

ICF Saudi Arabia Chapter - ICW 2026

From Insight to Impact: Futuristic Human-centered Workplace in the Middle East

1. Session Details

Session Title	From Insight to Impact: Futuristic Human-centered Workplace in the Middle East
Event	International Coaching Week 2026
Date	Monday, May 11, 2026
Time	7:00 PM - 8:00 PM (KSA Time)
Speakers	Coach Maleha Alfoudari & Coach Haitham A. Elmasry
Core Focus	Workplace wellbeing, coaching culture, leadership, AI, and human-centered transformation

YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/SSr0xUYxel8>

2. Executive Summary

This session explored workplace wellbeing as both an organizational design challenge and a personal responsibility. Coach Maleha Alfoudari framed wellbeing as a holistic experience that includes physical, emotional, financial, social, spiritual, environmental, and career dimensions. She emphasized that a healthy workplace is not limited to benefits or activities; it is a positive environment that helps employees reach their highest professional potential and contributes to stronger productivity.

Coach Haitham A. Elmasry expanded the conversation into the realities facing workplaces in the Middle East today: AI pressure, job insecurity, economic uncertainty, burnout, conflicting decisions, rapid change, and gaps in leadership capability. A central message emerged clearly: wellbeing is not the final goal; it is a means to sustainable productivity, continuity, trust, and human-centered impact.

The discussion also challenged the idea that the future workplace is a competition between people and technology. Instead, the session positioned the future as a partnership between human capability and technology, supported by coaching culture, just culture, trust between leaders and employees, and a renewed sense of personal responsibility for wellbeing.

3. Best Highlights from the Session

- Workplace wellbeing was presented as a holistic system, not a single activity. It includes physical health, mental wellbeing, financial stability, social connection, career growth, spiritual meaning, and environmental/organizational conditions.
- The session reinforced that “the happy employee is a productive employee.” Wellbeing was connected directly to performance, loyalty, engagement, and sustainable contribution.
- A wellbeing culture requires leadership commitment. Leaders must listen, create psychological safety, avoid blame, understand employees as individuals, and continuously learn and adapt.
- Coaching culture was positioned as a key pathway to wellbeing because coaching helps leaders listen, ask, understand, and empower rather than simply advise, solve, or instruct.
- The strongest strategic point was that wellbeing and coaching are means, while the larger organizational outcomes are sustainable productivity, continuity, and trust.
- AI was discussed as a major source of pressure, but the session reframed the issue: the future is not “human versus AI”; it is “human capability enhanced by technology.”
- Short-term workforce reduction or replacing people with technology may improve numbers temporarily, but it can damage trust, belonging, reputation, and long-term sustainability.
- Work-life balance was framed as personal and results-based. Leaders may be more convinced when employees demonstrate both strong results and sustainable self-management.
- The “new normal” requires rethinking how work is done. What previously took ten days may now need to be achieved in two, which requires technology, new skills, and renewed personal purpose.
- Leadership development without conviction has limited impact. The session emphasized that many leaders acquire skills without changing the beliefs that shape their behavior.
- The concept of “just culture” was introduced as a practical way to respond fairly to different employee behaviors: human error, at-risk behavior, and reckless behavior.

4. Key Insights

- Wellbeing must be designed systemically: A strong wellbeing program begins by assessing what already exists, identifying gaps across wellbeing dimensions, designing targeted interventions, implementing through policies and systems, measuring impact, and updating what no longer works.
- Human-centered workplaces require human-centered leaders: Leaders influence wellbeing through the quality of listening, fairness, psychological safety, trust, and the ability to see employees beyond their roles and numbers.
- Coaching culture is not a training event: It becomes real when leaders think, listen, and relate like coaches in everyday conversations, performance discussions, development planning, and moments of pressure.
- Wellbeing is both organizational and personal: Organizations create conditions, but individuals also need to own their wellbeing through physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional practices.

- AI anxiety should be addressed through capability-building: Employees do not need to know every tool; they need to learn the AI and technology applications most relevant to their work and future employability.
- Trust is the bridge between leaders and employees: Leaders usually hold broader information, while employees hold direct operational experience. Productivity and continuity improve when both sides trust each other and see each other as partners.
- Burnout and insecurity reduce sustainable contribution: Employees cannot consistently give their best when they feel replaceable, unsafe, or emotionally depleted.
- Results and wellbeing should not be treated as opposites: The session encouraged a more mature view where healthy, balanced employees can produce strong results over time.
- The future workplace will be faster and more complex: Human capability alone is not enough, and technology alone is not enough. The future requires integration, adaptability, and ongoing learning.
- Just culture supports accountability without blame: Not every situation needs coaching. Some situations require education, some require coaching, and some require accountability.

5. Workplace Wellbeing Model Highlighted

Dimension	Examples Discussed	Practical Meaning
Financial Wellbeing	Financial awareness sessions, advisory support, interest-free loans, support for managing personal finances.	Reduce financial stress so employees can focus, plan, and feel more secure.
Physical Wellbeing	Health checks, blood pressure and sugar screening, healthy food options, gym memberships, walking and physical activity initiatives.	Create daily conditions that support health, energy, and prevention.
Psychological / Emotional Wellbeing	Awareness sessions, breathing practices, mental health support, special leaves, self-care practices.	Help employees regulate stress, recover, and maintain emotional resilience.
Social Wellbeing	Volunteering programs, connection activities, team belonging, community initiatives.	Strengthen relationships, belonging, and meaning at work.
Career Wellbeing	Mentoring, career paths, personal development, learning opportunities.	Help employees see a future in the organization and grow their professional potential.
Spiritual / Meaning Wellbeing	Reflection, values, personal responsibility, meaning and purpose.	Connect work with deeper values and personal direction.
Organizational / Environmental Wellbeing	Policies, clear systems, reduced bureaucracy, positive leadership, psychological safety.	Make the workplace itself easier, safer, and more enabling for people to perform.

