Assignment 2

Reflective Diary & Critical Reflection

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TIMS3311 Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Practice

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PART 1: CRITICAL REFLECTION ESSAY

1.   Introduction to the WIL

I undergo the iLab/UQ Startup track with Sepal, a UQ startup that streamlines local market operations for organisers and stallholders. The objective is to address the cold start issue and validate stakeholder problems through qualitative interviews.

2.   Overall WIL Experience

2.1.   *Personal Lessons*

2.1.1.   *New Things Learned*

I recognised my capacity to stay adaptable in the new and unknown circumstances. I get worried about the project's progress when our first reach to market organisers in Brisbane area got minimal responses. Sepal's traction plan focused on Brisbane large organisers. But after sending 15 emails and receiving only 3 replies, I proposed expanding our outreach over Brisbane to go to other regions in QLD and later all over Australia. So far, we contacted around 70 organisers across 5 outreach batches in total and secured 13 interviews.

Our first positive response came from Bardon Markets. Not long after, we get encouraged to do in-person visits to secure interview quotas. We then met the organiser of Jan Powers Farmers Market, which became our first on-site interview. Invaluable to see their booking system and market map firsthand. During this visit, we also interviewed stallholders. In the following weeks we continued stallholder visits at The Collective Markets, West End Markets, and Mt Gravatt Markets.

2.1.2.   *Highlights and Difficult Times*

When most organisers didn't respond, I'd say that was the most difficult stage, regardless of the effort we put into researching websites and social medias. Discouraging to see our cold emails get minimal responses, which

made us question whether our reach out was effective. We also had no opportunity for warm introductions. However, this challenge became one of the most valuable learning points as it taught us to stay adept instead of following an unvarying plan. Breakthrough was when we finally hearing back from interviewees.

Another highlight was leading the team. I sometimes struggled to keep everything on track. Often I had to multitask coordinating meetings, updating our tracker, along with communicating internally. I committed to keep documenting progress and updating the tracker so everyone stayed accountable, though at times I felt doing things alone. The routine helped the team stay organised and maintain consistent progress.

2.1.3. *Dealt with Challenges*

Effectuation's frameworks were applied to tackle the challenges. Bird-in-Hand helped me use the resources already available, which are our team and online information, while building structure early through an outreach tracker and regular check-ins. Lemonade helped me see low response rates as feedback and use them to restructure our approach. I seek advice and visited markets directly to secure the quota when cold-emails were less effective. Effectuation prompt me that leadership under uncertainty is about staying resourceful and learning as you go.

2.1.4. *Things Do Differently in Hindsight*

Instead of waiting for difficulties to come, I'd say I'll make a contingency plan of what event we're going to come by, that may or may not happen in the future. Later on the journey, I found tools such as Lucidchart's planning charts could help visualise alternative scenarios. I also found out the Business Model Environmental Map (2019) by Strategyzer could further help understand the context within the market operation space, which could help a lot with mapping. Specifically to the market reachout,

I'll also prepare alternative channels such as Facebook or LinkedIn, alongside email. Lastly, I'd share outreach responsibilities more evenly within the team to avoid bottlenecks and fatigue.

2.2. Networks Established

2.2.1. Specific Networks Built

Through this WIL, I built networks within both the Sepal ecosystem and the Australian market community. Direct connections were from the organisers we contacted all over Australian states, along with stallholders from the markets we reached out to. In addition, I collaborate with my teammates Linh and Chang (Hannah) and Sepal's team, Kanish and Vikram.

2.2.2. Value Derived Beyond Surface-Level Benefits

The relationships with organisers gave me awareness of the market culture. Understanding some organisers' dilemma to accept new digital systems taught me that innovation must line up with human needs, not just the sake of efficient systems. The experience also improved my personal development. I learned how to build outreach emails (and rejections) and empathise more with customer pains and gains using the valuable resources introduced in the degree so far. I also valued the teamwork built throughout the WIL journey, specifically through challenges.

3. New Knowledge, Insights, and Skills

3.1. The Past

My knowledge of entrepreneurship was limited to conventional business functions. Growing up in a family-run retail SME, I understood supply and demand along with the marketing side but not how innovation have value along the way.

Joining UQ gave me theoretical frameworks and a bigger view of entrepreneurship, but had not applied them beyond class exercises. That's why I was look forward to join TIMS3311, as the WIL gave me an opportunity to put into practice what previously only learned in theory, in an Australian startup setup.

3.2. Key Learnings

3.2.1. Design Thinking

Design Thinking taught us how to approach stakeholder engagement with empathy and structure and become the most important framework in our problem validation. Stanford's Design School (2010) defines empathy as the "centerpiece of a human-centered design process," helping uncover users' needs through observation and engagement. While Sepal at first seemed focused on efficiency, I soon realised that understanding organisers' frustrations need a more empathetic view.

