

Neurodiversity program develops unique skills and talents for National Australia Bank

CUSTOMER
National Australia Bank (NAB)

LOCATION
Melbourne, Australia

INDUSTRY
Banking



Challenge

- Intense competition for talented IT resources
- Limited talent pool of cyber security specialists
- A need to increase diversity at NAB



Solution

- Development of the Neurodiversity at NAB program, based on the DXC Dandelion Program
- An opportunity to harness unique skill sets
- Integration of individuals with autism into the workforce



Results

- Successfully integrated new team into the NAB culture and working environment
- Increased productivity 26% and improved service for NAB employees and customers
- Ensured provisioning and fulfilling critical applications with high accuracy and speed; reduced numbers of incidents and escalations



Neurodiversity program develops unique skills and talents for National Australia Bank

Committed to building a workplace that's as diverse as it is dynamic, National Australia Bank (NAB) partnered with DXC Technology to establish the Neurodiversity at NAB program. The intent of the program was to embed diversity and inclusion into the culture and fabric of the bank through the employment of people on the autism spectrum.

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Head of Technology, Security, Business Management and Transformation, NAB

Based on the DXC Dandelion Program, the Neurodiversity at NAB program provides a holistic employment experience that offers benefits to both the participating individuals and the private sector. It provides an opportunity for businesses to address IT talent shortages by harnessing the unique skill sets that often come with autism.

These skills include an extraordinary capacity for visual thinking and comfort with routine and systematically oriented activities. Other typical traits are honesty, as well as the ability to pay close attention to detail and identify errors. For individuals on the autism spectrum, the program provides an opportunity to develop technical and social skills to obtain long-term, meaningful employment in the technology field.

Business challenge

The constant demand for new talent and the competition for resources in the IT industry is intense. The security arena in particular offers only a small pool of talented resources in high demand by many organisations. NAB believes that to achieve true competitive advantage in the technical world, it is essential to have a diversity of thinking and culture within its teams.

The characteristics of many people on the autism spectrum make them well suited to the IT realm. In particular, individuals working in the cyber security area need to look at things differently, so creativity of thought is important. Recognising patterns, solving difficult problems, and enjoying and thriving in routine-based environments is also



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important. In addition, some of the work can be quite repetitive so attention to detail and an ability to sustain superior focus for long periods without getting bored is also crucial.

NAB recognised the opportunity to integrate individuals with autism into the workforce and the advantages a neurodiverse workforce could bring.

Tracey Edwards, head of Technology, Security, Business Management and Transformation for NAB, says, “Like most large organisations NAB has challenges bringing in new talent and with constantly changing technology. This means we need new people with different ways of thinking. There’s only so much that universities and other higher education institutions can train people to do. Undertaking a very targeted campaign to recruit people with certain talents that come naturally to them was a no-brainer for the bank, and I think it’s something more organisations globally are starting to see the value in.”

The DXC Dandelion Program

The DXC Dandelion Program, which is part of DXC Technology’s Social Impact Practice, helps organisations access the wealth of talent in the neurodiverse space that is currently not being utilised. It helps address significant skills shortages in certain areas, while providing an opportunity for people on the autism spectrum to gain long-term viable employment.

The program is unique in that the recruitment process encourages individuals who may not have been given a chance in the past, as well as providing ongoing support to participants. This gives people who may never have worked before the chance to develop the valuable skills that make them an asset to the IT industry, while also learning about and integrating into a workplace so they can do their job to the best of their ability.

Karen Tytler, autism spectrum consultant for the DXC Dandelion Program, says, “It’s great to give a person a job, but if you remember your first job and how hard it was to learn about the workplace, multiply that by tens, if not hundreds, and that could be a real challenge. That’s where this program stands out — by addressing the challenges and providing the ongoing support to participants in ways that work for them so they can thrive.”

Why DXC?

DXC has established true collaboration between government, private organisations, academia and the community — who all share the same vision of helping neurodiverse and autistic individuals obtain meaningful employment and more importantly, achieve successful careers.

“DXC has a strong reputation in the technology field as well as five years’ experience building the maturity of this program, which other organisations we approached didn’t have,” says Edwards.

“The DXC Dandelion Program has an objective around a certain community and it had established networks, which is something NAB wanted to tap into.

“When we discussed the intent of the program, its objectives and the rollout, DXC demonstrated strong sustainability. NAB didn’t want to put a program in place for 3 years and then have it end. We wanted a 3-year kickstart which could be adopted for the long haul, and that was also DXC’s vision.”

Implementation process

During establishment of the Neurodiversity at NAB program, the DXC Dandelion Program selection and establishment phase was redesigned based on learnings and research over the last 5 years. This achieved a more efficient and effective methodology to identify suitable candidates, and a more streamlined application process.

