Designing the Student Journey and building a student-centric organisation

We have supported Universities globally and in the Middle East to understand and redesign their Student Journeys. When a University embarks on reimagining the Student Journey, five steps can help to transform their organisations to build a truly distinctive experience.

1. Understand your customer
Start with a customer ‘segmentation analysis’ – using institutional data to understand the makeup of the student body and break down groups of students into key demographics. Then, ‘develop personas’ – archetypes of representative University students that act as a point of reference for the journey design.

2. Map the current journey
Carry out workshops with staff, faculty and students to understand the current student journey in detail. Identify each of the key student ‘touch points’ throughout the journey and understand which parts of the University are involved in their delivery.

3. Identify areas for improvement and map the future journey
Work with students and other stakeholders to identify the ‘pain’ and ‘love’ points – what’s working well and where there are areas for improvement. Identify solutions to enhance the student experience and to improve the efficiency of service delivery. Map the ‘to-be’ Student Journey and create a shared vision around achieving it.

4. Configure the organisation around the Student Journey
Consider how the University’s Operating Model needs to change in order to deliver the Student Journey in the most efficient way. What new tools, processes, systems, and people capabilities are required to deliver the optimal student experience? Review the University organisation structure and re-engineer back-office processes.

5. Build digital solutions to enhance the journey
Identify digital solutions that enable students to interact with the University online, 24/7, on a self-service basis. Consider using a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to track all student interactions and generate rich data on student behaviour. Integrate systems and consolidate data to drive decision making.

Case Studies

Leading Universities worldwide have already used a Student Journey approach to transform their organisations, and Middle East HEIs look set to follow suit.

Australia: Deakin University
In 2015, Deakin underwent a Digital Transformation to significantly enhance the student experience, developing a digitally enabled student journey and building an end-to-end student experience.

UK: Leading University
PwC was engaged by a leading UK University to support it through an organisational-wide transformation based on the student journey. This led to a holistic end-to-end student experience.

UAE: Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT)
HCT, the UAE’s largest multi-campus University, underwent a transformation of its Operating Model designed around the student journey. As part of this programme, PwC supported HCT to map the future Student Journey and develop new policies and procedures, and designed a Student Journey web portal to access key areas. This led to an enhanced organisational focus on students and their experiences.

For more information...

PwC is one of the leading providers of professional advisory services to the higher education sector globally. Our Middle East Education and Skills Team is made up of a group of dedicated sector specialists who offer deep strategic and operational expertise across the key sectors, from early learning through to secondary, vocational and higher education. The team is led by Sally Jeffery, PwC’s Global Education & Skills Network Leader, bringing together the full range of our network’s global expertise for our clients. Please get in touch with one of our team for further information.

Overview

This publication is the first in a series that examines the key themes influencing one of the world’s most dynamic regions in Higher Education – the Middle East.

Our first paper looks at how Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the region can apply a Student Journey management approach to help build efficient, customer-centric organisations that are agile enough to survive and thrive in a rapidly changing environment.

We look at the main issues facing Higher Education in our region and how Student Journey design and management can help Universities to meet these challenges. Thus, we offer a series of practical suggestions for Universities based on our own experience in the region and globally.

Student Journey – A definition:

“The end-to-end sequence of all the interactions that a student experiences throughout their relationship with a University – from the first time they hear about it at high-school, to completing their studies, graduating, continuing their learning, and keeping in touch as an alumnus.”

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Reimagining the Student Journey
Creating efficient, student-focused Universities in the Middle East

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The challenge

The global picture

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) worldwide are facing a common set of challenges that are fundamentally disrupting the way in which Higher Education is delivered in the 21st Century. There has been significant discussion in the sector as to how providers can respond to the following major trends:

1. Continued global rise in student numbers
2. Increased competition for the best students between the best Universities, including from non-traditional online learning platforms
3. Rising expectations among increasingly tech-savvy students
4. Decreasing budgets forcing a drive towards operational-efficiency

The specific Middle East context

With a growing Higher Education sector driven by a bulging youth population, increasing participation in Higher education, and the need to respond to critical labour market needs, should Middle Eastern Universities be worried? We believe that along with the global headwinds in Higher Education, there are a number of specific challenges facing Universities in our region that are building the case for transformational change.

1. Tightening public sector budgets
2. Increasing local competition
3. Rising Customer Expectations

As oil prices have risen since the lows of 2016, ‘lower for longer’ oil prices and economic diversification have led to fiscal tightening and increasing pressure on HEIs to become more efficient.

While oil prices have risen, the share of GCC Universities’ revenue from oil is less than 20%, with a growing proportion of the GCC’s student population being international. The UAE and Qatar has plans to establish foreign Universities to be set up in the Kingdom, leading to increased competition for students.

Students in the Middle East, like their global peers, place a high value on satisfaction and expect a vibrant campus life, enabled digitally. HEIs need to adapt in order to meet these changing needs.

Dropout rates at GCC Universities are higher than in leading global systems. This leads to reduced per-student revenue, inefficiency and ultimately, a poorly educated workforce.

Shrinking budgets forcing a drive towards operational-efficiency is one of the factors that can contribute to HEIs losing students to other institutions as students become increasingly mobile, both between local HEIs and internationally.

The benefits of Student Journey management

How can the Student Journey help to address the challenge?

HEIs that take a proactive approach to designing and managing the Student Journey can not only improve their ability to attract, retain and ensure the success of the students, but also create lean, efficient organisations that are built around their core customers. Efficient, student-centric Universities are better able to generate and retain revenue, invest in improvements, and compete for ranking positions.

The concept of designing the customer journey is frequently used in the retail sector. By applying a similar approach, Universities can focus marketing activities towards operational efficiency and enhance academic outcomes by making the experience as simple and seamless as possible, and by providing students with relevant, normalised information through digital tools, bringing services directly to the student. This will shape the student’s perception of the University for years to come. HEIs should also consider how students are onboarded from other institutions as students become increasingly mobile, both between local HEIs and internationally.

Process improvement

Aligning back-office functions around the student journey can help to drive efficiency savings by removing duplication and focusing on activities that enhance the student journey. It can also break down silos between departments to support a consistent student experience.

Data-driven decision making

Once the student journey is designed, it should be managed by the University in its entirety, with a clear set of Key Performance Indicators and reporting lines. Institutional data can be consolidated around the student journey, allowing for powerful Business Intelligence and improving the ability to adapt as required. For example, significant investments in technology or physical infrastructure can be supported by a solid evidence base.

Attract students

The concept of designing the customer journey is frequently used in the retail sector. By applying a similar approach, Universities can support students during this critical phase by making the experience as simple and seamless as possible, and by providing students with relevant, normalised information through digital tools, bringing services directly to the student. This will shape the student’s perception of the University for years to come. HEIs should also consider how students are onboarded from other institutions as students become increasingly mobile, both between local HEIs and internationally.

Enriched student life

Universities can use a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to track and monitor each of the student interactions throughout the journey. This 360° view provides a rich picture of student behaviour down to an individual level and allows Universities and faculty members to tailor content to individual students and provide additional support for those who need it, thus enhancing academic outcomes and reducing dropout rates.

Students who have a positive experiences of the journey are more likely to stay engaged with the University as alumni. But Universities also need to map and better service the alumni journey and build alumni marketing capabilities. Engaged alumni are more likely to contribute to Universities through donations, participation in continuing education courses, or through other, non-revenue-generating activities.

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