

# Coaching at Scale

AI Democratizes  
Leadership Development

**joshbersin**

It's no wonder athletes, executives, and sports teams use coaches, as they can help jump-start potential and escalate performance to much higher levels. A coach will assess your current situation, help you identify gaps and think through where you need help, and then suggest ways to improve. Coaches not only help many employees in their careers but also provide guidance for a better work/life balance, helping them adjust to changes in the workplace, especially in view of the post-pandemic world.

But coaches can be expensive and hard to find, so organizations rarely offer a coach to everyone. In fact, many companies only assign coaches to solve management problems, leaving most employees unable to get this kind of help. However, a new breed of intelligent matching companies like BetterUp and Torch are now making coaching more affordable and scalable. Companies from Chevron to AB InBev to Warner Brothers and Salesforce now give access to coaching deep down in the organization, as part of their leadership development programs.

Ultimately, of course, every manager should be a good coach. Our research on performance management shows the "coaching and development" model is now the most popular and successful way to manage people<sup>1</sup>. Companies have moved away from "competitive assessment," and now want managers to understand people's needs, help them prioritize, and coach individuals for development, career growth, and performance.

## Democratizing Leadership Development Coaching with AI

What if you could give every employee in your company a coach that helps them with developmental suggestions at any time? AI-based platforms like Cultivate remove the need to prioritize who gets coaching. All employees can get their own digital buddy that "sits on their shoulder" and helps them along, suggesting how to better communicate, collaborate, and work with others—and without taking any time out of their day. The AI syncs to the employee's everyday behavior as it provides continuous feedback. Think of it as the smartwatch for business relationships.

AI has become a part of our daily lives. Almost every application we use (from Spotify to Facebook to Uber) uses AI to recommend songs, news, or the best route to drive to your destination. We ask Alexa to set a timer, use our email system to help us find focused messages, and if we do not speak a language, we use Google Translate.

At work, Cortana or Microsoft Viva can tell us when to take a break, put in focus time, and stop working after hours. Our email system recommends which documents to attach, corrects our spelling, and suggests follow-up actions. And new tools from Google find pictures and answer questions without us even needing to ask.

While these are great tools for day-to-day productivity, they do not help hone leadership skills, communicate better, or recognize people more equitably. Coaching is still seen as an inherently human capability: While one in three people thinks AI is better at maintaining work schedules than their manager, the same amount of people thinks their manager is better in coaching than AI.<sup>2</sup> However, more and more of our communications are now digital. Microsoft's Work Trend Index from March 2021 shows meetings have more than doubled between February 2020 and February 2021, chats are up 45%, and 40.6 billion more emails have been sent<sup>3</sup>.

All these digital communications do a lot more than transfer information. We send many signals without realizing it because our underlying messages are often unconscious. But the people we work with may draw their own conclusions, impacting their sense of belonging, engagement, retention, and overall experience—and ultimately their performance and productivity.

If we respond quickly to a team member, we show them they are important to us. Checking in more with some team members than with others can indicate bias and favoritism. The tone of our emails can be either directive or inquisitive, positive or negative. We may not always ask for opinions and instead just tell people what to do.

<sup>1</sup> [joshbersin.com/2018/11/we-wasted-ten-years-talking-about-performance-ratings-the-seven-things-weve-learned/](https://joshbersin.com/2018/11/we-wasted-ten-years-talking-about-performance-ratings-the-seven-things-weve-learned/)

<sup>2</sup> [www.oracle.com/corporate/pressrelease/robots-at-work-101519.html](https://www.oracle.com/corporate/pressrelease/robots-at-work-101519.html)  
<sup>3</sup> [www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/hybrid-work](https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/hybrid-work)

