Arvato x Sarah Burnett - The Future of AI - Transcription

Al Davies-Jones
So as part of National Customer Service Week, we've been investigating the future of artificial intelligence (AI) and what this means for the customer service industry. Today we have Sarah Burnett, who is a tech evangelist at KYP.ai, which is a productivity and process mining platform, who we've recently partnered with for our brand new product – ADE - Arvato's Discovery Engine. She's also a renowned tech analyst and the author of '*The Autonomous Enterprise - Powered by AI'*, which I've got a copy of right here, and that's published by BCS, the Chartered Institute for IT.

Within this interview, we're going to be discussing generative AI, human performance, knowledge work, privacy and data concerns, as well as the ethical use of AI. So good morning, Sarah. Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with me and Arvato.

Sarah Burnett 1:13
Good morning, Al. Thank you for asking me.

Al Davies-Jones 1:15
We've got quite a few questions to get through, so let's begin if that's okay with you?

Sarah Burnett 1:26
Absolutely.

Al Davies-Jones 1:28
Lovely. So McKinsey has recently released research that shows that generative AI will perform at a median level of human performance by the end of this decade. Our question really to you is whether you agree with that with that research from McKinsey or do you think it could be even sooner?

Sarah Burnett 1:48
Do I think it's possible? I think it's possible across some capabilities. I'm sure generative AI, as McKinsey has predicted will equal, if not overtake, human capability

in areas like creating art from descriptions or to do with writing content, coding, and lots of different areas. I'm not entirely sure. I saw their research and I realised that they also predicting that AI would match human capability in some areas like emotion detection and social interactions. I'm a bit doubtful about that - and I'll tell you why. It's because I think the way that AI is being trained for emotion detection doesn't give it enough context.

For example, when it comes to detecting human emotions, it's often based on facial expressions from images and I think that that's very narrow. For example, you could be frowning because you're concentrating or you could be frowning because you're unhappy or angry, you know.

So I believe there are some limitations there that they need to overcome and unfortunately it's already being used for emotion detection in lots of different software. For example, some HR organisations are using it for detecting whether a person is enthusiastic or not. You know, that kind of thing is really scary.

Al Davies-Jones 3:11
Right, sounds very Orwellian, doesn't it? I think just touching on that point as well, we've been talking a lot about vulnerable customers and vulnerability within AI. I'm thinking about facial expressions of people with disabilities and other factors like that. That must make it quite difficult for AI to even be able to read someone's face.

Sarah Burnett 3:19
Yes, well, there's already talk of it not being able to cope with those kinds of situations and also some minorities. There isn't enough diversity in the training and that's always an issue. With any kind of software, I think not having diversity within the development team can matter. But you know, AI can have such a massive effect that I think we need to get that right.

And the same with sentiment analysis in text, when you handle customer complaints for instance. I think that's got to take more of a contextual approach. Humans can be trying to make fun of something, and it might come across as sarcastic, which could indicate irritation or anger, you know?

I'm doubtful about it, but I'm very happy to be challenged and I'm very happy to be completely wrong because so much is going on - so much research and development. ChatGPT caught us all up by surprise. It was just incredible.

Al Davies-Jones 4:43
Exactly. It really did. Going back to not being able to tell people's context over email, even as a human, my jokes don't often land over email. So you don't have to have to deal with that!

Sarah Burnett 5:09
Exactly, exactly. How often have we made a quick reply to something? Thinking "right, got that done" and then it's come across as abrupt and caused all kinds of issues, when it hasn't been meant in that way - but these things happen, don't they?

And can AI cope with it and not make a decisive judgement about it. Because if we have a situation where cars are looking at your facial expressions, then you have an accident, and they say you were angry and it was due to road rage, when you were actually concentrating on where you were going. Things like that could really matter. And we need to get it right.

Al Davies-Jones 5:43
That's really that's really interesting.

In terms of the automation of knowledge work, obviously we talk a lot about automating repetitive tasks, but what about things that can easily be automated in terms of knowledge work? Can we expect this to improve in the next decade or so as well? In your book, you state that automation turns the traditional knowledge work inside out. I wondered if you could just touch on that a little more.

Sarah Burnett 6:21
I believe that as more processes are automated, the way that we work will change. In an organisation where people are sitting or working on their computers, effectively we are pools of teams of people working on similar kind of functions in groups. I think that will change. I think it will be more the robots, the solutions, the

automations doing the work and the people supervising those automations, and that will definitely happen. I'm absolutely certain about that.

As to how much of each process will get automated, that very much depends on the type of process and the capabilities of AI as it develops faster and faster. But, we are already able to automate things that we couldn't last year because of ChatGPT coming along and enabling us to automate content creation, coding and web development.

There were solutions there before that, but they were very niche and they weren't quite as capable and not able to do it so easily within seconds. You know, it's phenomenal. But what I see is more human augmentation at the moment. So you might use ChatGPT to start you off on some piece of content. How far that will go and how quickly it will become end to end?

