Podcast Episode 4: Impact of Automation and AI on Workplace Support Services with Mrinal Rai, Principal Analyst, IS 💬

TJ: Hi, I'm T.J., and in this episode, we're going to talk about automation and AI's impact on improving workplace support services and acting as personal digital secretaries to help us understand and decipher the world of possibilities around the upcoming artificial intelligence and automation induced workplace solutions we have with us Mrinal Rai, the principal analyst at the information Services group. With more than a decade of rich, holistic experience from both technological and business standpoint in digital workplace services and enterprise social collaboration, Mrinal is a true visionary who envisions and chalks the evolutionary trajectory of modern workplaces. Being a technology enthusiast at heart, he regularly publishes scholarly articles, party leadership reports on how to utilize and derive supplemental benefits from cutting edge technology to revolutionize the way of working in organizations. He counsels industrial leaders to digitally transform and elevate traditional workplaces to a digital workplace conducive to the needs of today's users with an unwavering focus on the user experience.

TJ: Hi, Mrinal.

Mrinal: Hi TJ.

TJ: Thank you for joining us today. We really appreciate you taking our time to talk to us.

Mrinal: Happy to be here. Thanks for having me.

TJ: So, keeping the topic in mind, which is automation and AI's impact on the workplace services. What are your views on the current state of sports services across enterprises and what are the trends that are influencing changes in this area?

Mrinal: Well, if you look at enterprise workplace support services right now, they're going through a major transformation because of introduction of automation and technologies. Now, if you look at some challenges that these services were facing, they were ever inefficient processes because of high number of tickers that could have been automated. They were dissatisfied users because they were not satisfied with the time it is going to take to serve their incident. Of course, there was high cost on service test to set up and these were the challenges that these clients were facing. And there are some trends that are influencing these areas. There's a huge potential of automation, analytics and AI and robotic process automation. So, with the usage of these technologies, the clients that experiencing benefits like cost optimization, improved user experience and improving their process.

TJ: Okay. So, what is the value that enterprises are currently realizing by leveraging automation and AI engines?

Mrinal: Well, the most important and the most obvious and visible benefits is about reducing the number of tickets, improving their efficiencies. Enterprises are experiencing what is called shift left ideology for reducing the number of tickets. It also reduces the cost associated with ticket resolution by automating the most routine type of issues. Of course, it results in efficient operation. The high-end benefit these technologies can provide is enhanced user experience because of personalization.

TJ: Mm hmm. Very interesting. But looking back, we were promised a lot. Automation and artificial intelligence was supposed to change the way we work. How far have we come in the last five years? Is there a gap between what was promised and what is currently being delivered?

Mrinal: TJ with any technology or machine, the basic aim is to make the humans life easier or reduce their efforts at the same. And similar was promised for automation and AI. And it has changed the workplace outlook if you ask me. We have seen a lot of clients that are beginning to understand the importance of these technologies and getting them implemented in their ecosystem to deliver efficient results. Clients are beginning to understand chatbots and they have started adopting it. Few years down the line, we had some clients who had some reservations about implementing chat-based solutions. We see clients more open towards implementing these solutions now, and especially for the tickets that require less human intervention they are getting automated. Also, clients are now willing to explore and experiment further with the potential that these solutions have because automation and analytics can have further experiences and the possibilities that can be explored regarding and end-user experience.

TJ: Ok. Let us move the focus towards the end users. What is the state of adoption for the end user facing automation solutions like Chatbots, robotic process automation, etc.?

Mrinal: Well RPA, we see lot of clients adopting it. And it is not just related to workplace. It is also related to process re-engineering. So, RPA is already getting a lot of traction. Of course, implementation in workplaces will deliver a lot of business benefits. If you have a better efficient automated process, you can improve it further. And similarly, chatbots are also being adopted, however, their adoption is only limited to a text-based solution. The AI and automation enabled technologies also have potential to take feedback or take input from users in other formats other

than text. However, currently we are seeing clients are slowly beginning to adopt the text-based format. Of course, with due course of time we will see clients trying to experiment other formats as well. Automation is right not limited to service desk. However, there are other possibilities that clients can imagine. The most important thing is the knowledge base that these automated solutions can refer to resolve the already known issues. When an end user uses an issue and that issue has already been resolved in the past, that is their knowledge base. These automated solutions can refer to these knowledge visits to reduce those issues to occur.

TJ: Right. Right. So, looking at the potential value that A.I. and automation bring to the table, what are the major hurdles in way of exponential growth in this area?

Mrinal: I think adoption and cultural change is the most important aspect. I would not call them hurdle, but if end users are not adopting these solutions, yes, it can become a hurdle, even though the technology promises a lot. And if the end users are not able to adopt it properly, it can become a hurdle. So, adoption definitely is a challenge. One more challenge I would like to highlight is that automation in most of the cases is still considered as a natural evolution of IT helpdesk operation and usually associated with a cost cutting budget. If that CIO is able to introduce automation and reduce the number of tickets making service desk operations efficient, they would not be considered as a business benefit. I have seen many clients who consider these as only part of improving their existing operations. If these technologies are only seen as an enabler for improving the service desk operation and not really seen as something that improves end user experience, it would be difficult to get buy-in from other business leaders, which is equally important to help the culture built into the organization to adopt these technologies.

