Step 1: Familiarisation - Unified Observation Table

Research Questions

- **RQ1**: How do early-career individuals in Germany describe trust in AI vs human career coaching?
- **RQ2**: How do they describe perceived effectiveness of AI vs human career coaching?
- **RQ3**: How are trust and effectiveness connected, and how do they influence preferences for AI, human, or hybrid models?

Participant Overview

#	Name	Age	Background	Location	Current Role
1	Daniel	24	Serbia→Berlin	Berlin	UX/UI Designer
2	Simon	24	Brazil→Munich	Munich	ML Engineer
3	Lisa	28	German	Munich	Marketing at BCG
4	Laura #1	25	Spanish-German	Munich	Aerospace→Cloud Engineering
5	Oleg	25	Russia→Germany	Germany	Data Analyst
6	Lena	~22	German	Berlin	UX Researcher (Student)
7	Mehmet	26	Turkey→Munich	Munich	Project Engineer
8	Sofia	27	Spain→Hamburg	Hamburg	Data Specialist
9	Jonas	28	German	Cologne	Backend Developer (Fintech)
10	Alina	29	Ukraine→Frankfurt	Frankfurt	Compliance Officer
11	Pierre	27	France→Stuttgart	Stuttgart	Industrial Designer
12	Noura	23	Syria→Düsseldorf	Düsseldorf	HR Coordinator

#	Name	Age	Background	Location	Current Role
13	Slava	30	Poland→Leipzig	Leipzig	Operations Manager
14	Silvia	25	Italy→Berlin	Berlin	BD Climate-tech
15	Mihir	26	India→Munich	Munich	Embedded Systems Engineer
16	Katharina	28	German	Hamburg	Product Marketing Manager
17	Amir	24	Iran→Cologne	Cologne	HCI Master Student
18	Laura #2	27	Spain→Frankfurt	Frankfurt	Finance Analyst
19	Tobias	28	German	Stuttgart	Mechanical Engineer

Observations by Participant

1. Daniel (UX/UI Designer, 24, Serbia→Berlin)

#	Observation	Category
1	Career transition from Serbia; navigated German job market as immigrant	Career Context
2	Values structure and clear process in coaching interactions	Trust Drivers
3	Uses AI for portfolio feedback and interview preparation	AI Usage
4	Appreciates AI's non-judgmental nature for practicing conversations	Trust in AI
5	Finds human mentors essential for understanding German workplace culture	Human Value
6	Trust in AI is "conditional" - useful for structure, not emotional depth	Trust-Effectiveness Link
7	Prefers hybrid model: AI for preparation, human for validation	Preference

2. Simon (ML Engineer, 24, Brazil→Munich)

#	Observation	Category
1	International background (Brazil to Munich); tech-savvy ML engineer	Career Context
2	High comfort with AI tools due to technical background	AI Comfort
3	Uses AI extensively for technical learning and career planning	AI Usage
4	Values human coaching for emotional support and accountability	Human Value
5	Trust in AI based on consistency and lack of judgment	Trust in AI
6	Effectiveness requires trust as "permission" to share real problems	Trust-Effectiveness Link
7	Sees AI as "always available" advantage over humans	AI Advantage
8	Prefers hybrid: AI backbone with human checkpoints	Preference

3. Lisa (Marketing at BCG, 28, German, Munich)

#	Observation	Category
1	Working at top-tier consulting firm (BCG); high-pressure environment	Career Context
2	Used professional human coaching through company program	Human Experience
3	Values empathy and "feeling seen" as core trust drivers	Trust Drivers
4	Finds AI useful for quick frameworks but lacks emotional depth	AI Limitation
5	Human coach helped with identity questions AI couldn't address	Human Value
6	Effectiveness tied to coach's ability to challenge without shaming	Effectiveness Drivers
7	Trust enables depth; without trust, conversations stay surface-level	Trust-Effectiveness Link
8	Prefers human for deep work, AI for tactical preparation	Preference

