13. Developing agency in the creative career: a design-based framework for work integrated learning

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INTRODUCTION

Research (Freeman 2007; Higgs, Cunningham and Bakhshi 2008; Andrews, Yeabsley and Higgs 2009; Higgs and Freebody 2010) shows that approximately half of all creative practitioners operate as 'embedded creatives' – that is, they secure creative employment in organizations located in fields beyond the Creative Industries. However, it is also known that creative workers move between embedded and specialist roles over the course of their career (see, for example, Vinodrai 2006; Bridgstock and Hearn 2013). These career circumstances foreground the significance of having the necessary skills to successfully cross disciplinary boundaries in order to negotiate a professional role. An implication of this for emerging creative practitioners is the need to be able to identify and successfully target shifting professional and industry standards while remaining responsive to change. A further implication involves creative practitioners engaging in a continuous cycle of renegotiation of their professional identities. This makes the management of multiple professional selves, along with creating and recreating a meaningful frame of reference (such as the language around their emerging practice), a necessary skill.

This chapter presents a framework for work integrated learning (WIL) experiences, in which undergraduate Creative Industries (CI) students develop the skills necessary to manage their emerging professional identities with agility. Agility is required in the face of rapidly changing work contexts. Central to the framework is the use of ideas and processes from the field of design practice (for example, architecture, industrial design, interaction design). Students are encouraged to think of their internship role and their professional identity as things they must design. They are also encouraged to see their career as moving through design cycles. The use of such design-related ideas and processes promotes the value of agency

and autonomy as skills necessary for creative practitioners. The chapter draws upon the authors' reflections on the WIL program in the Creative Industries Faculty at the Queensland University of Technology, which was the first program created specifically for a faculty-wide Creative Industries context. This program offered students a range of industry placement and advanced specialized projects in the field for academic credit (Collis 2010). The CI WIL program is a final-year capstone program that, in 2012, had six subjects, over 700 enrolments across 13 disciplines (from journalism to fashion to performance studies), and nearly 30 academic and professional staff supporting it. The program operates as an interface connecting Creative Industries students with industry partners and academics.

UNCERTAINTY, AGENCY AND NEW CAREER IDENTITIES

Creative Industries graduates emerge from university into an increasingly dynamic, unknowable and ontologically unfamiliar world (Barnett 2004). This leads to a form of personal uncertainty that recognizes that we can never hope to satisfactorily describe the world, 'let alone act with assuredness in it' (ibid., 250). The lack of a clear understanding of conceptual boundaries around the new type of professional suggests being 'employable in more than one place' (Geurts in Meijers 1998), which is often seen as negative due to the perceived dilution of disciplinary boundaries. Meijers (1998) has framed this as 'despecialisation of the work' and discusses the resulting need to either create or renegotiate roles in response to 'work-related insecurity' and the rapidly changing conditions of the work environment. Post-industrial fragmentation perpetuates despecialization of professional roles, but also breaks down traditional – or fixed – boundaries around the notion of a 'career'. Professional futures are uncertain, and individuals must navigate this uncertainty as a necessary skill. In the working world of the twenty-first century, the meta-level critical capacity to transform ambiguity and uncertainty into opportunity and possibility becomes significant.

The diversity of the Creative Industries student cohort and economic changes affecting the number and types of available internship opportunities have highlighted the significance of students negotiating the parameters of the role. Further, the majority of organizations taking CI interns are small to medium enterprises with a high turnover of creative staff. This chapter presents the argument that a lack of clarity in the context of CI practice creates the potential for practitioners to actively generate new roles and shape new professional pathways within the industry: shifting

from a deficit- or risk-oriented framing towards a strength- or agency-based approach. Central to this argument is Arthur and Rousseau's (1996) concept of a 'boundaryless career'. The experience of uncertainty this concept addresses shifts from a risk society (Beck 1986) to a change in perception: uncertainty is the necessary trigger for generating 'new [professional] opportunities' (Bolles 1996). This lens frames the lack of clarity around a creative professional role not as an indicator of failure, but as a catalyst for assuming a greater degree of control over determining its boundaries. Assuming agency over the professional pathway requires ongoing cultivation of the skills necessary to intentionally generate – or design – variations on career identity. This capacity is furthered by the additional agility to shift freely between multiple roles in response to changes in the industry contexts (Bridgstock and Hearn 2012).

WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING AND EMBEDDED CREATIVE INTERNS

Work integrated learning refers to learning in the workplace and can take many forms, including internships, practicums, fieldwork and moot court, to name a few. WIL programs can now be found in many university courses. The justification for WIL is that students learn in a deeper, more meaningful way and are better prepared professionally when theory is integrated with practice (Boud and Solomon 2003). Thus WIL can potentially be of great value to students, providing opportunities to experience and make sense of professional practice with all its attendant 'unpredictable, immediate, unique, transient' and transdisciplinary knowledge requirements, and its 'competing interests' (Orrell 2007; Franz 2007).

However, Creative Industries WIL programs, like the bulk of university curricula, place great emphasis on archetypal specialist roles, with disproportionately little emphasis on embedded roles involving creative practitioners working outside the Creative Industries, despite growing evidence of the importance of embedded roles in creative careers (see, for instance, Bridgstock and Cunningham, Chapter 14 in this volume). Examples of embedded creative practitioners include: an Interaction Designer working in health developing interfaces for e-health applications, or a Creative Writer working in education developing interactive digital literacy resources. Thus Creative Industries students enrolled in embedded WIL placements will often be working with people far outside their disciplinary specialisms, providing creative–cultural expertise in 'non-creative' contexts.

For Creative Industries students, defining career pathways using embedded WIL experiences is partly an opportunity to actively shape new

roles within organizational structures. This process necessarily involves a complex set of negotiations, with students assuming increasing agency. The new set of skills involves the capacity to successfully balance and navigate the existing and prospective professional opportunities. It involves a deeper engagement with the established (or tangible) boundaries of vocation (Cope and Kalantzis 2011), as well as prospective (or intangible/yet to be defined) boundaries. The process of crossing disciplines and fields necessarily involves reconsidering the existing boundaries, while the process of creating new boundaries is inherently a creative, meaning-making process. It is at the intersection of the personal, the academic and the professional that an opportunity to harness the emergence of new professional configurations, and the formation of a new role, arises.

TOWARDS A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING

We argue that traditional 'top–down' approaches to WIL, comprising predefined and predetermined roles and activities, do not address the growing challenge of navigating the world of work and constructing a career identity in times of rapid economic change and uncertainty. They do not yet fully appreciate the need for students to have control over their professional pathway, potentially leading to a lack of reciprocity between industry and academia. There is a need for a WIL framework that structurally enables greater reciprocity and dialogue between stakeholders, and facilitates students to develop the skills necessary to create and maintain it.

Despite existing programs providing support to students in finding industry and community placements, those instances where students take part in co-determining the parameters of the placement have the potential for better outcomes, particularly in regard to becoming prepared for managing their careers into the future. A new framework proposed in this chapter places agency at centre stage in creating and renegotiating a professional role at the core of the WIL experience, building on the notion of 'internal locus of control'. Originally introduced by Julian Rotter in 1954 in the context of psychology, this concept relates to an individual's perception of control over their life, in regard to their inner self or their external environment. The framework has a wide application across a number of fields, including academia and tertiary education (Watkins 1987, 222). This approach to WIL pedagogy further aligns with the broader societal 'shift in the balance of agency' (Cope and Kalantzis 2011), which frames professionals more strongly as 'self-steering units' (Meijers 1998, 191).

We are beginning to see a shift in WIL programs to more inclusive,

dynamic and reciprocal models. Franz (2008), for instance, developed an action-based pedagogical framework for WIL in the discipline of built environment and engineering. A higher level of responsiveness and an inclusive cooperative dynamic among key stakeholders is also argued by Smith and Smith (2010), who further highlight the contribution of the industry-partner perspective to WIL.

AN ITERATIVE, DESIGN-BASED FRAMEWORK FOR WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING

Design can be defined as a meaning-making process (Krippendorff 2006). It is a capacity for criticality and creative synthesis that shifts from top–down traditional control towards what Cope and Kalantzis call the experience of 'agentive autonomy' (Cope and Kalantzis 2011, 58). Through a design-based framework, agency and intentionality in shaping a professional career pathway are brought to the fore. A design-based approach also foregrounds meta-level capacities and facilitates agile/creative learning (as opposed to reproductive learning) required to navigate and negotiate an embedded role. Agile/creative learning is defined by van Peursen (1992) as the process whereby, through interaction, the learner connects new knowledge with existing knowledge and, through that, intentionally develops new learning processes that are self-directed and self-reflexive. This results in the acquisition of meta-level capabilities.

