

Leadership in Action Report

E-Pocket Help Project

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Project Overview

During the summer holiday, I set up a social campaign that aims to promote age equality in older adults use of digital technologies during the Covid-19 lockdown. The programme consisted of a mobile app and a volunteering outreach group, which allowed volunteers to work with the App and connect with older adults who needed assistance when they navigate the web.

Week 1: Outreach

I began this project by having a conversation with my supervisor for the research project I conducted on digital literacy skills. In this meeting, I explained my initiatives of setting a social campaign for older adults' digital literacy skills through a mobile App. My plan was approved by my supervisor, who then send me some links to other organisations working on similar projects. These resources allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of what a social campaign should look like.

Following the meeting, I met up with a couple of computer science students to discuss the possibility of my plan, especially whether an armature programmer can build an interacting mobile app with a voice recognition feature. The feedback I received was a mix of positive and negative opinions. Crucially, I learnt that while it is possible to create an App that I want to achieve within six weeks, I need to simplify the programming of the App to make sure that it can run and be tested immediately after the coding.

Week 2: Design

Based on the feedback I collected from the plan I drafted, I redesigned my App algorithm to ensure that it is not too complicated and can be used by both the older adults and the student volunteers. While I was designing the App, I found myself constantly needing to pick up new knowledge in the Python programme to achieve the algorithm I planned. To ensure my knowledge can keep up with the backend development of my App, I signed up for some more advanced programming courses on FutureLearn and Codecademy to keep up with my learning.

I also used Canva and Adobe Spark to create the frontend of the App. The interface of the App needed to be clear and easy for all age groups to use. After conducting some research into App interface, I decided to borrow Google's template, which only focuses on the functions that are essential to the user. As a part of my market research, I printed out the pictures of my front-end interface and shared them with the older adults who lived around me. The feedback I collected from these older adults were generally positive, and many commented that having an App like this would be very helpful during the lockdown.

Week 3: Execute

During the execution phase, I aimed to connect the Python codes with the interface I developed using XCode software. However, I found this to be extremely challenging as I was unable to achieve this as my computer was too old to process the software. To resolve this issue, I wrote the codes again but this time in Swift language. I planned to simplify the programme even more by rewriting the codes specific to the IOS system. While the Python and Swift codes shared many similarities, I had some difficulties translating the codes from one language to another. To resolve this issue, I spoke with a few software engineers I knew to seek a solution. I was told that my

programming skills may be too basic to achieve this at the moment, and I should look into some non-programming software to deliver my App as soon as possible.

Week 4: Adjustment

Seeing my App fail to work on the IOS interface was the most stressful part of the project. During the adjustment phase, I went back to stage 2 where I was researching and redesigning the entire App again. With the help of my peers, I found out the Wix.com website offers a service for me to develop the web-based App using both the codes I drafted and the graphics by dragging icons and text boxes directly to the webpage. However, unlike writing the entire App myself, Wix did not provide some of the functions that I wanted to integrate into my App, such as an AI chatbot. As a compromising solution, I ended up creating more volunteer roles to fulfil some of the functions which I initially planned to execute using the AI software.

Week 5 – 6: Resource Bank

During the last two weeks of the project, I have completed the first version of my App as a minimum viable project and started to build a resource bank for the volunteers and older adults using the App. In two-week time, I completed ten blog articles as guidance for older adults navigating themselves online, ranging from “how to shop on Amazon?” to “Spotting the scams online”. During this process, I developed a template for the articles to be written for the resource bank and article guidance for the volunteers to follow in the future.

Week 6: Presentation

At the end of the project, I presented my App to the older adults whom I interviewed again. Using the focus group technique, I gathered a new round of feedback for improving my App development. Additionally, I also pitched my idea to several charitable organisations and care homes which work with older adults to support the development of their digital literacy skills. I was glad to see my audiences were excited about the project that I created. They also provided me with some useful feedback for future development, such as extending the function of the App to the deaf-blind community.

Project Reflection

My leadership in action project was more usual than I thought. Initially, I planned to set up the App within the first three weeks of the programme, recruit volunteers and publish it in the IOS market for my users to download. However, during the execution, I found my project was perhaps overly ambitious. One important factor was the fact that I did not thoroughly consider the unarticulated goals that my project required. Therefore, I had to constantly simplify my project to ensure that it can be delivered on time.

However, the challenges I have faced allowed me to develop my communication and problem-solving skills more than ever before. The various issues I faced during the App development taught me to never give up on the challenges and always seek external help when it was necessary. The opportunity to speak to people from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines allowed me to build a team that is diverse and inclusive – older retirees, marketing managers, students, and charity workers, which I could not even dream about at the start of the project.

The mixed feedback I received from people in different disciplines allowed me to reflect on my personal beliefs and actions when I carried out this programme. Crucially, I realised that I still need to keep practising my problem-solving and decision-making skills to lead and establish an original project from scratch. My leadership in Action project only marked the start of E-Pocket Help. I will continue to work with my team and reach out to more organisations and the Durham Volunteer and Outreach team to continue fulfilling this social campaign project.