

Executive Summary: Exploring Coaching with Protégé – A Comprehensive, Human-AI Hybrid Approach

Introduction

Coaching is a transformative process that helps individuals achieve personal and professional growth. For those curious about coaching, its benefits, and accessibility, Protégé offers an innovative way to experience coaching between live sessions. Developed under the guidance of Ruth Pearce, *Protégé* is an AI-driven coaching assistant designed to complement human coaching by fostering self-reflection, maintaining momentum, and delivering actionable insights.

This summary provides an overview of the recent evaluation of Protégé, highlighting its strengths, areas for improvement, and our personal recommendation on its role in a coaching program.

Key Findings

- **Effective for Progress Between Sessions:** Protégé was rated highly for keeping users on track between live coaching sessions, with an average score of 1.5/2. It offers a structured, engaging, and confidential space for users to explore challenges and next steps.
- **Ease of Use and Credibility:** Users appreciated its ease of use and trusted that Ruth Pearce supervises its development, enhancing credibility and comfort (average score: 1.8/2).
- **Unique Strengths:** Protégé's ability to reframe questions, provide space for reflection, and encourage actionable next steps makes it a valuable tool for fostering self-improvement and developing coaching skills.
- **Complement, Not Replacement:** While effective, participants emphasized that Protégé does not replace the emotional depth and nuanced understanding of human coaching. It works best as a complement to live coaching, bridging the gap between sessions.



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Personal Recommendation

We firmly believe in the power of a hybrid coaching model that combines the strengths of human connection and AI-driven tools. Protégé is exclusively offered as part of a comprehensive program that includes:

1. **1:1 Coaching:** Personalized sessions with an experienced human coach to dive deeply into your unique goals and challenges.
2. **Group Coaching:** Collaborative sessions to build community, share insights, and foster mutual accountability.
3. **Protégé AI Assistant:** A continuous support tool for maintaining progress, reflecting on key themes, and practicing self-coaching skills between live sessions.

This blended approach ensures you experience the best of both worlds—the depth and empathy of human coaching alongside the convenience and structure of an AI assistant.

Our Commitment

We are committed to delivering an unparalleled coaching experience that prioritizes human connection while leveraging innovative tools to enhance accessibility and outcomes. Protégé was created to make coaching more accessible, but always as part of a broader program that includes human support.

If you are new to coaching, Protégé offers a safe and supportive way to explore its potential. For experienced coaching clients, it provides a consistent resource to sustain your growth journey. Together, these elements create a comprehensive coaching experience designed to help you achieve meaningful, lasting change.

Contact us to learn more about our coaching programs and how Protégé, combined with 1:1 and group coaching, can help you unlock your full potential!



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The full report:

Introduction

One of our goals at Pearce Insights is to create coaching solutions that suit audiences with a variety of learning and processing styles, differing levels of experience with coaching and that meet people where they are in terms of time, budget, and access.

This is the first step in many (we hope) towards making effective coaching available to more people and making that access flexible.

We don't believe that AI coaching will replace human coaching – there are so many things that a good or great human coach can do and bring to a session that AI is a long way from accomplishing. Human coaches can make leaps and connections that are based on our deep understanding of the person in front of us.

We do believe that having an AI assistant coach is beneficial as an additional flexible resource for coaching clients. Some scenarios where the AI tool is expected to add value:

1. Availability – Protégé is available to coach at any time of day and unlike Ruth or any other human coach, does not have to rest, eat, exercise or attend to any other aspect of life.
2. Extremely disciplined about the coaching process – Protégé has been taught what coaches can – and cannot – do in the name of coaching. It stays 100% true to the coaching approach and is therefore consistent and predictable.
3. Learns as she coaches – like a human coach, Protégé learns about you as your coaching process evolves. It will remember past conversations and increasingly make links to things you have previously discussed. It will start to notice patterns that it may be helpful for you to become aware of.
4. You want to focus on the tactics you will use to achieve a goal rather than discovering or defining the goal in the first place. You want to create a step-by-step plan or timeline to achieve a goal. Protégé is uniquely suited to helping you get specific in your planning and execution.
5. Accountability – Protégé has learned that accountability is important. At each session it will ask if you want to review tasks you had committed to previously. As with a human coach, how you use the session is entirely up to you, but it will remind you that there are past commitments and do a check in.