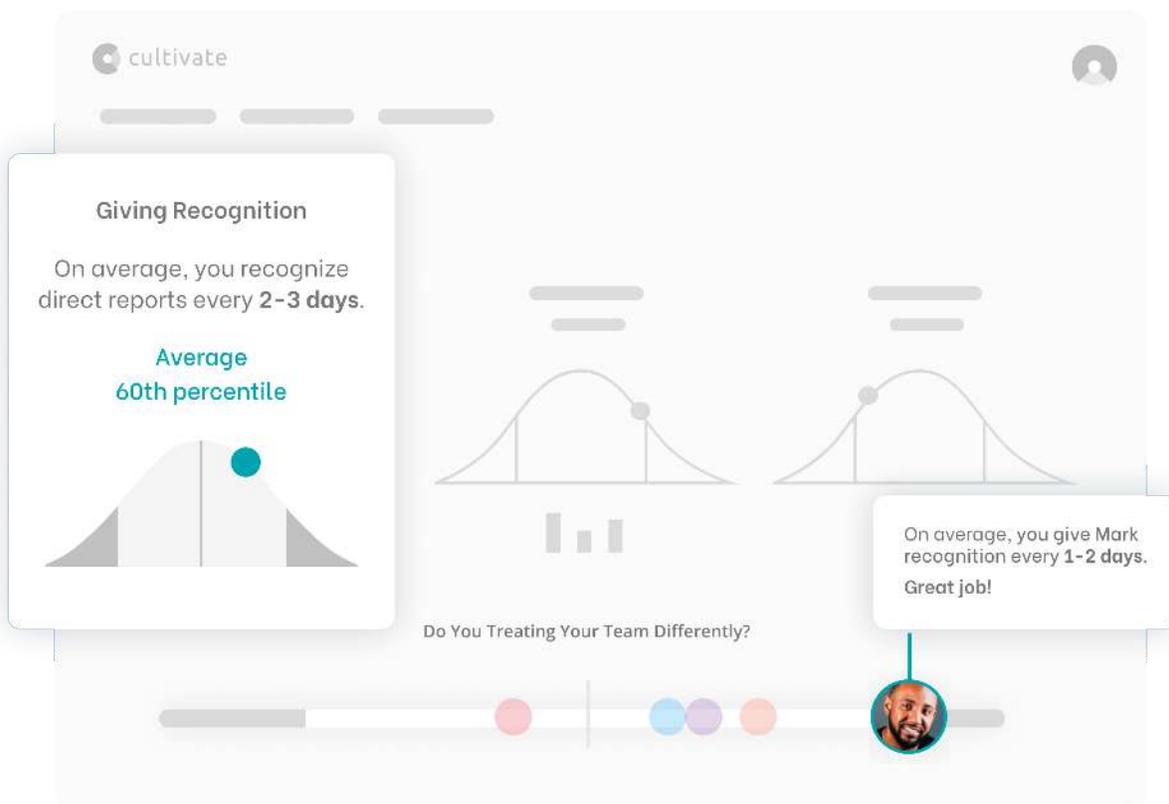
New technologies can link into all these underlying messages, recognize patterns, and suggest solutions to improve, thereby making us better communicators, leaders, teammates, and salespeople. And that's where AI comes in. Natural language processing of email and chat messages, organizational network analysis to identify connections, meeting time analysis, and response frequency all provide a full picture of our digital communications. An AI coach, however, observes your digital behavior to help you get better at power skills like communication, leadership, and relationship-building. See Figure 1.

After you opt in and give the system permission to digest meetings, emails, and content, it starts analyzing all these factors and then provides in-the-flow insights tailored to you, with specific suggestions on how to improve. For example, if you

are a people leader, the AI looks at how much time you spend with your direct reports, how quickly you respond to each of them, what tone you use with each, and how much recognition you give them. Then, when you go into a meeting with one of your team members, it emails you suggestions to improve your interactions, e.g., if you don't recognize that person as much as others on your team, it may offer an article on ways to recognize people, as well as quick tips to increase recognition.

Similarly, if you are a team member, it gives you insights about your digital relationships with others and highlights improvement areas. In today's agile world, anybody might serve as a team leader, facilitating discussions, getting input, and driving work forward. Or, if you are a salesperson, it can help hone your sales skills. In today's hybrid model, many of your sales interactions are also digital.

Figure 1: Example of AI Coaching



Source: Cultivate, 2021.

# Benefits of AI-Based Coaching

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We talked with several Cultivate clients, and they all love AI coaching. We heard it helps “make the unseen seen,” provides nudges to help with more effective collaboration, and it develops skill sets to enable one to become a better leader, teammate, or salesperson. Importantly, this can happen without interrupting the workday. Bite-size insights are served up when needed in the flow of work.

The benefits of AI coaching are significant for both the company as well as the employee.

## For companies:

- **Easy to set up.** AI-based coaching with technology like Cultivate, which plugs into your email, chat, and calendar system, is easy to set up, works with any email or chat system, and is ready to use without any training.
- **No need to administer in-house.** Nobody needs to administer it or enroll people in it, like you would have to do with traditional leadership development programs. The system starts learning as soon as you connect and keeps getting better because of the embedded machine learning.
- **High participation rate and user satisfaction.** Participation is about two to three times higher than traditional voluntary training programs. The 80% of pilot participants said they wanted to continue using it because it was so helpful. People love it because it helps them learn and develop in the flow of work. If people keep coming back for more in a voluntary program, that indicates it is useful.
- **Positive behavior change.** Whether your goal is to improve the digital relationships of your people (like PwC), or to cement specific leadership behaviors (like SAP), the nudging and personalized insights help with learning.
- **Increased employee engagement and retention.** Better communication, collaboration, and teamwork means happier employees—and that in turn increases engagement. A leader at BASF said, “If Cultivate only

prevents one person from leaving BASF, it pays for itself. This may be an employee who finds that their relationship with their manager improves. Or an employee who sees Cultivate’s use as a signal that BASF cares about their workplace welfare. It could also be a leader who views the tool as an indication that BASF is invested in their professional growth, as well.”