The framing of design as a meta-level practice, and transferability of design thinking and processes to WIL, involves conceptualizing the professional role as a designed object or artefact. Perceptions of the professional self as an iteratively created malleable structure involve the act of articulating and re-articulating that role. However, the process of classification and labelling, by definition, has the capacity to simultaneously define, 'lock in' (and, therefore, give access to an idea by giving it conceptual boundaries, in this case linguistic) and restrict access to future iterations of the professional self. For an internship role to be framed as a designed object, it needs to be reconceptualized not as singular and fixed, but as an iteratively emergent and perpetually renegotiable set of parameters.

Reframed as an artefact, the WIL role is simultaneously a designed object with conceptual boundaries and a process of iterative design through interaction with others. The parameters of the professional role are dialogic and integrate multiple voices: those of the learner's career aspirations, the academic standards and the affordances to accommodate these within the organizational structure of the industry partner. Weaving the voices of multiple stakeholders is an interactive participatory

process of managing the complex and continuously changing heteroglossic dynamic formed by the multiple contributors to the shape of the internship role. By framing the internship role as a multiplicity, we argue against overinvestment by creative practitioners in a single career pathway, and instead for generating many simultaneously rising prospective roles.

In assuming responsibility for designing their professional pathways, Creative Industries interns necessarily become co-designers of their WIL experience, acting as agents of change in shaping the internship role. When applied to WIL, the iterative phase, core to the design process, translates into the process of purposefully renegotiating a professional role – a role that is perpetually involved in synthesizing personal, academic, and industry parameters and expectations (which are, in turn, subject to change). Within this framework, it is not the persistence of role boundaries that could potentially hinder its future reconceptualizations, but rather the lack of creative agility and imaginative foresight into new relational possibilities and the interfaces that would enable new roles to emerge. Krippendorf's definition of 'interface' as a dynamic object could be applied to the professional role in order to reconceptualise it as processual. It can be seen as a cycle of assimilation and adaptation and a new kind of artefact, a product with a configurable and reconfigurable interface (Krippendorff 2006). Scaffolding this approach across WIL pedagogy will help to achieve better results for emerging creative practitioners by cultivating their capacity to construct, renegotiate and sustain a dynamic multiplicity of actual and conceptualized professional identities.

The advantages of using a dynamic framework based in philosophical and pedagogical principles of design practice include access to a set of new understandings that can further be explored in the context of WIL. For example, 'empathy' and 'equity' (principles of participatory design) can be used as foundations for building sustainable industry partnerships through WIL programs. In negotiating a role, reciprocity and collaboration create space for mutual impact through closer relationships and fostering deeper understanding. The transferability of a design-based framework implies a 'value-based approach to WIL' that opens up the possibility of sustained mutual benefit and reciprocity critical to the formation of sustainable long-term partnerships (Zelenko and Creyton 2012).

AGENCY-BASED CRITERIA FOR WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING

What might evidence of the developmental processes and outcomes we propose in this chapter look like? To address this question, we developed

a new set of agency-based criteria founded on the principles of design practice presented in this chapter, and trialled them using a set of reflective blogs completed by CI WIL students. The new criteria utilize some aspects of an existing set of criteria by Krumboltz (1993). The criteria were initially selected and reworked significantly to better capture and respond to meta-level agency-driven attributes evident and practised by emerging creative practitioners.

To pilot-test these criteria, we analysed a set of reflective internship blogs written by Creative Industries students in order to track the degree of agency, and locate their 'locus of control' in their experience of constructing an internship role. The blogs were written as part of formal assessment by final-year students from three disciplines: creative writing, media and communication (mediacomm), and interactive and visual design. Four blogs from each discipline were selected – two embedded interns and two specialist interns. The disciplines were selected on the basis of their potential to illustrate the application and value of a design-based agency-led approach to WIL.

