

PRODUCT WHITEPAPER

SMART COMPASS

Coaching Intelligence for Effective Founder Support

How founder coaches can support their coachees more precisely, unlock potential, and systematically improve the quality of coaching

Partner Whitepaper

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Status: July 2026

Discussion basis for pilot, research, and cooperation partners

Executive Summary

SMART Compass is a digital support system for founder coaches and the organizations that support founders. It combines structured needs assessment with a digital founder file, a coaching roadmap, and the preparation and follow-up of individual sessions, so that quality in coaching, mentoring, and advising is supported from the start and sustained across the entire process.

The starting point is not which coach happens to be available. What matters first is what kind of support a coachee actually needs at their current founding stage. The SMART model makes these support functions visible: Structuring, Motivation, Access, Reflection, and Transfer. A clearly guided, AI-supported assessment translates the conversation into a structured SMART profile, creating a shared working basis for coach and coachee.

On this basis, SMART Compass supports the entire coaching process: from initial orientation through prioritized next steps and suitable coach matching, to the preparation, documentation, and reflection of individual sessions. The system does not replace the coach. It helps the coach get to the relevant core faster, hold together progress across multiple sessions, and make transfer commitments visible.

What the System Aims to Deliver

- Better context. Prior knowledge, current founding stage, request context, SMART profile, and roadmap are brought together in one place.
- Clearer focus. Potential and support needs are differentiated along the five SMART functions instead of being described in general terms.
- More continuity. Preparation, session focus, reflection, coaching notes, and commitments form a traceable history.
- Program learning. Aggregated patterns can help organizations develop programs and coaching offers on a more evidence-based footing.
- Simpler reporting. Coaches and their organizations can track the relevant activity faster and more easily.

Guiding Idea: SMART Compass understands coaching quality as the interplay of accurate needs assessment, good preparation, focused interaction, and secured transfer. The platform creates a shared infrastructure for this.

1. Why Founder Coaching Needs Infrastructure

Founder coaching lives on experience, relationship, trust, and situational judgment. At the same time, a session in practice often starts with incomplete context: information sits in emails, notes, or various forms; goals change; earlier agreements are not immediately at hand; and the next session starts over with reconstruction.

The problem is therefore not a lack of coaching competence. What is often missing is an infrastructure that supports the quality of professional coaching work. Without a shared diagnosis, it remains unclear whether a coachee currently needs structure, motivation, access to resources, reflection, or support with transfer. Without visibility across sessions, good impulses can get lost between sessions.

Recurring Breakdowns in the Coaching Process

- The coach receives a lot of background, but little prioritization for the upcoming session.
- Weeks or months can pass between coaching sessions without it being clear what the current progress actually is.
- The coachee names a visible problem, while the actual support need remains hidden underneath it.
- Agreed steps are not systematically connected to the next session.
- Organizations see activity, but hardly any recurring patterns in the support needs of their target groups.

Surfacing Potential Instead of Labeling Deficits

SMART Compass does not assess a founder's personal suitability and does not produce a psychological performance judgment. The system asks which coaching function is already well supported in the concrete context, and where additional support could make a difference. A weak Access value, for example, can mean that relevant network or experience-based knowledge is missing; a weak Transfer value, that existing knowledge has not yet been translated into routines or experiments.

Potential becomes visible in two ways: existing strengths can be used more deliberately, and unused support resources can be tapped more specifically. The coach does not receive a ready-made solution, but a reasoned hypothesis that they can professionally assess and work through together with the coachee.

Scope: The platform is meant to sharpen the coach's professional judgment, not replace it. Diagnosis becomes a basis for conversation, not a label.

2. The SMART Model as a Shared Language

The SMART model originates from academic work on coaching functions in founding processes (Hagedorn, 2017). It describes five different types of support that founders may need depending on their situation and development stage. The model continues to be developed through an active research

program, including an ongoing qualitative validation study based on fifteen founder interviews and a quantitative survey currently in preparation.

Phase-Sensitive and Evidence-Based

Support needs are interpreted relative to the founding stage. A lack of customer access means something different in a very early idea stage than at market entry; a not-yet-mature scaling routine is not automatically a gap if the venture is still being validated. SMART Compass therefore distinguishes five development stages and evaluates each dimension in that context.

For each SMART dimension, the system works with the status values Strong, Present, Weak, and Missing. The rating is supplemented by conversational cues and evidence from the assessment. This keeps it traceable what the diagnosis is based on and where the coach should ask more precise questions.

Important: The SMART profile is a structured snapshot of support needs. It is not a static personality trait and should be reviewed and developed further over the course of coaching.

