NIA ENWL018
Project Avatar

Progress Report

31 July 2019

VERSION HISTORY

Version	Date	Author	Status	Comments
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REVIEW

Name	Role	Date
Dan Randles	Head of Innovation	29.07.20

APPROVAL

Name	Role	Date
Steve Cox	Engineering & Technical Director	31.07.20

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GLOSSARY

Term	Description
AI	Artificial intelligence
CEP	Customer engagement plan
DNO	Distribution network operator
DPS	Data privacy statement
ECP	Engaged customer panel
GB	Great Britain
IPR	Intellectual property rights
MVP	Minimum viable product

1   PROJECT FUNDAMENTALS

Title	Project Avatar
Project reference	NIA_ENWL018
Funding licensee(s)	Electricity North West Limited
Project start date	October 2016
Project duration	5 years 2 months
Nominated project contact(s)	Geraldine Paterson (innovation@enwl.co.uk) Tracey Kennelly (innovation@enwl.co.uk)

2   PROJECT SCOPE

Engagement with Electricity North West customers, GB suppliers with learning applicable to all licensed operators

Experts: consultation with a range of specialist service organisations and manufacturers of innovative technologies and relevant trade associations.

Customer engagement: research across the full range of Electricity North West customers: domestic and commercial customers with specific quotas on sub-segments including, but not limited to, urban, rural, the young (18-24 years) and customers who have made previous contact with their distribution network operator (DNO).

Employee engagement: frontline Electricity North West customer service teams.

3   OBJECTIVES

Delivering customer interactions in a technologically advanced seamless system manner will only impact on the costs and quality of a system operator's operations if the customer responds positively to that interaction.

- To broaden the level of understanding concerning customer service needs and future expectations.

- To have a robust measure of anticipated future attitudes, behaviours and needs by customer segment.

- To integrate customer research with existing service provisions and innovative solutions to optimise a customer service approach, enabling a strategy for DNOs to meet the future needs and expectations of its customer base.

- To facilitate the creation of bespoke customer service solutions targeted at specific customer groups to meet their unique medium- and long-term future needs.

- A blueprint for implementing bespoke customer service solutions incorporating a link to network control systems and data.

4   SUCCESS CRITERIA

The project success criteria are:

- An understanding of current and future customer service needs and how unmet needs might be addressed.

- Identification of a range of innovative solutions that best meet customers' increased servicing expectations.

- Reactions to mass customer contact capabilities and identification of the optimal strategy in terms of automation and interactivity.

- An appreciation of the variations in acceptability and applicability of innovative technologies and solutions across key customer segments and groups.

- A customer service blueprint, which incorporates data from existing network control systems, to best meet existing and future needs of specific customer groups and leverage higher levels of customer satisfaction.

- A demonstration of how innovative technologies and solutions can assist DNOs to better plan their customer investment strategy.

5   PERFORMANCE COMPARED TO THE ORIGINAL PROJECT AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND SUCCESS CRITERIA

The key findings from the development of the prototype solutions and learning from testing these with customers have been published in two separate reports on the project webpage.

The key outcome from the exploratory research can be found in our project progress report 2019 which can be found on our website and on the Smarter Networks portal.

5.1   Virtual Worker Trial

As part of customer vulnerability commitments, DNOs must maintain the accuracy of the Priority Service Register (PSR), which is used to identify customers' requiring additional support during an outage. This dictates regular contact with customers registered on the PSR database. Increased communication and focussed awareness campaigns have seen a significant acceleration in the amount of priority service registrations and the Electricity North West register currently contains over 844,000 records. The register requires enormous human effort to manage, and it is recognised that emerging technologies could provide a more efficient method to maintain the accuracy of our records.

We completed a procurement exercise and Codebase8 were appointed to integrate an intelligent automation platform to data cleanse the PSR register to support the welfare process. This platform is based on the 'Thoughtonomy' product, which will integrate two virtual workers to automate the data cleansing operation and run the ongoing process.

The Virtual Worker element of the project has now reached the UAT phase, testing is ongoing between the teams to check that the virtual workers are cleansing the data as expected. During this phase the team are also reviewing the performance of the virtual workers and assessing the potential outputs and likely support resource required to manage exceptions if they were running in the live environment. This phase is taking longer than expected and the virtual workers are currently much slower to process records than we had hoped. More testing, fixes and performance refinement would need to be carried out before the virtual workers could be moved to the live environment as we need to ensure that the defined business rules work as expected and do not incorrectly delete data.

6 REQUIRED MODIFICATIONS TO THE PLANNED APPROACH DURING THE COURSE OF THE PROJECT

As previously reported the project team disseminated the learning to the Electricity North West's customer team, who recognised the value and the potential of new platforms to enhance current customer services.

On the basis of the customer feedback, the customer team suggested a trial deployment of Virtual Workers to support existing welfare processes, which could advance our customer service offerings. The innovation team felt that this would be excellent additional learning which could be delivered within budget but required an extension of the project by 24 months to allow for the development and subsequent assessment of Virtual Workers.

7 LESSONS LEARNED FOR FUTURE PROJECTS

The procurement process for services to provide new technologies, designed to integrate with existing secure systems, which hold extensive personal and sensitive customer data can be protracted and introduce time constraints in delivery. As mentioned above the installation of the virtual workers is taking longer than expected and more testing, fixes and performance refinements are required.

8 THE OUTCOME OF THE PROJECT

Not applicable.

9 DATA ACCESS

Electricity North West's innovation data sharing policy can be found on our website.

There has been no data gathered during the course of this project. The project is purely gathering customers' opinions on the future of customer service.

10 FOREGROUND IPR

There is no foreground IPR associated with this project.

11 PLANNED IMPLEMENTATION

Not applicable.

12 OTHER COMMENTS

Not applicable.