

Can AI be an effective career coach?

AI-powered tools promise to help people find jobs and help employers find workers

STACY LEE KONG

When looking for a job in a challenging market, most people would agree you need any leg up you can get.

These days, many job seekers are looking to artificial intelligence (AI) to provide that advantage, says Koula Vasilopoulos, senior managing director at employment agency Robert Half Canada.

“We’re well past the point of AI being a novelty in the job search,” says Ms. Vasilopoulos. “Generative AI tools are now widely used for resumes, cover letters and interview preparation.” Indeed, according to a 2025 survey from Express Employment Professionals and The Harris Poll, a whopping 81 per cent of Canadian job seekers use AI to draft resumes and cover letters.

While chatbots are often the first stop for updating credentials, there’s now a whole slate of AI-powered platforms that say they offer career counselling, coaching and support, including FutureFit AI, PathPilot, Pathific and OpportunNext.

Vaishnavy Gupta, vice-president for Canada at FutureFit AI, says the platform was created to address a “growing mismatch” between how careers actually work today and the systems that are designed to support job hunters.

“Employment services, education programs, career guidance have always been built for a much more predictable labour market, and that’s not really the case anymore,” she says.

EXPLORE PATHWAYS, IDENTIFY SKILLS GAPS

FutureFit AI, which was founded in Canada and is now based in the U.S., bills itself as a “career GPS.” Ms. Gupta says the platform brings together data about jobs, skills, career pathways, training and employers, then uses AI to turn this fragmented labour market information into actionable guidance for job seekers.

“For individuals, this translates into personalized career navigation,” Ms. Gupta says. “The platform helps people under-



FutureFit AI’s Vaishnavy Gupta, outside the company’s Toronto headquarters, says the platform was created to address a ‘growing mismatch’ between today’s careers and the systems designed to support job hunters. GALIT RODAN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

stand their existing skills, explore relevant pathways, identify gaps, access training, prepare for jobs and move toward employment with clearer direction.”

For example, if a barista logs onto the platform, it will identify the skills they’ve picked up (for example, customer service, team management, time management), pull in real-time information on the most in-demand jobs in various cities, then recommend jobs in their preferred field based on their skills. Or, it might suggest alternative career paths, based on what companies are hiring for.

If there is a gap between what someone wants to do and their skillset, says Ms. Gupta, the platform will provide tailored training recommendations or other ways to fill that gap. Users typically access the platform through the public or private organizations FutureFit AI partners with, such as government-funded non-for-profits Palette Skills and First Work.

Ms. Gupta notes that in addition to helping job seekers, FutureFit AI also serves employers –

by helping them identify talent pools to fill in-demand jobs – and governments – by helping them provide personalized support at scale for their citizens.

“The platform is not only designed to help one person decide what to do next,” she says. “It is designed to help workforce systems become more responsive, co-ordinated and aligned to changing labour market needs.”

‘AUGMENT, NOT REPLACE’ CRITICAL THINKING

As with many tools powered by AI, skeptics may question whether algorithms can supplant the kinds of insights a person could provide. Stephanie Whitney, managing director of the Future of Work Institute at the University of Waterloo, says that AI-powered career counselling tools can be beneficial for job seekers, especially when they help users “archive” their own story – their past successes, values and anecdotes.

“This ‘second brain’ can help the user to stay consistent across multiple platforms while

maintaining their authentic voice,” Dr. Whitney says. “For people re-entering the workforce or pivoting after a lay-off, AI tools can build confidence by helping to translate skills to new sectors and/or contexts, giving job seekers the professional vocabulary to talk about values and skills that they already possess.”

These tools can be powerful if used with a ‘human-in-the-loop’ approach, she adds.

“AI tools should be used to augment, not replace, the job seekers’ critical thinking about their career.”

Ms. Vasilopoulos says that while career coaching tools can help individuals “explore pathways they may not have previously considered,” she thinks there is a limit to what they can reasonably offer.

“AI tools tend to present what’s statistically most likely, not necessarily what’s most meaningful or what will be the most fulfilling individually. Things like personal motivation, workplace dynamics and the nuances of potential growth all play into career decisions,” she says.

“Progression still depends on judgment, self-awareness and relationship-building, areas where human insight remains essential.”

That’s something Ms. Gupta and her team are thinking about, too. While FutureFit AI says it offers personalized career guidance, it’s not actually trying to replace humans, she says – especially in cases where job seekers need additional or specific support.

“The platform does a really good job of handling things like navigation and providing personalization at scale, so it works best alongside counsellors, employment services and case workers, who are best positioned to address more complex and personal circumstances,” says Ms. Gupta.

“When someone is dealing with challenges like mental health, housing instability, immigration issues, we’re built to connect them to the right kind of support, rather than substitute that support.”

Special to The Globe and Mail