

ICF CONVERGE

OCTOBER 23-25, 2025 • SAN DIEGO



Transform your coaching practice

**James E. Varnham, FLPI
Human-Centered AI Advisor**

**Susan Caesar
Director of Artificial Intelligence, ICF**



James Varnham

From London, BUT..... lived in Denmark for 24 years.

Spent 25 years working in the Professional Education & Certification industry

Led policy initiatives at EU level related to European e-competence framework

Carnegie Mellon University consultant on a World Bank funded authentic examination project

Held global senior leadership roles in Edtech, publishing and certification bodies

Led Emerging Technologies (including AI) corporate adoption and up-skilling for the last 8 years

Co-Owner of AI Academy

Director on ICF Credentials & Standards Board (Public Member)

Advisor on the AI in Coaching Coalition

Fellow & Ambassador of the Learning & Performance Institute (The LPI)





James E. Varnham

I help audiences understand how to get the best out of themselves when using AI, and how to get started. It all begins with curiosity and optimism. Join me!

 Connect with me on LinkedIn 

ICF Converge 2025

 The Jagged Technical Frontier - Research 

 The Impact of Generative AI on Critical Thinking - Research 

How we can work together



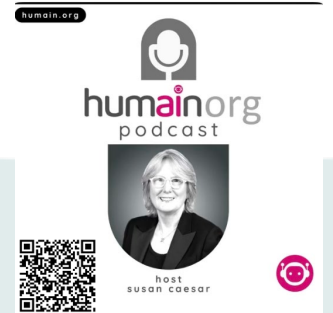
Susan Caesar

ICF Director of Artificial Intelligence,

Human-centered AI,
Digital strategy and transformation,
Customer operations at scale,
DEIB advocate

Founder: Humain.org

Non-Profit - advocating for inclusive innovation



Agenda and Expectations

1. Insightful Perspectives (ICF + AI)
2. Expert Analysis (Beyond the Hype)
3. Practical application of AI you can put into practice today
4. Interactive Resources & Wrap-up

AI isn't just a tech shift,
it's a **catalyst for
human evolution**

Why AI Matters:

“AI Can Lower Skill Barriers, Helping More People Acquire Proficiency in More Fields, in Any Language and at Any Time.”

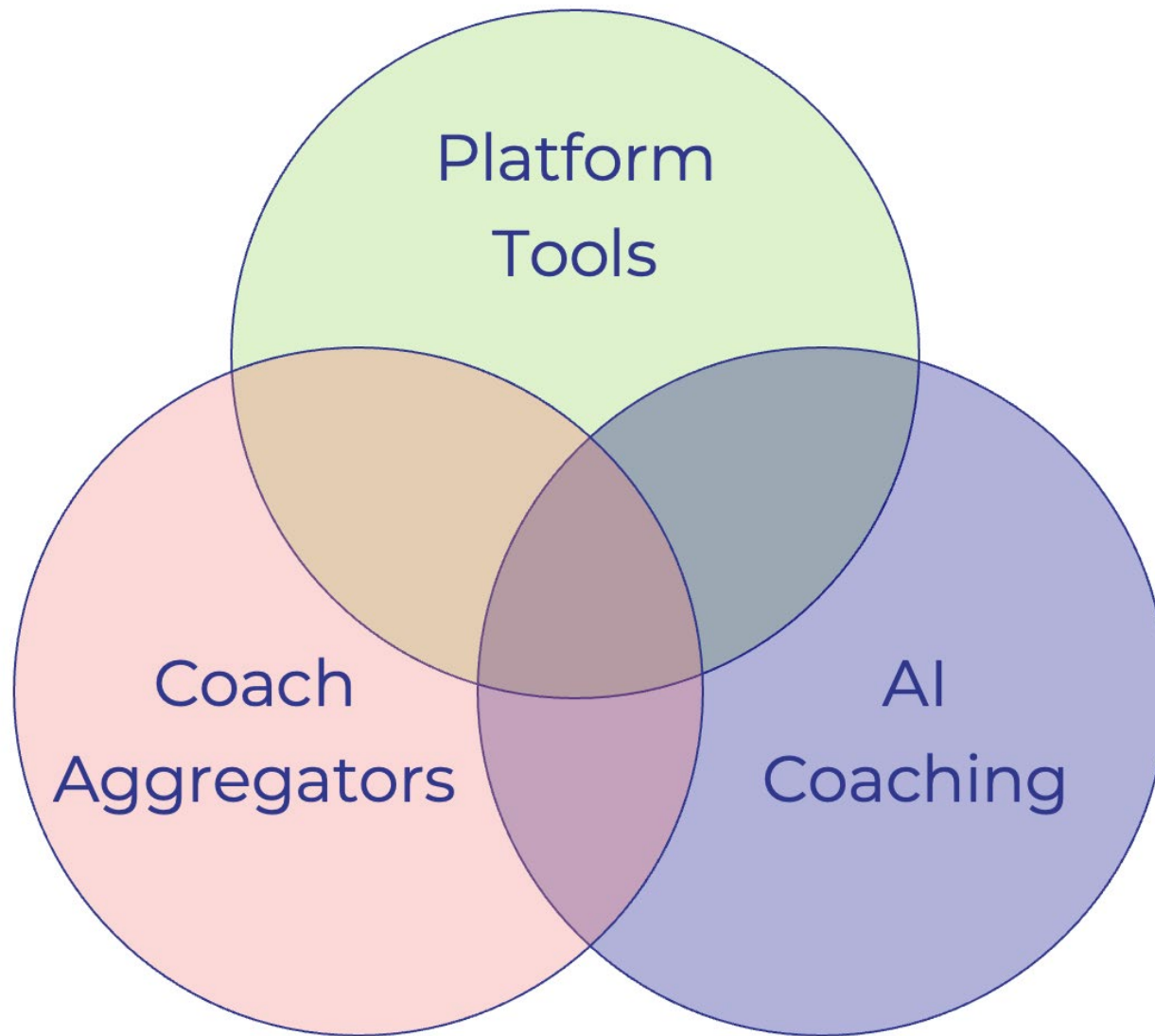
McKinsey – Superagency in the Workplace.

