

## AI, digital transformation, and vulnerable customers: Building resilience and overcoming challenges - Transcript

**James:** [00:00:00] I don't think, personally, a lot of people who would see themselves as non-vulnerable necessarily understand what it is to be vulnerable.

We know that during the most recent financial crisis, which we're still living through today, that actually there's an awful lot of people who have found themselves under financial pressure and vulnerable for the first time.

**Sarah:** I think you've hit the nail on the head with people who are in the workplace not really understanding necessarily what vulnerable people are going through and I'm thinking of elderly folks who are not digitally savvy and they can be really stuck now without old fashioned services and some of them are housebound.

And they need trusted people to be able to deal with their, uh, financials and all these other requirements that they have. Even paying a heating bill can be really difficult for them. It's about then [00:01:00] understanding what the special needs of the person that is contacting the organization are and then dealing with those.

And AI can not only identify the kind of needs that a person might have, but also find a solution. AIs. Basically going to increase personalization. And that's particularly good news for vulnerable folks with AI. You can actually understand their requirements a bit better and offer them services or solutions that suits their specific needs.

Exactly right.

**James:** And actually understand who they're talking to as well. For example, we can use now speech analytics, text analytics, to actually identify the timbre in somebody's voice. So the agent can be talking to that person and they can be advised, this person is now beginning to sound upset. They're getting stressed in this conversation.

Purely because speech analytics, powered by AI, gives the ability to understand that emotion. [00:02:00] That then allows the agent to potentially take action. And the same with text analytics as well is actually reading what is going on in those chat messages or other channels. And again, being able to interpret because of the way the wording is going, even picking up on the fact that somebody might use uppercase, somebody's getting angry.

So it's Using that intelligence within the system to help inform the agent, to your point, is giving the agent tools to be able to have a much better conversation with that

**Sarah:** customer. You reminded me of another requirement, which is simplification. Uh, you know, people might not all have the same level of education, so they, uh, the way that documents are worded, uh, might make life difficult for them.

So actually simplifying, we all know how difficult legalese is, you know, dealing with legal contracts and so on. So, uh, AI being used to simplify, identify where the need is and simplify the language. I think that's really important. Another aspect

**James:** of it too. You've also reminded me then of, of language [00:03:00] because.

We sort of easily assume, don't we, that everybody speaks English to a level. And that's just not the case. There's an awful lot of people living in the UK alone who speak multiple languages, English quite often not being the first language. And historically, we've had to handle those calls by having somebody who spoke that language with them.

AI enables that to be much more fluid.

**Sarah:** There are great examples of how AI is helping. actually helping the agents or social workers reach out and pre-emptively reduce, you know, avoid problems. Um, I came across a really good case study, uh, where some local authorities in the U. S. are now using data that is available to them as government bodies.

AI then analyses that data and predicts when somebody might become homeless. It does represent a challenge about the data, uh, you know, data privacy and in the right hands and for the right purposes, that's perfect. But [00:04:00] I think we do need guardrails that would then protect people in, uh, you know, in other circumstances where it could be used negatively against them.

**James:** I think financial services historically have been quite good at using that. data to predict where problems might be coming. It's how other sectors of the business community, to your point, do a similar thing and take their own data, but potentially other data sources, to do that level of prediction.

**Sarah:** There's a big focus on elderly folks who fall prey to financial scams more than other age groups do. Uh, and that kind of analysis by financial institutions to identify unusual patterns or, um, you know, transactions that are way beyond what, what is expected to actually then contact the account holder.

Instead

**James:** of having to react to something happening, they can potentially proactively plan in advance. The other thing which you touch upon is, is. Vulnerability isn't a permanent state, so it fluctuates. Somebody [00:05:00] who might be vulnerable this year for various reasons in five years' time may not be. Um, so it's important that, that, that data changes with reality.

Um, otherwise you begin to treat people, again, the world has moved on, they're no longer in that way. Historically, it's been very hard to identify somebody who's vulnerable for whatever that reason might be. Partly because it's been wholly reliant upon that individual or a member of that individual's family.

Telling an organization that they are vulnerable with it, or they're struggling with somebody, but it's still relying upon them being told As opposed to now using AI to predict and and actually identify those people And then go out and say are you in this position and help them with it? It's up to us as businesses to make sure that we're aware of unconscious bias and make sure that we plan that and we build within algorithms, within AI to understand that.

And again, the benefit of AI is once it's been planned, it will learn and take that into account.[00:06:00]

Forget that actually the person looking after the customer may themselves have Some challenges and some needs as well, and AI can help them as well with that. It also can free up time to focus on what really matters. So if I think around, for example, in, um, in specialist areas in local government, for example, then it's, how can you free up people's time to focus on what really matters?

So for example, it could be a social housing conversation, something like that. So instead of being focused on administration or on non, non-important tasks, AI can be used to free that up and allow the expert to focus on what they should be doing, which for them is much better. But then it also means they can help the customer in a better way.

We really believe in, I think it's called human in the loop, but fundamentally we believe in actually. AI isn't there to necessarily replace human intervention. It's absolutely there to complement. And part of that is this choice of channel. And it's knowing when somebody needs to talk to a human or when somebody is [00:07:00] comfortable talking using AI.

And it's actually therefore that ability to orchestrate the right thing for the customer. And I think that's what AI has brought us now. It's brought an ability to do that really

**Sarah:** well. And having trigger words that would Directly called a human. Yes, who should be in the loop and you know, for example dealing with bereavement.

**James:** It's very clunky An incredibly experienced agent doesn't need that, but AI actually helps guide the agent through that without needing the form. And actually, coming back to that point, it's recognizing the timbre of somebody's voice so it can actually guide the, where the agent goes in terms of the tools, removes the need for those processes.

makes the conversation more natural, but also much more empathetic in terms of what they're dealing with in that way, and can get to the answers much quicker as well for the customer.

I think that's really important, that ability to switch between channels seamlessly. We've talked about it I think for [00:08:00] many years. It's only really now that the AI has given us that ability to properly switch customers between channels. I think the other thing that we now have the ability to do is for the knowledge to travel across those channels.

So actually, if you've started the conversation to your point, maybe in chat. You suddenly need to move to a voice conversation. You don't have to repeat everything again. The, the, the agent on the end of the phone has got access to the previous conversation that was in chat. Because there's nothing worse than having to repeat it all again.

Again, for anybody it becomes really irritating.

I think we often forget, or rather I should say, we often focus on the needs of the customer. We forget that actually the person looking after the customer may themselves have some challenges and some needs as well. And AI can help them as well with that. It's up to us as businesses to make sure that we're aware of unconscious bias and make sure that we plan that and we build within algorithms within AI to understand that.

And again, the benefit of AI is once it's [00:09:00] been planned, it will learn and take that into account.

**Sarah:** But it's so important for it to be constantly checked and it's fairness. and lack of bias validated. The good news is that there are tools, open source tools, that help AI developers check their models for bias and, uh, testing them for fairness by tweaking, uh, key data points, uh, so that they can see how the decisions were made and tracing things back and being able to effectively, um, it's not quite an audit trail, but it's something resembling an audit trail and making sure that it's AI remains, uh, balanced and fair.

I think that's really important.

**James:** The difficulty is, I think it's still very immature, the level of data that identifies different vulnerability

**Sarah:** needs. Then another thing that I'd like to see is, um, For organizations to provide really help, helpful hints and [00:10:00] tips as people go through using the forms online, whatever it is that they're doing.

I would also like to see is maybe some tools, maybe very simple teaching tools that are available

**James:** online. If we make the interaction as natural and intuitive as possible, you can take away a lot of that fear.