- **Culture change.** Aggregating results to a team or organizational level shows patterns and areas of opportunity. In addition to the culture change that happens when leaders change their behavior, companies can also take broader strategic actions to shape the culture positively.
- **Better performance outcomes.** When managers ask people for more of their opinions, they give them autonomy and agency: two factors shown to have a positive impact on outcomes. Similarly, recognition has been shown as a key outcome driver by various studies.

## For employees and managers:

- **In-the-flow development.** Employees and managers are so busy, and many don’t have time to take another training course that might not fit their needs. Customized, bite-size insights served up when needed don’t take a lot of time and make you a lot better.
- **Better digital communication and collaboration.** Most people feel they have room to grow in communication, and digital communication is at the heart of communication today. Getting real-time, always on, and helpful insights for improvement is a big bonus for people who want to improve their skill sets.
- **Increased self-awareness and emotional intelligence.** Research from Cultivate shows that nine in ten users of AI-based coaching say the use has improved their self-awareness. When people see the impact their communication behavior has on others, they become more empathetic to others’ needs.

- Increased trust in the company.** Our research on employee experience excellence identified trust in the organization as the most important element of employee experience.<sup>4</sup> When you provide people with a coach—human or AI-based—it demonstrates the company cares about them, and that in turn increases trust. Empathetic, transparent leadership communication is another factor in trust, and the coach helps with that, too.

## Digital Behaviors Matter

The pandemic has shifted our communication patterns. Where some communication was face to face and some was digital, today's remote or hybrid world of work makes all communication digital and therefore trackable, which enables AI to provide coaching.

Meanwhile, the way we manage has changed, too. Gone are the days where the boss at the top of the organization chart passed

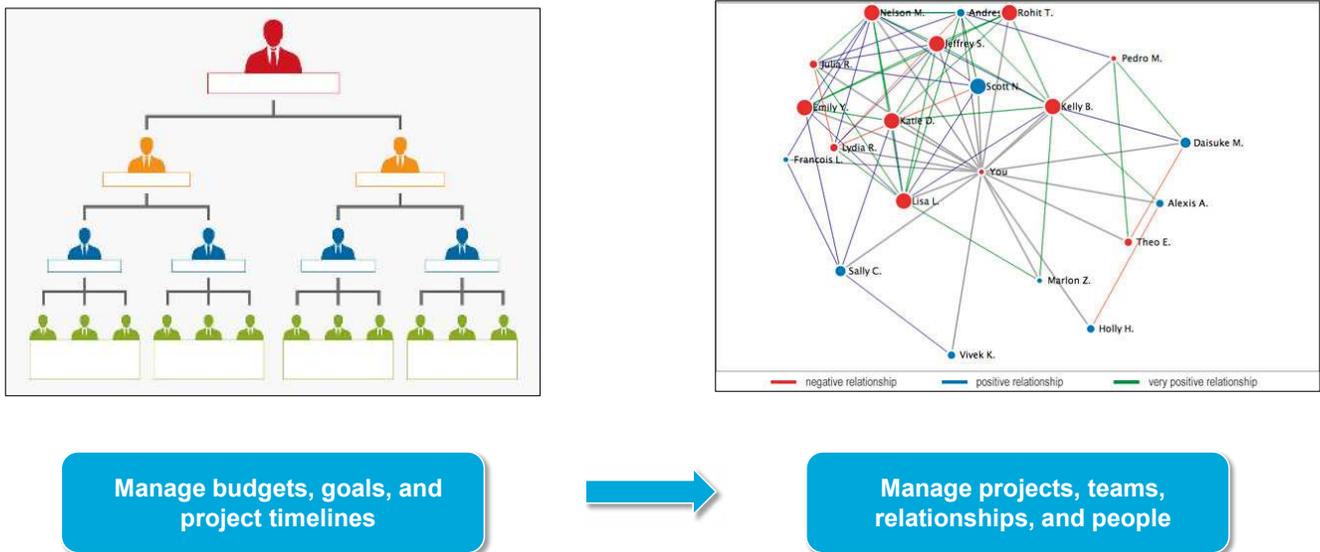
down commands to their direct reports, who then executed on it. The concept of a "network of teams" has been around for a long time, but behaviors and mindsets changed in response to the pandemic, making this idea a reality. People across different groups worked together to create new systems, and worked in agile ways like never before. Today, anybody in the company can lead teams, projects, or work, using cross-functional relationships to make change happen (see Figure 2).