AI Matters Because It's
Transformational—It's
Reshaping How We Live, Work,
Learn, and Make Decisions.

“AI advances at **five times**
the speed of the internet and
creates **three times the**
impact.”

Source: John Chambers
Former CEO of Cisco.

The Confluence



In Coaching, **Human Connection Remains Essential**

**AI is Already Playing a Key Role in
Shaping Personalized
Development and Continuous
Learning.**

AI in Coaching:

- Empowers Coaches to Focus on Coaching Interactions
- Supports Scalability to Meet Organizational Needs
- Provides Real-Time Feedback and Insights
- Measures Progress
- Expands Access to Coaching
- Accelerates Its Impacts Across an Organization

AI-Enhanced Coaching

AI in coaching is split into two application categories.

Coach Assisting Capabilities:

- Session Transcription and Summarization
- Organize Practice Administration
- Professional Accreditation Compliance
- Customize Advertising to Match Client Needs
- More Personalized Client Communication
- Automated Scheduling of Client Sessions
- Follow-Up Alerts and Notifications
- Track Client Adoption and Usage of Resources
- Standardize and Automate Onboarding
- Automate Social Media Campaigns
- Automate Invoice Creation and Tracking

Coaching Service Capabilities:

- Orientation: Frequently Asked Questions
- Onboarding
- Role Play - Experiential
- Habits
- Practice and Explore
- Discreet Assessment

A person is shown from the chest up, smiling broadly. Their hands are clasped together in front of them. The image has a blue tint. The text 'Building Trust is Deeply Human' is overlaid on the left side. The words 'Building' and 'Trust' are in white, while 'is Deeply Human' is in orange. At the bottom, a yellow banner contains the text 'AI Can't Replicate the Human Element of Trust.' in dark blue.

Building Trust is Deeply Human

AI Can't Replicate the Human Element of Trust.

Maintaining Coaching Authenticity

**Best practice is critical
to help build trust.**

Practices include:

- Strong Foundation
- Co-creating the Relationship
- Communicating Effectively
- Cultivating Learning and Growth
- Assurance and Testing
- Security and Privacy

