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## Toward the Digital Coaching: Personalization, Adaptation and Challenges

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**Abstract:** With the arrival of the digital age, coaching, like other disciplines that focus on the human being, finds itself in a conjunctural break with its professional framework centred on well-being, empathy, direct dialogue and the immediate reactions and emotions of the client. The digital alternative to coaching, characterized by the use of online platforms, mobile applications, live chat, video calls and other digital resources, is advancing in a transcendental and fragmentary direction rather than an immanent one. In this work, we will explore the concept of digitalising life coaching in various situations such as during pandemics, in busy schedules, in remote areas, and with considerations of discretion and anonymity. We will begin by outlining, in a linear and progressive manner, the transition from the demythification of traditional face-to-face coaching to the personalisation of digital coaching. Secondly, we will list the advantages and disadvantages of digital alternative. Finally, we will present some illustrative statistics in order to clarify and specify our theme.

**Key words:** challenges, digitalisation, life coaching, personalization

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Digital life coaching has frequently been discussed within wellness, health and sport life coaching, emerged with the practices of Human Potential Movement (HPM), (Spence, 2007) and from humanistic traditions of psychology (Maslow, 1954). Many studies show that with the development of technology, life coaching starts to attract individuals who wish to achieve their personal and professional goals, it also assists them in recognizing their strengths, aspirations and challenging. The foundation of this discipline is due to the work of Albert Ellis as psychologist who is considered as one of the founders of cognitive-behavioural approach therein he prefigures life coaching. In fact, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, Thomas Leonard, popularly known as the father of *professional life coaching*, had raised the profile of coaching life. After him Thomas Leonard, known as the "father of coaching,". He played a major role in defining the modern coaching as a distinct

profession during the decency 1980s and 1990s. He is also the founder of the first formal coaching organizations, including the International Coach Federation (ICF) and Coach University. His philosophy is focused on six principles: Self-Discovery and Empowerment, Focus on Personal fulfilment, values-based coaching, creating systems and tools, focus on balance and the coach-client partnership. In fact, after its foundation until today, the role of the life coaching with digital version is adopted as new alternative and strategy aiming to support individuals to create action plans and move forward with a real and practical collaborative process focused on self-discovery, personal growth, accountability and goal setting.

In this regard, Douglas and MacCauley ( 1999), highlighting the major importance of formal developmental relationships, argue that the overarching aim of digital life coaching is sustained cognitive, behavioural and emotional changes that facilitate goal attainment and the enhance performance and well-being in one's life. Likewise Enhancing relationship and human potential, managing finances, dealing with stress, developing new career directions are the aims and the targets of digital life coaching. Furthermore, a significant shift in theoretical and empirical approach has taken place, leading academics and researchers to use digital life coaching as a methodology for developing an understanding of the processes targeting human development and change. ( Grant, 2003). After this period, many books were published in order to enhance and support this emerging discipline.

Additionally, the role of the life coaching in its digital alternative form today is to help people to take action toward their goals by using excellent questioning, active listening, raising self-awareness and increasing self-confidence to guide individuals toward specific objectives. In other way, digital life coaching isn't therapy and it doesn't focus on looking backward. Instead, it's about looking forward and encouraging people to move toward a place where they want to be. Moreover, it helps people become more productive and achieve a better balance amid consistent changes.