The six criteria used are listed and described below:

1. *Setting parameters for the role and assessing the malleability of organizational structure to accommodate these* Evidence of understanding the role, reflection on the scope of the role and the structure to evaluate potential for change and growth (starting point/trigger).
2. *Setting the parameters for aspirational professional identity/end goals* Including explicit references to professional aspirations; identifying and setting priorities (as markers for change); enacting change by problem-solving.
3. *Explicit assessment or awareness of degree of agency over pathway/s through the role* Setting the intent to plan/co-plan and manage/co-manage the role; type and quality of mentor feedback.
4. *Willingness and attempts (rather than existing capacity) to adapt to change* Attempts at creating new role/new tasks/new direction beyond original role description; intentional attempts at reframing own goals to accommodate the predetermined role proposed by the organization (category exists in title, but is substantially modified to differentiate between an innate capacity and the intent to identify a need for and develop a new skill or ability).
5. *Intentional managing of relationship dynamic to serve the end goal/aspirational coordinates of career identity* Planning or ceasing opportunities to carry out higher level of operational control where called upon and/or where appropriate.

6. *Iterative evaluation, planning and seeking opportunities to evaluate change against set goals/markers*   Independently reflecting on and identifying factors contributing to change; receive and use both positive and negative feedback (existing category, Krumboltz 1993); provide constructive feedback.

INSIGHTS, REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Analysis in response to the first criterion showed that a value-based alignment creates greater trust, freedom and agency to drive creative decision-making within the role. Control over the role at a meta-level of alignment of personal values with an organization's values – as opposed to experience of control at the level of managing tasks day to day – results in a more meaningful professional outcome. Interestingly, embedded internship roles did not necessarily result in a greater degree of control over the role or in greater value for the intern, although specialist roles did so in instances where greater experience of creative freedom and decision-making within the role was afforded.

Analysis using the second criterion addressed the varying degrees of agency in shaping the role, and raised questions about the differing levels of technical specialization needed to fulfil role objectives. Responses show that these variations in technical skill determined the malleability of roles. Technical specialization leads to more rigidly defined roles that are prescriptive. In these instances, professional success is determined by sustaining consistency and continuity of the pre-established role boundaries. Change or variation on standard processes is perceived as risky or erroneous. Strategies for managing expectations and readiness for unanticipated change within the role have been linked to having a sense of an aspirational/career identity in place: 'my expectations of my role as a media researcher differ to my expectations of the workplace' (mediacomm specialist).

The blogs also show that the process of engaging critically with a predetermined/predefined internship role could lead to the establishment of a career identity (participant response). In this context, embedded roles may not necessarily offer interns more control over shaping the professional role. Across both the specialist and embedded contexts, a strongly matched professional/internship role with a career identity/broad direction enables more flexibility at the granular level of tasks and responsibilities (participant response). Ability to articulate and align an internship role with their aspirational career identity prompts them to consider and reflect on professional possibilities and the potential value of their

practice. For embedded creatives, articulating practice across disciplines creates tangible boundaries to the intangible possibility of enacting that role in the future. The process of articulating the aspiration becomes the mechanism through which the value of the role and the direction are formulated. In the context of embedded creative practice, a professional role may be the final destination (participant response). Here, the boundaries of a career identity often consist of meta-level, as opposed to concrete role-specific, attributes and aspirations. These attributes and aspirations are agency-enablers as they provide orientational clarity. Reflective blogs show that the opportunity and the act of articulating a career identity in a workplace context is an experience of agency and control in itself (participant response).

For embedded creatives, agility in venturing beyond established role boundaries may facilitate the emergence of a new career identity (participant response), and a clear sense or articulation of a career identity may in itself provide an impetus for its emergence. Too broad a career identity has the risk of resulting in a lack of direction, as boundaries can be too abstract, universal/open-ended or all-encompassing. An indeterminable professional pathway must fall back on existing organizational pathways and dynamics in order to gain definition. For specialist practitioners, a predetermined role is more meaningful precisely because it is experienced as more manageable, with clearer boundaries, and anchored by a career identity.