I would advise people to always check the output of whatever's produced - take it as a starting point rather than as a complete solution. But there are areas where it's actually delivering significant benefits. There's one example, one of my colleagues wrote a blog about it where a team in pharma that's doing pricing calculations has automated those calculations with generative AI, so they have the pricing template and generative AI does the calculations. Over a week, I believe they're saving more than an FTE in terms of the time that it used to take.

So that's significant and that can't be ignored by any business. It's got to be taken into account - all kinds of new processes. The other aspect of it is, so there's generative AI that allows you to automate a lot more than before, but then generative AI in combination with other technologies is a whole other chapter in this development.

I'm talking to intelligent automation vendors who tell me they're going to integrate it with their solutions, so they'll be able to provide better search. They'll be able to provide conversational interfaces, among other things. I mean, some of them are telling me that it's going to make the training of their AI lot easier as well. So we're going to see this wave of development thanks to the availability of generative AI as well.

Al Davies-Jones 9:35
That's a huge part of it, yes, So it's all very exciting. I mean, obviously there is that fear factor around it for a lot of companies. But again, you mentioned in your book about companies that are getting left behind, or just implementing technology for implementing technology's sake, rather than looking at the end goal and actually looking at what they want to achieve.

But from your perspective as well, which industries would you say stand to gain the most from AI, if not all? There's got to be a few that are the standouts that you would say?

Sarah Burnett 10:17
I think there's some industries that perhaps were lagging and they'll be able to catch up. I'm thinking of some of the professional services, legal firms and so on. I think they'll be able to do a lot more than before. I'm also hearing that consultancies are using generative AI to help them develop bids for contracts and so it's speeding up that side of their business as well. I believe legal and professional services they'll gain a lot from generative AI.

I think global business service organisations will benefit hugely because they have their procedures and processes for things like accounting or Technical Support or whatever it is that they are doing for their customers. And then suddenly, they can add all these other things and improve what they're doing, do it faster and better, maybe even change, give new options for pricing - that kind of thing.

But perhaps other areas. I think include any of the horizontal functions like HR and, in particular customer service. I think it's going to be revolutionised.

Al Davies-Jones 11:33
Well, we're hoping so!

Sarah Burnett 11:35
Yes, definitely! I think of Technical Support, for example. You can have generative AI produce highly specialist virtual assistants to your agents and to your Technical

Support folks who can find the information much faster. They can be very specific, and if the first level support is stuck, they can go on to and find an expert and bring them into the conversation. Either live with a customer or actually supporting the first level support agent and the same with any customer.

I think the ability to provide guidance online - I've been talking about this for some time now for some years - but this is really changing the way that guidance could be provided online as to the next step to compliance - all of those kinds of things.

But then there's a whole new level of customisation and personalisation that's going to happen, because I think in a similar way, generative AI could help produce chat bots or assistants that are very much personalised for the customer, using the kind of language that appeals to the customer, going by their history and previous interactions. This could be using the kind of words, the word choices, that the customer likes, and generally just being able to do a conversation in natural language, building trust. Because unfortunately chat bots haven't always been good, have they?

Al Davies-Jones 13:22
No, they haven't. And some companies, they're still not great! But yes, totally agree. Sometimes I've had conversations where although it is a conversation per se, but it's felt very stilted and - that point you've just made there about speaking the same languages as the customer - that personalisation goes beyond just addressing the customer as their name or their pronouns.

It's actually reflecting their language. I've had chat bots that have sent me emojis back when I started using emojis, so that's you know it's really cool to see and it's definitely something we're exploring.

Sarah Burnett 13:26
Right, right. And then there's the internationalisation aspect for global companies to be able to converse in all the languages that they support more easily than they do now, and having being able to internationalise and localise products all that and services, I think all of those will be helped by generative AI.

Al Davies-Jones 14:08
Exactly. Brilliant, so it's very exciting for everyone then.

So in terms of specific activities, what AI or automated activities will deliver the most value for organisations? I think you've touched on that a little bit there with chat bots and agent assistant and things like that. But are there any other specific tasks or activities that you think are going to add a lot of value from by being automated or using AI?

Sarah Burnett 14:51
Well, honestly, I think it will vary a lot. So there are the horizontal functions that I mentioned like customer support, customer service, HR, those kinds of things. But at the end of the day, it depends on how complex your processes are and what you know about them. And this is where I'm afraid I have to do a bit of a plug for KYP.ai because it gives you it gives you the intelligence that you need in order to choose. So why wouldn't you do it in a data-driven fashion, you know?

Al Davies-Jones 14:57
Plug away!

Sarah Burnett 15:22
We have the ability to get visibility into how things are being done and as well as optimising them, then choosing what could be automated, and getting recommendations for what technology to use to automate the identified process and then the business case for it as well.

It will be changing decision-making significantly because by using these technologies together, and other intelligent automation solutions, you can significantly increase the return on investment. The value generation is now really going through a different kind of a different scale of potential and opportunity I think.