Ethical Practice



Beyond the **hype**

STAND UP

**IF YOU HAVE USED AI
CHATBOTS (IE:
CHATGPT) AT LEAST
ONCE**

STAY STANDING

**IF YOU USE AI
CHATBOTS EVERY
WEEK**

STAY STANDING

**IF YOU USE AI
CHATBOTS EVERY
DAY**

STAY STANDING

IF YOU HAVE BUILT
TARGETED, STRUCTURED
WORKSPACES

IE: CUSTOM-GPT'S,
CHATGPT PROJECTS,
GOOGLE GEMS,
PERPLEXITY SPACES ETC

STAY STANDING
IF YOU HAVE BUILT
AI AGENTS



WAU: Weekly Active Users
MAU: Monthly Active Users

Jagged Technological Frontier

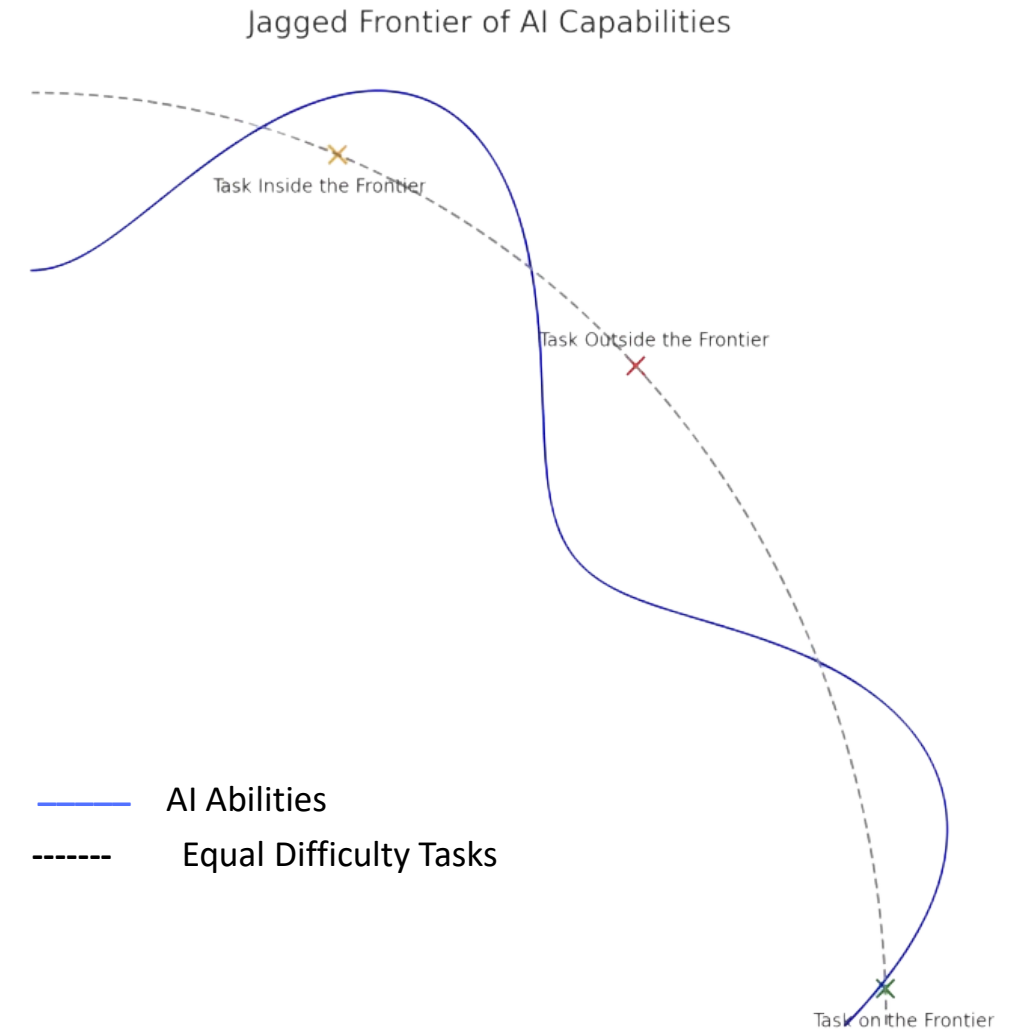
Understanding what to use AI for

Navigating the Jagged Technological Frontier:
Field Experimental Evidence of the Effects of AI on
Knowledge Worker Productivity and Quality*

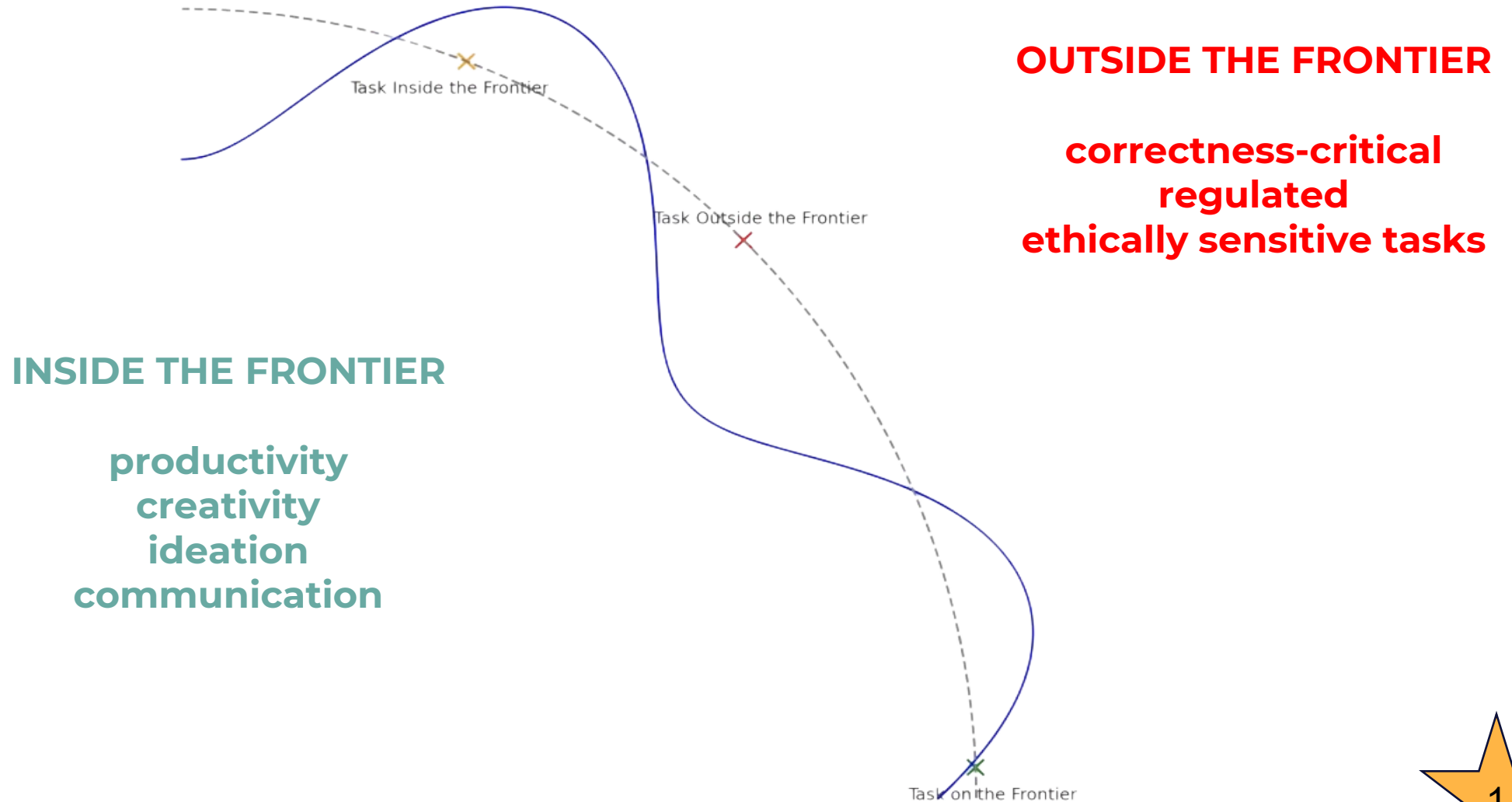
Fabrizio Dell'Acqua¹, Edward McFowland III¹, Ethan Mollick², Hila Lifshitz-Assaf^{1,3}, Katherine C. Kellogg⁴, Saran Rajendran⁵, Lisa Kray⁵,
François Cadelon⁵, and Karim R. Lakhani¹

