Reflective Diary & Critical Reflection

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1. Overall WIL Experience

Personal Lessons

I worked as an intern in an e-commerce company in China before joining the TIMS3311 WIL project. It was my responsibility to promote new products through online platforms and optimize campaigns. Because of this, I made the assumption at an early age that marketing success is primarily about exposure and reach. When I joined the Lili Grace Foundation (LGF) project, my first focus was to increase digital visibility, because I believed that if more people knew about the campaign, they would make a donation to it.

During the course of the project, I realized that this assumption was too simplistic as the project evolved. In my interviews with donors, I learned that people donate to a cause not because they see it online, but because they feel a connection to it and feel connected to it. This discovery was eye-opening. The experience made me realize that the key to effective impact communication lies in empathy rather than marketing strategy. The decision to make a donation is based on emotion and trust, not on clicking a button. It was this shift in perspective that fundamentally changed the way I understood value creation for me.

Our first online survey received only a few responses, which proved to be one of the most difficult moments of the whole process. Having spent a lot of time designing it, I was disappointed because I had put so much time and effort into it.However, with the guidance of Jack and through reflection using Lean Startup's Build-Measure-Learn cycle, I was able to reframe the problem in a new way. As opposed to trying to "fix the tool," I decided to revisit the assumptions that underlie it rather than try to fix it. My realization was that asking hypothetical questions ("Would you like to donate?") was ineffective. With Design Thinking's empathy principle in mind, I rewrote the

questions to make them more relevant to past behavior and the experiences of real people. There were a lot more responses to this version of the survey than the previous one.

As a re-start, I would approach the problem from the beginning with an empathy-first approach, taking time to observe and listen before designing any solutions. In my experience, iteration is not a sign of failure but rather a natural part of the process of innovation and as such, it is not a sign of failure either.

Networks Established

The project provided me with the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with my teammate Zechen, our mentor Jack, and our LGF partners Chipo and Doris throughout the course of the project. In addition to Jack's mentorship, Chipo and Doris provided authentic local insights that shaped the emotional direction of our MVPs, which helped me develop a more critical and structured approach to problem-solving. The conversations we had with Chipo about his journey from Zimbabwe to Australia shed light on the human stories that drive social change.

As a member of a small, cross-cultural team, I also developed my communication and coordination skills as a result of my work experience. I felt that the network that we built extended well beyond the classroom - it gave me a sense of belonging in a global ecosystem of innovators who are motivated by social purpose instead of profit-making.

2. New Knowledge, Insights, and Skills

The Past

Prior to taking TIMS3311, I had practical marketing experience, but little exposure to structured innovation methodologies. The focus of my previous e-commerce work

was on maximizing visibility and conversions, not understanding human needs. Although I was familiar with digital marketing analytics, I was not familiar with Design Thinking, Lean Startup, or Effectuation. Throughout my career, I have approached challenges linearly-plan, execute, deliver-without testing or reflecting in between.

I found it difficult to grasp the concepts of iteration, empathy, and experimentation at the start of this course. My understanding of innovation was that it was about big ideas, not continual small experiments. This belief was completely challenged by the WIL experience.

Key Learnings

Entrepreneurship and innovation became a turning point for me after taking this course.Innovating involves learning quickly through small, affordable experiments, rather than having a perfect idea.

Design Thinking：My empathy stage helped me shift from asking questions to really listening to what was being said. While interviewing donors, I focused on uncovering the donors' emotions, such as compassion, trust, or skepticism, during the process. When I was telling stories, I noticed that stories that involved children or parents often triggered an emotional response from my audience. We used real faces and authentic stories in our MVP design instead of generic visuals to convey this insight, which directly influenced the design of our MVP.

As a result of my prototyping experience, I have learned that visual storytelling can be a quick and effective way to test ideas. As a result of using Canva, I designed four versions of donation ads: one with a founder's story, one with a child's journey, another with a parent's quote, and one with a transparency message. In lieu of building a full website, these prototypes enabled quick feedback loops rather than building a whole website. It was our intention to use each mockup as a "conversation starter," demonstrating how people react emotionally to different types of narratives. I have gained a better understanding of how empathy translates into design decisions as a result of this practical application of low-fidelity prototyping.