4. Laura #1 (Cloud Engineering, 25, Spanish-German, Munich)

#	Observation	Category
1	Career pivot from aerospace to cloud engineering; technical transition	Career Context
2	Used AI to prepare for technical interviews and negotiate offers	AI Usage
3	Values competence and industry-specific knowledge in coaches	Trust Drivers
4	Distrusts generic advice that doesn't account for German tech market	Distrust Drivers
5	AI effective for structured preparation but not for emotional processing	Effectiveness
6	Human mentor crucial for navigating internal politics	Human Value
7	Trust affects willingness to follow through on advice	Trust-Effectiveness Link
8	Prefers hybrid with clear division of labor	Preference

5. Oleg (Data Analyst, 25, Russia→Germany)

#	Observation	Category
1	Russian immigrant; navigating visa constraints and career growth	Career Context
2	Visa status creates additional pressure on career decisions	Context
3	Uses AI for resume optimization and interview prep	AI Usage
4	Values confidentiality highly due to workplace sensitivity	Trust Drivers
5	Distrusts internal HR/coaching programs - fears information sharing	Distrust Drivers
6	AI provides safe space for honest reflection without judgment	Trust in AI
7	Human connection needed for networking and real opportunities	Human Value
8	Effectiveness of AI limited by lack of local market knowledge	AI Limitation

#	Observation	Category
9	Trust determines how much "real" information is shared	Trust-Effectiveness Link

6. Lena (UX Researcher, ~22, German, Berlin)

#	Observation	Category
1	Bachelor student; early career stage with less professional experience	Career Context
2	Used AI for career exploration and understanding different paths	AI Usage
3	Values authenticity and non-salesy approach in coaches	Trust Drivers
4	Skeptical of coaches who seem to have "agenda" or template	Distrust Drivers
5	AI helpful for brainstorming but lacks nuanced career guidance	AI Limitation
6	Finds peer mentors more relatable than formal coaches	Human Value
7	Trust builds gradually through demonstrated understanding	Trust Development
8	Prefers informal human guidance supplemented by AI research	Preference

7. Mehmet (Project Engineer, 26, Turkey→Munich)

#	Observation	Category
1	Turkish background; engineering role in Munich automotive sector	Career Context
2	Cultural adjustment challenges in German workplace hierarchy	Context
3	Uses AI for communication style and email drafting in German	AI Usage
4	Values coaches who understand multicultural dynamics	Trust Drivers
5	Distrusts advice that doesn't account for immigrant experience	Distrust Drivers
6	Human mentors needed for navigating unwritten German workplace rules	Human Value
7	AI effective for language and structure, not cultural nuance	AI Limitation

#	Observation	Category
8	Trust in human coach depends on their cultural competence	Trust-Effectiveness Link
9	Prefers hybrid with culturally-aware human component	Preference

8. Sofia (Data Specialist, 27, Spain→Hamburg)

#	Observation	Category
1	Spanish background working in Hamburg; data analytics role	Career Context
2	Used AI extensively for career decision-making and scenario planning	AI Usage
3	Values structured approach and explicit trade-off analysis	Effectiveness Drivers
4	Appreciates AI's ability to "hold" complex decision matrices	AI Value
5	Human coaches valued for emotional containment during uncertainty	Human Value
6	Distrusts coaches who push predetermined solutions	Distrust Drivers
7	Trust enables sharing of real fears and contradictions	Trust-Effectiveness Link
8	AI effective for clarity, humans for courage	Effectiveness Split
9	Strong preference for hybrid model with clear roles	Preference

9. Jonas (Backend Developer, 28, Cologne)

#	Observation	Category
1	Backend developer in fintech; German native in Cologne	Career Context
2	Tech-pragmatic view of AI as tool, not replacement for humans	AI Perspective
3	Uses AI for code-related career skills and technical interview prep	AI Usage
4	Values directness and honesty in coaching relationships	Trust Drivers
5	Distrusts "fluffy" coaching that lacks concrete outcomes	Distrust Drivers