6. Building a Wellbeing and Coaching Culture

Step	Description	Why It Matters
1. Assess Current Reality	Identify existing wellbeing initiatives and gaps across physical, emotional, financial, social, spiritual, and career wellbeing.	Avoid duplicating activities and understand what employees actually need.
2. Define the Purpose	Clarify whether the aim is productivity, employee experience, retention, market reputation, awards, or culture transformation.	Purpose guides design and prevents wellbeing from becoming scattered activities.
3. Design the Programs	Create wellbeing interventions that match identified gaps and employee needs.	Programs become relevant and practical rather than generic.
4. Implement Through Owners	Engage HR, IT, leaders, policy owners, and other stakeholders to embed wellbeing into systems and practices.	Wellbeing requires shared accountability, not only HR ownership.
5. Measure Impact	Track participation, experience, productivity indicators, retention, and qualitative stories.	Measurement helps leaders see value and supports continuous improvement.
6. Review and Refresh	Continue what works, improve what is weak, and remove programs that no longer add value.	Sustainability depends on learning, adaptation, and evidence.

7. Dialogue and Q&A Harvest

Discussion Area	What Participants Raised	Insight Captured
AI Pressure and Job Security	AI is creating pressure for employees, managers, and organizations, especially when people fear replacement.	The key response is not fear, but relevant reskilling and human-technology integration.
Regional Uncertainty	War, economic pressure, and living with the unknown affect employees' psychological state and ability to plan.	Wellbeing must account for external realities, not only internal workplace factors.
Employees as Numbers	Participants expressed concern that some organizations focus only on profit and treat employees as spreadsheet numbers.	Short-term cost decisions can undermine long-term trust, loyalty, and belonging.
Work-Life Balance	A participant noted that some leaders still equate success with exhaustion and overwork.	Balance becomes more credible when connected to sustained performance and clear results.

Discussion Area	What Participants Raised	Insight Captured
The New Normal	Some participants reflected that earlier work environments felt more productive and cohesive despite heavier demands.	The workplace has changed; renewing purpose and integrating technology are now essential.
Leadership Development Gap	Participants questioned why leaders attend high-quality development programs but do not apply what they learn.	Skills without conviction rarely change behavior. Leadership beliefs must shift, not only leadership knowledge.
Coachability and Employee Behavior	A participant asked whether every employee is coachable and how coaching fits into workplace wellbeing.	Not every situation calls for coaching. Just culture helps leaders choose education, coaching, or accountability based on behavior.
UAE Experience	Dr. Fatima shared practices from the UAE, including workplace happiness, reducing bureaucracy, simplifying procedures, and wellbeing programs.	System-level design can directly improve employee wellbeing, decision-making, and ease of work.

8. Practical Takeaways

For Leaders

- Listen before solving. Employees often need to feel heard before they can perform at their best.
- Make wellbeing part of leadership behavior, not only part of HR programs.
- Use coaching behaviors in everyday conversations: ask, listen, clarify, empower, and avoid unnecessary blame.
- Build trust by explaining decisions where possible and recognizing the human impact of change.
- Reframe AI as a capability enhancer and support people to learn the tools relevant to their roles.
- Avoid treating exhaustion as proof of commitment. Sustainable performance requires energy, health, and clarity.

For HR, L&D, and OD Professionals

- Map current wellbeing initiatives against a holistic wellbeing framework to identify gaps.
- Link wellbeing to organizational outcomes such as productivity, retention, engagement, continuity, and employer reputation.
- Embed coaching capability into leadership development, performance conversations, promotion criteria, and people-management expectations.
- Review policies and procedures that create unnecessary bureaucracy or emotional load for employees.
- Measure both quantitative and qualitative outcomes, including employee stories and examples of behavior change.
- Create practical AI learning pathways focused on role-specific use cases rather than general fear or hype.

For Coaches

- Help leaders distinguish between symptoms and root causes when addressing burnout, disengagement, or low performance.
- Support clients in renewing their personal mission in light of the “new normal.”
- Use a just-culture lens to help leaders respond fairly and effectively to different behaviors.
- Invite leaders to explore the beliefs behind their actions, not only the skills they need to develop.
- Encourage clients to define their personal wellbeing toolkit across physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions.

For Employees and Professionals

- Take personal responsibility for wellbeing instead of waiting only for the organization or leader to change.
- Learn the technologies and AI tools that are most relevant to your role and future employability.
- Demonstrate sustainable performance through results, learning, health, and balance.
- Regularly revisit your purpose and redefine what success means in the current stage of your life and career.

9. Memorable Statements

“The happy employee is a productive employee.”

“Wellbeing is not the goal; it is a means.”

“Coaching is a means to wellbeing, and wellbeing supports sustainability and productivity.”

“The future is not human versus AI; it is human capability enhanced by technology.”

“Reducing people may treat the symptom, but it does not treat the real disease.”

“Do not wait for someone to train you for the future; learning technology is a personal commitment.”

“Just culture means choosing the right response for the right behavior.”

“Wellbeing is a personal responsibility.”