Using Maurya's (2017) Problem Interview Script, I used Design Thinking to craft empathetic interview questions. Guided by "How Might We" questions, I reframed each of Sepal's four pain points (which already researched before), which are Bookings and Payments, Product Uniqueness, Compliance Tracking, and Cancellations, into exploratory questions. I asked them to walk me through their current workflow and describe which steps felt most time-consuming or stressful instead of directly asking whether organisers faced difficulties. This approach gave more open and honest responses.

We also used journey mapping to envisage stakeholders' pain points throughout the market application operation. I found a [visual tool](#) that helped our team find out where delays happened and gave structure to what would otherwise be teh feedback. I also completed the [BCG X - Venture & Business Builds](#) virtual internship this semester, which gave me

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a clearer understanding of how journey mapping connects to capturing value across the venture-building process.

Design Thinking acts as the foundation of our iLab/UQ startup placement as it helps us approach research as a conversation built on empathy rather than just a data-gathering task.

3.2.2. *Lean Startup*

Blank (2013) emphasises that successful ventures prioritise experimentation and customer feedback over elaborate planning. It guided our premature problem-validation, where we focused on confirming whether the problem existed before giving solutions, as in Lean Startup guidance.

Led by Blank (2013) and Osterwalder's Value Proposition Design (2014), I treated our first interview as an MVP. Each interview became a test within the build-measure-learn loop, helping validate assumptions step by step. I added follow-up questions such as how long email exchanges or approvals took before stallholders secured a position after I observed some patterns on the answers.

Strategyzer's (2025) VPC further clarified how organisers' pains and gains aligned with our proposed features. This process moved my mindset from predicting outcomes to learning through quick feedback loops. I've come to see this iterative way of thinking as something important for my future roles.

3.2.3. *Effectuation*

While Design Thinking and Lean Startup directed how I approached the WIL, Effectuation shaped how I approached myself throughout it. It became my most personal transformative framework because it reflected

how myself truly function amidst the uncertainty. Sarasvathy's logic line up closely with my experience at Sepal, where responses were unpredictable and progress depended on what we could control. I applied the Lemonade by turning setbacks into opportunities when I see the cold email responses were low. We widened our outreach beyond Brisbane and treated each rejection as feedback. I chose to make due with what we already had rather than waiting for the perfect situation with Bird-in-hand.

Effectuation also influenced how I led the team. As the designated lead, I found that leadership is more about empowering others to take action than it is about having power. I recorded milestones, maintained the team tracker and acted as a liaison to Sepal's team to keep progress structured and transparent. I came to see leadership through Effectuation, which is building structure out of uncertainty and turning limited resources into progress.

3.3. The Future

3.3.1. Current and/or Future Career

The WIL experience boosted my ability to use evidence-based validation and human-centred research, which are directly applicable to future roles in consulting, business analysis, or venture creation. The iterative and empathetic approach I practised at Sepal hopefully will guide how I design and test new ideas in any future organisation I'm pursuing.

3.3.2. Career Trajectory Impact

As a Business-Management student, a field that was quite general, I'm not sure which pathway I'm going to take. The WIL experience clear up my career direction. Experiencing the startup work gave me confidence to pursue human-centred innovation and consider careers that blend strategy and design, such as venture studios or social enterprises. I am also keen on working in an adaptive, learning-oriented environment.

3.4. Course Feedback

3.4.1. Value Identification

I valued how the TIMS3311 course gave me a real-world application of my major. Working directly with a growing startup venture gave me depth that both traditional courses or regular internship can't give. I also appreciate the opportunity to see a startup's growth hands-on.

3.4.2. Potential Improvements

1. I think mandatory check-ins could help students stay on trackduring this flexible course, though announcements and consultations were given. I think it could be made through weekly diary entries or required consultations.

2. I noticed on 13 October in-class check-ins, other students received help from other cohorts on their project. A group discussion channel with facilitators could help future cohorts connect and share solutions more easily.

3. Lastly, a specific individual scoring system would make grading fairer. A Google Docs template combining quantitative and written feedback could better capture each member's contribution than current tools like BuddyCheck as this project was quite heavy unlike regular assignments.

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PART 2: REFLECTIVE DIARIES

Entry 1

Timeline: 28 August - 13 October 2025

I began blasting out cold emails to the organiser, between 8-10 September. After waiting for a week, I realised that only 2 out of 10 Brisbane organisers replied to our outreach and I worried our project might be stuck. I then came up with a plan to expand our scope. First expanding further into QLD (second batch), then into NSW and VIC (third batch), and finally, once I felt we could secure the quota, into TAS and WA (fourth batch). The fifth batch I sent was on 13 October, just because some of the organisers ghosted us after saying their availability.

It required hours of research into markets across states, lurking into blogs and social media. In Google Sheets, I created a master tracker that contained our timeline, milestones, market locations, and other miscellaneous things. This tracker became a basis on our placement as it kept the team on track and easier to communicate. It also becomes an accountable tool if something occurs.