Professional services companies have always worked like that. They quickly bring people together on teams to work on client projects and then disband these teams. Now many companies are following similar methods.

However, when everybody in the company can be a leader, everybody needs support to lead well. AI-based coaching gives each person insights to manage projects, teams, relationships, and people better.

With new ways of working, the leadership capabilities your company needs are changing, too.

**Figure 2: Leaders Can Be Anywhere in the Company**



Source: Josh Bersin Research, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Employee Experience Excellence study, Josh Bersin Research, June 2021

And when our relationships improve, so do results. Better projects mean happier customers, more financial success, and more innovation.

You may not have the time or resources to give formal communication training or leadership development to everybody, or provide everybody with their own human coach, but you can easily provide them with technology that helps them get better at the human skills they need:

- Communication across remote or distributed teams
- Emotional intelligence
- Cross-functional collaboration
- Leading through change

All of these are critical in the new world of work, as the latest LinkedIn Learning study reveals.<sup>5</sup>

## Human Coach or AI-Based Coach?

What are the differences between AI-based coaches and human coaches? It is really like comparing apples and oranges. You can see the human coach as the macrocoach, available periodically for the questions the coachee wants to discuss, which sometimes include big strategic topics, and facilitating the coachee to find their own answers through thoughtful questions. For example, if you are looking to discuss a career change or big life decisions, a human coach can be invaluable, helping you to find your path. Technologies from companies like BetterUp and Torch make human coaches more affordable and connect you with the right coach using AI-based matching.

Your AI-based coach will not discuss questions with you. Instead, it gives you insights you can't get from a human coach. Available all the time, anytime, and observing all your digital behaviors, digesting the content of your emails, and then recommending suggested actions and learning, you could see it as a microcoach. See Figure 3.

Figure 3: Human Coach vs. AI-Based Coach

	Human Coach	AI-Based Coach
<b>Use cases</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bigger, strategic topics (e.g., career coaching, life decisions)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observable digital behaviors (e.g., communication pattern, frequency, speed, content of emails)</li> </ul>
<b>Availability and duration of coaching relationship</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At targeted times (e.g., 30 minutes every other week), over specified time period like 6 months</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anytime, all the time, for as long as you opt in, and without any time commitment from you</li> </ul>
<b>How coaching occurs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion-based, coach asks questions and facilitates responses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observations and recommendations based on digital behaviors, as just-in-time nudges</li> </ul>
<b>How results are measured</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behavior change evaluated outside the coaching session, with a separate assessment tool (e.g., 360-feedback, employee surveys)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behavior change is measured and reported directly inside the coaching tool, with immediate insights if a behavior improved</li> </ul>

Source: Josh Bersin Research, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> LinkedIn 2021 Workplace Learning Report, 2021, [www.learning.linkedin.com/resources/workplace-learning-report](http://www.learning.linkedin.com/resources/workplace-learning-report)

The strengths of human and AI-based coaches are complementary as they are good at different things. Together, human coaches and AI coaching can give you a comprehensive solution. People are much better at discussions than AI, and AI is much better than people in analyzing large amounts of data quickly and consistently, based on rules.

For example, your AI-based coach might surface biases in your behaviors toward specific team members based on your digital behavior. A discussion with your human coach will help you understand the deeper issues at play and identify sustainable longer-term solutions like getting to know those team members you don't spend enough time with more, understanding their needs, and actively reaching out to them. Meanwhile, your AI-based coach will serve you insights if your digital behavior is changing, indicating if the solutions to mitigate the bias are working.

One of the big advantages of an AI-based coach is that it's a closed loop system: The measurement and evaluation of the behavior change occur right in the same system, and result in new recommendations.

## The AI-Based Coaching Platform: Passive Listening for Culture Change

One of the most important things you can do is to improve outcomes like financial performance or customer satisfaction. In every study we have done recently (on pandemic responses and business resilience; on diversity, equity, and inclusion; and on employee experience) listening to employees and acting on results always comes out as the number one practice for overall outcomes.