Al Davies-Jones 15:58
Yeah, definitely. And it's not just the financial side of things, the ROI and bringing time back to the company - it's that well-being of employees. Obviously that's one of

the things that KYP.ai shows so well through the software is how productive someone is being. But also if they're being stretched too far, is there anything that the company can do to help and alleviate any concerns. So it's an all-rounder. It's not just for processes and it's not just for return on investment. It's to help employees and humans, basically.

Sarah Burnett 16:47
Absolutely. And you can also find opportunities to help them. So talking about augmentation helping them do things faster and achieve more so they're more engaged. They're proud of what they do and they value the tools that you're putting in their hands. I think that's really important. And we all know, despite all this talk of intelligent automation and scaling up, humans are required.

My model in my book talks about the fact that there's going to have to be supervision. You've got to think about where is the knowledge going to be held? How are you going to maintain the knowledge of your processes, your formula, all the things that you do as a business, that is the make up your business - are you going to trust all of that to AI or are you going to make sure that there are generations of employees that can continue their business and the succession planning? All of that is really important.

Al Davies-Jones 17:47
Yes. You touched on that - about when employees leave and staff turnover - does that knowledge of the processes go with them? Obviously training is vital and it's that supervision role that cannot be performed by AI. It has to be performed by humans. So that's going to be reassuring, I think, to a lot of people. We don't want to implement AI to take people's jobs. It's been implemented to augment to, to assist, to help and further help companies and employees.

We'll go on to the last couple of questions, which you know we spoke about previously that we could perhaps talk about these at the same time.

What are your thoughts on privacy risks and data breaches because of the increased use of AI and also what safeguards are needed to ensure responsible use as of AI as well?

You talk a lot in your in your book about ethical AI – I really like that phrase. I think that'll be, again, very reassuring to a lot of people. How do we make it ethical?

Sarah Burnett 18:59
There are risks and we can't deny them the fact that AI needs an awful lot of data to be trained in the first place and validated. How is that data managed? Where is it? Where is it coming from? How is it sourced? Those are all really important questions and I think as an industry we need to answer those questions and be transparent about how we do things, so that we can win trust.

There have been far too many tools and apps that harvest information without our knowledge and that kind of thing needs to be stopped, and this is where I think industry and governments need to work together to produce guidelines, frameworks that aids developed and the way it's used. It's good to see some governments starting to act and take steps.

The risk is that we would limit development. We don't want to limit development, so it’s about finding the right balance between managing it and allowing it to develop.

I think starting with data, the way that you source it, if you ensure that it's ethically sourced, that if you do use third party tools - there are a lot of third party tools out there that validate the model for truthfulness and fairness - all these kinds of things. I hear they're quite difficult to use. They're quite time consuming to implement and take a lot of effort, particularly as a lot of AI companies are startups. They don't have this sort of manual capability or resources to use some of these technologies, so we need to come up with better solutions and I think it will happen. I think over time all these things will be developed.

And we will have guidelines. I'm really encouraged when I see vendors talk about how ethically they develop things and I think that kind of thing will become really quite important as time goes by.

Al Davies-Jones 21:24
I think so. What I was just going to say, touching on that point about, vendors and

putting their own guidelines together, I think when we have to submit a lot of tenders, a lot of bids, a lot of companies - and especially public authorities / local authorities - are going to start wanting to see how we ethically use AI in bids and responses to tenders and things like that.

Do you think that's something that will start to happen?

Sarah Burnett 21:58
Yes, absolutely, and I think it's going to be one of the many kinds of ESG type requirements, and the sooner the better really as far as I'm concerned. I called for it in my book about the importance of ethical development and ethical use - as for AI in the wrong hands in the hands of bad actors, that's a serious threat. It requires intergovernmental co-operation to address that, working together with the industry - but it's a huge, huge area that we need to tackle.

Al Davies-Jones 22:44
I think we could have had an entire conversation about the ethical dilemma of AI! But yeah, that's really interesting. Is there anything else that you want to add in terms of the future of AI or do you feel like we've covered everything in those questions?

Sarah Burnett 23:01
I think we shouldn't be afraid of it. I think we should use the capabilities that are available today, not only as corporations to automate processes, but as individuals helping ourselves to do our work faster and better, to keep up with developments because a huge amount is happening and we need to see what works for us.

I encourage teams to look at what works for them, what would help them and not to be afraid of it. For now, AI isn't self-aware. It's not going to take over the world. It might happen and some of the experts tell us it's quite likely in the future, but we're not there yet. And so let's use it to our advantage in terms of business and work and see what it can do for us.

Al Davies-Jones 23:38
Yeah, definitely. That's brilliant. Well, thank you again. It's been lovely talking to you and I'm sure this will be extremely interesting for people to watch and think about

these ideas and topics. There are lots of opinions on AI and especially within business. But very, very interesting and insightful. So thank you for your time!

Sarah Burnett 24:18
Thank you.