¹Digital Data Design Institute, Harvard Business School; ²The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania; ³Warwick Business School, Artificial Intelligence Innovation Network; ⁴MIT Sloan School of Management;

⁵Boston Consulting Group, Henderson Institute

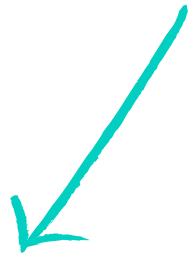


Jagged Frontier of AI Capabilities



Original Case Study Audience

758 BCG
Consultants



**Control: (No
GPT)**



Access to
GPT



Access + GPT
Training

What Generative AI is great at

Inside The Frontier

Idea generation & copywriting

Examples

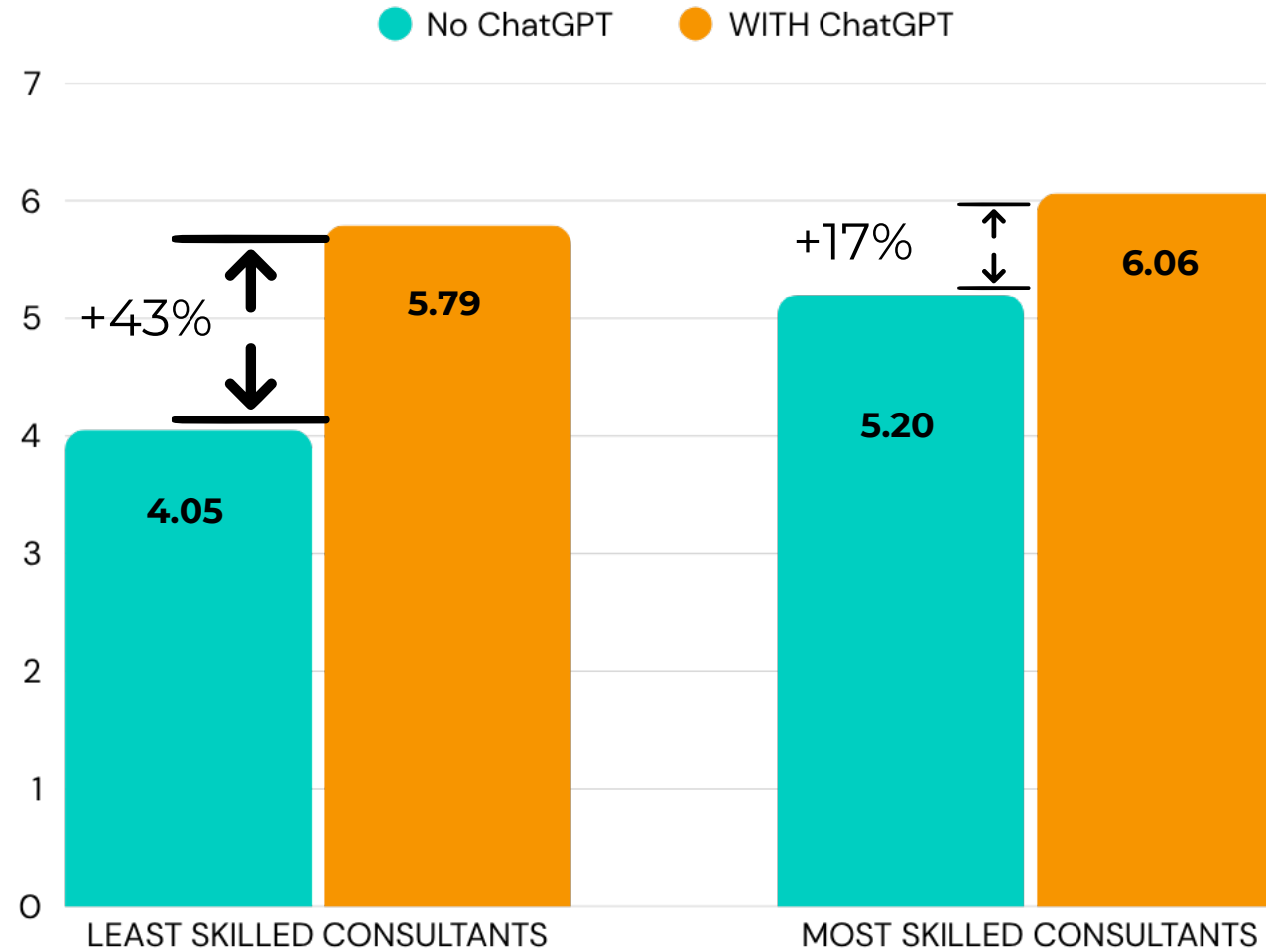
- **Creativity** (ie: propose 10 idea's for a new shoe targeting an underserved market or sport)
- **Analytical Thinking** (ie: Segment the footwear industry market based on users)
- **Writing Proficiency** (ie: Draft a press release marketing copy for your product)
- **Persuasiveness** (ie: Draft an inspirational note to employees detailing why your product would outshine the competitors)

The Result

Consultants increased

- **Productivity** (Completed **12.2%** more tasks on average)
- **Efficiency** (Completed tasks **25.1%** more quickly)
- **Quality** (More than **40%** higher quality compared to the 'control group')