Why is listening so important? Your employees must be your most important priority. Your customers are important, but the switching cost for customers is usually low. If you

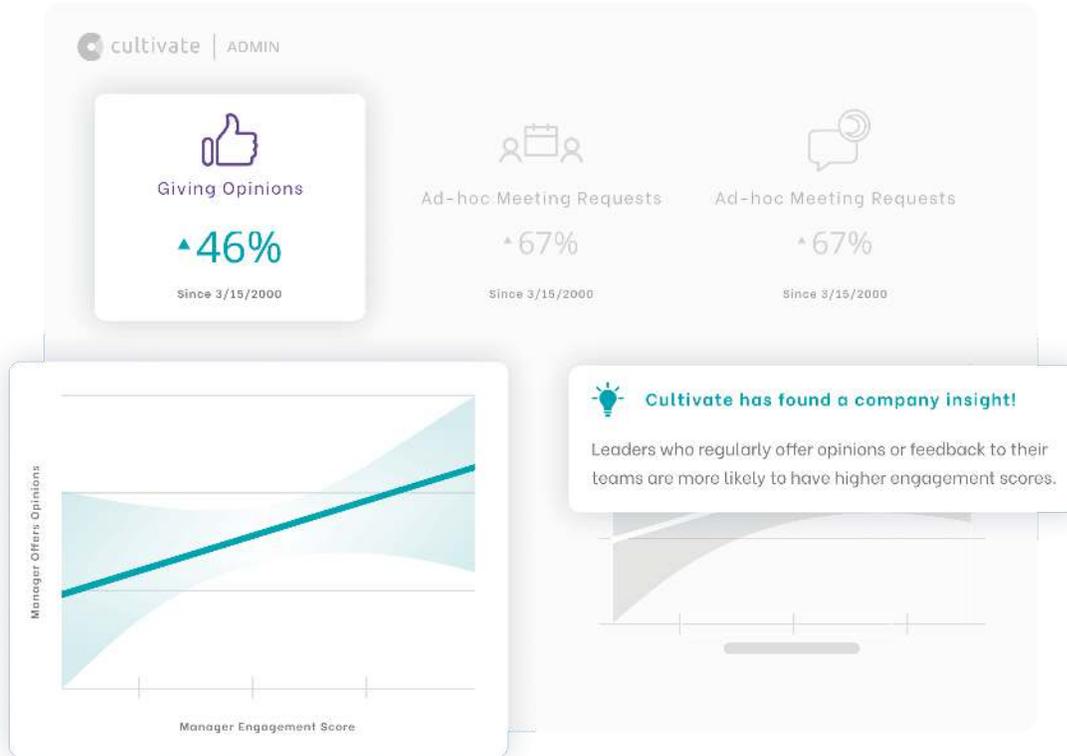
don't like one store, you go to the next one tomorrow. Poor experience in a hotel? You just stay at the one next door on your next trip. But employees vote for you with their life. Their livelihood, that of their families and their definition of self, are often tied to their job.

Listening must take many forms, mostly because employees are complex and have complex needs. While surveys are important as people want to be asked their opinion, today we moved well beyond the big annual engagement survey (which still has a place in the lifecycle) and added pulse surveys and even always-on platforms where people can constantly voice their opinions. Microsoft does daily surveys of 2,500 of their employees, rotating them so that no employee gets surveys more than once a quarter. The surveys include open-ended questions like "what's on your mind" or "how are you doing," letting the team identify issues and needs as they emerge and respond quickly.

Passive listening—understanding behaviors and extracting insights—factors in a holistic listening architecture, too. Organizational network analysis can help you identify who is well connected and who might be isolated. The natural language processing of social media sites helps you read for the tone of people's attitudes, and sorting through performance goals can help connect people who may be working on the same things and might not even know about it.

On the organizational and team level, the insights from the AI coach can surface issues people may be having. For example, if a lot of people struggle giving recognition, that might highlight a deeper cultural problem to address. Or, if there is a lack of asking for others' opinions, people are likely to feel less empowered. Once you have identified these issues, you can even connect them to outcomes and determine how digital behaviors drive the things the business cares about. See Figure 4.

Figure 4: Company Insights from the AI-Based Coach



Source: Cultivate, 2021.

Do teams with a strong culture of recognition also have better financial performance? Do groups with open questions have increased innovation? Are teams with less after-hour emails healthier and happier? Once you get cultural insights from your AI-based coaching platform, these correlations become a reality, and with that your ability to drive impact.

## Shaping Culture in a Positive Direction

Once you've identified the overall cultural traits of teams or organizations, you can take action. For example, if you identify a less psychologically safe environment on a team, people are not asked for their opinions, for example, you can then work on addressing the issue. Maybe you need

to ask people questions about this in a survey, or conduct focus groups, to dive deeper into what is really going on. You may need to bring in additional data points, like team demographics, or other things that have happened in the organization that might be related to this.

