INSIDE INNOVATION PODCAST EPISODE 2: THE HUMAN SIDE OF AI

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

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Christopher Wickes [00:00:03]

Welcome to Episode Two in Accenture's Inside Innovation podcast series. My name's Chris and I'm a product manager in our conversational AI practice in Accenture Technology. And today I've got two of my colleagues here. I've got Francesca, who's a business analyst in our life sciences group, who's been with Accenture for about two years. We've also got Mahnoor , who is in our technology group. She joined as a graduate last year. I myself have been with Accenture for six years. I'm old hat to all of this. But today we're going to be talking about some of the work that Accenture is doing in the area of artificial intelligence or AI. And I guess a good place to start might be how we actually define AI. I know, Francesca and Mahnoor , given that you're relatively new to Accenture, some of your you're training that you went through was all about AI. So maybe you can fill us in on how Accenture defines it nowadays.

Francesca Fasesin [00:01:

Actually, when
I was recruited into Accenture,
part of the recruitment exercise was to use a form of AI: natural language processing. There are many types of AI, and I think the issue is people don't understand all the different types of

But as part of the Technology Visionaries programme , we came together as a group to build a call centre bot using AWS Amazon's AI. service. And then also as part of my analyst training, which we did in Bangalore in India, we built a chatbot, this time using IBM Watson, to allow people to input their preferences in buying a property in London. And the chatbot was actually linked to Facebook, which is really cool because you could then see your answer you could type in your answers into the Facebook Messenger chat and then be presented with different options of properties that suited your preferences. So, yeah, I've been introduced to AI through my training opportunities at Accenture and as I said before, in the way that I was recruited into the firm.

Christopher Wickes [00:02:17]

A lot of the work we're doing is around automation in the contact centre . A lot of people

in contact centres do very, very repetitive work. A lot of Accenture's clients struggle with retention of staff in their contact centre just because answering the same question over the phone over and over and over again is not the most motivating way to spend your day. So actually, by being able to automate some of those kind of customer service queries that are coming into the contact centre , whether that's through a typical chatbot on the website, where you can type your questions and the chatbot will answer, which is all using natural language processing to understand what the questions are all about and then find an appropriate answer to that, or it can also be a voice to voice interaction. We've done a number of projects over the last couple of years where we've

actually built a voice assistant and hooked it up to the company's telephony system. So people calling up the company's customer services, they're actually speaking to a voice bot rather than a customer service agent. Generally, what we do is we use these automated chat bots for the more simple questions, and then that frees up the time from the agents in order to focus on more high value work, which they find more interesting as well.

Francesca Fasesin [00:03:45]

Mahnoor, I know you're quite active in the AI community space in Accenture. So do you want to tell us more about what you're doing there?

Mahnoor Raja [00:03:53]

So I'm actually part of the data and AI community here at Accenture, and this is where we have the opportunity to speak with senior managers and leadership in the AI practice at Accenture to be able to understand what are the kind of projects and the work that they do and the challenges that they face in their respective areas at Accenture. And I think what is really nice is the opportunity to be able to interact and participate in various lunch and learn sessions that are held to be able to expand your knowledge. So one thing that Accenture do really well is being able to provide lots of learning and development for anyone who's interested in picking up skills that will enable them to put themselves in the AI field and be able to learn from those around them. So that's something that I've really enjoyed, joining as a graduate at Accenture.

Christopher Wickes [00:04:43]

I mean, I personally I joined as an experienced hire six years ago into our banking practice as a technology consultant because I had previously done a graduate scheme with a bank in IT and then I managed to find myself over the years, hopping from project to project. You pick up new skills, and then I eventually moved into our emerging technology group. I guess one of the interesting things about working at Accenture is the fact that there is a lot of mobility in terms of where you end up.

Francesca Fasesin [00:05:17]

Yeah, and I think another cool thing to mention is the Technology Quotient that we have. Which is an initiative that's come down from Julie Sweet herself and essentially is empowering everyone at Accenture, no matter where you sit within the business, to understand the emerging technologies, as you said, or key technologies of our modern time. And essentially enable everyone to have a thorough conversation, whether it be with our clients or amongst ourselves about these technologies of which AI and the different applications is one of them. And I definitely found the Technology Quotient, the curated material around that really helpful, in addition to all the various learning boards that we have. And I was looking this morning, we have one even for responsible AI and what is your experience with that Chris? And the considerations in the work that you are doing with chatbots?

Christopher Wickes [00:06:12]

