

## TIMS3311 Critical Reflection Essay

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### Overall WIL Experience

Throughout the course TIMS3311, I have been able to apply my technical entrepreneurial knowledge to real-world startups. For 10 weeks, I have been interning with Leah, Founder of Aloe Vita- Australia's first all-natural, carbonated aloe vera drink, which has been an amazing experience.

Before starting this semester, my honest impression of startups was that they are very chaotic, didn't have much structure and that the founders do anything and everything at all times. But in fact, what I found was that there are structures and processes to follow that assist in starting a venture. The Lean Start Up Method, Design Thinking and Effectuation theory are key principles that can help inform our decisions as a startup. Since being able to see the connection between theory and practice, I have loved the structured and methodological approach of building a startup that is theory and evidence backed. Starting a venture now (after taking this course) seems like a much less daunting task and has given me hope and confidence that I can do it too in the future.

A highlight of this WIL experience was the event with Faba and UQ Ventures. Leah invited us to the event as she was flying up to Brisbane to pitch Aloe Vita and to celebrate the conclusion of the Faba program for that cohort. It was a fantastic night in the UQ Atrium, filled with innovative startup ideas, interesting conversations and a buzzing atmosphere. It made me realise how creative and supportive this industry is to fellow founders, people with an idea or keen entrepreneurship students!

Our team has had some difficulties with internal communication throughout the semester. Without having a weekly class, it has been difficult to meet in-person consistently to catch up and discuss our tasks and progress each week. We typically meet online with Leah most Monday nights during class time which is also the reason as to why we do not catch up as a team at that time. As a result of this, as team leader, I send weekly emails/messages as to what we need to achieve this week for our project, however the work completed is usually delayed (no urgency) and quality is inconsistent. Thus, I usually find myself doing a good amount of the

work including, creating the survey questions, constructing the survey in Qualtrics, downloading the survey results and cleaning the data in excel, completing the BMC, and creating summaries for our interview results.

Although the workload is not evenly distributed between our group, I have really enjoyed doing some of everything and being able to help Leah develop Aloe Vita.

In hindsight, I would establish a day/time outside of class time that suits our team (without Leah) to meet and discuss weekly tasks. Although I have enjoyed the work, it would have been more beneficial for the other members to take responsibility for the work delivered. Additionally, assigning each team member a role is another solution to delegate work. For example, Chelsea could be '*Problem Validation Survey Specialist*', who specialises in summarising and presenting survey results, Ruoqi: '*Customer Insights Lead – Interviews*', who specialises in identifying similarities between interviews and forming valuable insights, Ambryn: '*Team Leader & Account Director*', who collates all deliverables, quality checks work, ensures cohesiveness between findings and is the direct contact with Leah. These specified roles would be in addition to collecting survey responses and conducting interviews.

I have previously worked with Chelsea and Ruoqi in a group assignment in TIMS3304 - Social Entrepreneurship. Through working together again, we have been able to develop our relationship as students and friends. Furthermore, working with Leah has been amazing. Her connection to the Faba program allowed me to attend the Faba x UQ Ventures Event and have more opportunities to connect with founders and aspiring entrepreneurs. As such, as a student intern, I was able to share my connection to the TIMS3311 course with the founder of Tea Industries, Alexa Stathakis, who was interested in having interns!

On top of this, at the event, I was able to have a great chat with Beth Lawrence, UQ Ventures Empower Manager, and brainstormed creative ideas for our own entrepreneurial ideas. These ideas are something I will take with me after the completion of this WIL experience.

### **New Knowledge, Insights, and Skills**

Throughout my degree, I have been enrolled in multiple TIMS courses such as 1301, 2301, 2302 & 3304, learning multiple entrepreneurial concepts including the Lean

Startup Method, Design Thinking and Effectuation theories. Additionally, before this course, I had recently spent 1-month interning for a startup in Singapore as part of the UQ Ventures SUA program. This was an amazing experience where I learnt various skills working in a scaled startup as well as allowing me to gain new perspectives on global work ethics. I could then bring the knowledge I gained through this experience to my personal and professional life at university, particularly to this WIL course.

This course has helped me to apply entrepreneurial theories to a real-life startup, allowing me to connect theory and practice. In particular, the theory surrounding the Lean Startup method advises us to test assumptions and to fail fast. Our group were able to do this by testing assumptions through survey responses and interviews. We collected 70 survey responses and conducted two sets of 15 interviews- the first set aimed to validate the problem, the second set aimed to provide insight into our go-to-market strategy. Our initial assumptions included that Aloe Vita would be a 'skin drink' for Gen Z & Millennial women and that Aloe Vita would be well accepted as a new drink with little skepticism from consumers to using aloe vera as the main ingredient.

