

E-Coaching Systems

What is Coaching?

Coaching, of course, is about purposeful interactions between a coach and the person or persons being coached.

E-Coaching moves the process online and expands the possibilities. Some E-Coaches call what they do “distance coaching,” “distance mentoring,” or even “telementoring.” What’s interesting here is that online experiences and tools are the fundamental way of supporting the coaching relationship.

E-Coaching is the practice of coaching through technology. In this very broad sense, this means that if a human coach uses technology as a mode of communication (e.g., to get information about a coachee’s behavior or to give feedback), this is considered E-Coaching. Consequently, it could be argued that the communication systems that human coaches and coachees use to communicate in this practice are types of “e-coaching systems” (Bart A., 2017).

E-Coaching System by Kamphorst (2017)

An E-Coaching System is a set of computerized components that constitutes an artificial entity that can observe, reason about, learn from and predict a user’s behaviors, in context and over time, and that engages proactively in an ongoing collaborative conversation with the user in order to aid planning and promote effective goal striving through the use of persuasive techniques (Kamphorst, 2017).

Features of E-Coaching Systems (Kamphorst, 2017):

1. The system will need to have **social ability** in order to engage in an ongoing conversation with the user. This conversation is crucial for establishing and maintaining a collaborative relationship between user and system.
2. As coaching requires repeated interactions between user and system, the system should be **designed to be credible**, i.e., to be perceived as having expertise and being trustworthy.
3. In order to stimulate ideas and action, and to assess whether a person’s goals are consistent with that person’s life values, the system will need to be in some relevant sense context-aware (for more on the importance of context for e-coaching systems).
4. In order to ask questions that are pertinent to a specific situation the user is in or will be in, and to develop and maintain the trust that is needed for a customized, collaborative coaching relationship, the system will need **the ability to ask questions, give feedback, and offer advice that is tailored to the individual user**. For this, the system will need learning abilities to build up and maintain a personalized user model.
5. The system will need **to have information on which to base its questions and recommendations**, which means it will need to be able to interface with (different types of) data streams (e.g., direct user input, but potentially also measurements of physical activities, mood self-reports, sleeping patterns, etc.)
6. **The system has to be proactive** in order to initiate interactions with the aim of stimulating action or reflection. For example, the system could invite the user to reflect on his or her commitment to a particular goal, or warn the user at suspected moments of weakness. For this type of proactiveness, prediction of user behavior is key.
7. If the system is to be successful in supporting behavior change, not as a mere instrument, but as a coach, it needs to have some notion of what a behavior change trajectory looks like. For this, it needs to **operate on some type of model of behavior change** cf. the COM-B model and the COMBI model.
8. In order to support users in setting themselves up for behavior change success, the system needs the **ability to guide its user in a process of future-direction**.

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