We want to thank everyone who participated in our hybrid coaching test program in October/November 2024. We could not have reached this stage without you. That we are ready to soft launch Protégé on December 28th, 2024 is testament to your commitment to testing and full participation.

Testing will continue. Protégé will, as its name suggests, always be supervised and mentored by Ruth Pearce. And we will always work with the feedback of testers and users to help the tool evolve and develop.

If you have questions about the tool, the experience or the testing, please email us at admin@allellc.org. We will be happy to meet with you to discuss further.

This group committed to:

1. Attend four weekly live group coaching sessions facilitated by Ruth Pearce, JD, PCC
2. Use the AI Coaching Assistant Protégé developed by Ruth in partnership with Amigo and provide feedback.
3. Answer feedback questionnaires to identify gaps and opportunities in the AI coaching experience.
4. Meet with Ruth and provide feedback on the overall experience of the live coaching combined with the AI assistant coaching.

Our group comprised 10 people. 6 had worked with an AI tool to get advice and guidance in the past. 4 had no prior experience of working with AI for a coaching purpose. Over the time of the evaluation, we received 12 feedback forms. One was from a non-member of the test group who tested independently.

Key Findings

1. General Effectiveness and Usability:

- **Positive Impact:** Participants generally found Protégé effective in tackling coaching challenges (average score: 1.1) and appreciated its role in moving forward between live sessions (average score: 1.5).
- **Ease of Use:** Feedback highlighted that Protégé was easy to use and offered structured, well-framed coaching sessions, adhering to International Coaching Federation (ICF) standards.
- **Comfort and Trust:** Users felt comfortable using Protégé (average score: 1.6) and trusted that Ruth supervises it (average score: 1.8), enhancing credibility.

2. Comparison with Human Coaching:

- While Protégé provided useful insights, participants noted that it lacked the nuanced emotional depth and personalization of human coaching. Its average score in comparison to human coaching with Ruth was 2.8 out of 5.
- Protégé was not seen as a complete replacement for live coaching (average score: -1.2) but rather a complementary tool.

3. Strengths Identified:

- **Questioning and Guidance:** Protégé was praised for asking reflective, open-ended questions and restating responses to ensure understanding.
- **Self-Reflection Support:** Many participants valued the guidance Protégé provided in structuring their thoughts and identifying actionable next steps.
- **Non-Judgmental Environment:** Users felt comfortable asking questions they might hesitate to ask a human coach, creating a safe space for exploration.

4. Areas for Improvement:

- **Connection and Personalization:** Several users felt the tool was robotic and lacked the personal touch associated with live coaching. They suggested incorporating more of Ruth's tone and personality into interactions.
- **Depth of Interaction:** Some participants noted a lack of depth in questions and responses, with opportunities for improved conversational flow and breadth.
- **Session Flow:** A few users mentioned sessions sometimes felt prematurely ended or rushed, suggesting room for refinement in pacing.

5. Comparative Value:

- Protégé outperformed other AI coaching tools in personalization and response quality, earning an average star rating of 4.1.

6. Notable User Insights:

- Users valued Protégé's patience and structured format, describing it as a useful tool for self-improvement and developing coaching skills.
- Participants appreciated the tool's ability to reframe questions and focus discussions on actionable outcomes.

Recommendations

1. Enhance Personalization:

- Incorporate more of Ruth's tone, personality, and specific coaching style into Protégé's interactions to make it feel more like an extension of her coaching.
- Develop more nuanced conversational capabilities to mimic the depth and emotional resonance of human coaching.

2. Improve Depth and Variety of Questions:

- Refine Protégé's questioning algorithm to offer more layered, insightful questions tailored to individual user needs and scenarios.