Lean Startup：My decision-making process became guided by the principles of Lean Startup. As I originally viewed the survey as a final product, I later realized that it was just one iteration of an ongoing learning process rather than a final product. It was through the Build-Measure-Learn process that I was able to continually test assumptions and pivot on the basis of real-time data. As an example, when transparency messages were less effective than emotional stories, I learned that donors value "why" more than "how" when it comes to persuasion. This insight enabled us to pivot away from rational persuasion and towards emotional storytelling in our MVPs.

It has taught me the value of starting small through the MVP concept. As an alternative to designing a full campaign, I built mockups that captured the essence of what we were trying to achieve. This reminded me of the fact that entrepreneurship is about learning cheaply, not about launching a perfect product at the first attempt.

Effectuation ：Effectuation theory also influenced my mindset. *The affordability of the loss encouraged me to experiment within the confines of limited resources instead of waiting for perfect conditions to materialize. The crazy quilts emphasized collaboration - I realized that the best innovation often comes from collaborations, like how Chipo and Doris's insights transformed our MVP direction as a result of their insights.* My experiences with the failed survey finally led me to the idea of turning lemons into lemonade-the idea that surprises can be turned into opportunities. The initial disappointment became the foundation for better qualitative interviews as a result of that initial disappointment.

It is the combination of these theoretical frameworks that form a comprehensive learning loop - empathize, test, learn, and adapt to the changing environment. My work with them not only improved my project outcomes, but also changed my perspective on uncertainty, creativity, and leadership.

The Future：My WIL experience profoundly influenced my professional aspirations. As a marketing practitioner, I used to see myself purely as a practitioner, but now I

see myself as someone who combines innovation with social impact. In product innovation, customer research, or social entrepreneurship, empathy and experimentation drive decisions.

The experience also strengthened my confidence in ambiguity. The most important thing is to create a process for finding answers, not to have all the answers. My approach to solving problems now emphasizes iterative learning and stakeholder collaboration rather than fixed plans. In the long run, I hope to continue working with organizations that prioritize impact over profit-where storytelling and empathy become strategic tools.

Course Feedback

What I valued most in this course was its authenticity. In contrast to theoretical classes, TIMS3311 allowed us to apply innovation frameworks to real-world situations. Each interview, survey, and MVP iteration became more meaningful when we worked directly with LGF. It was not just a university assignment—it felt like a real startup experience.

Three suggestions for improvement:

> 1.Encourage more cross-cultural and inter-group MVP tests to widen the perspectives of users by exposing them to a wider variety of opinions.

> 2.The early "Framework Training Camp". Brief introductory courses on lean startup and design thinking will help students apply theory sooner and reduce confusion.

> 3. Share an "Innovation Showcase". Upload the MVP prototype to the shared platform for peer feedback. Inspiring and reflecting on others' progress can accelerate learning.

References

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Dairy

2 September : Today I reflected deeply on the feedback Jack gave me about our LGF project. I was struck by his comments, which made me realize I had been focusing too much on the symptoms of the problem rather than on the root cause of the problem. I was tracking Facebook metrics like followers and engagement, and I assumed that it was the low numbers that were causing the problem. Despite this, Jack's insight helped me see that these are only surface indicators—the real challenge lies in how donors connect emotionally with the mission of LGF, and in how trust is communicated among donors.

In response to this feedback, I pushed myself to think beyond data and apply the principles of Lean Startup instead. It wasn't possible for me to test my MVP idea at the time because I did not have a clear hypothesis about what drives the decisions of donors. It was also my failure to apply Effectuation-rather than leveraging the existing donor network or Chipo's story, I was trying to come up with solutions on my own rather than leveraging the existing means available to me.

I have learned that innovation begins with humility and curiosity, and not with assumptions. Being an entrepreneur doesn't mean that you have to be right; it means that you need to learn fast. My approach now revolves around reframing the problem around "donor trust and emotional connection," and using open interviews to explore authentic insights is one way to do that. I was taught by this experience

that iteration and uncertainty are part of the entrepreneurial journey, rather than as setbacks that need to be feared.