Although, after gathering surveys and interview results, we found that many Gen Z and Millennial women already had a skincare routine that they are happy with and didn't see the addition of Aloe Vita to their routines as necessary. It was also found that people are unfamiliar with consuming aloe vera (commonly being used to heal sunburn) and would be cautious to consume it initially. From these results, we were able to recommend that the brand offers free sample-sized drinks at its wholesalers or individual drink options (instead of a 6-pack) to overcome the fear of commitment in consuming aloe vera for the first time. Additionally, marketing Aloe Vita as an addition to their skin routine which can be consumed during social gatherings would generate an image of Aloe Vita as a 'healthy indulgence' for consumers. Thus, without using the Lean Startup method, these valuable insights would not have been discovered.

Additionally, Design Thinking theory focuses on ideating creative solutions rather than the problem. By utilising Design Thinking methods, we have been able to ideate ideas for a sustainable and achievable go-to-market strategy for Aloe Vita. We have

identified suitable target retailers including, local wholesale grocers, boutique cafes, community Pilates studios, 'paint and sip' businesses and most importantly, businesses that align with Aloe Vita's mission and have an already established community of Gen Z and Millennial women. On top of this, based off our interview insights, our team has validated and ideated potential brand characters, brand colours, possible millilitres per drink (drink size) and how many drinks should be sold together (6-pack vs individual). In particular, from our interviews, we found that a brand character would not align with the brand aesthetic or target market of Aloe Vita which is clean and minimalistic. Thus, Stage Two of our project has allowed us to be creative and further emphasise Aloe Vita's branding and values through the product branding and placement.

Looking to the future, by interning for Aloe Vita through this WIL course, I have gained experience building a startup from the pre-seed stage. It has helped me to break down the stages of starting a venture into a structured process and ultimately develop my confidence to do it myself in the future.

Throughout the course, I valued the independence with our group and startup along with optional check-ins/consultations and complete trust from our course lecturer. I enjoyed being able to completely apply my knowledge and creativity to assist in building Aloe Vita, and I found Jack very approachable and always willing to give constructive feedback when we needed it.

Three suggestions for this course would be to divide the larger project of assisting the startup into time frames. For example, Stage One (weeks 1-4): all startup teams work on validating the problem through surveys and interviews with a class session to present our findings. Stage Two (weeks 5-8): turn these insights into recommendations for the brand (including a "share" session with the class; Stage Three (weeks 8-11): implement these recommendations. This structured approach to the course would aim to provide internal motivation for teams as it creates a sense of urgency (deadline) and helps to guide teams and clarify findings throughout the semester.

Secondly, during the process of gathering survey responses, it would be useful to use the Blackboard Discussion Board as a platform to post survey links. This would

allow us to get a significant number of surveys from a range of customer demographics.

Lastly, having a peer review process for the subject would motivate team members to consistently contribute to the team projects within the startup. It would also allow valuable feedback to be shared to the class lecturer in order to mark accordingly.

## TIMS3311 Diary Entries

**22/8/25**

We had our first meeting today with Leah and the other startup team. It was great to meet everyone and get to know Leah's goals for Aloe Vita for our project. My group, consisting of Chelsea, Ruoqi and myself, have decided on our project for the subject being 1) validate the assumptions surrounding the problem and branding elements for Aloe Vita using the lean-startup method (BMC and focus group), and, 2) determine a go-to-market strategy with target partners and scalable products using design thinking tools (crazy 8's framework). From my prior experience, startups are known to pivot their ideas often as they validate their assumptions. Due to this, I think it will be possible that these projects may change throughout the length of the course and the unknown of where this project may end excites me.

I am very excited for this WIL experience! The fact that Aloe Vita is a very new startup and hasn't yet got a product to the market yet will allow us a lot of creative freedom. We can use the entrepreneurial theories like the lean start up and actually interpret the results and implicate them. This WIL experience is helping me see how the structure and processes of building a startup interplay to create a venture that is both theory and evidence backed. I'd be interested to see that after all the research and assumption testing through surveys and focus groups, that it will result in a successful business launch and journey for Aloe Vita. In saying that, I've learnt that I love this methodological way of building a startup and I don't think I would have experienced that if this course didn't exist. I'm thoroughly looking forward to working with Leah on Aloe Vita!