TJ: Ok, very interesting. Though, another interesting promise of this technology is cognitive personal assistance for everyone. What are the key areas that need to be conquered before we can see the chat bots evolving into personal digital secretaries?

Mrinal: I will give just a brief introduction about personal digital secretary. It may not just be only the chat bots. If a workplace support system is intelligent enough to know who the user is and what are their issues and can provide a contextual support, can reduce their tickets, can prevent their tickets from happening. I think any such system can act as a secretary because it helps, and users focus on their job rather than focusing on improving the IT operations. If you talk about the key areas that needs to be taken care before technologies like chat bots or any such technologies to evolve into personal digital secretary, it is important that users have that enabling culture in place. They should be able to adopt and bring that cultural change. Of course, another part, very important part is about proper knowledgebase. Any automated

system is as good as it learns properly. If you don't have a proper knowledge base in place, you're even if you have implemented the best translating or sentiment analysis solution implemented in your chatbot but it may not still may not be able to serve the end-user properly if they're not able to refer to the correct knowledge base.

TJ: Hm Hm. So, are there any other areas, in your opinion, that would be the prime beneficiaries of the evolution of this technology?

Mrinal: Well, I speak about the end user personalization, which is like my workplace should know who I am when I say it is a personal digital secretary wherever I go and I work from, this secretary should know who am I, what my role is. The workplace that I get access should give me access to all that apps and all the applications and all the work that that is related to my role. It should know what kind of projects I am working on, what is my priority and if I raise a ticket and it does not reside in the stipulated time, what could it cost to the organization? That is a level of personalization that automation and AI can bring to workplace support.

TJ: Okay. So, I'm gonna go back to the topic that we were talking about. The Enterprise Digital Assistance, and you helped us understand what the definition of an assistant and a secretary is. So, do you see enterprise digital assistants evolving and surviving as independent entities? Or will they eventually merge with the likes of Google assistant Alexa or Siri?

Mrinal: Well TJ, the workplace transformation is very much inspired by the changes happening into the consumer world. Google assistant, Alexa, Siri are all examples of what technology can bring into the consumer world. However, customization is very important when you look into the enterprise point of view. Commercially available assistance are not able to understand your business context your LOB applications. It should be good if your workplace assistant accepts and understands inputs from something like Siri or Alexa. But even if it doesn't, it shouldn't be a problem because technologies are not limited to the commercially available virtual assistance like Google or Alexa. Of course, these technologies are inspired by these solutions, but even if a workplace support services is not able to talk to commercially available virtual assistance, that would be fine because usually employees would like to keep their personal and professional lives separate. So, it is better that if it evolves as a separate entity.

TJ: Thank you very much Mrinal for sharing your views and enlightening our listeners. And when we come back after a short break, we will ask Mrinal on his takes on some trending consumer tech. Stay tuned.

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TJ: Welcome back. In this segment, we ask our guests to summarize their opinion about some exciting consumer tech. So, are you ready Mrinal?

Mrinal: Yep.

TJ: So, the first one is the big one. iOS or Android?

Mrinal: Well, I would say Android. When you talk of iOS devices, you feel like you are in a cage. You can only interact with the devices and that platform that Apple provides. Android provides you flexibility to transfer files and to work with different platforms, even Microsoft Windows.

TJ: Right. The next one is foldable displays.

Mrinal: Well I actually saw the foldable displays last year at Mobile World Congress. And the first thought that came into my mind that who would pay for this? But if you have an option to, you know, open that screen and get an iPad experience out of an phone, then why not? Of course, it should also favor your pocket.

TJ: Right. Right. So, what is your preferred virtual assistant?

Mrinal: Well, we live in the world of Siri, Alexa and Cortona. My favorite is still Alexa because we have a lot of apps and a lot of devices and apps connected with Alexa. We have an Alexa Echo, Alex TV, so it's easier to transition to give voice commands and watch and we'll go for your read content.

TJ: So, what are your views on the translating earbuds?

Mrinal: I have not come across that, but if there is something like that, I would be really willing to invest in that. That is the example of what technology can provide you, the power of technology. Imagine the usage of a translating earbuds for the cross-functional teams working in different geographies. It can have huge business potential.

TJ: Mm hmm. Ok. So, so, we know that you are a tech enthusiast. So, any interesting gadgets or tech that you like using?

Mrinal: Well, I am a graphic illustrator and artist as well, and I use tablets from Wacom. So currently I'm using their Wacom intuos pro, which connects to laptops and computers. Good for illustrators and artist. Wacom also brings with it something called Syntec, in which you can have the screen and tablet in the same device. So that is something I would like to use. It is quite costly, but that is something I would I'm looking forward to use.

TJ: Very interesting. A man with so many talents. So, I know that you have a very good page on Instagram. Would you like to tell our listeners about that?

Mrinal: You can follow my Instagram page. I think you will put the link into the description and looking forward to increasing my followers.

TJ: It was an absolute pleasure having you on this episode. There was so much we do not know about this exciting technology. Thank you again for your time and we hope for an opportunity to host you again.

Mrinal: Thank you. Thank you very much.

TJ: I thank our listeners for joining in. We want to hear from you. We need your feedback and suggestions for future topics. The contact information is available in the description. Comment, share, recommend and subscribe. See you all in the next one.