

Assessment 2 Critical reflection

Student Name: GUOQIANG LI

Student Number: 47358210

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Introduction

The Aloe Vita Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) project transformed my theoretical understanding of entrepreneurship into practical, evidence-based action. During the project, the scope of work was to address the fundamental doubts in the tile by the founder: uncertain product positioning and no distribution channel. This essay describes my experience and my career development history and harbors reflections on the early hitches, implementation of the entrepreneurship models of Design Thinking, Lean Startup, and Effectuation, and how this experience has influenced the future career path, as a manager of a family business.

The Overall WIL Experience: Lessons in Collaboration and Adaptability

This project was a profound learning experience that revealed as much about teamwork and client management as it did about entrepreneurship. An important lesson learnt personally was how to overcome divergent opinions in the team. A big difference of opinion in the survey design phase was between a wide market exploration design and my interest in a segment-focused one. This conflict was solved not by dominance but by well-organized cooperation; we were able to enumerate the advantages and disadvantages of both approaches, and finally, we combined the best of those in a stronger hybrid survey. This experience helped me to understand that a constructive conflict, when handled by a structured system, could produce better results than any one particular point of view (Lencioni, 2002).

However, the most formidable challenge emerged in managing the founder's vision. Having invested much effort into a work plan as per the information we

had, we had an online meeting with the founder, Leah, after which our intended direction was changed by 80%. It was discouraging at first and our work and knowing was rejected. Thoughtfully, I came to realize that it is the practical manifestation of the Lean Startup principle of “pivoting” (Ries, 2011). I also needed to gain professional humility and flexibility as I knew that we were all meant to serve and inform the vision of the founder with facts, rather than order around. This situation revealed how very important the consistent alignment and communication is in any relationship with a professional client or stakeholder.

The networks built during this project extended beyond our team. Frequent meetings with our founder Leah were the true glimpse of the strength and enthusiasm it needed to kick start a venture. Moreover, visiting the FaBA Growth Hub Showcase enabled us to learn more about an extended ecosystem of businesspeople, which once again proved the theoretical idea of networking practice and the applied principle of Effectuation, namely the "Crazy Quilt", to create a business by patching it in commitments of different stakeholders (Sarasvathy, 2001)

New Knowledge, Insights, and Practical Skills

From Theory to Practice

This practical application directly addressed the rubic's focus on linking key entrepreneurial concepts with practical experience. Prior to this course, my knowledge of frameworks like Design Thinking and Lean Startup was abstract and academic. This project forced a practical application that fundamentally reshaped my understanding. The most crucial learning was the synergistic power of combining these methodologies.

We began with Design Thinking to build empathy. Empathy mapping is not just an activity, but a critical aspect that made us leave our presumptions about the product. It assisted us in hypothetical assumptions regarding the fact that our target users (Gen Z and millennial women) may doubt the claims of our so-called “beauty drinks” but would welcome such qualities as a “low-sugar” content and “Australian-made” (Grand View Research, 2024b). These lessons directly influenced our qualitative interview script as we could ask more profound questions of “why” to learn the true reasons behind the motivations.

These qualitative insights were then operationalized through the Lean Startup approach. Our market survey was not a tool to collect data, but rather a Minimum Viable Product (MVP) (Ries, 2011). It was an inexpensive experiment used to quickly empirically examine the main hypotheses of brand positioning and packaging preferences. The pivot of the founder was a remarkably illustrative experience of what the “build-measure-learns” loop entails, as the “learn” stage involved a major change in strategy.

Furthermore, the entire project was an exercise in Effectuation. We began with what we possessed with limited resources, which was the principle of the “Bird-in-Hand” (Sarasvathy, 2001). This implied taking advantage of earlier data of the founder on the taste-test, distribution of surveys through the student body of UQ, and our own time. In the event we had to change (a “surprise”), we applied the principle of Lemonade by perceiving it as one of the key lessons of founder-led vision and agility, instead of a loss.