AI is an Equalizer



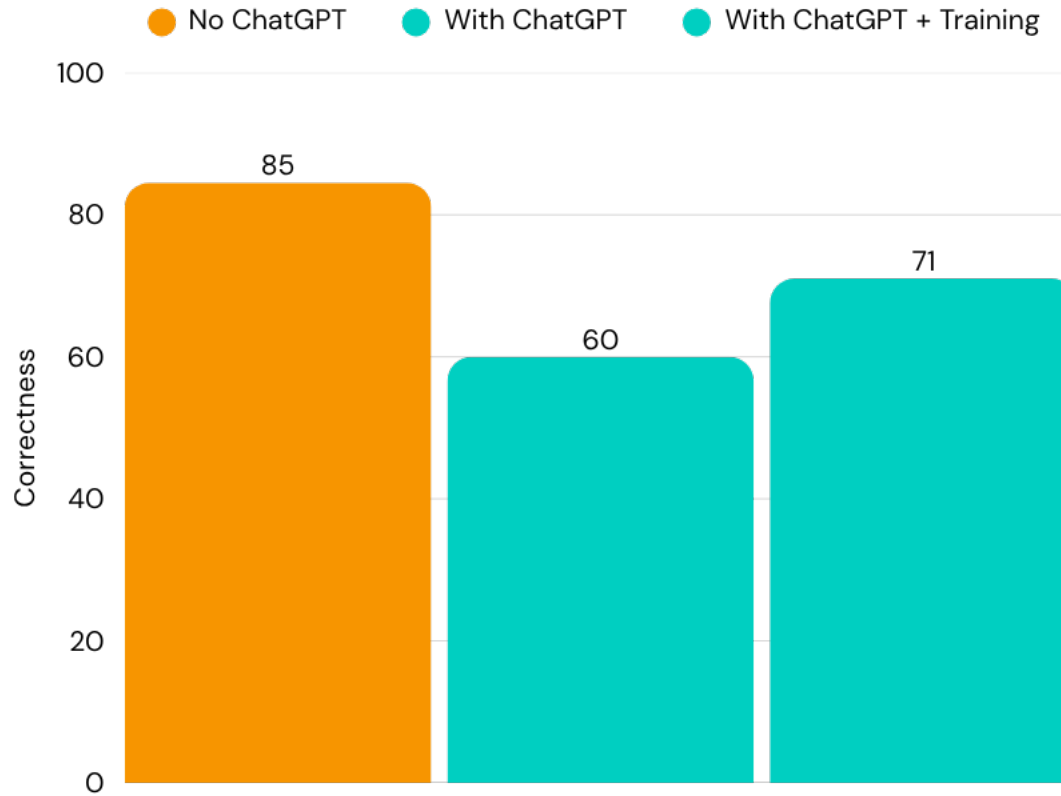
What Generative AI is NOT great at (yet)

Outside The Frontier

Data Analysis + Business Recommendations

- Participants worked with spreadsheet data and interview transcripts adapted for the experiment.
- Interview notes provided critical insights beyond the seemingly complete spreadsheet data.
- The main goal was to recommend strategic growth channels for a hypothetical company.
- Participants also proposed brand improvement actions, regardless of the brand chosen.

Outside the Frontier, Generative AI WORSENS Performance

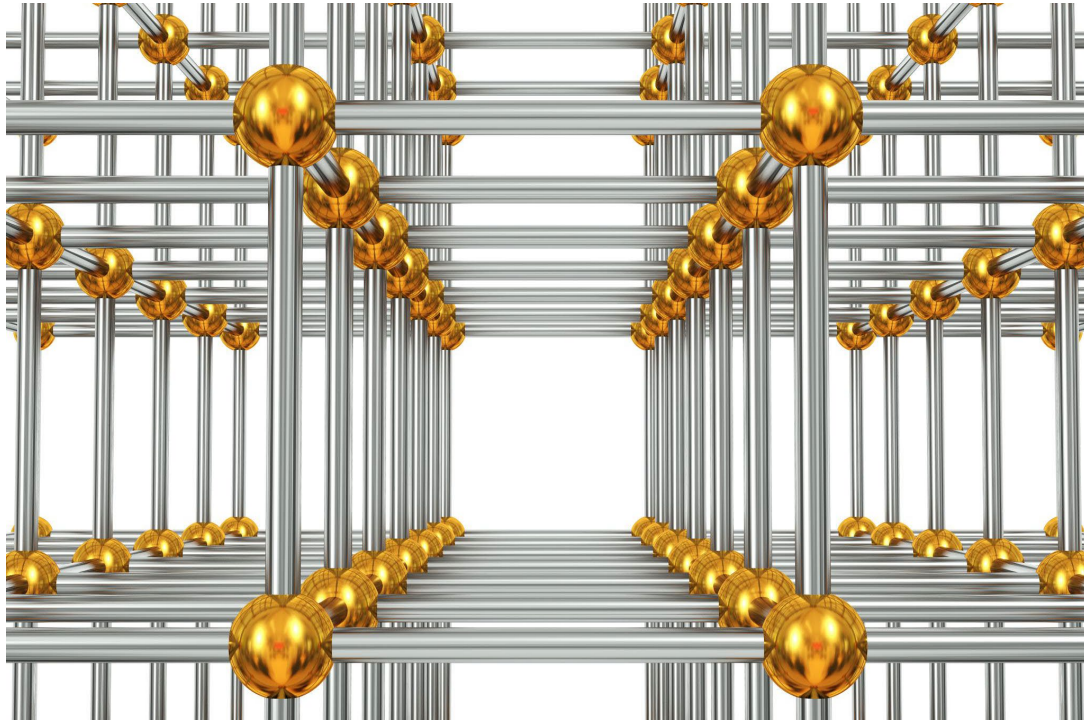


No Upskilling x Bad Use Cases
= A waste of time

Practical Applications

Prompt Engineering Vs One-Shot Prompting

Introduction to Practical Prompt Engineering with CIDI Framework



- What is CIDI? It is a structured framework for crafting effective prompts.
- CIDI helps clarify intent, ensuring AI understands the query better.
- Leads to more reliable and higher-quality responses across varied prompts.
- Improves clarity and consistency in everyday ad-hoc prompt usage.



