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Augmenting, Not Replacing:
The Role of AI in Executive Coaching

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Introduction

The rapid rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Generative AI (Gen-AI) is reshaping industries, workflows, and decision-making processes. Executive coaching—a discipline grounded in trust, reflection, and transformation—is no exception. Coaches are beginning to integrate AI tools into their practices to enhance efficiency, deepen insights, and extend reach. Yet, at its core, coaching remains a profoundly human endeavor, requiring interpretation, empathy, and the relational skills that no algorithm can replicate.

The Case for AI Augmentation in Coaching

AI offers significant opportunities to support coaching without eroding its human foundation. Practical applications include:

- **Feedback and Insight Generation:** AI can analyze leadership assessments, surveys, and communication patterns to surface themes and growth areas.
- **Content and Resource Development:** Coaches use generative AI to produce tailored learning materials, reflection prompts, or summaries that meet client needs.
- **Progress Tracking:** Automated reminders, dashboards, and analytics enable both coach and client to monitor development milestones.

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- **Administrative Efficiency:** Scheduling, documentation, and reporting can be streamlined through AI tools, freeing time for the relational aspects of coaching.

By managing the mechanical aspects of the coaching process, AI allows human coaches to spend more time on what matters most—building trust, holding space for reflection, and challenging leaders to grow.

The Enduring Value of Human Coaches

Despite these advancements, AI cannot replicate the subtleties of human connection. Empathy, intuition, and contextual judgment are essential in navigating leadership complexities. Effective coaching depends on the coach's ability to read between the lines, interpret unspoken cues, and co-create meaning with clients—dimensions beyond the reach of algorithms. In a time of disruption and uncertainty, leaders need more than data-driven advice; they need a trusted partner who can help them process ambiguity, confront blind spots, and embrace personal transformation. AI may offer information, but human coaches enable wisdom.

Looking Ahead

The future of executive coaching lies not in replacing coaches with AI, but in equipping them to harness AI responsibly. Coaches who combine data-driven insights with relational intelligence will elevate their practice, offering clients both precision and presence. The key is to treat AI as an augmentation tool—a partner in service of human development, not a substitute for it.

Possible Research-Base Opportunities

In 2024, an amazing research paper was published by Lara F. Calasso, Hansjörg Künzli, and Michael J. Burtscher, in which they investigated the factors that make executive coaching effective. They reviewed nineteen (19) different empirical studies that assessed actual coaching behaviours that correlated to effective client-identified valuable outcomes. To benefit from the full effort of this study, this article is a "must-read" article for anybody wishing to better understand coaching behaviours that drive valued outcomes for their clients. They further summarized these behaviours and classified them into common themes using thematic analysis, into a temporal order of five distinct phases within the evolution of the coaching relationship, that was informed by Whitmore's 1996 GROW Model. Interestingly, they found that coaching behaviours differed over the five phases, and provided a detailed illustration of what happens within executive coaching on a behavioural level. Most notably, no mention of AI inputs or correlations to AI-inputs to client valued outcomes are reported anywhere in their findings!

Call to Action

Organizations, coaching firms, and leaders must ask: How can we integrate AI into coaching practices in a way that enhances impact without sacrificing humanity? The answer lies in experimentation, dialogue, and ethical design. Begin by exploring AI tools that streamline your

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coaching processes, but commit to safeguarding the human-centered core of coaching. The future of coaching is not human or AI—it is human with AI.

Conclusion

Executive coaching is entering a new chapter—one where technology and humanity intersect. AI brings efficiency, data, and insight, but the essence of coaching remains rooted in trust, empathy, and transformative dialogue. The most powerful coaching of the future will not come from algorithms alone, nor from tradition unassisted by innovation. It will come from coaches who skillfully blend the precision of AI with the wisdom of human connection. By embracing augmentation rather than substitution, we can ensure that leaders are not only better informed, but also better supported in becoming the kind of leaders our organizations and societies need most.

References

Calasso, Lara F., et al. "What Are Executive Coaches Actually Doing and When Are They Doing It? A Systematic Review of Coaching Behavior." Consulting Psychology Journal, vol. 76, no. 3, Sept. 2024, pp. 238–258.