Analysis of one's awareness of the degree of flexibility and variation within the role – the third criterion – has overall been found to facilitate a greater experience of control over the concrete aspects of the role (for example, daily tasks), as well as assessing the potential for changing its direction. Joint negotiation of the scope within the role directly enables agency and facilitates the possibility of growth and transformation within the role. Successfully leveraging value from an apparent lack of role definition is the ultimate experience of agency and control, and bridges towards an aspirational identity, as one intern reports:

> during my internship I learnt to place myself as not only a 'graphic designer' but as a valuable creative practitioner in the industry, with a wide and varied array of skills and an enthusiasm to 'dip my toe in every pool' so to speak and undertake any task that would fit my client's needs. By doing so you increase your self worth, can adapt to technological and creative advances and make yourself indispensable to any company. (interactive and visual design specialist)

It was found that the experience and skill of agility and adaptation to changing work conditions remains regardless of the context, which could include either professional or personal circumstances. In embedded roles,

creatives were able to identify the lack of explicit instruction and structured guidance as an opportunity to extend parts of the role or propose a new direction – a willingness to reach beyond the established roles leading, in some instances, to taking on a key role in a creative project.

The observations from the fourth criterion are that willingness to adapt and change is critical for building professional resilience. This willingness arises when interns are pushed to operate on, or beyond, the boundary of previously acquired knowledge, skills and experience. This was seen as a trade-off between rigid constraints (for example, deadlines) and compromising one's own creative vision and values for the benefit of a project. Individual compromise resulting from a value-based alignment with the project team – as opposed to fulfilment of individual tasks at hand – opened new professional experiences and required interns to build links between previously unconnected skill sets. Despite the initial apparent 'misalignment' of personal aims with industry-based roles, the outcome is evaluated as an opportunity for growth: 'Though my initial aims were changed, I feel like in the end I have learnt a number of valuable insights about the industry and myself' (mediacomm specialist). Another student reported a similar outcome: 'My role within the company has multiple focuses and requires me to adapt to tasks which I have not attempted as part of my undergraduate degree' (creative writing specialist). Initial feelings of discomfort from facing the unknown are accompanied by negative expectations and 'disappointment', but ultimately judged to result in professional value and 'a number of new skills which weren't in [the] initial plan but are still beneficial for [the] future' (interactive and visual design embedded). Where embedded practice was initially deemed 'irrelevant', upon completion of the internship it was re-evaluated as 'very beneficial', as it provided important insights into the broader industry context (mediacomm embedded).

Overall, the experience of forming new knowledge among specialist practitioners is perceived negatively and, therefore, does not form part of a premeditated or intended outcome. Unanticipated professional growth resulting from applying knowledge in new and unfamiliar or uncertain contexts or circumstances where no clear pathway is outlined does not form part of the intended plan or objective. It is perceived as a 'challenging', negative or undesirable experience while it is occurring, but as an 'integral' and 'valuable' part of the role when evaluated in retrospect. For students interning in specialist roles, this process required a significant change to their individual 'way of thinking' and an explicit re-evaluation of difference as value-add. One student reflected on their engagement with workplace practice at a meta-level in order to articulate the value arising from their experience of difference: 'changing my way of thinking
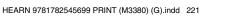
to stop pointing out the differences in our opinion and start recognizing the value was rather difficult' (creative writing specialist). For interns in core creative roles, the apparent lack of continuity and alignment between academic and industry contexts frames any 'misalignment' or disruption as erroneous or evidence of deficiency in one's capacities – rather than an opportunity to shape new professional pathways. Assuming agency in shaping the role is perceived as the last resort due to the disruptive experience of change.

For embedded interns, an internship is an opportunity for iteratively redirecting their practice and for meta-level conceptions of their learning: 'This internship is not only a chance to learn, but to reshape knowledge I already possess, and apply it from a new perspective or for a different purpose' (interactive and visual design embedded). Additionally, interns in embedded roles allowed the role to change by consciously surrendering the locus of control over its boundaries in order to be open to influence from external factors (for example, clients, other practitioners). The shift from core creative practice into an interdisciplinary embedded context is seen as 'a positive marker of . . . developing interdisciplinarity as a practitioner, which is both valuable and an unexpected bonus'. In conclusion, a lack of continuity between academia and industry is framed in a 'positive' light as a significant learning opportunity. Generally, embedded contexts are seen as providing a more valuable professional experience due to a broader application of core skills (creative writing embedded).

