Hello, welcome to On The Couch, I'm Catherine Garrett. This is our series of conversations with La Trobe University's senior leaders finding out a little bit about what they are up to and what's in store.

Today I'm speaking with Peter Nikoletatos, the University's Chief Information Officer. Peter welcome and thanks for coming in.

Thank you.

My first question for you is Chief Information Officer's a big title, you've got a big job, can you briefly breakdown for us what you do and what your responsible for.

Yeah. I guess the role of the CIO has a number of dimensions to it, predominately it's about the technology and information investment in the University, ensuring that we get the right mix at the right time to make sure that the student experience and the academic use and diminished reviews of applications and processes are all well balanced for the purpose of the institutions goals.

And are they at the moment?

Outlook by and large of course is always room for improvement but I'm pretty delighted that we've got the right set of operational activities underway but also with a view to what's happening around the corner. Innovation plays a very fundamental play at universities and we, I guess the right incubators for early adoption of creative and lateral thinking how we use technology.

Technology's changing at such a rapid rate, we all know that, are we keeping pace here at La Trobe?

Yeah that's a great question. You know I often think about IT in a bimodal way, as a series of activities that we have to do that is fundamentally about being operationally very very efficient and that's the day to day things, that access to the internet, being able to use our telephony, being able to use our systems on a regular basis in an intuitive way without having to think about it or better still always up, very very important. In a parallel way of course we need to think about investments that we need to make to stay competitive in a marketplace that is fundamentally very very competitive.

Can you talk us through some current and specific projects? Maybe Service Now or Office 365?

Yeah absolutely. So there's a couple of projects that we think are very important to do right now. Service Now is our service desk tool and what differentiates it from other tools is that we're not just rolling this out into IT, we're actually using it as a tool right across the business. So the experiences people have in getting support from other areas such as HR, or our student administration area or even education technologies, has a similar look and feel to it. It's important that the end user has as a similar as experience as possible in the way they interact with service desks across the university.

And what about Office 365?

Office 365 is a really exciting project for us. I mean emails are a very very mature product, we know that. But by going to Office 365 we are now moving into a completely different area, one that not only uses email, but starts to enhance a lot more of the collaborative technologies. For example Presence, instant messaging, web or desktop web conferencing type tools. We really want to make the software operate as a virtual office anywhere anytime and we think Office 365 provides the tools to do that.

And where are we in terms of that rollout?

service Now has been rolled out to 2 parts of our business right now and by the end of the year will have largely rolled in out across all of our target businesses that are going to use it. Office 365 has been in use for students since January this year. In that particular example what I'm really looking forward to is actually now setting it up as a lifelong email or connection with students once they graduate for us. With staff we envisaged to have them all across to Office 365 by the end of October this year.

Now you've only been at La Trobe a relatively short time, 12 months, what were roles before here?

Yes, I've had three basic experiences in the last 25 years. The last 10 have been in higher education, a period of 5 years before that in radiology, and prior to that 10 years with BHP in various roles across not only Australia but internationally as well.

So would you care to comment on the differences between working for a corporate, health and the university sector?

You know there are lessons learned in every single one of those. I mean BHP to me and still to this day I carry the adage that people are important, investing in people for the future is incredibly important. BHP taught me a lot about training people and I still to this day focus on developing people for the future and I think it's important, particularly in this technology evolution, that we always keep our skills up to date for what's about to emerge around the corner. Radiology was a much different challenge for me. It was probably the first time that I actually appreciated the importance of information. So working in various hospitals across Australia, mostly oncology type units, getting data, good quality data, to a referring doctor to make decisions about treating patients, you can't understate how important that is. And that's no different I guess what happens at universities. At the end of the day if you unpeel all the technology the pieces of value is the information and if you arrange it in a way that makes sense in terms of making business decisions then the institution will profit from that.

And what are your interests Peter outside of the University and work and when you're away from the computer screen?

Yeah, so I mean family is very important to me, I'm a commuter so weekends at home are absolutely fun and I've got 2 teenage daughters. I'm a cycling junkie so I really follow grand tours and the cycling calendar around the world. But there is no shortage of activities outside of work to keep me motivated.

Well you look very calm for a father of 2 teenage girls, how's it going for you?

It's highly enjoyable, I'm just reflected at the momentum I've got a 15 year old who we're about to send to friends for an exchange program and I'm thinking that's exactly what I wanted to do when I was 15 years old so some ways I see her living her life through the experiences that I wanted to have.

Yeah that's wonderful. So in 5 years time how do you envisage we'll be working with technology here at La Trobe?

What a great question. I mean 2 things are happening right now, what I call evolutionary IT, and then of course transformative IT. If you look at just evolution IT for a moment these are the things that are going to happen regardless of who the CIO is. But my role here is of course trying to get the timing right for the institutions benefit. That means understanding the next cohort of students, how they use technology, what types of technologies are going to be used and examples of that are how we integrate much more of the social media experience in our everyday operations because fundamentally each cohort of students that arrives now tends to have a greater investment in social media. From a transformative process it's trying to pick the right investments that can benefit the institution. An example of that is quite often they talk about smart campuses. And for me describing what would a smart campus mean to La Trobe? But how would you differentiate itself that it doesn't want to be just like of every other institution, it actually wants to be the benchmark when we talk about any innovative project we undertake.

Well exciting times ahead.

Absolutely.

Thanks Peter, thanks very much for speaking with us.

Pleasure.