#	Observation	Category
6	Human value in accountability and "someone watching"	Human Value
7	Trust in AI based on utility, not emotional connection	Trust in AI
8	Effectiveness measured by tangible career actions taken	Effectiveness Criteria
9	Prefers AI for preparation, human for accountability	Preference

10. Alina (Compliance Officer, 29, Ukraine→Frankfurt)

#	Observation	Category
1	Ukrainian refugee; compliance role in Frankfurt financial sector	Career Context
2	High stakes context (war, displacement) intensifies career decisions	Context
3	Used AI to navigate German bureaucracy and career options	AI Usage
4	Values confidentiality and safety as paramount trust drivers	Trust Drivers
5	Distrusts anyone who might share information with employer	Distrust Drivers
6	AI provides "anonymous" space for honest career reflection	Trust in AI
7	Human support needed for emotional processing of displacement	Human Value
8	Trust affects depth of disclosure and quality of guidance received	Trust-Effectiveness Link
9	Effectiveness of AI limited by lack of understanding refugee context	AI Limitation
10	Prefers hybrid with verified confidential human support	Preference

11. Pierre (Industrial Designer, 27, France→Stuttgart)

#	Observation	Category
1	French designer in Stuttgart automotive industry	Career Context
2	Creative field in engineering-dominated environment	Context

#	Observation	Category
3	Uses AI for portfolio development and presentation preparation	AI Usage
4	Values creativity and openness in coaching approach	Trust Drivers
5	Distrusts rigid frameworks that don't fit creative careers	Distrust Drivers
6	Human mentors valued for industry-specific design career knowledge	Human Value
7	AI helpful for structure but can miss creative nuance	AI Limitation
8	Trust built through demonstrated understanding of design field	Trust Development
9	Prefers human mentors from design background, AI for general prep	Preference

12. Noura (HR Coordinator, 23, Syria→Düsseldorf)

#	Observation	Category
1	Syrian refugee; youngest participant; HR role in Düsseldorf	Career Context
2	Multiple layers of transition: country, language, career	Context
3	Uses AI to improve professional German language skills	AI Usage
4	Values patience and non-judgmental attitude as trust drivers	Trust Drivers
5	Particularly sensitive to dismissive or condescending behavior	Distrust Drivers
6	AI provides safe practice space without fear of embarrassment	Trust in AI
7	Human mentors needed for navigating social aspects of German workplace	Human Value
8	Trust requires feeling respected despite language limitations	Trust Development
9	Effectiveness tied to feeling safe enough to ask "stupid" questions	Trust-Effectiveness Link
10	Prefers patient humans for guidance, AI for practice	Preference

13. Slava (Operations Manager, 30, Poland→Leipzig)

#	Observation	Category
1	Polish background; operations management in Leipzig logistics	Career Context
2	Most senior participant (30); different career stage perspective	Context
3	Uses AI for strategic planning and decision frameworks	AI Usage
4	Values practical, results-oriented coaching approach	Trust Drivers
5	Distrusts theoretical advice without operational experience	Distrust Drivers
6	Human coaches valued for accountability and follow-through	Human Value
7	AI effective for analysis but lacks operational intuition	AI Limitation
8	Trust based on demonstrated expertise and track record	Trust Drivers
9	Effectiveness measured by business impact and career progression	Effectiveness Criteria
10	Prefers experienced human mentors, AI as analytical tool	Preference

14. Silvia (BD Climate-tech, 25, Italy→Berlin)

#	Observation	Category
1	Italian in Berlin; business development in climate-tech startup	Career Context
2	Values-driven career choice (climate focus) shapes coaching needs	Context
3	Uses AI for market research and pitch preparation	AI Usage
4	Values alignment of values between coach and coachee	Trust Drivers
5	Distrusts coaches who don't understand startup/mission-driven context	Distrust Drivers
6	Human mentors valued for network connections and introductions	Human Value
7	AI helpful for preparation but can't provide authentic connections	AI Limitation