This study the emergence of digital life coaching as a transformative phenomenon and examines its evolution from traditional face-to-face coaching to digital alternatives. It evaluates the capacity of digital life coaching to adapt and personalize its services, as well as the challenges and limitations it faces when compared to traditional methods. First, we will discuss the stages of demythologizing the traditional approach, which relies on direct or physical contact. Specifically, we will focus on Media Richness Theory (L.Daft! &Robert,H.Lengel,1984) to illustrate how digital tools have evolved to enhance personalized coaching algorithms, adaptive systems and real-time feedback. Next, we will outline the benefits of digital coaching by examining both Cognitive Load Theory and Accessibility digital Theory. These frameworks will help highlight the importance of geographical, financial accessibility and technological accessibility ( e.g., apps, platforms and websites). We will Then, we will then examine the issues, modalities and methods unique to digital alternative, drawing on the Technology Acceptance Model ( Fred Davis, 1989) in order to deduce how uses' intention behaviour to use technology influences their adoption of various digital coaching tools. We will also consider how the interface, functionality, and perceived value of these tools affect user acceptance. Finally, we will present statistical data to evaluate the role of personalization and adaptability in digital coaching. in this part, we will based on both Adaptive Learning Theory ( Yoesoep Edhie Rachmad, 2022) and Self-determination Theory ( Edward Deci and Richard Ryan ,1985) to find out how digital coaching platforms adapt content and coaching techniques to individual clients. We will also examine how the adaptability of digital coaching enhances clients' motivation and engagement, potentially leading to better long-term outcomes . Our approach is principlaly focused on quantitative data in order to demonstrate how digitalization has contributed

to the expansion of life coaching, enabling it to reach a global audience.

### 1- Transformation and demythification

For over 29 years, various media have been utilized to support coaching, beginning with telephone coaching and later expanding to include newer forms like text-based and video communication. In fact, responding to digital transformation, the digital life coaching, especially during and after the pandemic crisis, has become merely and increasingly popular. Accessibility, flexibility and adaptability were and are today the new features. With technological revolution, coaching has gained notable popularity as a human resource, by this way, we notice the existence of a tremendous transformation aiming development intervention and increasing on digital coaching specifically over the past two decades and it has increased after COVID-19 pandemic according to International Coaching Federation (ICF).

This increase in digital life coaching is due to technological transformation, the omnipresence of Artificial Intelligence and the growth of platforms and software providers ( Zoom, Google Meet, Streamyard, etc.). additionally, time efficiency, cost-effectiveness, accessibility and freedom from geographical constraints motivate many clients to choose digital solutions and to access services anywhere ( Kanatouri 2020; Passemore et al.2023).

Complementing these transformative features, digital coaching is highly accessible and flexible in terms of time, and space, allowing easy booking and mobility. It also enables the monitoring of behaviours, thoughts and emotions. On another side, digital environments explore different roles and identities and enhance self-perception. Furthermore, many specialists find that digital environment is perceived more secure and safer than face-to-face environment, these environments, encourage in fact open communication about sensitive states and issues ( Hanumanthu, Domma and Slater 2016; Miyahira et al.2012).

Overall, we can conclude that all these benefits enhance coaching accessibility, effectiveness and experiences while

underlining the diverse potential of digital technologies in all their aspects. Thus, this transformation from traditional life coaching to digital life formats has made it easier for individuals to easily select and opt for this alternative. This figure illustrates and outlines the processes and dynamics between coaches and involvement of digital technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

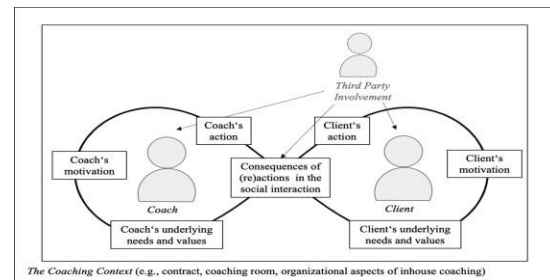


Figure 1. A model of ethical interdependence in coaching (Diller, Passmore, and Frey 2023)

### 2- Strategies for adapting and personalizing digital coaching

Personalizing and adapting digital life coaching requires first of all an adaptive communication style that resonates with each individual coachee's need. This process involves carefully, deeper understanding of specific requirements and customizing content and material. it pushes coaches to include and adapt different supports, videos, interactive models and exercises permanently. Furthermore, the adaptation of digital coaching incorporates diverse contents, delivery methods and structures to session through various channels destined to accommodate varying schedules and preferences. This way of adaptation and personalization can include options like chat messaging, dedicated coaching platforms, video calls, and even communication through social media and email to enhance accessibility and engagement.

