-advanced experience, approximately five to ten years, and were connected to a coaching association.
Can AI have empathy or compassion?	The speaker clarified that AI does not need to “have” human empathy to help users develop more empathetic communication and emotional awareness.
When is AI more effective than human coaching?	AI may be valuable for first-level work such as framing, analyzing, naming emotions, and starting reflection. Human coaches remain stronger for deeper human work.
Can an AI agent be trained on a coach’s style or niche?	Yes. The speaker explained that agents can be built around specific coaching knowledge, frameworks, language, and client use cases, with either autonomous platform support or expert guidance.
How culturally aware is the research?	The speaker noted that his research included contexts from the US, Europe, and Africa, but not all regions. Cultural adaptation may be needed in some contexts.
Are hybrid human-AI systems being deployed?	The speaker indicated that mixed systems are emerging across different sectors depending on coaching readiness, innovation mindset, regulation, and use case.

10. Memorable Statements

“The goal is not for coaches to become AI experts; the goal is for coaches to use AI responsibly where it creates value.”

“AI coaching can democratize coaching knowledge, but it does not replace the depth and warmth of human coaching.”

“AI is useful for framing, reflecting, naming emotions, and starting the thinking process.”

“When deeper human work is required, human coaches make the difference.”

“Some people value AI because there is no human being judging them.”

“We do not need AI to have empathy for AI to help a human being develop more empathy.”

“Ethics begins with understanding the tool and being transparent with the client.”

“Consent is not a formality; it is part of building trust.”

“Bias exists everywhere; the professional question is whether we are aware of it and managing it responsibly.”

“The future of AI coaching is something coaches can help shape.”