#	Observation	Category
8	Trust enables vulnerable conversations about career-values tensions	Trust-Effectiveness Link
9	Effectiveness includes alignment with personal mission	Effectiveness Criteria
10	Prefers mission-aligned humans, AI for tactical preparation	Preference

15. Mihir (Embedded Systems Engineer, 26, India→Munich)

#	Observation	Category
1	Indian engineer in Munich; embedded systems in automotive	Career Context
2	Visa considerations (Blue Card) shape career decisions	Context
3	Uses AI for technical interview prep and salary negotiation	AI Usage
4	Values clear communication and explicit expectations	Trust Drivers
5	Distrusts vague promises or "soft" coaching approaches	Distrust Drivers
6	Human mentors valued for understanding Indian→German transition	Human Value
7	AI effective for data-driven aspects (salaries, market info)	AI Value
8	Trust in humans requires shared understanding of immigrant experience	Trust Development
9	Effectiveness measured by concrete career outcomes	Effectiveness Criteria
10	Prefers AI for research, humans for strategic guidance	Preference

16. Katharina (Product Marketing Manager, 28, German, Hamburg)

#	Observation	Category
1	German native; product marketing in Hamburg corporate environment	Career Context

#	Observation	Category
2	No immigrant/visa concerns; different trust landscape	Context
3	Used professional human coaching through employer program	Human Experience
4	Values competence and industry expertise as trust drivers	Trust Drivers
5	Distrusts generic advice not tailored to marketing career	Distrust Drivers
6	AI useful for content creation and competitive analysis	AI Usage
7	Human coaches valued for navigating corporate politics	Human Value
8	Trust enables honest discussion of workplace challenges	Trust-Effectiveness Link
9	Effectiveness requires actionable, specific guidance	Effectiveness Criteria
10	Prefers quality human coaching, AI as supplementary tool	Preference

17. Amir (HCI Master Student, 24, Iran→Cologne)

#	Observation	Category
1	Iranian student in Cologne; HCI Master program	Career Context
2	Academic→industry transition pending; uncertain path	Context
3	Uses AI extensively for research and career exploration	AI Usage
4	Values intellectual depth and genuine curiosity in coaches	Trust Drivers
5	Distrusts superficial or rushed coaching interactions	Distrust Drivers
6	AI provides space for extensive exploration without time pressure	AI Value
7	Human mentors needed for industry connections and practical advice	Human Value
8	Trust develops through intellectual respect and genuine engagement	Trust Development
9	Effectiveness includes expanding thinking, not just action steps	Effectiveness Criteria

#	Observation	Category
10	Prefers AI for exploration, humans for reality-checking	Preference

18. Laura #2 (Finance Analyst, 27, Spain→Frankfurt)

#	Observation	Category
1	Spanish finance professional in Frankfurt banking sector	Career Context
2	Faced three-path decision: banking vs. climate startup vs. academia	Context
3	Intensive 3-week AI-supported decision-making process	AI Usage
4	Created weighted decision matrix with AI assistance	AI Usage
5	Values competence, context understanding, and confidentiality	Trust Drivers
6	Distrusts coaches who push agenda or make big claims	Distrust Drivers
7	AI effective for structure, trade-offs, and mirroring avoidance	AI Effectiveness
8	"Trust is like permission" - enables sharing real problems	Trust-Effectiveness Link
9	AI cannot "hold" fear like humans can	AI Limitation
10	Effectiveness possible with partial trust for structural tasks	Trust-Effectiveness Link
11	Trust in AI: 7.5/10; Human coach: 6.5-7/10	Ratings
12	AI effectiveness: 9/10; Human coaching effectiveness: 5.5/10	Ratings
13	AI helped enable better human conversations through clarity	Hybrid Synergy
14	Strong preference for hybrid: AI prep + human emotional support	Preference
15	Final decision (climate scale-up) achieved through AI-supported process	Outcome