Dimension	Function	Relevance to Coaching
S	Structuring	Create structure: clarify priorities, next steps, roles, and work processes.
M	Motivation	Strengthen capacity to act: support energy, self-efficacy, resilience, and emotional stability.
A	Access	Open up access: make contacts, expertise, customer access, capital, markets, or experience-based knowledge available.
R	Reflection	Enable reflection: professionally work through assumptions, blind spots, team dynamics, and feedback.
T	Transfer	Secure implementation: translate knowledge into decisions, experiments, methods, and routines.

3. From Diagnosis to a Continuous Coaching Process

The core of SMART Compass is a continuous process. Individual functions combine into a working logic that connects coachee, coach, and organization.

1. Capture context. The coachee records their venture, stage, industry, location, team, and other relevant profile information.
2. Clarify needs. A short, guided AI assessment asks phase-sensitive questions about current challenges and available support resources.
3. Generate a SMART profile. The five coaching functions are presented in structured form with status, description, and conversational evidence.
4. Derive action. Profile and stage together produce a prioritized coaching roadmap and matching tools for the next steps.

5. Activate suitable support. In an organization-bound Pro context, suitable coaches can be suggested and requested directly.
6. Prepare and document sessions. The coach works with the founder file, SMART focus, open roadmap items, preparation, reflection, and the session log.
7. Secure continuity and learning. Commitments, notes, and history remain visible; organizations can identify patterns in support needs through aggregated metrics.

The Role of AI

AI is embedded in clearly defined tasks: guiding the diagnostic conversation, generating a coaching roadmap, and supporting matching. It does not operate as an open-ended, general-purpose chatbot and does not make autonomous coaching decisions. Results are provided as a structured working basis that must be interpreted by coach and coachee.

Core Principle: *SMART Compass does not automate the relationship. It reduces friction around the relationship and frees up more time for the actual coaching work.*

4. Workspaces in the Product: Coachee, Coach, Organization

The current product stage reflects three working environments, all built on the same SMART diagnosis.

Coachee Workspace

After onboarding and building a founder profile (venture, stage, industry, location, team), the coachee completes an AI-supported, phase-sensitive SMART assessment. The result is a founder cockpit with a SMART profile, the next recommended step, a prioritized roadmap, and matching tools. In the Pro context, a coach directory, AI-supported matching, and a request overview are added.

Coach Workspace

The dashboard brings together accepted coachees, new assessments, open requests, and current session logs. The digital founder file brings SMART profile, roadmap, coach notes, and commitment status (agreed, in progress, completed) together in one place. Session preparation and follow-up run through a SMART focus, guiding questions, checklists, and reflection questions, and are recorded in the session log. A contact pool, peer case consultation, and a resource area complement day-to-day casework.

Organization and Admin Area

Administrators manage organizations, coaches, startups, and approvals through invitation and approval processes. Aggregated reporting shows assessment activity, stage distribution, SMART signals, and requests, providing a basis for program steering.

Product Logic: *Free-tier founders use assessment, profile, roadmap, and tools in a self-service model. Coaching, matching, and organization functions are bound to a Pro context with an organization.*

5. How SMART Compass Can Support Coaching Quality

Coaching quality is not created by software alone. A system can, however, create conditions under which professional coaching work becomes more consistent, more focused, and more capable of learning. SMART Compass addresses several quality dimensions to this end.

Potential at Three Levels

- **Coachee.** Coachees gain orientation, recognize resources, and receive concrete next steps.
- **Coach.** Coaches can prioritize faster, ask more grounded questions, and better support transfer between sessions.
- **Organization.** Organizations recognize aggregated patterns in support needs and can develop their offerings, coach pools, and program components more specifically.

Realistic Framing: The platform can foster the conditions for quality and make quality trends more observable. It does not guarantee coaching success, nor does it replace a methodical evaluation of actual impact.

Quality Goal	Mechanism	Visible in the System
Relevance	Phase-sensitive SMART diagnosis	Profile with status and conversational evidence instead of a general problem description
Preparation	Bundled case context	Founder file, last session, open roadmap items, and the coach's own notes
Focus	Explicit session focus	SMART focus, guiding question, and a preparatory checklist
Continuity	Linking multiple sessions	Chronological preparation, session logs, and open follow-ups
Transfer	Visible commitments	Roadmap commitments with status, notes, and follow-up
Reflexivity	Structured follow-up and peer consultation	Reflection questions, documented insights, and a case forum
Program learning	Aggregated analysis	Stage, SMART, request, and matching patterns for organizations

6. Value for Coachees, Coaches, and Organizations

For Coachees

Coachees receive an understandable snapshot of their current support needs. Instead of starting with an unspecific request for help, they can name what they want to work on and which resources are already in

place. Roadmap, tools, and status create orientation; in the Pro context, the system also leads to suitable coaches and a transparent request overview.