3. Refine Session Flow:

- Extend session durations and allow users more time to reflect on responses before advancing to the next question.

4. Add Interactive Features:

- Introduce a voice feature for a more dynamic user experience and enhance interactivity through tools like visual feedback and tailored session summaries.

5. Targeted Communication:

- Market Protégé as a powerful tool for progress between live coaching sessions, emphasizing its value as a complement to—not a replacement for—human coaching.

Conclusion

Protégé offers a high-quality AI coaching experience that combines structure, usability, and adherence to professional coaching standards. While it cannot fully replicate the nuance and emotional connection of human coaching, it is a valuable tool for fostering self-reflection, maintaining momentum between live sessions, and supporting individuals aspiring to grow personally and professionally. With ongoing refinements, Protégé has the potential to set a new standard in AI-driven coaching tools.



Appendix A: Question Bank

The questions:

The full question list is provided in Appendix A.

Questions were in four broad categories.

Category 1 – First Impressions & Prior Expectations

Category 2 – Effectiveness, Safety & Feel

Category 3 – Comparing with prior Experience

Category 4 – What Else? Opportunity to share feedback about likes and dislikes and anything else the user wanted us to be aware of.

Question Section 1 – First Impressions and Prior Expectations

Protégé was useful in tackling my coaching challenge

I felt comfortable working with Protégé.

Protégé was telling me what to do.

Working with Protégé felt similar to working with Ruth.

After working with Protégé, I feel ready to take the next steps with my coaching challenge.

I want to work with Protégé again

I would prefer to work with Protégé than with a live coach.

I don't feel good about using AI for coaching.

Question Section 2 – Effectiveness, Safety & Feel

Protégé offers an effective way to keep moving forward between live coaching sessions.

I was comfortable working with an AI coach assistant.

I trust that Ruth is supervising Protégé.

Protégé would be an effective coaching solution without any live coaching from Ruth.

I felt safe engaging with Protégé.

I would recommend it to my friends or colleagues.

The voice feature enhances the experience

The calendar feature has helped

Have you used other AI tools for advice or coaching?

Question Section 3 – Comparing with prior experience

If you HAVE used other AI tools to get guidance or coaching, how did you rate Protégé



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How did the coaching experience compare to human coaching with Ruth
Star Rating

Question section 4 What else?

What is something that you particularly valued about working with Protégé?

What is something you particularly disliked about working with Protégé?

What else do you want us to know?

Appendix B: Tabulated Results

Tabulated results for Questions Sections 1 – 3

Question	Minimum	Maximum	Average
Protégé was useful in tackling my coaching challenge	-1	2	1.1
I felt comfortable working with Protégé.	-1	2	1.1
Protégé was telling me what to do.*	-2	1	-0.7
Working with Protégé felt similar to working with Ruth.	-2	2	0.3
After working with Protégé, I feel ready to take the next steps with my coaching challenge.	-1	1	0.6
I want to work with Protégé again	-1	2	1.0
I would prefer to work with Protégé than with a live coach.**	-2	0	-1.2
I don't feel good about using AI for coaching.*	-2	0	-1.6
Question	Minimum	Maximum	Average
Protégé offers an effective way to keep moving forward between live coaching sessions.	1	2	1.5
I was comfortable working with an AI coach assistant.	1	2	1.6
I trust that Ruth is supervising Protégé.	2	2	1.8
Protégé would be an effective coaching solution without any live coaching from Ruth.**	-2	2	-0.3
I felt safe engaging with Protégé.	-1	2	1.3