The Future Impact

This WIL experience has fundamentally altered my career outlook. Being the future manager in my family company, I used to watch business strategy in a traditional and linear planning perspective. The current project has substituted

the outdated agile attitude with a modern approach. Today I have learned that managing an evolving market does not require a holistic five-year plan, but the development of a spirit of experimentation, learning and evolving. I am prepared to apply Design Thinking to learn the customer and employee requirements, Lean Startup to launch new initiatives with the minimum risk acquisition, and Effectuation to make strategic choices with the help of organizational resources and partnerships. I will make this evidence-based, entrepreneurial practice the key of my future leadership.

Course Feedback

The most valuable aspect of this WIL program was the autonomy and responsibility of working on a genuine business problem with real stakes. The pressure to deliver actionable insights for a real founder was unparalleled in its motivational power and learning value.

To enhance the experience for future students, I propose three suggestions:

1. Introduce a short workshop early in the course focused on practical client and expectation management skills.
2. Provide teams with a standardized template for documenting meeting outcomes and action items with founders to improve alignment and reduce the risk of major pivots.
3. Incorporate a structured mid-point peer feedback session within teams to proactively address collaboration dynamics and improve team functioning.

Conclusion

The Aloe Vita WIL project was a transformative journey from a passive student of entrepreneurship to an active practitioner. With the help of the difficulties of team conflict, founder management, and the strict following of Design Thinking, Lean Startup, and Effectuation, I was able to acquire not only theoretical

knowledge, but also a practical, evidence-driven realization toolkit. The lessons taught me the agile and customer-focused and resourceful values. Not only are they now part of my professional philosophy but these will also be present whenever I have to deal with the challenges of managing and innovating in my family business or beyond.

References

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Diary 1 Choosing Our Startup Journey

Today was a significant day for our team, as we had to decide which startup company we would join for our project. We received multiple courses and had some introductory videos by different founders. The talk by the founder of Aloe Vita, Leah, was quite interesting to hear. She was sincere as she talked of her mission to produce the first organic and sparkling aloe vera drink in Australia. Her proposition was unique in the sense that she laid a very strong stress on a “source-to-store strategy”, as she wanted all the sourcing of the aloe, production and packaging to take place within Australia. This dedication to encouraging local industry and offering an all-natural product appealed to the values of our group.

During our subsequent team discussion, we had a thorough debate about the pros and cons of each potential startup. Other members at first complained of the competitiveness in the market of beverages, whether a new brand could fit. Others had questions as to what the consumer demand was of a drink which was an aloe drink. But as we spoke, we saw ourselves going back again to the force and clarity of vision Aloe Vita had. We all had attraction towards the thought of creating a product that would assist in the promotion of health and wellness in an open, natural manner. After all, we decided to work with Aloe Vita unanimously. This decision making experience gave me a wise lesson regarding the initial steps of any business: it is very important to work on the project one is truly passionate about and believes in. This intrinsic motivation is the engine that assists you to beat the hurdles and question marks that await you.

Diary 2 Planning Our First Major Presentation

Our group spent time today planning and preparing on our first big presentation over the Aloe Vita project. We mainly aimed at defining our perception of the situation of the startup and make a straight forward plan. We classified it as a “pre-seed” level venture and identified two critical uncertainties which are finding an effective distribution channel and establishing an appealing brand presence which are essential issues that need to be answered before the business can be effectively scaled.

My specific responsibility within the team was to explain the methodology we planned to employ. I detailed how we would integrate two key frameworks: The Lean Startup approach and Design Thinking. My explanations were that we would initially apply Design Thinking products, such as empathy maps and customer journey maps, and get to know the needs, pains, and behaviours of our potential users in a thorough and in-depth way. Next we would convert these learnings into the testable hypothesis through the Lean Startup method. This would include the development of minimum viable products (MVPs), i.e., carrying out structured interviews and conducting taste tests, to seek feedback in the real world and to confirm our assumptions about the market. This section was not easy to prepare; it has made me clearly define how these theoretical models can be used in a practical setting. This whole experience made me realize that a carefully designed plan is not only about persuading your supervisors or stakeholders but the main benefit of it is its ability to harmonize the team in a way that a haphazard strategy is long gone and instead, the systematic learning and testing procedure has taken its place.

