

PILOT STUDY ON EMPATHY & AI



Can an AI coach build empathy?

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



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Responsible AI Consortium

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THE STUDY

An independent pilot study on increasing empathy through AI.

A research team from Abu Dhabi University, KFUPM and Corvinus University tested the AI coach built on the 5 Spheres of Empathy, as part of the Responsible AI Consortium with QS, mentored by Gasm Elbary Elkhair.

12

participants recruited

45

coaching sessions completed

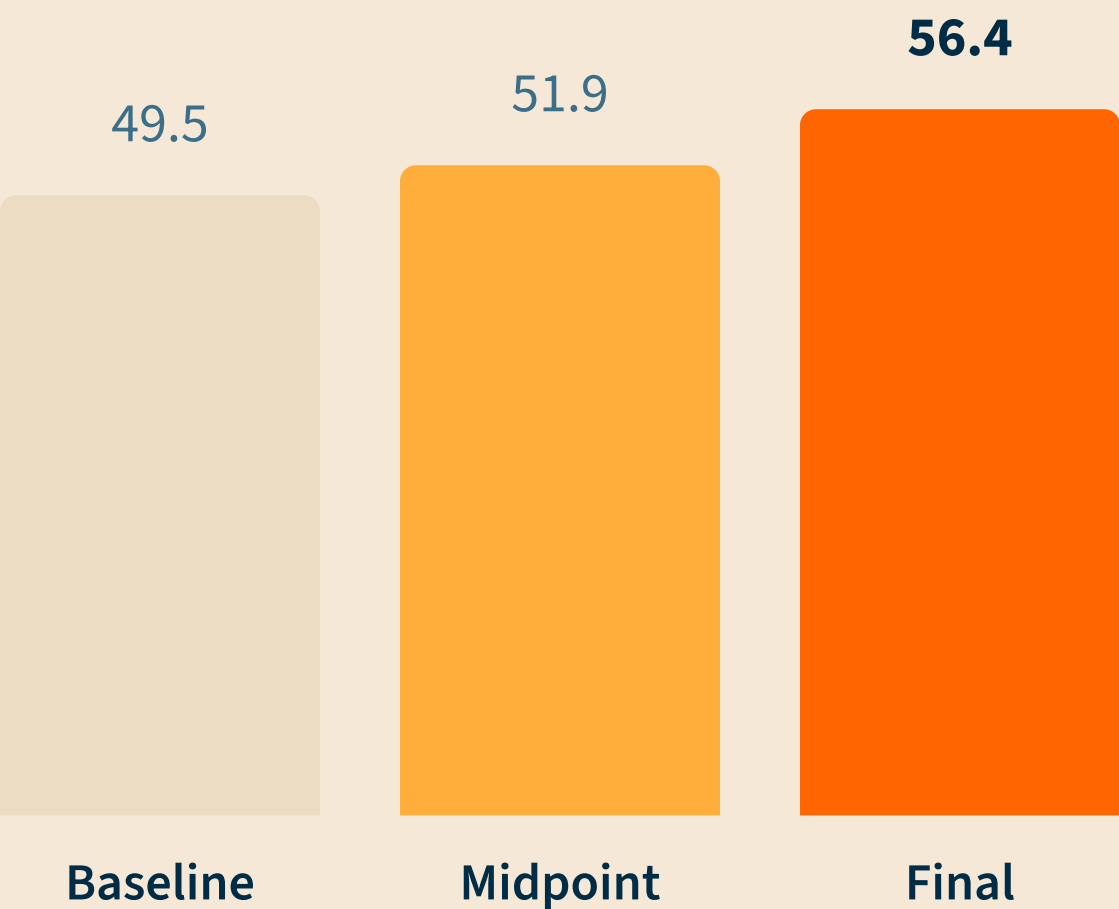
4

sessions per participant, 30–45
min each

3

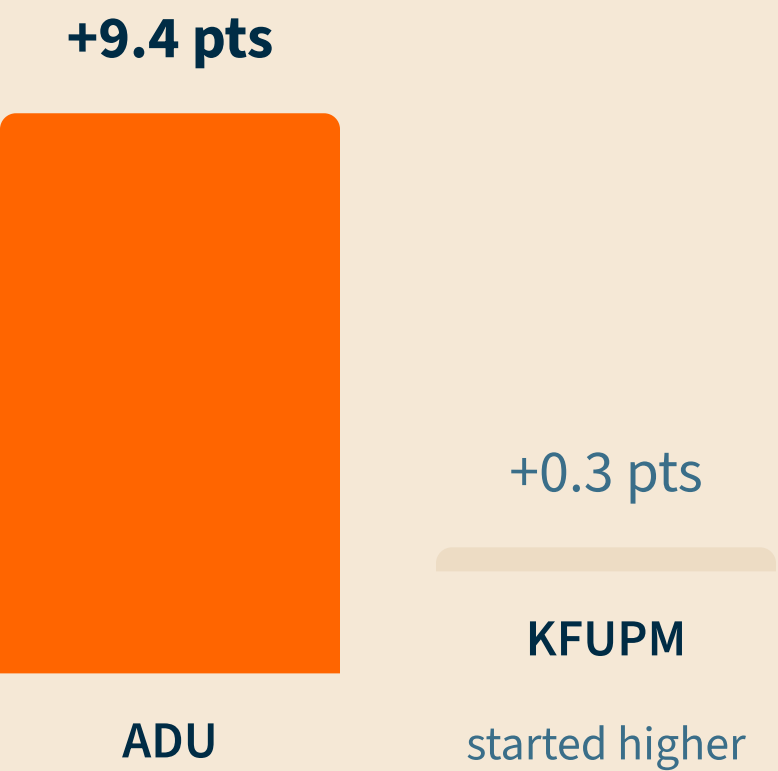
empathy surveys: baseline,
mid, final (TEQ)

Average empathy rose **14%** over the study.



Toronto Empathy Questionnaire, max 64. Scores rose at every measurement point, and rose faster in the second half.

ADU rose. KFUPM barely moved.



Same coach, same scenarios. Part of the answer is arithmetic: KFUPM began from a higher baseline, so there was less room to rise. The rest may be context and culture.

Engagement didn't fade. It grew.

9.5 out of 10 by the final session

This wasn't people going through the motions. Session by session, participants leaned in more, and **58% of reflection entries described a genuine shift in perspective.** Not "I felt good". Seeing a situation differently, in their own words.

The scenario they picked most: **understanding myself.**

Each session, participants chose one of five scenarios: a customer, a colleague, a family member, someone they disagreed with, or themselves. They chose themselves nearly a third of the time. More than any other option.