From the initial applicants, 18 individuals were invited to attend a one-day workshop, with 12 candidates invited to participate in a subsequent 3-week assessment program.

At the completion of the assessment, candidates had successfully:

- Been introduced to the world of cyber security
- Worked on a real IT software development project
- Learned a number of modern software development techniques
- Worked in an agile framework, using agile toolsets
- Programmed a robot
- Worked as a collaborative team

At the end of the assessment, six individuals were offered positions in the Enterprise Security department working within the Staff Identity and Access (IdAM) team at NAB.



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Operational phase and organisational change

The new team was successfully integrated into the NAB culture and working environment. Performance management was undertaken using consistent tools and methods to assess autism support and mental health management needs to ensure trainees were not impacted adversely by working within the program.

Challenges cited by NAB weren't necessarily during implementation, but rather during the preceding stage. "I think a lot of people who didn't previously understand autism were a little fearful of saying or doing the wrong thing. That was a challenge which we overcame with education," Edwards says.

A major part of the program and Tytler's role is to build autism awareness throughout the bank. "I work very closely with the technical lead of the program, who manages the workflow and work training as well as providing support around how to deliver those messages more effectively for trainees," she says. "This includes ongoing training and information to broader bank staff around working with neurodiverse individuals and diversity in general."

DXC and NAB established working groups to initiate an internal communication strategy to introduce the Neurodiversity at NAB team to bank employees. Analysis was undertaken to establish an overall training strategy and framework and to define and tailor initial and ongoing training packages to suit the organisation's requirements.

The following autism awareness training sessions were successfully delivered to employees across several offices:

- General awareness sessions — an introduction to the NAB's Neurodiversity program for all NAB employees
- Manager training sessions — more detailed and specific autism training for NAB leaders
- NAB team/colleagues training sessions — more detailed and specific autism training for NAB staff and interacting teams/leads
- One-on-one leader/manager training — leaders worked directly with DXC autism spectrum consultants to address specific challenges/scenarios and the use of specific strategies



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Results speak volumes

The Neurodiversity at NAB program is helping address challenges in recruiting people with the right skillsets. The recruits quickly established themselves as valued team members by making significant contributions to the IdAM team in achieving key targets, improving service to NAB employees and customers, and provisioning and fulfilling critical applications with high accuracy and speed.

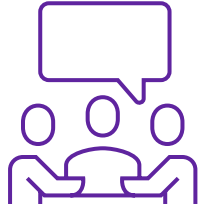
The business results are outstanding with a report assessing output after three months identifying a 26% productivity increase by the DXC Dandelion team compared to the existing teams' output. Another example highlighted a trainee who scripted a new program within the first couple of weeks that effectively saved the bank hundreds of hours.

The program can benefit other organisations in many ways — most importantly by ensuring diversity and creativity of thought. Edwards says, “Diversity is particularly important to our organisation. NAB has stepped into a number of diversity areas and this is just one of those. We've improved productivity, we've increased our engagement score, and we're reaping the benefits of having that different mindset and those values in our organisation.”

It also makes a difference for people working in the team to see their organisation committed to diversity. A number of existing team members have commented on how much they appreciate working for an organisation showing such commitment to diversity. They speak of the difference it's made for them personally, having someone in their team that thinks differently and can bring a new perspective to their work. Additionally, where individuals previously might not have felt confident to think or express themselves differently, this program encourages them to do that — thereby conceiving innovative solutions to previously unsolvable problems.

The program could also help NAB become an employer of choice in the competitive IT world. Edwards continues, “I think this is one of the main advantages to organisations that find it difficult to recruit good talent. We've had a number of individuals say they've chosen to work at the NAB because of this program — because it aligns with their values. It helps them decide that NAB is a place they want to work.”

Organisations like the NAB are embracing the program because it's good for business. The DXC Dandelion Program helps tap the untapped potential that exists in the community and the competitive advantage and business case for that is hard to ignore.



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The future

NAB engaged DXC for three years, but the intent is to embed the program as an ongoing recruitment talent pool, rather than simply bringing in groups at certain points in time.

The program aims to have trainees move quite quickly out of their initial role if that’s of interest to them. This includes secondments to other areas or where individuals will apply independently for employment in other areas of the bank or within other organisations.

Placements in other areas of the Enterprise Security department began in late 2019, with team members undertaking projects in various departments, including Engineering,

Oversight and Access Management, Awareness and Advisory, Detection and Fraud, Infrastructure Delivery Services and Infrastructure, Workplace and Security.

Since the assignments began, many other teams in the business are offering placements to Neurodiversity at NAB team members. NAB anticipates that many of these placements will result in more permanent secondments.

Edwards concludes, “Our industry is changing all the time, so we are constantly looking for new ways to bring different talent, innovative thinking, and creative problem solving into the organisation. The DXC Dandelion Program really brings that.”

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