Only when you really understand the issue can you address the issue. Sometimes it may be as simple as continuing to let the AI coach do the coaching, because it may be an issue on a leadership behavior level. Perhaps you need to do more to support people to create a positive culture.

Insights from the AI-based coach are powerful to help shape the direction of the culture in a positive way, creating an irresistible organization that people love to work for.

# Getting Started with AI-Based Coaching

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The best time to get started with AI coaching is now. In today's incredibly competitive labor market, helping people develop, empowering better leaders, and shaping the culture in a positive way is paramount not just for your HR team but also for the business itself. To get started, consider these points:

1. **Identify the business problem you need to solve.** Are you looking to increase employee wellbeing through better leaders, like BASF did? Have you defined specific leadership capabilities that you need to measure and develop, like SAP? Or are you broadly aiming at helping every employee develop and sustain better relationships, like PwC? Are you focusing on psychological safety and a culture of trust? Or is the AI coach another listening platform to enable your company to identify issues in the employee experience? Clearly define what you are trying to achieve, and the target population.
2. **Define success measures.** Think about both leading indicators, such as adoption and continued platform engagement, and outcome measures like employee engagement, retention, or business outcomes. Continuously monitor these success measures.
3. **Pilot to see how it works.** Identify a small group of employees to pilot the use of the AI coaching. Not only will they give you great feedback on the use of the technology but also you'll also get great champions for the solution. This

can be a small subgroup (like in BASF where only 20 people started with it), or a larger group like SAP did.

4. **Evaluate pilot, refine, and expand.** Use the lessons from the pilot to hone communication, change management, and success measures. SAP used their newly developed three leadership competencies and the associated change management program to increase adoption.
5. **Scale and expand.** Roll out the solution more broadly, continuously track feedback and success measures, and advance the program further.
6. **Expand measurements.** Identify how you can leverage the insights generated about the culture and climate in your company for broader people analytics scenarios, and work on identifying correlations with business outcomes.

## Lessons from the Frontline

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As you consider an AI-based coaching platform for your employees, learn from others who have already been on this journey.

- What business problem did they try to address?
- How easy is it to do this?
- How do they communicate this to employees?
- And most important, will people use it?

We've talked with three large complex companies in different industries who have taken different approaches to this topic (see pages 10-13).

## SAP Uses AI Coaching to Help People Lead Better

SAP is a German multinational software corporation based in Walldorf, Baden-Württemberg, that develops enterprise software to manage business operations and customer relations, especially known for its enterprise resource planning (ERP) software. SAP is the largest non-American software company by revenue, the world's third largest publicly traded software company by revenue, and the largest German company by market capitalization. With more than 102,000 employees around the world, the company aspires to help the world run better and improve people's lives.

When Joshua Margo, Senior Director of Learner Experience, started his role in 2020, he learned about a pilot that his predecessor had started using AI coaching, provided by Cultivate, as a leadership coaching tool. According to Margo, "The AI coach helps you track your digital relationships and gives you suggestions to improve those behaviors you value most." The pilot started within HR, allowing HR directors to use the tool and determine how it could be useful for their client groups.

"The initial pilot was extremely easy to set up. You just sign up with your email, and immediately the tool gets access to your calendar, your emails, your chat messages, and all your written digital communication," explained Margo.

Beyond a simple set-up, the feedback from pilot participants was exceptional. People appreciated the ease of use, the immediate, in-the-flow of work input, the personalization and relevance, and the connection to helpful resources provided by the AI coach, such as the articles from HBR that help raise awareness or give tips to improve specific behaviors. Margo and his team rolled out AI coaching to people managers in the United States, Canada, and India, tying it directly to the company's leadership development program as an optional tool to improve leadership behaviors.

"AI coaching helps you develop your leadership capabilities. It's like having a buddy on your shoulder that watches out for you and gives you helpful hints. The AI makes the unseen seen, and that's really helpful," said Margo.

However, configuration and user personalization are key. According to Margo, "You can tell the tool what behaviors

are more critical to you, and based on that, the tool will calibrate recommendation. For example, I work with a team internationally, so not sending out emails after hours is less critical for me. Chances are, my work hours are somebody is after work hours because of the time difference. But I really want to focus on recognition because I know this is important for employee engagement and performance."

As each user can tell the AI coach what is most critical to them, it creates immediate and personalized value to let leaders know what they do well, and what to improve on, and how to improve.

Per Margo: "For example, the tool might tell me I am not great at asking opinions of my team members. Right before I go into a meeting, I'll get a nudge, an email with observations on the tone of my emails with this person, including tips how to ask for input more effectively."

