DXC TECHNOLOGY

Human centred design to improve student experience

CUSTOMER
La Trobe University

LOCATION
Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

INDUSTRY
Higher Education

Challenge

- A need to improve student connections, a sense of belonging, and overall experience
- No clear definition or understanding of current student experience during peak periods
- A need to solve the business problem of using too many human resources to support peak period (Orientation and first week of semester) and understand issues impacting on a positive student experience

Solution

- Human Centred Design (HCD) and Agile delivery to address La Trobe student needs and explore emergent technology as an opportunity to augment effort
- Innovative techniques helped uncover pain points previously masked by the number of staff providing support during peak periods
- A cross-functional, collaborative, and self-organising team co-designed the best possible service for students

Results

- La Trobe students engaged throughout the discovery and design process and as part of project team
- Agile delivery with iterative development facilitated an outcome every sprint
- Co-designing potential solutions with students and staff ensures high relevance and chance of success and the ability to challenge the existing business model

Human centred design to improve student experience

La Trobe University is a teaching and research university with seven campuses across Australia serving over 38,000 students (2017). 52 years young, the latest Times Higher Education ranking put La Trobe as 7th in Australia and 2nd in Victoria, with their research ranked in the top 1.2% of the world's universities. With a primary goal to deliver a consistently high quality experience for all students, La Trobe University aspires to be number one in Victoria for high quality student experience and learning outcomes by 2022. A new strategic plan was designed to support the University in achieving exceptional student experience — a critical business driver enabling the 2022 vision.

"The idea of the DTC really appealed to La Trobe since its approach is to think big but start small while challenging the status quo to act differently. We wanted to take people on a journey and were adamant about co-designing solutions with students — DXC appreciated that."

— Stuart Hildyard
CTO, La Trobe University

Challenge

While student experience is a core part of the La Trobe University philosophy, there was no clear definition of what the current aspiration was for key peak period support over orientation periods and the start of each semester. La Trobe engaged DXC Technology as a strategic partner to help define and focus on improving student experience (local and international) during peak periods so they felt more connected and engaged with an improved sense of belonging at the university.

In parallel, a significant business problem facing the Higher Education sector in Australia is the census period dropout rate. Reducing the dropout rate by just 1% has substantial positive revenue impact (almost seven figures) — and La Trobe knew that improved student experience through peak periods could help influence this metric.

The other key objective of this initiative was to explore emerging technologies that could be applied to improving the student experience. La Trobe was already undertaking 'Horizon 01' and 'Horizon 02' programs aimed at improving customer experience. Initiatives are covering process improvement, online feedback, wellbeing, ongoing customer service training and recognition programs. In support of these programs, Horizon 03 was initiated to focus on improving the student experience during peak periods.

Solution

O-Week Go! is proposed as a cloud based application designed to help integrate students into their orientation experience in an innovative and fun way.

Leveraging DXC's unique Digital Transformation Centre (DTC) methodology and approach, a seven-week engagement was delivered to gain deep insights into student experience. DTCs form part of a global network of centres and leverage Human Centred Design (HCD) for improved results.

The HCD approach allowed the project uninhibited collaboration across the university with hundreds of students and over 15+ organisational units involved in the co-creation of a proposed future. The HCD way of working also helped to further embed behaviour supporting La Trobe's Cultural Qualities of Connected, Care, Innovative and Accountable.

By bringing together clients, partners, university students, researchers, professional staff and DXC, multi-skilled teams of varying size (from 2 up to 12), collaborate on the customer's site and resolve an identified business challenge.

With teams exposed to design thinking, product development, Agile ways of working and DevOps, incubation of new ideas is possible through to minimal viable products (MVPs). Ideas are fleshed out quicker for mobilisation in hours as opposed to weeks (or months), with the approach consistently delivering rapid ROI and lower risk for all involved (fail fast and learn early).

The DXC team introduced La Trobe to a new way of working by applying innovative techniques to uncover pain points that may previously have been masked by additional resources during peak periods. La Trobe graduates and students were involved throughout the discovery phase to support project outcomes.

Saurabh Singh, client partner and national higher education industry lead for DXC said "DXC is deeply passionate about bringing the human centred design experience to the forefront of the enterprise ecosystem. This is reflected in our co-creation and HCD approach at La Trobe in understanding how we can help students feel more connected and have a better sense of belonging."