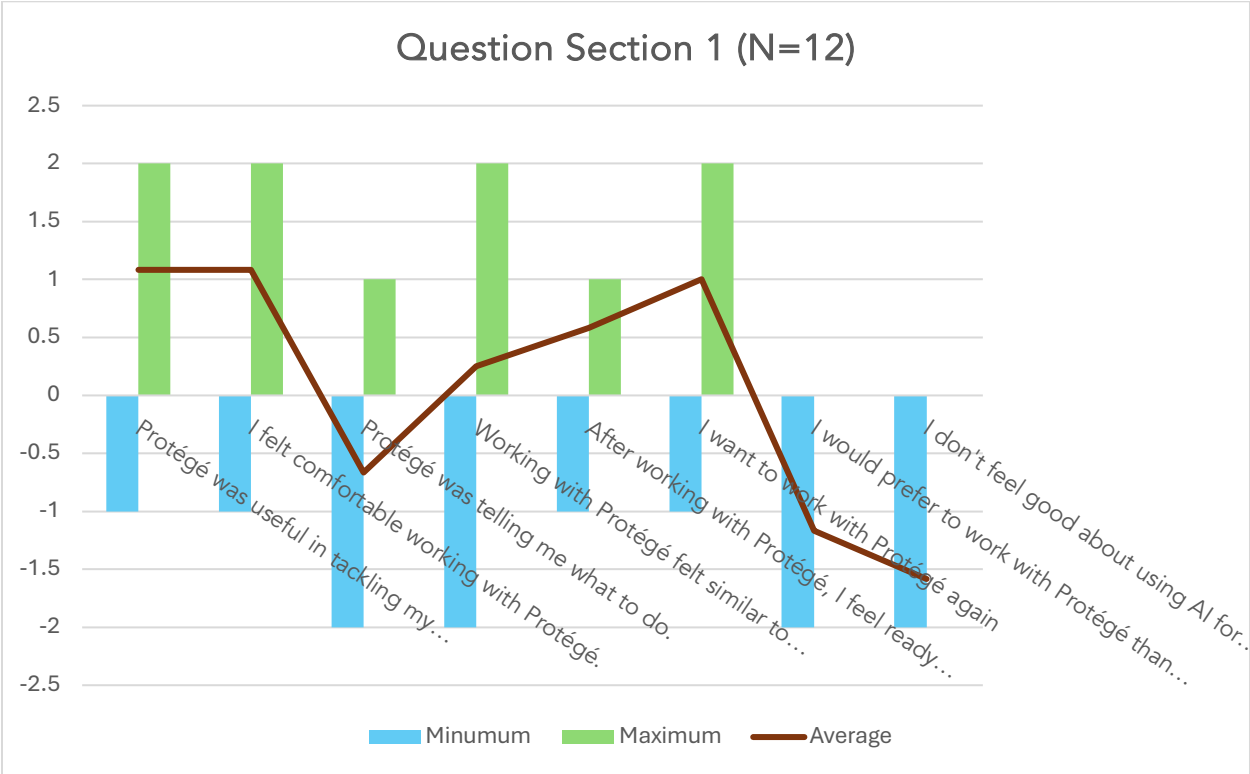
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I would recommend it to my friends or colleagues.	-2	2	0.9
Question	Minimum	Maximum	Average
If you HAVE used other AI tools to get guidance or coaching, how did you rate Protégé	4	5	3.8
How did the coaching experience compare to human coaching with Ruth	1	4	2.8
Star Rating	2	5	4.1

* These questions are negatively scored – i.e the lower the score (or more negative) the better from the perspective of the success of the tool.

** These questions may help to reassure coaches who are afraid that AI will make their services redundant. As in most cases with technology, it will replace those who are not as skilled as coaches, but there will likely be a preference for the personalized coaching of 1:1 and 1: many coaching with a human. The advent of AI may mean it even more critical to be able to differentiate our human coaching from others, but a skilled human coach has more to offer currently than a AI tool.