**8/9/25**

We had our 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting with Leah today at 5pm during our class time. This week we have been working on creating a survey to validate both the problem and branding strategy to be ready for an event in Melbourne called HEXPO, a festival of ideas and innovation. We also talked through a draft of the business model canvas (BMC) to get our assumptions in writing and to collaborate on expanding these assumptions for the first stage of our project.

One thing that was particularly difficult this week has been trying to coordinate a time with the team to catch up and discuss our goals for the project that week. We have lacked some internal communication, however the meeting with Leah still went very well and our team was able to stay on the call after our meeting with Leah to talk through our goals for the week. I believe that a Monday night call with Leah and the group is an effective time slot (while we do not have class) which we will attempt to do consistently every week.

Prior to this experience, I had a strong knowledge base of entrepreneurial theories including the lean start-up, design thinking & effectuation, through courses including TIMS1310, TIMS2301, TIMS2302 & TIMS3304. However, I had never had experience applying these concepts to a real start-up. In particular, the theory surrounding the lean start-up method advises us to test assumptions and to fail fast. Our intern group at Aloe Vita have been able to put this into practice by creating a BMC in order to organise our assumptions and test them through a survey. Thus, recognising the link between theory and practice has been an extremely valuable skill that I am already starting to develop and will take forward into future entrepreneurial endeavours.

### **13/9/25**

This week we refined the survey questions for the HEXPO event that Leah will be attending down in Melbourne. We have decided that for the first stage of our project we will conduct a survey along with interviews. Thus, we have already pivoted from our original project idea. We put the survey questions into Qualtrics to create a survey that can be scanned via QR code by consumers and people attending the HEXPO event.

Something that I have learnt throughout this WIL course is that building a venture needs both theoretical concepts and common sense. For example, the survey that we built needs to ask the most important questions to get answers that we need to validate and be less than 5 minutes for consumers to actually complete it. There is no point asking every single question that we need answering (which is a lot as this is a startup) because the completion rate will be very little. This concept will definitely help me in the future as I also wish to start a business. It has given me a good

perspective of the initial tasks that must be completed when starting a venture and how to go about these tasks using theory.

Additionally, Leah expressed her need to create a social media presence to begin working towards gaining brand awareness amongst Aloe Vita's target market. Prior experience on social media channels shows that documenting 'the founder journey' is of interest to consumers on Instagram and Tiktok. Additionally, this type of content is achievable for Aloe Vita as it is in the pre-seed stage and thus does not have a physical product to advertise yet. Generating a following for the brand Aloe Vita is equally important as advertising the product. This could be beneficial for Leah as I am currently the Managing Director for a student-run Marketing and Communications Agency a UQ- Newish Communications. We have a Marketing and Social Media team that can create content for Aloe Vita in the future when the product gets developed. Logistically, it would be difficult as she operating Aloe Vita from Melbourne, however, it may be of value and interest to her.

**3/10/25**

At this stage of the WIL course, we have completed our survey and collected 60 responses for Aloe Vita. We designed the survey specifically for the HEXPO event that Leah attended and have distributed it to our networks here in Brisbane too. Through this we have gained valuable quantitative feedback regarding consumer behaviours towards functional beverages including questions like "What functional benefits appeal to you?" and "Rank other considerations that impact your decision when choosing a functional beverage" etc. This allowed us to validate the problem using lean startup methods and pivot if need be. We also are working towards completing our 30 qualitative interviews to dive deeper into the consumer behaviours and attitudes surrounding this sector. As such, the target market for Aloe Vita is in the age bracket where they already have an established skin care routine and thus, are not influenced by a functional beverage that is good for your skin; instead a 'detoxifying drink' is more appealing to them.

This really shows that there is no limit to primary & secondary research, as you can continue to extract more valuable insights.

**9/10/25**



I just attended the Faba x UQ Ventures Event last night on behalf of Aloe Vita as a student intern. It was such a great night meeting Leah in-person (she is from Melbourne), listening to her pitch Aloe Vita, hearing the reaction from the audience and networking with other keen entrepreneurs. The atmosphere was buzzing, and I quickly realised first-hand at what a supportive and creative industry entrepreneurship is! I was able to provide value to some of the other startups in the program that were also on the lookout for interns and gave them the course code for this subject- it is a really great subject with valuable mutual benefits!

## Bibliography

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