For Coaches

Coaches do not simply get more data, but more sharply prioritized context. They can start a session with a reasoned hypothesis, set a SMART focus together with the coachee, and track agreements across multiple sessions. Their own notes stay attached to the relevant case; recurring preparation and follow-up routines are supported.

For Organizations

Organizations manage founder, coach, and approval processes in a role-based system. Aggregated metrics show, among other things, assessment activity, founding stages, SMART signals, frequent gaps, coach requests, confirmed matches, and active coaches. This creates a basis for program steering without every analysis having to rely on personal raw data.

Suitable Deployment Contexts

- Universities, entrepreneurship centers, and technology transfer offices
- Incubators, accelerators, and venture studios
- Economic development agencies and publicly funded founder support programs
- Innovation networks and organizations with their own coach or mentor pools

Positioning: *The coach is at the center of day-to-day quality work. The coachee and the organization benefit directly alongside: the coachee through more orientation and continuity, the organization through more steerable processes and aggregated learning.*

7. Trust, Data Protection, and Responsible AI Use

Founder coaching processes sensitive information about ventures, challenges, and working relationships. SMART Compass therefore separates interface visibility, actual data rights, and privileged server processes.

Key Safeguards

- Roles and organizations determine which data coachees, coaches, and administrators may see and edit.
- Database-level access rules complement the interface logic; confidential access is not protected by hidden buttons alone.
- Privileged workflows such as approvals, requests, and cross-organization reports run through server-side validated functions.
- AI requests are authenticated through a server-side proxy, limited in size and frequency, and restricted to approved task families.

- Usage events are designed as a limited, aggregable set of events and avoid free text content as well as direct personal identifiers.

Responsible Interpretation

The SMART profile is a decision-support working basis. It must not be understood as an automatic judgment of the person, as a psychometric test, or as a guarantee of coaching impact. Transparent conversational evidence, phase-sensitive framing, and professional review by the coach are therefore central components of the product logic.

A supplementary technical document on architecture, data model, and security measures is available on request for IT and data protection review.

Governance Principle: *Responsible AI use here means: a clear purpose, limited tasks, traceable results, secured data pathways, and human interpretation.*

8. Maturity and Next Development Steps

SMART Compass is a functioning product stage with continuous role- and data flows, from assessment and SMART profile through roadmap and matching to the coach working environment and admin reporting. The platform is suitable as a basis for pilots, structured partner discussions, and further empirical validation.

Prioritized Development Paths

1. Diagnostic validation. Further empirically test and standardize the question library per stage and SMART dimension.
2. Contact recommendations. Deliver the existing coach contact pool to coachees as a targeted, directly visible recommendation.
3. Impact logic. Develop a formal evaluation model for diagnostic quality, session focus, transfer, and perceived coaching quality.
4. Organization reporting. Extend time-based, cohort, and program perspectives while maintaining data protection thresholds.
5. Coach collaboration. Deepen resources, peer case consultation, and organization-wide learning loops.

Meaningful Quality Indicators for Pilots

- Share of sessions prepared and followed up
- Continuity of open and completed roadmap commitments
- Perceived clarity of session focus for coach and coachee
- Usefulness of the SMART profile for session preparation and prioritization
- Aggregated patterns in support needs by stage or cohort

These indicators describe quality conditions and process signals. Statements about causal impact or long-term founding success would require more extensive evaluation designs.

9. Invitation to Collaborate

SMART Compass is aimed at organizations and coaches who want not only to organize founder support, but to systematically improve it. The next sensible step is testing it in real coaching contexts.

Possible Pilot Process

1. Prepare context and users. Choose an existing program, a cohort, or a coach network as the pilot environment, onboard coaches and coachees, and define shared quality goals.
2. Test the process. Use assessment, SMART profile, roadmap, founder file, and session preparation and follow-up in everyday coaching.
3. Evaluate experience and develop further. Connect coach and coachee feedback with the quality indicators, and sharpen diagnostics, workflows, and reporting based on the findings.

We Are Looking For

- Pilot partners with real founder coaching programs
- Coaches who want to help shape diagnostic and session-related workflows
- Research and transfer partners for validating the SMART model
- Organizations that want to connect coaching quality and program steering more closely

Closing Thought

Good founder coaching remains human. Its quality depends on trust, professional judgment, and the ability to offer the right kind of support at the right moment. SMART Compass creates a digital working basis for this: it makes support needs visible, connects diagnosis with concrete coaching work, and helps secure learning beyond individual sessions.

SMART Compass is therefore neither a coach marketplace nor an automated substitute for coaching. It is a quality and decision infrastructure for founder support, built to help coaches work more effectively and to support coachees more specifically in realizing their potential.

Contact: *Interested in a conversation, a pilot, or a research collaboration? Contact: Dr. Anja Hagedorn.*