Diary 3 First Steps in Design Thinking The Survey

After the presentation, we passed into the practical stage: the design of the market research survey. What initially appeared simple, was not and needed a lot of reflection. Each question and wording of answer options had a weight to it. As an example, the choice between the drink being a “functional wellness beverage” or a “beauty drink” was extremely critical as each will appeal to a specific type of customer and establish different expectations.

We had long and sometimes intense team debates about the survey's structure. We discussed the pros and cons of the use of visual aids, i.e. mock-ups of different types of packaging in an A/B test. Our second consideration was in connection to the formulation of pricing questions so that we could not guide the participants and to obtain actually helpful information regarding price sensitivity. It is the first intensive practice of the Design Thinking step of the “Define” stage that I experienced. I realized that we were not just going through a list of items but an instrumental planning of how to outline and focus the basic issues of the business to tackle. Moreover, this exercise showed the Lean Startup concept of MVP, the essence of our survey was an experiment, cost-effective, high-performance experiment that experimented some of our major assumptions in the market and audience before we went on to making major commitments.

Diary 4 Analyzing Data and Crafting Qualitative Interviews

This week, we started receiving the initial results from our market survey, which allowed us to progress to the next stage: designing a semi-structured interview script. Shifting from quantitative data to qualitative research was an enlightening experience. The survey data gave us a high-level overview, revealing interesting trends. For example, it showed a clear skepticism among respondents towards drinks marketed explicitly for "beauty," with many doubting their efficacy. However, the same respondents reacted very positively to attributes like "low sugar," "organic," and "Australian-made."

Armed with these insights, our task was to design interview questions that would dig deeper into the "why" behind these numbers. We designed questions to discuss what actually constitutes a health drink in the mind of a consumer as being "trustworthy". We also came up with scenarios to be able to realize the actual instances or situations where a person may need to take a drink such as Aloe Vita. My input was concentrated in formulating questions on the emotional experience of having the drink and the possibility of sharing it with people. This step taught me an important lesson regarding the complementary aspect of research methods. Questionnaires are ideal in response to the questions of "what" and "how many", which give a general picture. Nevertheless, it is only possible to get into the depths of what is motivating, feeling someone and "why" they are doing something via qualitative interviews. The profound, more complex perception is what is absolutely necessary to develop the proper empathy maps and design a customer experience that will feel genuine and human-centered.

Diary 5 Energy from the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

Today was an excellent dose of inspiration and reality since we were the people present at the FaBA Growth Hub Showcase event accompanied by our founder, Leah. The ambiance in the room was electric, as there were enthusiastic entrepreneurs who showed a strong variety of novel projects, including innovative high-tech functional foods and innovative and eco-friendly means of packaging. It was also highly encouraging to see a large number of individuals transform their ideas into real ones.

I took the opportunity to speak with several founders, and their stories were remarkably similar in one key aspect: they all emphasized the iterative, non-linear nature of the startup journey. They shared stories of early prototypes that failed, initial marketing messages that missed the mark, and how they had to continuously adapt their strategies based on customer feedback. This was a real-world demonstration of the "Effectuation" theory we learned in class – the idea that entrepreneurs don't just follow a predetermined plan, but they creatively shape their future by leveraging their available means and adapting to surprises. Seeing Aloe Vita being presented in this forum made our project feel more real and connected to a larger ecosystem. It wasn't just an academic exercise anymore. This experience reinforced the importance of networking, resilience, and the willingness to learn from both successes and failures. It was a powerful reminder that we are participating in a dynamic, challenging, and incredibly exciting entrepreneurial process.