Digital coaching often referred to as electronic or e-coaching as well as virtual coaching (e.g. Blok et al., 2017). Researches have shown and highlighted the positive influence of digital coaching on health

outcomes. The modality of coaching emphasizes the personalization of the digital coaching through multiple process: the personalization of goals, collaborative co-creation, facilitating interaction, continuous evaluation, establishing clear goal-setting and effective persuasion techniques.

Various studies indicate that, digital coaching is easily customizable, adjustable and customizable in order to meet individual needs and to be comprehensible.

On another side, it seems to us that digital coaching is primarily designed to emphasize motivational aspects. Moreover, personalized digital coaching involves also a complex and sophisticated process that requires meticulous coordination and precise planning. This process integrates contributions from experts and specialists from different disciplines and fields as computer science, medicine and psychology science. To achieve effective outcomes in sense of adaptation and personalization the strategies of digital coaching target different groups, apply behaviour change techniques and implement suitable strategies.

### **3- Benefits of digital coaching**

Digital coaching provides several distinct advantages and benefits, especially in terms of accessibility. Furthermore, it allows to individuals to connect with coaches regardless of their geographical location, which is especially advantageous and beneficial for people who live in another areas or those who lead busy schedules ( Bak et al.2023; Carson, Choppin, kim and Lee2023). Additionally, there is another key benefit is its and significant advantage is cost-effectiveness. In fact digital coaching permits to people to reduce expenses compared to traditional methods coaching which requires more charges and expenses due to travel. Furthermore, it accommodates modern lifestyle and aligns better with by offering flexible scheduling sessions. Moreover, digital coaching also utilizes platforms and advanced technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) to focus on each individual's specific goals and needs in order to progress and personalize effective coaching experiences. Likewise, digital coaching provides anonymity and privacy, which enabling individuals

to feel more comfortable and share easily their discuss sensitive and personal issues and thoughts in digital setting. Additionally, platforms and software providers ensure that clients' data is kept secure and private by creating a safe environment for interactions between coaches and coaches. A nother benefit of digital coaching consists to ensure continuous support which available through communication outside of scheduled sessions allowing coachees to obviously, reinforce their insights and techniques discussed during their coaching session. This accessibility to diverse resources and global network allows coaches and coachees connect from different backgrounds to connect in order to enrich their experiences and foster cross-cultural understanding.

As a result, we can identify eight main benefits of digital coaching: flexibility, accessibility, personalization, globalization, support, safety and safeguard, convenience and lower costs. However, it's crucial to consider that these benefits of digital coaching can vary depending on social, cultural and ethnic contexts. Moreover, many challenges must be confronted, particularly due to the absence of universally recognized standards and regulations. Trust And credibility. Those credibility and trust remain significant concerns especially for newer or lesser-known coaching platforms , which can cause potential clients to question qualifications coaches and leading them to be cautious. This situation highlights the importance of clear and transparent communication.

### **4- Ways of development: intervention, tools.**

Digital coaching requires specific additional skills. According to Schein (1999) the primary role of coaching is to foster a collaborative exploration of problems and involves a cooperative process between the coach and the client aimed to concretize action plans. In addition to that, Greif, Schmidt, and Thamm (2010) outline six successful steps of effective coaching concentrated on actions of the coach:

- The coach supports the client's learning transfer into practice.
- Feedback about the client's satisfaction with the process and post-action evaluation of progress.
- The coach supports the client's internal and external resource activation
- The coach helps the client set SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound).
- The coach guides the client to identify concrete solutions to the problem.
- The coach provides emotional support and shows empathy.