One of the main things is about having diverse teams. Because I think that's often the reason that AI has some of these ethical pitfalls is that AI as a technology, is all based on training a system with loads and loads and loads of data. And at least historically, there hasn't been that much thought put in to where that data comes from, and is that data representative of society as a whole or is it super biased and it's only reflecting a small segment of society? And there was, I was reading an article recently where, they were testing all of these voice assistants and they found that by far the demographic that was most successfully understood by things like Alexa and Siri and everything like that was kind of white, middle class American men. Just because that's where, historically, that's where all the data came from, to train the speech recognition. But I guess now people are realising that actually it's really not OK, that people who have got a slightly different accent or they come from a different background or they're a different ethnicity, don't get as effectively understood by these systems. The fact that they're being excluded is really, really problematic. And again, now that people have going to noticed that this is a problem, then everyone's taking steps to improve that and

they're being a lot more careful where their data is coming from. And that is some of the considerations that are in some of the responsible AI guidelines in Accenture is double check where is your data coming from and is that a true representation of who the end users are going to be and not just being biased and reinforcing any existing biases. A project I worked on a couple of years ago, we built a voice assistant for a client in Ireland. Some of the processes that were happening in the client systems and some of the questions that were coming in could only be done over the phone previously and otherwise people would have to fill in a paper form. So it was excluding certain people who weren't as digitally savvy because they couldn't access some of the self-service tools on the websites and things like that. So their only choice really was to pick up the phone. And because it was such a popular channel for people to contact, they were having to wait for hours and hours and hours. So actually, we created a new way of people solving their problems. And we had, within the first few days of going live with that, I remember there was an 87-year-old person phoned up the system and they managed to fill in an application for whatever they were doing successfully just through the voice channel. So from an accessibility perspective, AI is helping in a lot of ways as well, because it's kind of opening the door to people who previously couldn't access some of the digital services that maybe people in a slightly younger demographic are used to nowadays.

Mahnoor Raja [00:09:20]

Yeah, absolutely. And I think being able to understand the human side of it, rather than always focussing on machine interactions and system perspectives, will also help us to improve the offerings and experiences that that people want from AI.

Christopher Wickes [00:09:34]

Previously, it's been down to the end user to learn how to use a system, so you've had to read the instruction manual — which button do I click to make this happen? And which menu do I have to go to to make that happen? Whereas now you can literally just tell the machine what

you want it to do. So it's making it much more human focussed rather than system focussed.

Francesca Fasesin [00:09:57]

What do you think about AI and culture? I think we alluded to… We touched on it briefly, but my experiences of AI before I even stepped into Accenture and understood technology as a whole, was I Robot, Age of Ultron Avengers, you know, these evil learning robots that decided that humanity was actually the problem and not the actual problem that they were created to solve. So, how do we enable people to be clued up on AI and to understand we're nowhere near that type of AI being developed. And actually AI is extremely helpful to our day to day lives.

Mahnoor Raja [00:10:41]

I think this comes back to probably the point of educating people on AI. When I joined Accenture, I came from a science background that absolutely had no idea of AI and its applications. And I think that's something that I really benefited from in my training: exploring Accenture's Tech Vision of 'AI and Me' and actually understanding what that means. So I think the education of AI amongst society and communities themselves is really important alongside integrating AI tools so that people are able to understand what are the benefits, what are the risks that this presents, and how we can see this affecting us.

Francesca Fasesin [00:11:18]

Yeah, so one of the ways in which I believe AI is enabling society is the application of AI within health care. So I'm aware of various AIs that have been developed to enable doctors to diagnose a number of conditions and including reading X-rays, saving a lot of time, which doctors can reinvest into their patients; talking to them and spending time on other more complex needs within the health care system.

Christopher Wickes [00:11:50]

I think another one that I can maybe touch on is voice, especially just going back to that topic. One example of voice being a really interesting

application of AI is — I've been doing a fair bit of work recently with voice biometrics, which is a field/ level within speech recognition. So actually not just recognising the words that somebody is saying, but actually being able to create a fingerprint of who is this person speaking based on the unique characteristics of their voice. So both from a security perspective, it's much better because the knowledge-based questions that traditionally have been used are pretty easy for fraudsters to hack because they can just find a lot of the information from Facebook or anything like that but also it's way more convenient. One thing that I always find interesting and you don't necessarily realise that it's AI, it's something that everyone is familiar with is when you're on a website and you're trying to fill in a form and it's got that 'I'm not a robot' tick and you have to click that. And it's either those wobbly letters that you have to try and interpret and type out what they are, or it's that grid of pictures and it's like click all of the cells that include a traffic light or a bicycle. I didn't realise until quite recently that that is actually training image recognition algorithms — that is used for training self-driving cars to recognise potential obstacles or street signs and things like that. So, again, it's probably something that people are all too familiar with and they find it really annoying. But actually that is going to be feeding into tomorrow's technology when we eventually have things like self-driving cars.

Francesca Fasesin [00:13:46]

Yeah, and just to build on that, I think training the machines to correctly perceive hazard is one thing. I think hand in hand we have to train the machines, but also the humans to operate these machines correctly and safely.

Christopher Wickes [00:14:01]

So I think after that discussion, we've shown that AI is a massive area. And it's really a collection of lots of different technologies that are all building up into this overall topic of artificial intelligence. And I hope we've given people a rough idea of where we are now, where the technology is going, and also the type of work that Accenture is doing in this area. If you're interested, you can always find more

insights on our website, which is Accenture.com. And as ever you can keep up to date by following the conversation on our social channels. So thanks very much again for joining us. And thanks again to Francesca and Mahnoor for sharing your experiences. If you've enjoyed this podcast and you want to hear more, then check out our Powerful Minds podcast series, where we'll be talking more about technology's power for social good. And of course, if you'd like to work on the kinds of projects we've been talking about and if you care about using technology to change the world for the better, head to our website, Accenture.com/careers to find out how you can get involved.