CIDI Prompt Engineering Framework

- One-shot prompt without CIDI on coaching.
- Example:

“Write about how AI can be used in coaching.”

- Use the CIDI framework on the same coaching prompt.

Example:

CONTEXT: You are a market analyst for the coaching profession. Your goal is to explain how AI can support professional coaches in their practice.

INSTRUCTION: Write a 200-word overview describing specific, practical applications of AI in coaching, with examples relevant to executive and life coaching.

DETAILS: The summary will be used in a workshop for professional coaches who are curious but skeptical about AI. Write in a professional yet reassuring tone, and highlight both opportunities and potential pitfalls

INPUT: Produce 3 short sections with headings: (1) Practical Applications, (2) Benefits for Coaches, (3) Limitations & Cautions

One-shot prompt without CIDI on coaching. Example: ***“Write about how AI can be used in coaching.”***

AI is increasingly being used in coaching across various domains—life coaching, executive coaching, health and wellness, sports, education, and more. Its ability to process vast amounts of data, recognize patterns, and provide personalized insights makes it a powerful tool for enhancing the coaching experience. Here’s an overview of how AI can be used in coaching:

1. Personalized Goal Setting and Progress Tracking

AI can help clients define clear, measurable goals and track their progress over time. Through data analysis, it can provide feedback based on real-time inputs, such as performance metrics, journaling patterns, or behavior tracking. This ensures that goals remain dynamic and aligned with the client's evolving needs.

- **Example:** In wellness coaching, AI wearables can monitor sleep, heart rate, and activity levels to suggest personalized health strategies.
-

2. Conversational Coaching Assistants

AI-powered chatbots or virtual coaching assistants can simulate coaching conversations, offering guidance, encouragement, and accountability outside of scheduled sessions. These tools can support users with daily check-ins, reflection prompts, or reminders.

- **Example:** An AI chatbot can ask reflective questions to help a client clarify values or review weekly progress.

Use the CIDI framework on the same coaching prompt – but tailored to what YOU are interested in.

Example:

CONTEXT: You are a market analyst for the coaching profession. Your goal is to explain how AI can support professional coaches in their practice.

INSTRUCTION: Write a 200-word overview describing specific, practical applications of AI in coaching, with examples relevant to executive and life coaching.

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INPUT: Produce 3 short sections with headings: (1) Practical Applications, (2) Benefits for Coaches, (3) Limitations & Cautions

ChatGPT Output:

1. Practical Applications

AI tools can support executive and life coaches in several time-saving and insight-generating ways. For example, AI-driven transcription and note-taking tools like Otter.ai or Fireflies can capture session highlights, allowing coaches to focus fully on the client without losing key details. Sentiment analysis can help identify shifts in client tone or language patterns over time, offering data-backed insights into progress or areas needing attention. AI can also assist with scheduling, goal tracking, and even generating reflective prompts or follow-up questions tailored to a client's stated goals.

2. Benefits for Coaches

Used thoughtfully, AI can extend a coach's capacity—not replace it. It can streamline administrative tasks, freeing up more time for deep client work. Data from AI tools can complement a coach's intuition, offering another lens for understanding patterns or client needs. In executive coaching, for example, AI may surface communication trends in team interactions, while in life coaching, it might help track shifts in mindset across journal entries or session transcripts.

3. Limitations & Cautions

AI should never replace the human connection at the heart of coaching. Coaches must be cautious about data privacy, especially when using third-party tools. Insights generated by AI should be interpreted carefully and always contextualized within the coach-client relationship. Ultimately, AI is a support tool—not a substitute for human judgment, empathy, or ethical responsibility.

ONE SHOT

Likely Output: Very generic, surface-level text, maybe a list like: *“AI can support scheduling, provide resources, and give feedback.”*

Good: Quick, simple, gets something on the page.

Bad: Too broad, lacks context, doesn't target the audience, no depth.

CIDI Framework

Likely Output: A well-structured, audience-relevant overview that is practical, reassuring, and clearly segmented.

Good: Tailored to coaches, provides useful structure, balances positives with risks.

Bad: Slightly longer to set up and requires more effort to draft.

From Doing, to Stewarding - Critical Thinking

The Impact of Generative AI on Critical Thinking: Self-Reported Reductions in Cognitive Effort and Confidence Effects From a Survey of Knowledge Workers