These essential elements of digital considering these conditions of modality, many issues emerge like the direct communication and feed-back and emotional aspects which are very crucial and important to have a clear idea about what the coachee and his needs. The bellow mentioned the increase of coaching specific-tools from 2004 to 2019

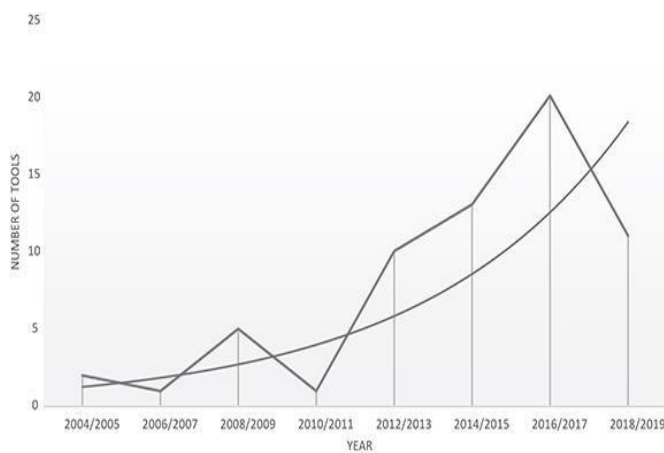


Figure 2: The increase of the coaching specific tools 2004-2019

Walther (1990-1992) finds that despite the fact that strong relationship can be built over computer-mediated communication or computer-based text may take longer to be established. in other words, counselling and psychotherapeutic research supported, empirically this statement and observation h (a.o. Barak,

Hen, Boniel-Nissim, & Shapira, 2008; Cook & Doyle, 2002; Murphy, Mitchell,

& Hallett, 2011; Rice & Love, 1987). These researchers add that visual contact is not efficient and appropriate for all tasks and it seems less comfortable for discussing embarrassing issues.

Furthermore, empirical insights show that technology-mediated involve limited sensory cues and that (Rogers, 1959; Schmidt, Thamm, & Greif, 2008; Stober, 2006). On other side some studies show that leaner media such as online texts and telephone can be viable for developing strong rapport and for facilitating positive coaching outcomes. Here bellow are the different types of basic media that are used to facilitate the digital coaching dialogue and process.

Table 1: Basic media types to facilitate the coaching dialogue

Audio communication and Video communication	3 D graphical self-representation and Text-based communication
Asynchronous Audio messages Asynchronous video chat Synchronous Telephone/ Vo IP Videoconferencing Video-calls, HD	Desktop-based or through HMD, avatar-centric (with built in audio or text chat) Asynchronous text chat/e-mail Synchronous text chat,

That includes also many alternatives as the creation of platforms, videos calls, chatbots and synchronous and asynchronous text-chat. In a similar vein, William, Christie and Short (1979) proposed that media affect interpersonal communication by the investigation of challenges.

Digital coaching tends to solve many problems, here bellow, there is a table to illustrates the diverse types of problem-solving media.

Table 2: Supporting media types to complement the coaching conversation.

Text	Visual and Auditory	Audio-visual
Pre-defined online question sets, reflective journals, online resources (blogs, articles), pre-coaching assessments	Visualisation aids (graphs, online images, mind maps, whiteboard sketches) Podcasts	Interactive/ non-interactive video 3D simulations (virtual worlds, constellation tools

Furthermore, comparative studies between digital coaching and human coaching ( traditional coaching) show that human coaching involves many problems and difficulties as bias, conceptual clarity, freedom of expression pressure and language, however, digital coaching can, principally involve these issues through accessibility, spatial and timing flexibility (Chatterjee, 2021)

Harris and Endsor, (2018) underline that there are already over 500,000 chatbots available to us, offering customer service, learning support, travel advice, companionship and even therapy. Furthermore, develop digital coaching has progressed through many initiatives and diverse chatbots used as advisors’ coaches in research such:

- *Vicci* : it’s anonymous entity based on a chatbot platform that coaching people to achieve their goals, it’s created by the University of Stellenbosch

Business School in South Africa, it’s based on interactions.

- *Butterfly.ai*: this chatbot is focused on soft skills and assist human being to become an exceptional leader by the personalization of coaching and guidance, it’s based on AI.
- *Coachbot* : it’s a coach team where members of a team are invited to participate in a series of task-based interactions, that facilitates discussions based on diversity of thinking.
- *Coach otto* : it’s developed by Dan Tomaschko Jeff Orkin , it consists to identify social norms and patterns of dialogue by the creation of machines which converse with human beings.