19. Tobias (Mechanical Engineer, 28, German, Stuttgart)

#	Observation	Category
1	German engineer in Stuttgart automotive supplier; recognition struggles	Career Context
2	Paid for private coaching (€900), stopped after one session	Human Experience
3	Trust ruptured when coach dismissed feelings: "everyone feels that"	Trust Rupture
4	Coach pushed consulting path that didn't fit Tobias's values	Distrust Drivers
5	Felt labeled ("introverted engineer") rather than understood	Distrust Drivers
6	Same phrase ("everyone has this") felt dismissive from coach, connecting from colleague	Trust Nuance
7	Switched to AI + senior colleague informal mentoring	Adaptation
8	AI provides psychological safety - "cannot shame me"	Trust in AI
9	Uses AI for conversation prep and structured reflection	AI Usage
10	Human mentor provides accountability and political context	Human Value
11	"When I distrust, I share safe version, advice is not tailored"	Trust-Effectiveness Link
12	Trust in human coaches: 4/10 (post-bad experience)	Ratings
13	Trust in AI: 7/10; AI effectiveness: 6/10	Ratings
14	Human coaching effectiveness: 2/10 (for his experience)	Ratings
15	Prefers hybrid: AI for prep, trusted human mentor for context	Preference

Cross-Cutting Observations

Trust Drivers (Human Coaching)

1. **Empathy and feeling seen** - Being heard without judgment

2. **Competence and expertise** - Industry/context-specific knowledge
3. **Confidentiality** - Clear assurance information won't be shared
4. **Cultural understanding** - Especially for immigrants navigating German workplace
5. **Non-judgmental challenge** - Ability to push without shaming
6. **Transparent process** - Clear explanation of coaching method
7. **Authenticity** - Not feeling like a "case" or revenue stream

Distrust Drivers (Human Coaching)

1. **Dismissiveness** - Invalidating feelings or experiences
2. **Template approach** - Pushing one-size-fits-all solutions
3. **Agenda/bias** - Promoting specific paths (e.g., consulting)
4. **Personality labeling** - Framing traits as defects
5. **Salesy vibe** - Overconfidence, marketing language
6. **Lack of confidentiality** - Fear of information sharing
7. **Generic advice** - Not tailored to specific context

Trust Drivers (AI)

1. **No judgment** - Safe to share without embarrassment
2. **Consistency** - Always available, doesn't get tired
3. **Structure** - Helps organize chaotic thoughts
4. **Conditional privacy** - User controls what to share
5. **No ego** - Doesn't need to be right
6. **Patience** - Can explore extensively without time pressure

Distrust Drivers (AI)

1. **Hallucinations** - Confidently wrong information
2. **Privacy concerns** - Uncertainty about data usage
3. **Generic output** - Sometimes too templated
4. **Lacks context** - Cannot understand specific workplace politics
5. **No accountability** - No consequences for bad advice
6. **Cannot "hold" emotions** - Misses depth of human experience

Trust-Effectiveness Patterns

1. **Trust as "permission"** - Higher trust → more honest sharing → better tailored advice

2. **Trust affects follow-through** - Distrust → resistance to implementing advice
3. **Partial trust sufficient for structural tasks** - Can use AI effectively without full trust
4. **Same words, different trust impact** - "Everyone feels that" can dismiss or connect
5. **Trust builds gradually** - Through demonstrated understanding over time
6. **Trust enables vulnerability** - Required for deep identity/values work

Preference Patterns

- **18/19 prefer hybrid model** (AI + human combination)
- **AI preferred for**: Preparation, structure, practice, analysis, availability
- **Human preferred for**: Emotional support, accountability, context, connections, challenge
- **Key hybrid principle**: AI for "thinking," human for "feeling" and validation