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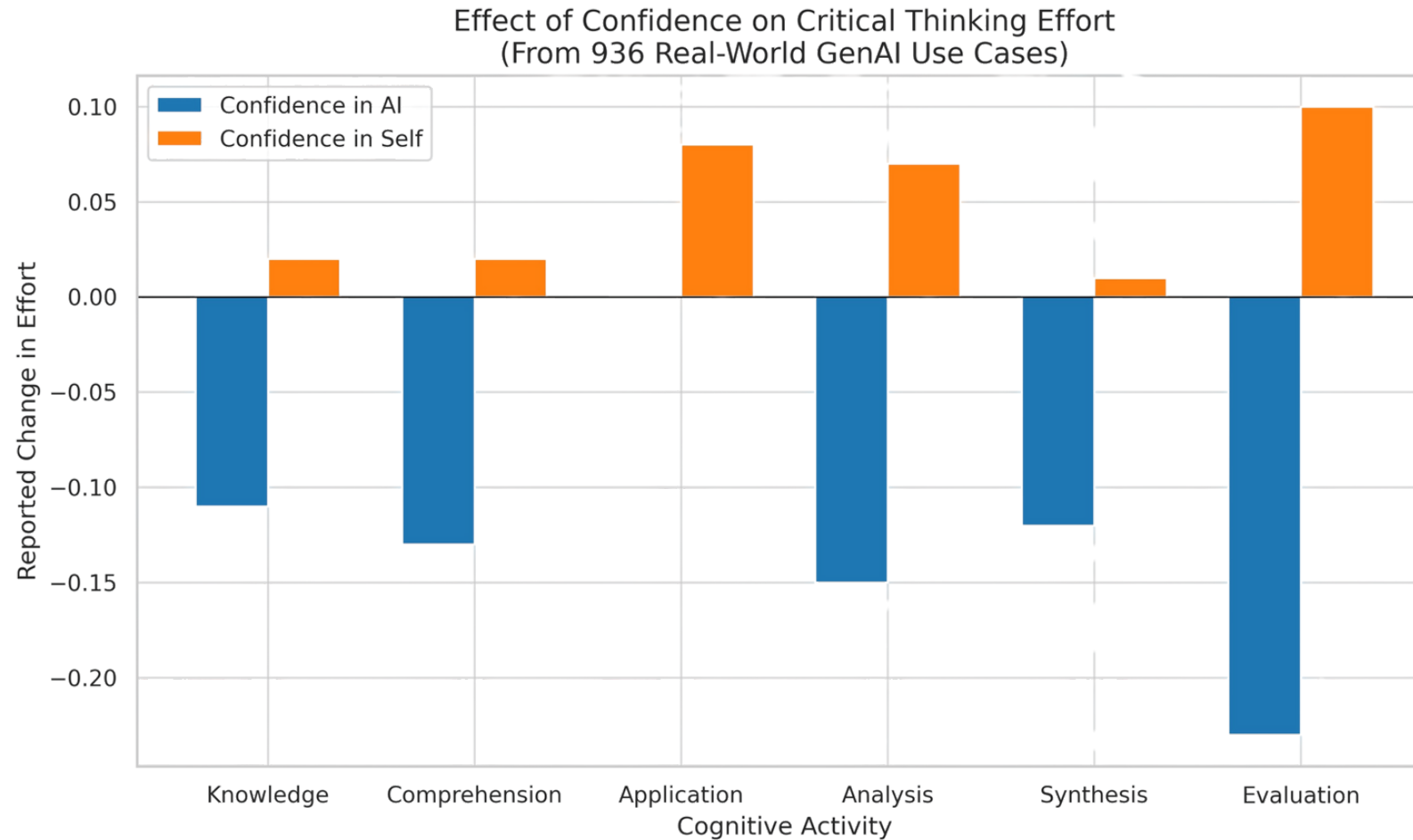
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Bloom's Taxonomy is a hierarchical framework used to classify learning objectives into levels of complexity and cognitive skills

Effect of Confidence on Critical Thinking Effort



Practical Applications

Context Vs Prompt Engineering

Context Engineering with RAT-FEET Framework

“The scaffolding holding the project together”



VS

CIDI

Ad-Hoc
Prompting

RAT-FEET

Projects or
System Prompts

Using ChatGPT to Coach You Through RAT-FEET



ChatGPT can act as your co-coach to walk you through each step of RAT-FEET.

R – Role: What role should ChatGPT play in this project?

A – Audience: Who is the target audience for the outputs?

T – Task: What do you need ChatGPT to achieve?

F – Format: In what format should responses be delivered?

