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# Getting ready for the digital human workforce

20 Jun 2018, by *Amy Sarcevic*

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Managing a human workforce can be a demanding experience. To perform well and remain loyal, most people require a competitive salary, a commutable office location, an aesthetically pleasing working environment with natural light and plenty of space, a cohesive team culture, motivational incentives, praise and recognition, regular breaks, a manageable workload, variety, training, career progression – not to mention mandatory provisions like superannuation, sick leave and workers’ compensation.

These needs equate to significant annual overheads, particularly in government call centres, where demand for service is often under unsustainable pressure.

Introducing digital humans – the low maintenance alternative. Digital humans can work 24x7x365, requiring nothing but an electricity and internet connection (beyond their initial programming of course).

And, thanks to advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), digital humans like ‘Nadia’ now have personalities and can exhibit human traits, such as empathy.

Nadia was developed in response to the need for better interfacing between government institutions and the general public.

For the last two decades many governments have attempted to relieve pressure on over-burdened call centres by providing digital substitutions in the form of automated responses, online forms and FAQs. However, this impersonal approach to service delivery is inaccessible or off-putting to many.

Digital humans overcome this by humanizing online interaction. Not only do they look human, they can convey complex emotion, read facial expressions (via webcam) – detecting even subtle emotional cues – and provide an appropriate, empathetic response to customer questions.

Just like any human, digital humans also develop emotional intelligence the more they interact with a given person or community. If a customer changes his or her usual tone or facial expression, the digital human will detect this and adjust their own tone and expression accordingly.

Marie Johnson is the Managing Director and Chief Digital Officer at the Centre for Digital Business – a firm specialising in AI, co-design and digital transformation – and is due to speak at the **AFR Innovation Summit – 30-31 July in Sydney.**

Ahead of her presentation at the Summit she says, “For the last twenty years, many organisations have simply placed an electronic veneer over front-of-house departments and put absolutely everything online”

“But this approach is making people feel alienated and frustrated, particularly those who may be having to communicate with government agencies following a traumatizing health diagnosis, a bereavement, or marriage breakdown. It also fails to take into account the significant subset of the population who lack digital literacy, or who are living with an intellectual disability”.

In contrast, digital humans provide a channel of communication which is accessible, conversational, and inclusive. Co-designed upfront and throughout the lifecycle, the digital human has a unique personality designed to befit the nature of their role; and becomes progressively knowledgeable the more it interacts.

What’s more, digital humans maximise the value that human staff deliver by unshackling them of lower value or repetitive tasks, so that they can add more meaningful value.

In an increasingly customer-centric private sector, this type of digital differentiation may now be key to remaining competitive. “Firms who point customers towards frustrating and inaccessible online forms or advice centers are increasingly vulnerable to competition – from companies who are effectively implementing AI as the face of their brand”, says Ms. Johnson.

The CEO of Faceme – the AI company whose digital human platform brought to life the first digital assistant in Australasian banking – Danny Tomsett adds, “By 2020, customers will manage 85 per cent of their relationship with enterprises without interacting with a human. It is individualisation and a company’s ability to make digital conversations more human that will differentiate companies in future”.

With the potential introduction of a digital human workforce, many business leaders and resourcing departments/agencies are concerned about the impact on business and wider society.

Marie Johnson will address these concerns and continue the conversation at the **AFR Innovation Summit – to be held 30-31 July 2018** at the Sofitel Wentworth Sydney.

**Learn more and register.**

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