6 September：In today's blog post, I would like to share with you some valuable feedback that Chipo provided regarding our competitor analysis. To begin with, I compared LGF with other large Australian charities such as Mater Foundation and Children's Hospital Foundation to see how they compare. Chipo reminded me that, as he pointed out to me, these are not LGF's direct competitors, given that their focus and donors' motivations are different from the LGF's - they serve domestic causes, while LGF connects Australian donors to health access in Zimbabwe.

As a result of this conversation, I was able to develop empathy not only for donors but also for LGF as a whole. As part of the refinement process, I added international health non-profits like UNICEF, Life for a Child, and Insulin for life to the competitor set. The most important thing for me was that I began to understand that LGF's differentiation lies in its diaspora connection-I realized that it combines community identity with empathy as well as tangible medical support.

I learned that in order to define a problem from a Design Thinking perspective, it is essential to understand the context of it, which means understanding not only the end users but also the entire ecosystem. The reason why this is important is that the alignment between purpose and positioning is crucial to the success of strategy and innovation. As a result of combining competitor benchmarking with donor insight, I am now able to ensure that LGF's MVPs are communicating LGF's unique mission in an authentic and clear manner.

20 September：Throughout the course of our project, I gained a deeper understanding of how donor motivations are complex and emotional. In response to Chipo's feedback, I decided to integrate external benchmarking with donor interviews to validate LGF's positioning by integrating external benchmarking with donor interviews. With the use of Lean Startup's build-measure-learn cycle, we tested assumptions about what motivated donors more: empathy for children, trust in transparency, or identification with the story of the founder.

The results challenged my earlier thinking. It was not possible to categorize donors neatly into neat categories. The motivations of these individuals overlapped instead, with some caring about transparency, while others were primarily moved by emotional storytelling at the beginning. Using this insight, I was able to illustrate the importance of prototyping empathy to support Design Thinking: the importance of testing not only visuals, but also emotional responses as well.

In my experience, innovation is not linear; it is a continuous process that requires iteration as well as interpretation. A layer of understanding is added with each new piece of data or comment that is added. I consider this reflection to be important

because I believe it has reshaped my mindset from one that is results-driven to one that is insight-driven.Research has now become a creative process that fuels meaningful design, rather than a checklist that must be completed in order for the design to be meaningful.

4 October：I created a donation survey in the early stages of the project in order to test whether donors would trust me, but the feedback was disappointing. In retrospect, I realized that I had designed the survey to confirm my own hypothesis and not to explore new insights that might come from it. I was advised by Jack that I should avoid closed or predictive questions like "Would you donate? " and instead use open-ended prompts that allow people to express real experiences.

Using Human-Centered Design and Lean Startup principles, I rewrote the survey and developed four MVP visuals: the founder's story, a child's story, a parent's story, and a transparency image. By creating these mockups, it was possible to create rapid feedback loops without investing heavily in production. I had the opportunity to experience the Build-Measure-Learn cycle in action as I went through this project.

There is no doubt that iteration and humility are essential components of entrepreneurship, and I have learned this from this experience. My focus was to listen instead of assuming, and as a result, I created tools that truly invite conversation. Furthermore, it reminded me of the principle of Effectuation - that is, to test ideas quickly and cheaply to learn as much as possible as quickly as possible. This matters because innovation begins where curiosity replaces certainty.

14 October：After conducting 20 interviews, I finally understood the depth of the question: Why do people donate? My initial assumption was that the most significant barrier was the lack of trust. However, most interviewees never used the word "distrust." Instead, they spoke about uncertainty, for example, "not knowing if the money had reached the correct people" and "not receiving follow-up updates." It was important to make this distinction. It shifted my focus from trust to connection.

The experience shifted my focus from trusting people to connecting with them.

Children's experiences were a big influence on some, parental resilience was a major influence on others, while transparency of data touched on a few. The study of the Value Proposition Canvas validated our study—the same message delivers different levels of value to different segments of the market.

My first step in understanding emotional resonance was to show participants our four MVP images. Many participants said they wanted to "see hope" and "believe in real people," confirming the importance of authentic storytelling when it comes to persuasion. There is no doubt that talking to users is an act of innovation in and of itself. In this context, I am reminded that entrepreneurship is at its core not in building products, but in building an understanding of the market.