

# THE ROLE OF WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENTREPRENEURS

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

This study looks at the influence that work-integrated learning (WIL)<sup>1</sup> has on entrepreneurs. There were four themes in the research that related WIL to the development of entrepreneurs: seizing opportunities, thinking “outside the box”, being resilient during difficult times, and the importance of having a network. WIL was important for all participants, and it provided the time, mentorship, and physical space to develop ideas.

## WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

This study looks at the influence of WIL on entrepreneurs. The researchers define key traits of entrepreneurs like autonomy, innovativeness and risk-taking. They also discuss why these traits are important to business, organizational growth, and in the context of higher education. Uncertain work environments and job markets brought on by COVID-19 has made entrepreneurial traits more desirable. Entrepreneurial traits can help students adapt to these changes.

## WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

Researchers interviewed seven graduates from Canada and the UK who had previous work-integrated learning experiences. These graduates had also set up their own business. The participants were asked to draw pictures to show what influenced them to become an entrepreneur. They were also asked to draw a picture to describe an entrepreneur. Participants then discussed their drawings with the researchers in interviews. Researchers asked the participants about their studies and work experiences and how those influenced their journey. Researchers used a combination of the interview answers and drawings to identify common themes.

They also looked at the effect of unexpected circumstances and how well the participants adapted in their journeys. The researchers explored the impacts of these elements on the development of the participants as entrepreneurs.

### <sup>1</sup> **Work-integrated learning (WIL):**

an education model that combines academic studies with a workplace or practice setting. Work-integrated learning includes a partnership of an academic institution, a host organization, and a student.

## WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

The researchers found that the participants had different journeys towards entrepreneurship, but there were similar themes across the interview answers and drawings. The researchers found four main themes: seizing opportunities, thinking “outside the box”, being resilient during difficult times, and the importance of networks. The second finding was that the influence of WIL was important for all participants. WIL provided a framework of support that allowed the participants to get through difficult times.

In addition, several participants completed an e-co-op work term. An e-co-op term is a work term dedicated to launching student start-ups. These work terms provided participants with the time, mentorship, and physical space to develop their ideas.

## HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

Work-integrated learning practitioners can use this research to generate awareness of how WIL impacts the development of entrepreneurs. Higher education institutions can use this research to influence the design of WIL programs to encourage entrepreneurial opportunities and development. Employers can use this research to foster entrepreneurial traits in their work-integrated learning opportunities for students, and to fill their talent pipelines with entrepreneurial students. Students can use this research to reflect on their own entrepreneurial traits and development throughout the WIL experiences.

## KEYWORDS

COVID-19, work-integrated learning, entrepreneurship, rich picture, resilience

## CITATION

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*The Work-Learn Institute at the University of Waterloo is the only institute in the world dedicated to research on co-operative education and other forms of work-integrated learning.*