Appendix C: Graphical Presentation of results from Question Sections 1-3



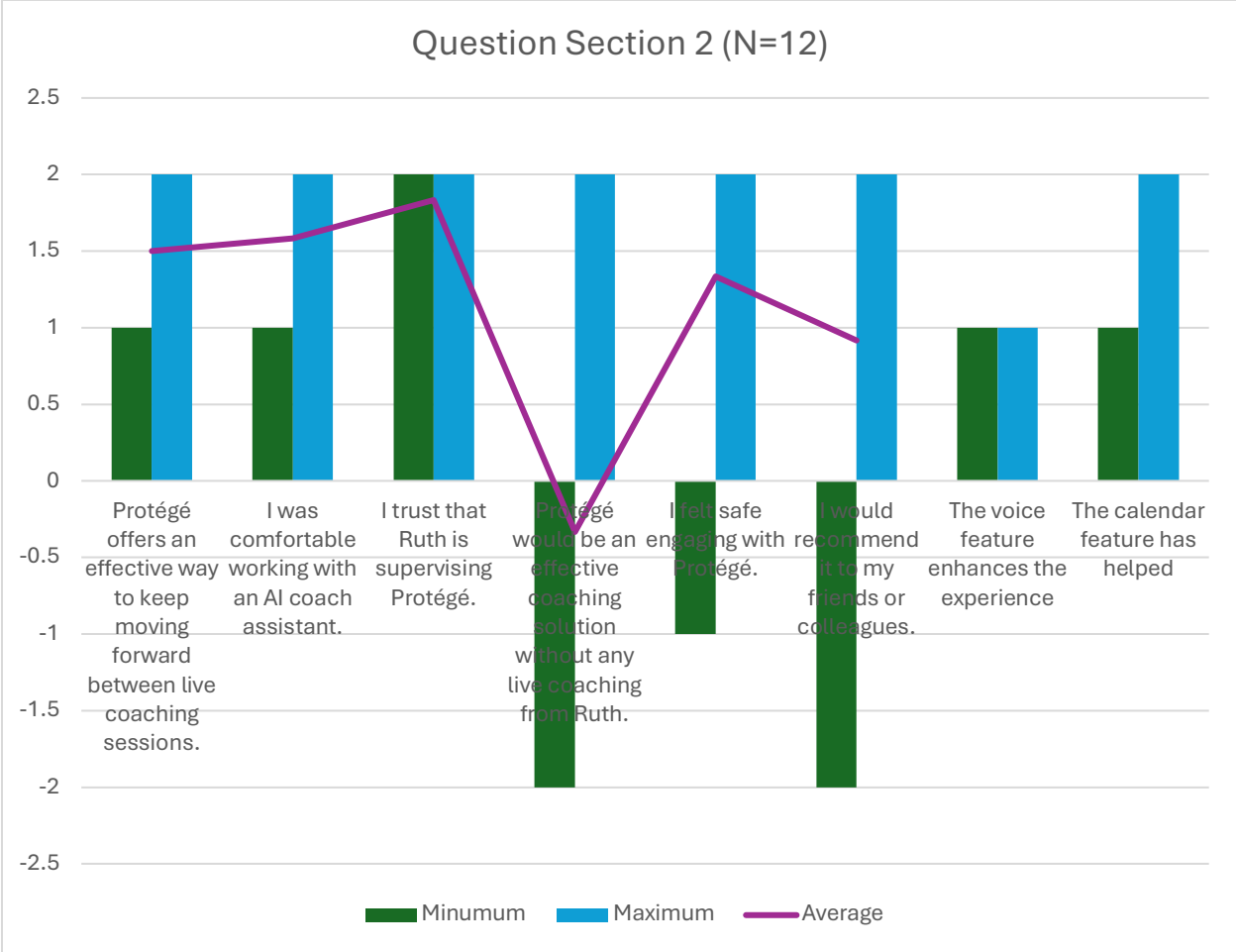
Notes:

- Two of the questions are reverse scored – i.e. the lower the score the better the tool can be said to be.

I don't feel comfortable about using AI... - Of 12 responses 9 said they very much disagreed with that, 2 somewhat disagreed and 1 was neutral.