Nobody told them to start there.

Which is exactly what the 5 Spheres predicts.

- **1 • Self work: values and beliefs** ← where they started
- **2 • Self work: physical, mental, emotional** ← and here
- 3 • Direct stakeholders
- 4 • Affected, indirect stakeholders
- 5 • Those who come after

Self-understanding isn't a nice-to-have. It's the foundation. You can't extend to others what you haven't done for yourself.

NOW THE HONESTY. BECAUSE THIS MATTERS.

What this study can, and cannot, claim.

- Small sample: 12 started, 11 finished
- No control group
- Compressed timeline
- Self-reported scores

"We can say empathy scores went up and people engaged deeply. We cannot say the AI caused it."

From the team's own report



"That rigour from a student team is rarer than the finding." · Mr. G, Galeno Chua

In their own words.



"I had never looked at empathy as a concept before this. I learned how people think, and how they want to be understood."

Ahmed Faarih · Corvinus



"The 14% was real. The reflections were real. Now run it again: longer, larger, with a control group and clear safety rules."

Zoha Salman · ADU



"The hard part wasn't the AI. It was getting people to stop and reflect, every session, every week."

Thamer Al-Hirsan · KFUPM

CREDITS

The people behind the study.



Ahmed Faarih

Researcher · Corvinus



Thamer Al-Hirsan

Researcher · KFUPM



Zoha Salman

Researcher · ADU



Gasm Elbary Elkhair

Mentor

Run as part of the Responsible AI Consortium with QS.
Optomize and the 5 Spheres method: Galeno Chua.

WHAT COMES NEXT

The next study is coming.
Bigger, longer, with a
control group.

Watch this space.