In sum, other chatbots have developed in order to facilitate the tasks between coaches and coachees and to replace coaches such *Wysa*, *Youper*, *Emoquo*, *Maslo*. Today this progress continues in a linear vision targeting the promotion and the creation of chatbots coaching.

Today more applications (apps) and more platforms are available in order to develop digital coaching through many shapes and forms including Skype, e-mail , host meeting platforms such Google Meet, Zoom, Teams, YouTube, reels, and TikTok facilitate more personal connections. This kind of coaching has been developed and raised with the emerging capabilities of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Moreover , this choice encourages coaches to embrace video content to stand out in a competitive landscape. In other words, transformation through the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in coaching helps to discover human capabilities, enhances client relationships and generates innovative ideas.

It permits also to break geographical limitations in coaching and that can now serve clients in hybrid modality local and global. This trend, facilitated by asynchronous coaching and technological

advancements, allows coaches to broaden their reach beyond local markets and to stay permanently informed about global trends. It permits the personalization of the coaching programs and enhances the interactive and customised nature of coaching experiences.

Digital coaching becomes challenging for smaller or newer platforms and necessitates differentiation of strategies to stand out in a crowded market.

## 5- Statistics

According to the Digital Global Overview January 2022 report, the global number of internet users over the past decade increased from 2.17 billion to 4.95 billion (average growth 8.58% per year). Furthermore, this increasing caused a huge increasing of the social media users, the number goes from 1.48 billion users to 4.62 billion users in January 2022 (average growth 12.11% per year). Comparing the growth in January 2021 of the total number of internet users and active social media users, we find that the number was 4.0% and 10.1%, respectively.

We will expose and present statistics which originate from a comprehensive analysis undertaken by the CoachRanks team, drawing insights from the International Coaching Federation's Global Coaching Studies. These statistics show that online coaching platforms market prevent \$4.5 billion users by 2028 of, with a great raise estimated by 13.03% from 2021 to 2028. In the similar vein Verified Market Research shows that North America holds the largest market share raising to 11.92% during the forecast period.

Talking space, we find that Schools and universities constitute the largest segment of the online coaching market in 2020. projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 12.01% from 2021 to 2018. The same source notices the existence of notable segments include Business Meetings, Corporate Enterprises and Professional Training Institutes.

This increasing is due to technology integration and the diversity of virtual platforms like Zoom and scheduling tools such as Paperbell which enhance global digital accessibility including even those less tech-savvy.

## 6- Psychological and sociological issues:

The desire of individuals to actively contribute a to their own development is deeply influenced by the social and psychological environments and contexts in which they are situated. In fact, in term of the development of personality, individuals are expected to require both autonomy and the ability one's own identity. However, this process is significantly by external social contexts often define the possibility for personal growth.

Smartphones, in general, have powerful technical abilities to facilitate personal development interventions. These devices offer sophisticated, widely applicable and psychologically attractive in order to increase user engagement. Researches indicate that people form strong emotional attachment to their smartphones, which further increases their participation in such interventions. In addition, digital tools foster individual autonomy and internal accountability, both of which are essential for sustained personal for change.

In a study using the generic-change factors model (Allemand&Flückiger,2017) and examining the effectiveness of two-week digital intervention targeting self-discipline, facet of consciousness, openness to action or facet of openness to experience of many participants ( Wepfer, Stieger,et al.,2020), as result, studies show that personality facets can be changed by using a short-term digital intervention with high treatment intensity. Further supporting the potential for digital interventions to modify personality, a study by Stieger, Flückige, et al. (2021) examined the effectiveness of a three-month digital-coaching intervention targeting personality traits. Using a randomised controlled trial with a large adult sample, the researchers found that the smartphone application PEACH facilitated significant in the targeted personality traits and provided a huge interaction. Study demonstrated that personality

development can be actively shaped through digital means.