Observations from applying the fifth criterion on managing relationship dynamics showed that the degree of reciprocity from knowledge transfer between interns and the industry was one where the industry affected students rather than students bringing new knowledge to industry. Instances of leadership and initiative were not sought, anticipated or explicitly planned by interns, but where the initiative was taken, results had an impact on the organization. Agency and creative control were seen by interns as a last resort, and the authority to generate ideas was assumed only if no explicit instruction was available, resulting in a falling back on pre-existing solutions. Perceptions of creative freedom are experienced as simultaneously desirable yet restrictive: 'In a perfect world, designers have 100 per cent of creative control over any given project' (interactive and visual design specialist).

The final criterion produced highly granular and detailed accounts that exemplify problem-solving unfolding on a day-to-day operational level. Overall, there was an indication that an explicit evaluation of role leads to a greater awareness of one's capacities, skills, knowledge and, ultimately, the value of one's professional contribution. The ongoing feedback received by both core and embedded creatives from internship supervisors

formed the foundation of their professional confidence and resilience, and ultimately led to the experience of thriving in the workplace. A recurring theme throughout responses among all creatives was the value-based alignment of individual aims and organizational ethos. Students experienced a greater sense of value from immersion (and subsequent dilution of role boundaries) within collaborative 'decentralized' dynamics. The resulting sense of belonging to a group was interpreted to lead to 'greater opportunit[ies] for professional success as a valued contributor than at university, where [their] work is for individual gain' (creative writing specialist).

Importantly, the practice of explicit and ongoing self-assessment (a part of traditional WIL program design) and an articulation of professional development outcomes (new knowledge and skills) proved a critical factor for both core and embedded creatives' self-perception and awareness of their value as creative practitioners. Without explicit evaluation/reflection on learning curves, this value remains tacit. The process of identifying and explicitly relating one's own professional value to a real-world workplace raises internal awareness and external perception of this value.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR WIL PEDAGOGY

The experience of agility and adaptation – the iterative reframing/ redesigning of the role – within an internship is not necessarily maximized within embedded contexts (as opposed to specialist contexts). Instead, it is strongly linked to the ability to activate and sustain the reciprocity between the meta-level value-based aspirations and the concrete (or predetermined by industry) role boundaries. Disciplinary differences have emerged from the analysis, suggesting that the value of an agency-driven model for embedded WIL may not be uniformly transferable. Although the responses included in this chapter are limited (that is, the number and types of disciplines and practices represented, the sample size; three disciplines [media and communication, creative writing, interactive and visual design] were included with four blogs [two specialist and two embedded] from each discipline), the analysis has produced insights into the experiences and competencies required for creative practitioners to thrive in the workplace. These can be distilled into a number of principles that support agency in an embedded WIL context, including:

value-based (as opposed to skill-based) alignment to facilitate reciprocity and potential for mutual impact;

self-reflexivity and an ongoing synthesis of predetermined and
aspirational or prospective aspects of the role to enable articulation
of one's value as a creative practitioner; and
future-orientedness or meta-level approach to managing a career
pathway.

The framework has further implications for the development of cur-
riculum and learning materials. Of particular significance is the emerging
difference – and dynamic relationship – between more complex meta-level
learning resources (that are necessary because they provide that common
denominator to a diverse and fragmented set of practices and disciplines)
and the relationship of these to the roles situated within the specific
discipline-embedded creative processes (where students independently
ground and apply these meta-level principles in ways appropriate to their
respective fields). The primary benefit of structuring content this way is
that meta-level concepts – by virtue of not being tied to the parameters
of a given practice – have the potential to be of value and reused across a
number of contexts and fields.

The aim of this chapter has been to use the insights from the process-
based design field as a lens through which to reflect on WIL programs
catering to a diverse and dispersed set of disciplines in order to inform
future developments that prepare creatives for the world of work.
New developments in WIL pedagogy supporting embedded creative
practitioners need to take into account the principles that frame work
integrated learning. The attributes of agency, critical and leadership
capacities, and self-reflexivity (as shown in this chapter) are contrib-
utors to generating new professional experiences and opportunities
for emerging creative practitioners. These principles could be further
extended to guide the design of corresponding frameworks for evaluat-
ing embedded WIL pedagogies in the Creative Industries, of which the
set of criteria developed specifically for use in this case study is only one
example.

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