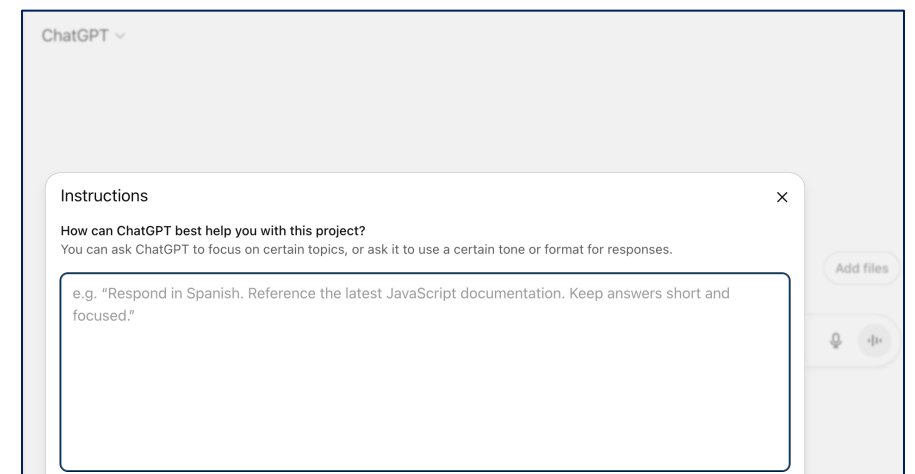
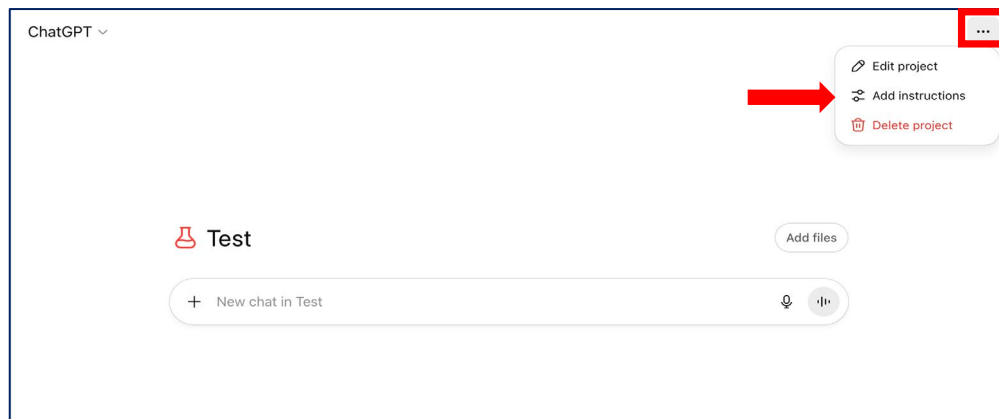
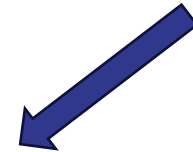
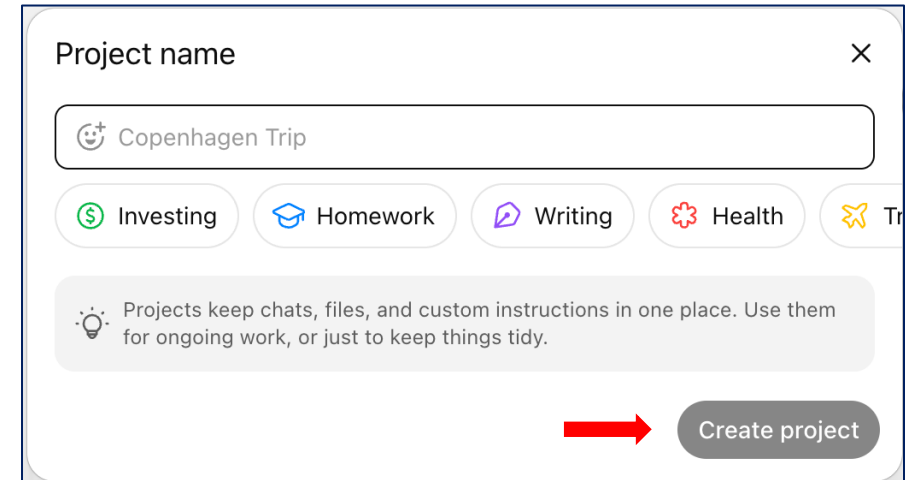
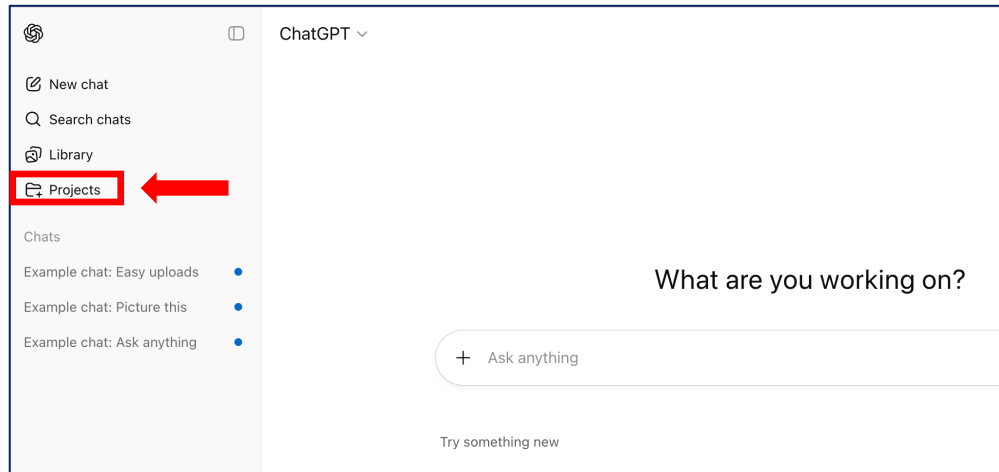
E – Examples: Can you provide examples of good output?

E – Exclusions: Guardrails! “No jargon, no long paragraphs.”

T – Tone: Adds a level of depth to capture your own voice: “Warm, clear, encouraging.”

By answering these, ChatGPT helps you create a robust Project Persona.

Create a Project, using RAT-FEET





ChatGPT ▾



Using CIDI to have ChatGPT co-create RAT-FEET system prompt

What are you working on?

Context: You are an AI Assistant guiding coaching professionals in prompt and context engineering. The goal is to co-create structured system prompts using RAT-FEET.

Instruction: Explain RAT-FEET simply, then guide the audience step by step to build a prompt. Ask them questions for each element, capture their input, and assemble it into a complete draft.

Details

Use clear, supportive, coaching style language.
Keep responses focused and actionable
Present a final draft prompt and invite refinements

Input

Audience ideas and preferences for each RAT-FEET element.



CTA

1. Practice prompting using the CIDI Framework!
2. Use CIDI to ideate 1-3 **projects** you can build over the next week which would give you greatest value.
3. BUILD projects, use RAT-FEET for project instructions, assess the output, and iterate project instructions.
3. Try different AI Labs / Chatbots and see what fits you best.



*...and then move on to
AGENTS*

THANK YOU!



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Susan Caesar