Starting in January 2021, Margo took the use of AI coaching several steps further, making it that much more relevant for SAP. First, Margo and his team tied it directly to their three newly established leadership behaviors:

- Unlock potential
- Make it happen together
- Explore possibilities

The AI coach gives managers actionable insights on how they are doing on these behaviors and where they can improve. Rather than just giving managers generalized information about these behaviors or merely raising awareness, people get personalized, in-the-moment insights to hone these capabilities.

Second, in addition to suggesting HBR articles to learn and develop, Margo's team connected the suggestions of the AI coach to LinkedIn Learning resources as well, providing richer content and resources. Leaders can choose how they want to learn about their behaviors: either quickly reading an HBR article or engaging with deeper learning through LinkedIn.

As a result, Margo expects SAP's leadership trust index (a leading measure of outcomes) and employee engagement will improve because leaders work much better with their teams. The adoption of the AI coach—voluntary for any leader in the

*(SAP Continued)*

U.S., Canada, and India—has been significant. For Margo, the use of the AI coach helps bring the new leadership behaviors to life and supports managers to “work and lead the SAP way.”

Next up for SAP is using AI coaching to improve team dynamics. This allows team members to suggest how they like to work while the AI coach provides those insights to the leader. That way, the AI coach improves the culture of the team and enables a better employee experience.

“It’s our first use of AI for leadership development, and the results are outstanding. Because it doesn’t make decisions, it observes and recommends, and it’s for your own development, people trust it. And it really helps you get better at leading your team.”

## BASF Supports Employee Wellbeing with AI-Based Coaching

BASF is a German multinational chemical company and the largest chemical producer in the world. The BASF Group comprises subsidiaries and joint ventures in more than 80 countries and operates six integrated production sites and 390 other production sites in Europe, Asia, Australia, the Americas, and Africa, and employs over 117,000 people worldwide.

When Tom Rausch, Global Head of Digital Innovation Community, came across Cultivate in 2018, he was excited about the opportunity to apply AI to interpersonal relationships, all with the sole purpose to improve them.

“I understand both the value and limitations of employee surveying. As a manager, you see your employees’ needs at a point in time. But often that moment has passed, or the feedback is not entirely forthcoming. So, when I learned of a way to make my actual behavior more transparent and receive real-time suggestions on how to better support my team, I had to try it!”

And try he did. Rausch first used AI-based coaching capabilities with his team, as did 20 other team leaders in North America. Feedback from 18 of these 20 people was very positive, indicating the technology was useful and they would continue using it, given the opportunity.

“That positive feedback was enough to make Cultivate more widely available at BASF. So, I handed it over to HR, and they offered it to others across the organization as a strategic leadership tool,” said Rausch.

One business group in North America deployed it for all people managers across the region, with anyone who has direct reports having access to it.

“The value of AI coaching is that it’s specific to you, and specific to the relationships that matter to you. As a manager, the wellbeing of your direct reports matter, and that’s where the insights from your AI coach can really help you,” explained Rausch.

The uptake of AI coaching has been high. Typically, about 60 to 70% of people who are invited participate in the use. That’s about two to three times higher than traditional leadership development programs. The reason for that? It’s all

in the personalization, and the way insights can immediately be applied to interactions with people on our teams.

“Learning not about people like you but about yourself, when you need it, where you need it, so you can quickly recalibrate behaviors, is just much more engaging, and impactful,” explained Rausch.

When employees are well, feel supported, and trust their leaders, they also perform better, directly resulting in higher customer satisfaction, more innovation, and a more profitable business.

“The Holy Grail will be to show that direct impact to the P&L. Once we can establish that, AI coaching will move from an HR tool to a business necessity,” explained Rausch.

As the use of AI coaching spreads across leaders in North America, there are additional considerations to account for before roll-out in Germany can take place. For example, data privacy regulations like general data protection regulation (GDPR), workers council notification, and internal leadership requirements.

Beyond the use of AI coaching for developing leadership capabilities, Rausch sees opportunities to provide people-actionable insights for any relationship-building, e.g., to improve sales effectiveness.

“We are already giving feedback on the effectiveness of our salespeople. It could be helpful to add AI coaching on top. For example, to identify what type and frequency of language best resonates with the most customers.”

Rausch sees various other opportunities to expand the use of AI coaching, from recruiting to team composition and onboarding, all with the view to improving employees’ work and life.

“The important thing for us is that Cultivate always looks out for the employee. Rather than using the tool to drive compliance or rigid processes, it helps managers lead better and teams collaborate more effectively. And that will in turn result in overall employee wellbeing, which is our ultimate goal at BASF,” said Rausch.