I learned to adapt from this experience. By pivoting early, I realised how impostant it is to plan for multiple outcomes instead of relying on solely one pathway. The low response rate became the encouragement for widening our scope, which made our validation more diversified and representative of Australian markets rather than only focusing on Brisbane, as the initial traction.

Reflecting on this moment, I see it as an illustration of effectuation's "Lemonade Principle", in which turning unexpected challenges into opportunities, and staying flexible! It also helped me recognise adaptability under pressure as one of my growing traits..

Entry 2

Timeline 2: 13 September - 20 September 2025

Our interview with Jan Powers marked a turning point in how we diversified validation. Up until then, I had relied heavily on cold emails which generated little engagement. On 13 September, I sent the second batch of cold emails, and (again) only two out of ten responses. We finally had a catch-up with Jack on 15 September, where he suggested we go directly to the markets. I coordinated for us to visit in person, targeting to meet organisers (or even marquees) and interview stallholders as well. Based on our location, we decided to visit two markets over the weekend (20-21 September), which are Jan Powers Farmers Market and The Collective Markets. The following week, we also went to West End Markets and Mt Gravatt Markets, for interviewing stallholders.

Though the organiser stall wasn't available for The Collective Market, we did meet Astrid, the coordinator of the Jan Powers Farmers Market. I was nervous, but seeing how open she was in person made me realise that direct, go-to-market approaches were effective. To our surprise, our email hadn't even been read and was buried in a pile of approx. 100 emails! We then get a lot of information from the interview, and she even showed us their current system for sorting stallholders and their tent mapping.

Entry 3

Timeline: 12 September and 17 September 2025

Kanish (Sepal's CEO) led us to understand the current problems in market operations during our first meeting on 20 August. I already understand the main points, but I appreciated that he later break down the problems according to key stakeholders, which are organisers, stallholders and customers.

On 12 September, we had a progress catch-up where he explained the four main pain points faced by organisers, which he had identified through conversations with them: Bookings and Payments; Product Uniqueness and Category Saturation; Compliance Tracking; and Cancellations. Then, we about to interview stallholders, we had another quick catch-up (17 September) about stallholders' pain point, which is Brand Activation. I changed the format of our qualitative interview questions to emphasise empathy-driven prompts in response to feedback.

This process showed me how to translate theory into practice. Design Thinking's empathise mode (2010) moved from being an abstract concept to something that shaped how we made our scripts. Instead of asking superficial questions, I test assumptions methodically using Ash Maurya's Problem Interview framework (2017). We were able to better understand stallholders' frustrations with their gains and pains by using Lean Startup's Value Proposition Design (VPC), which is based on Oswalder's Value Proposition Design (2014). The "Humble Discovery" Google Drive definitely gave us a lot of perspectives on customer development.

Why this matters is that it taught me the discipline of listening and researching deeper. Entrepreneurs often jump straight to solutions, but I learned that framing questions around lived experiences open more real-life needs. This enhanced our validation and gave us with assurance that we understood the definition of our problem.

Entry 4

Timeline: 13 September - Present

Learning how to talk to stakeholders from diverse backgrounds is one of the most memorable lessons from this WIL. It was far from perfect when it first started. My first call is with Mitch from Bardon Markets by a phone call (13 September). I had to restate and clarify my questions because I stammered a lot. I've finally gained confidence in interviews after doing a number of them.

I mentioned that if Sepal's product wasn't ready, we could position ourselves as student researchers rather than company representatives in the Assignment 1 presentation. This framing helped me get traction. I observed some hesitation when I went to interview Jan Powers until I explained that we were UQ student researchers. Some organisers wrote in emails that they were glad students had an eye in the industry.

"How Might We" (HMW) questions helped me to frame issues more constructive. While responses openness differ across markets, positioning the project as a research initiative rather than a sales call consistently reduced barriers and led to more honest conversations.

Entry 5

Timeline: Present

I took on the responsibility of spearheading this WIL overall journey. From my previous experiences, I learned that accountability is the most important thing in any project, which means I need to document everything. Hence why I created a tracker and a dedicated drive to keep our milestones organised. I also update every milestone and record every meeting on a MoM. I also took on the role of liaison between Sepal's and our team. We did have a Slack group, however I frequently had to remind the team to stay on course or restate assigned tasks.

What surprised me was how much I ended up enjoying the role. I'd always seen myself as someone more comfortable supporting from the side, yet in this WIL I proudly took pride in leading.

WIL helped me see leadership as one of my growing traits. I'm still learning, especially with delegating tasks and communication, but I realised that leadership is not only about assigning responsibilities, but about creating a situation where uncertainty can be managed. I adopted Effectuation's "Start with what you have, build as you go" mindset as I use the tools and people I have in hand to keep things moving.