In line with this, growing body of research in the psychological and psychotherapeutic literature that supports the feasibility and effectiveness of online and telephone-based therapeutic interventions, which have been shown to be efficacious effective as face to face treatments ( O. Barak et al., 2008; Murphy, Michetel, & Hallet,2011;Conoley, & Brossart, 2002; Simon et al.,2004; Cook & Doyle, 2002; Lovell et al.,2007; Ludman et al.,2007; Mohr et al., 2012). Similarly, research in the medical field has found that computer-generated humanoids (virtual humans) can overcome psychological barriers by interacting by with patients in natural language, providing a space for individuals to be engaged honestly and openly (Lucas et al.,2014). This suggests that assisted treatments have empirically been validated to be a cost-effective method to assist clients with a variety of psychological issues (Newman et al., 2011). Additionally, digital tools like apps have been shown to enhance positive psychological skills such as sensitivity, imagination and empathy which all essential for psychological development and personal growth. ( Huhuet et al.,2016)

Sociological research has increasing emphasized that individuals tend to treat computers as social actors or even as peers (Sundar,2004). This aligns with meta-analysis realized by Nass and Moon (200) who demonstrated that humans exhibit behaviours such as politeness and reciprocity toward computers. Furthermore, communication messages, particularly in digital contexts, are impacted by socio-emotional dimensions including passivity and agency, as well as the desire of social connections (Bakan,1966).

## **5- Limitations**

The wider usage and adoption of digital tools, including AI, will lead to significant ethical, technical and moral challenges. In this context, we note that many limitations are related to the complexity of adaptive situations. Furthermore, technical challenges include disruptions due to momentaneous breaks in the Internet connexion, the complex of handling certain tools, and limitations in software capabilities.

On another side, the absence of physical presence in video communication or telephone interactions could create challenges related to body language. This involves non-verbal cues such as: gestures posture, facial expressions, physical presence and hand movements. The limitations of text-based communication present also challenge, as it lacks crucial non-verbal cues like bitch, speed of speech, tone of voice, breathing patterns, body language and silences. All of which convey essential information in face-to-face interactions.

Ethical challenges associated with the use of digital media could also pose significant risks, particularly regarding breach of clients' confidentiality and data privacy. Moreover, potential risks can be observed during the exchange information through electronic means because of the existence of the history of any interaction. Thus, possibility of some accidental disclosure or breach higher than face-to-face coaching conversation. Furthermore, these ethical challenges can extend to issues related to recording traffic emailing and hacking computers via virsues. For Jones and Moffitt (2016), similar ethical challenges are encountered in mental healthcare field, where specific policies and safeguards are necessary to enhance these concerns.

Additionally, coaching tools introduce hermeneutic challenges, they often include visualizations such as drawing, graphs and progress charts. These require permanent and ongoing interpretation by the coach in order to obtain insights into the client's motional states and thought processes. In other words, it is crucial that these hermeneutic challenges must reflect and represent the client's world own view.

## Conclusion

This study underscores the growing demand for digital coaching as a real response to evolving personal and market needs. This transformative shift has fostered a synergy between human intuition and technological innovation. This, in other words, reshape the future of coaching by unlocking new opportunities for growth and fulfilment for both coaches and coachees. Moreover, the flexibility by removing geographical barriers through online access to coaching materials and sessions reinforces hybrid model that ensures a personalised and comprehensive coaching experience. This, in return, attracts a broader user audience and contributing to the overall coaching market.

The demythification of traditional face-to-face coaching methods is increasingly necessary due to advancement in technology, new intervention modalities and the ongoing digital revolution. In fact, adapting and personalizing digital coaching to answering to demands of diverse contexts and timelines presents a serious challenge which implies policies, practices and new alternatives.

Despite of the advantages of digital coaching, the personalization and generalization requires local and global commitment, unanimous agreements, conventions and universally accepted standards and regulation in order to protect personal information and the task of coaches over the world to handle many challenges and limitations.

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