People Assist: transforming employee support with AI
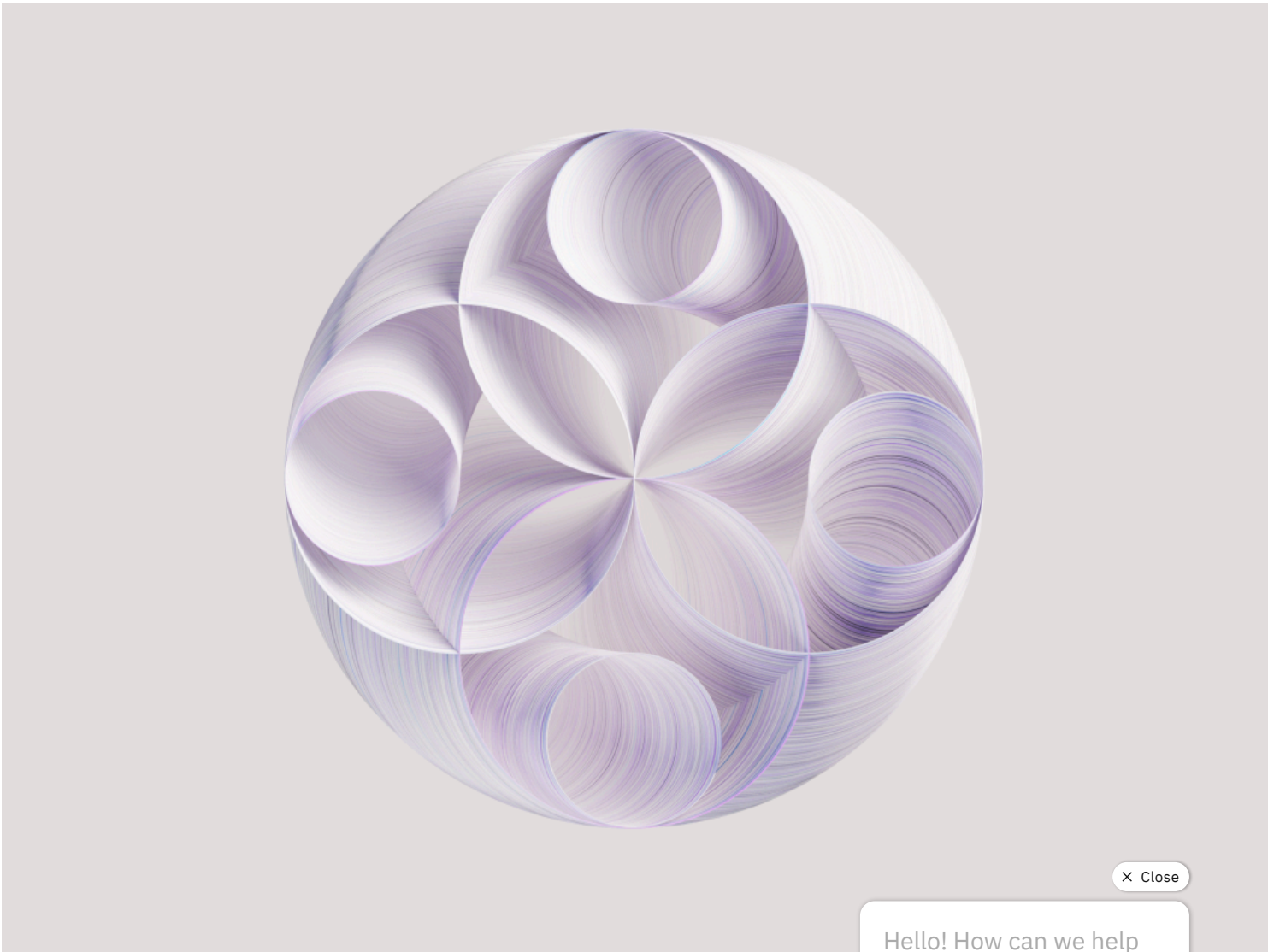
University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust
and IBM

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Driving innovation in employee experience

One of the UK's largest teaching trusts, University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire (UHCW) NHS Trust serves a population of over one million people. The Trust is always looking for new ways to further improve the day-to-day experience for its 10,500+ employees, which in turn supports the delivery of high-quality patient care. One of the many ways the Trust is doing this is by exploring the potential of AI and automation to increase efficiency, further improve employee workflows and lower operational costs.

550+

Over 550 conversations on the platform since launch

2,080

Estimated to save approximately 2,080 working days per year

"This is the first step as we look to explore how we can advance this resource tool through additional artificial intelligence functionality to support other transactional HR processes in the future. This is the start of a people digital transformation journey for UHCW NHS Trust, and we are hopeful this will change the way we offer specialist service support to our colleagues."

Donna Griffiths
Chief People Officer
University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust

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New AI-powered virtual assistant available 24x7

To that end, the Workforce Department of UHCW NHS Trust recently began a proof-of-concept (POC) pilot with IBM and SCC (link resides outside of ibm.com) to build a new virtual assistant. This AI tool, called People Assist, can serve as a one-stop-shop for all HR queries and routine tasks around the clock. The front end of the assistant was built using IBM® watsonx Assistant™, a product that helps build better virtual agents to drive enterprise productivity that can deliver automated self-service support across all channels and touchpoints. When a user submits a question, the assistant queries UHCW NHS Trust HR policy documentation, uses retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) to summarize its findings, and provides a response to the user. This step in the process is made possible by IBM watsonx.ai™, a next-generation enterprise studio for AI builders to train, validate, tune and deploy AI models.

Improving the quality of HR information and advice

The pilot demonstrated that it is possible to complete routine queries as well as administrative tasks in a matter of minutes rather than days. Currently, around 400 inbox queries and over 200 calls related to people/HR queries are received daily. It is therefore hoped that the People Assist tool will not only release time back to staff seeking answers to basic queries but also support the release of HR colleagues to support advice and guidance on more complex people management queries. UHCW NHS Trust believes this should contribute to higher retention and employee satisfaction. Additionally, it should increase the department's overall efficiency and help to reduce energy consumption and advance sustainability goals.

In the first seven weeks since the launch of People Assist, over 550 conversations have been held on the platform, with the most common queries being car parking, pensions, annual leave, where to access policies and forms, and mandatory training. Almost 50 users accessed People Assist over the weekend or outside core office hours. People Assist is estimated to save approximately 2,080 working days per year across HR/People Operations, Workforce Information, Centralized Resourcing and other People Directorate services.

NHS
University Hospitals
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About University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust

[University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust](#) (link resides outside of ibm.com) is one of the UK's largest teaching trusts, responsible for managing two major hospitals in Coventry and Rugby, which between them serve a population of over a million people. Every year, the Trust provides more than 800,000 episodes of care to patients from across Coventry, Warwickshire and beyond.

About SCC

As the first UK IBM Platinum Business Partner, [SCC](#) (link resides outside of ibm.com) enables people to do business by planning, supplying, integrating and managing their IT. With a customer-focused approach, SCC helps businesses optimize their technology through cloud services and digital workplace, and drive transformation to achieve their strategic objectives.

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