During the discovery phase, it became apparent that students didn't currently feel supported throughout their education lifecycle. The DXC team created a comprehensive student journey map for the peak period and discovered that most activity ended on Day 1. Following discovery, 200+ La Trobe students were engaged via a unique 'pop-up' on campus to provide input to final recommendations aimed for pilot during 2020 peak periods. Students voted for ideas and shared general insights forming a deeper understanding of the student community, their motivations and pain points.

Results

"By 2022, we believe this will empower students to personalise their orientation experience while also enabling La Trobe to adopt a proactive stance to connections, and therefore potentially improving student retention rates and NPS scores for its orientation program."

— Saurabh Singh
Client partner and national higher education industry lead, DXC

The Strategic Capability and Student Journey Roadmap Assessment was completed and presented to executive sponsors with a suggested alpha and beta implementation roadmap. With more than 1,000 data points and 190 ideas generated, the DTC team articulated four common themes that would help improve student experience during peak periods:

• Better information

• Consistent experience regardless of campus

• Ability to build connections and maintain friendships

• Ensure effective preparation

From those four themes, a co-creation stage with students, staff, and other key stakeholders conceived six potential solutions broadly impacting three areas: people and culture; tools and technology; and physical space.

Co-creation was essential to ensure solutions were not only relevant and desirable, but also feasible and viable to implement. Solutions included:

• Virtual campus tours: Virtual reality (VR) simulation enabling students to take a tour of all La Trobe campuses from the comfort of their own home

• Intro me: An app to facilitate online peer connection, with a physical social space provided for meeting peers face-to-face

• Student hub: Central place integrating Learning Management System, My La Trobe, LTU website and social media platforms to enable students to find all the information relating to La Trobe (both social and educational) in one place

• What's on campus: An app to help students navigate and identify locations using augmented reality (AR) with notifications on any current and upcoming events happening nearby

• VR orientation: A way to experience La Trobe O-week using virtual reality (VR) to explore the university campus and the events going on in real time

• O-Week Go!: A game for La Trobe students with a checklist of what needs to be done before and during O-week and an easy way to track everything as it's completed

Saurabh Singh said "Throughout the seven-week engagement, our Agile and HCD ways of working not only gained significant interest across the university, but it also helped us bring together a consolidated story of the student orientation journey from a staff, student, researcher and vendor perspective."

Accompanying the recommendations was a comprehensive insights report listing the many pain points and motivations the team identified during the contextual inquiries. By following a HCD approach and engaging as many students as possible to support and learn from, the project's recommendations were extremely well received during concept testing. Stuart Hildyard, CTO at La Trobe University said

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"HCD will continue to be embedded as a "new way of working" to support the University's cultural transformation."

The final recommendation is envisaged as a single orientation platform which will not only bring campus life to light through emerging technologies, but will also provide La Trobe with the ability to better track and predict the level of student engagement and connections.

Benefits

The biggest learning from this initiative was the power of co-creation through the principles of the DTC and HCD to ensure engagement. Students felt excited and valued to be part of the journey, and both professional and academic staff appreciated their active involvement throughout discovery and design.

Delivering in an Agile way meant the team underwent iterative development and delivered an outcome every sprint (two weeks). The team was cross-functional, collaborative and self-organising and continuously adapted to co-design the best possible service for students. La Trobe acknowledged that minimal presence was required as a product owner, and was grateful to the high performing team for delivering outcomes within the timeframe.

Stuart Hildyard said, "The idea of the DTC really appealed to La Trobe since its approach is to think big but start small while challenging the status quo to act differently. We wanted to take people on a journey and were adamant about co-designing solutions with students — DXC appreciated that."

Next Steps

Planned alpha and beta phase implementations are in negotiations, which will encompass a more in-depth planning and execution of proposed solutions.

Throughout the co-design process with students and staff, the need for an innovative and integrated application to support social and academic aspects of orientation and enable students to connect with peers and/or staff champions to build team connection was identified. O-Week Go! is proposed as a cloud based application designed to help integrate students into their orientation experience in an innovative and fun way.

Saurabh Singh concluded, "By 2022, we believe this will empower students to personalise their orientation experience while also enabling La Trobe to adopt a proactive stance to connections, and therefore potentially improving student retention rates and NPS scores for its orientation program."

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