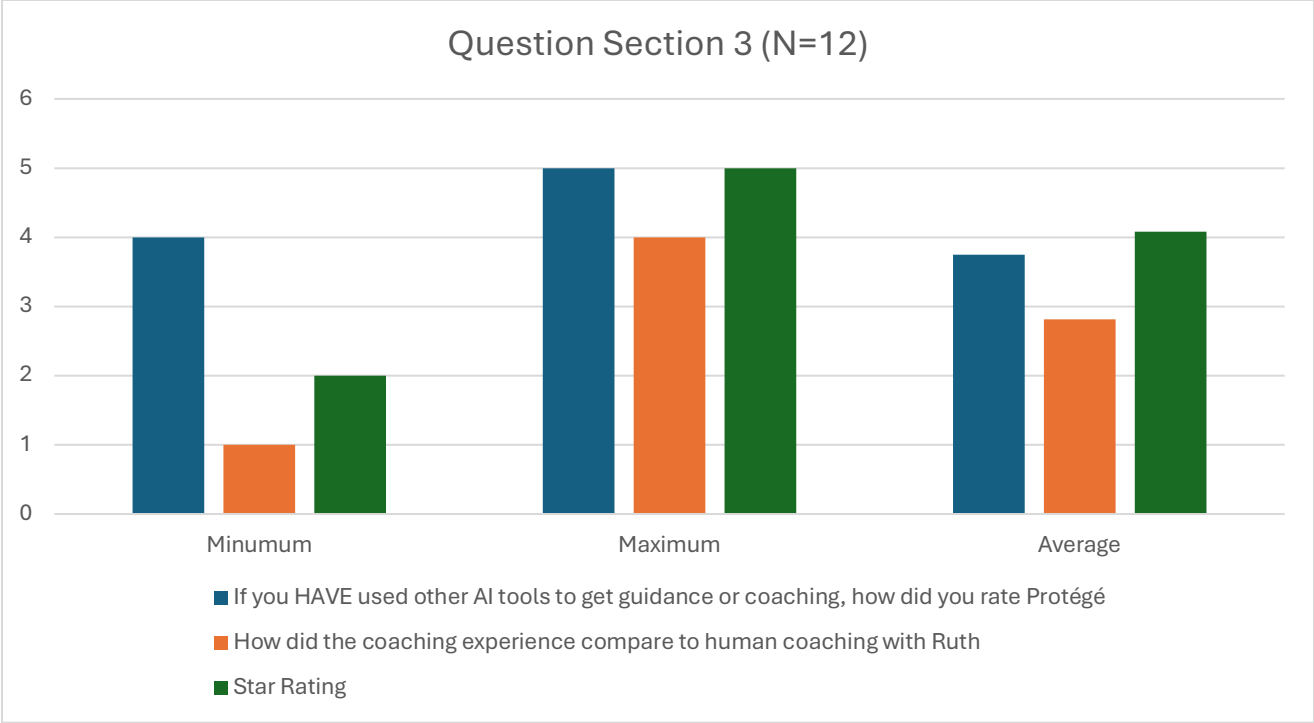
Protégé was telling me what to do – 6 people said not at all, 2 people were neutral, and 4 people felt it was very much telling them what to do.

- The answers to “I would prefer to work with Protégé may give comfort to some coaches as the consensus was that the experience of AI coaching was at best neutral in comparison to a human coach. At this stage in AI development, the feedback of this group suggests that AI coaching has a long way to go before it is a threat to good and great human coaching.



Notes:

1. Most people would recommend the tool to others. However, 2 people said they would not and one person said they would definitely not.
2. Everyone reported that the tool was helpful. Half the group said that it was more helpful than they expected.
3. The group was unanimous that they totally agreed with the statement that they trust that Ruth



Notes:

1. Some of those who have previously used AI tools felt that it was difficult to get an answer out of Protégé. However, this is the nature of the coaching model. One user who uses AI extensively said that this tool was a high performer compared to others.
2. While the enthusiasm for AI coaching varied, everyone was agreed that human coaching is more helpful and can handle a broader range of scenarios. Nevertheless, users found that Protégé did help them to make progress on their own.
3. The average star rating was 4.1/5 which at this stage of development is very exciting. Based on this feedback, we are ready to do the initial launch of Protégé.