## PwC Enables People to Strengthen Relationships with AI Coaching

PwC is a network of member firms that says its purpose is to build trust in society and solve important problems. PwC is among the leading professional services in the world, with more than 284,000 people globally, and offices in 155 countries. PwC delivers value and quality work to organizations and individuals through tax, assurance, and advisory services.

Chris Murray, a partner in PwC's UK people and organization practice, explored AI coaching using Cultivate in 2019 to help clients with culture change and transformation. Murray also serves as the Transformation Leader and CTO for PwC UK's tax practice, bringing AI coaching to 4,000 people at all levels in that practice to help with remote and hybrid work.

"We've always worked flexibly, but the pandemic has meant that more people are working remotely and will continue to do so for some time, as we move toward the new normal. With most of our people transitioning to remote working overnight, there was a large seismic shift in the way that we work. Cultivate has helped our people to stay connected and has coached them through how to digitally interact and further build trust with others in their team," explained Murray.

PwC provided the AI coach to leaders across their UK tax practice with the knowledge that the effectiveness of leaders' digital behaviors and communications has a direct impact on inclusivity, wellbeing, employee engagement, and productivity (This impact has been even more prevalent in the last year.).

Therefore, Murray introduced the AI coach as a tool to empower their people to become more self-aware of their actions with their teams to ensure they continue to build on the inclusive culture.

The results have been great so far. People love the insights and how easy they are to get (as well as the nudges), and the actionable suggestions. Beyond the individual insights on how to collaborate better, communicate more openly, and recognize people more, the team calibrations have also been particularly helpful for busy leaders at PwC.

"For example, the AI coach can tell you that you are not meeting as often with certain people on your team, and even though there might be a good reason for that (maybe they work on projects you have no role on), it might send a message that you are not giving the same attention to all people," said Murray. Chances are, people will notice these inequities, and might feel treated unfairly. With the help of the AI coach, leaders get these insights frequently, so they can easily balance out inequities, checking in with people more evenly so everybody has the same access to leaders, as well as equitable opportunities.

Murray sees opportunities to add value to his clients, bringing AI coaches in for developing leaders, changing behaviors, and increasing employee engagement, and with that, helping clients get better business outcomes.

## Conclusion

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AI-based coaching is the best-kept secret to help increase leadership and professional capabilities with microinteractions and suggestions. It is quite easy to do, people really enjoy working with it, and the value it creates immediately is substantial.

Just a few years ago, hardly anybody used the insights created by Microsoft on their work hours and focus time, nor recognized how these behaviors impacted productivity and wellbeing. Now, many of us take these nudges for granted and incorporate them into our daily work practices. The same will be the case for insights on your digital communication behaviors. Once you implement AI coaching and start benefiting from the insights, it will be hard to imagine functioning without them.

## About Josh Bersin



*Josh Bersin is an internationally recognized analyst, educator, and thought leader focusing on the global talent market and the challenges impacting business workforces around the world. He studies the world of work, HR and leadership practices, and the broad talent technology market.*

*He founded Bersin & Associates in 2001 to provide research and advisory services focused on corporate learning. Over the next ten years, he expanded the company's coverage to encompass HR, talent management, talent acquisition, and leadership. He sold the company to Deloitte in 2012, when it became known as Bersin™ by Deloitte. Bersin left Deloitte in 2018..*

*In 2019, Bersin founded the Josh Bersin Academy, the world's first global development academy for HR and talent professionals and a transformation agent for HR organizations. The Academy offers content-rich online programs, a carefully curated library of tools and resources, and a global community that helps HR and talent professionals stay current on the trends and practices needed to drive organizational success in the modern world of work.*

*Bersin is frequently featured in talent and business publications such as Forbes, Harvard Business Review, HR Executive, FastCompany, The Wall Street Journal, and CLO Magazine. He is a regular keynote speaker at industry events around the world and a popular blogger with more than 800,000 followers on LinkedIn.*

*His education includes a BS in engineering from Cornell University, an MS in engineering from Stanford University, and an MBA from the Haas School of Business at the University of California, Berkeley.*

## About Kathi Enderes



*Kathi is the vice president of research at the Josh Bersin Academy; she leads research for all areas of HR, learning, talent and HR technology. Kathi has more than 20 years of experience in management consulting with IBM, PwC, and EY and as a talent leader at McKesson and Kaiser Permanente. Most recently, Kathi led talent and workforce research at Deloitte, where she led many research studies on various topics of HR and talent and frequently spoke at industry conferences. Originally from Austria, Kathi has worked in Vienna, London and Spain and now lives in San Francisco. Kathi holds a doctoral degree and a masters degree in mathematics from the University of Vienna.*