Uncovering WIL practices to enable WIL's expansion in higher education

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Abstract

The Australian Government is financially incentivising work integrated learning (WIL) to enhance graduate employability. As such, universities are currently expanding WIL pedagogies and practices from their traditional domain of professional degrees, to be incorporate into almost all university degrees. Using Kemmis' Theory of Practice Architecture, this study investigated the practices of established WIL practitioners in universities and uncovers what can be referred to as a WIL *ecology* of practice. This ecology comprises of key WIL practices, including: *networking and selling, negotiating, collaborating and innovating* and *legitimising.* The findings from this study offer important insights into how higher education institutions may develop a WIL ecology of practice, and critically, achieve WIL funding objectives, which has arguably become ever more important given the challenges COVID-19 has presented to university operational budgets.

Practitioner Notes

1. The Australian Government is financially incentivising work integrated learning (WIL) in higher education to enhance job-ready graduates. Particularly given the COVID-19 downturn, this ensures WIL's expansion into more degrees but does require capacity building.

2. To inform WIL's expansion at universities, our qualitative empirical study investigated the 'practices' of established WIL practitioners, as practices are potentially more scalable than individual characteristics.

3. By taking this Theory of Practice Architectures approach, we identified six shared WIL practitioner practices; *networking, selling, negotiating, collaborating, innovating* and *legitimising*. These practices interconnected to form a WIL *ecology* of practice at this university site – this was important because this ecology can be adapted to expand WIL in other universities.

4. By professionally developing willing academics in *networking, selling* and *negotiating* practices and enhancing support for WIL in the institutional environment, to reduce the time and effort they invest in l*egitimising* their work, we propose that you can achieve both WIL outcomes for your learners and achieve the Australian Government funding targets for your institution.

Keywords

Authors

Lynnaire Sheridan, Oriana Price, Lynn Sheridan, Melinda Plumb, Renee Cunial, Taryn McDonnell, and Rozalia Pocius

Introduction

The Australian Government is financially incentivising work integrated learning (WIL)—that is, learning experiences that resemble 'workplace experiences'—based on the premise that "…providing work-integrated learning opportunities for students has significant benefits for the job readiness of graduates" (Australian Government, 2017, p.26) which, in turn, may increase graduate employment and help fulfil tax-payer expectations of higher education (Divan et al. 2019). While this Government initiative is new, WIL is not, with many institutions historically and strategically adopting workplace participation targets as key elements within degree structures (i.e., teaching/nursing – compulsory number of professional days in the workplace (Orrell, 2018). However, as of 2019, the performance-based funding models (such as the National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund's Job-ready Graduates Package) have solidified the role of WIL as integral to achieving university funding based on 'job ready graduates' (Australian Government, 2019; Australian Government, 2021).

Now bolstered by a financial imperative, WIL is expanding from its traditional domain (Orrell, 2018) into many degrees in many forms including online projects, internships or workplace projects (TEQSA, 2017). Essentially, this will require increasingly more academics to engage in WIL practice delivery. While the benefits of WIL in relation to students' work-readiness are well known (Edwards et al., 2015), there has been little investigation into the academics who coordinate and carefully facilitate the WIL experience (Emslie, 2011; Clark et al., 2016; Whelan, 2017). This lack of understanding inhibits the expansion of WIL across degrees as the vital supports that might be required for academics are not apparent; particularly given WIL has considerable resource implications for universities (Jackson et al. 2016; Patrick et al 2009).

In this paper, we address that gap in understanding by examining what established WIL practitioners *do* in their day-to-day 'practice'. The findings presented in this paper represent part of a larger study examining WIL, its practices and the impact these practitioners have on the implementation of WIL in higher education (Sheridan et al., 2021). Here, we draw on Kemmis' theory of practice architectures (Kemmis & Mahon, 2017) to illuminate the 'practices' that WIL practitioners enact within the university setting. We argue that understanding the practices of the WIL practitioners is important in addressing the gap in our knowledge of WIL in higher education if government targets and higher education outcomes are to be met.

Theoretical Framework: Kemmis' Theory of Practice Architectures

The core purpose of this study is to understand how established WIL practitioners enact WIL in one higher education setting to inform its scalability in other higher education settings. Scalability alone means that it is not viable to research an individual practitioner's unique nuances—such research cannot inform universities on how to professionally develop academics and build capacity for WIL practices. Instead, we adopted the theory of Practice Architectures (TPA) to examine things at the practice level, not an individual level, to make the findings more transferable to any university setting. TPA looks at practices as being socially constructed (it holds a social ontology) and the key concepts of TPA are illustrated in Figure 1 and will form the basis for understanding WIL practices within the university site.

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Figure 1

Kemmis' Practice architectures framework (Kemmis et al., 2014, p.38)
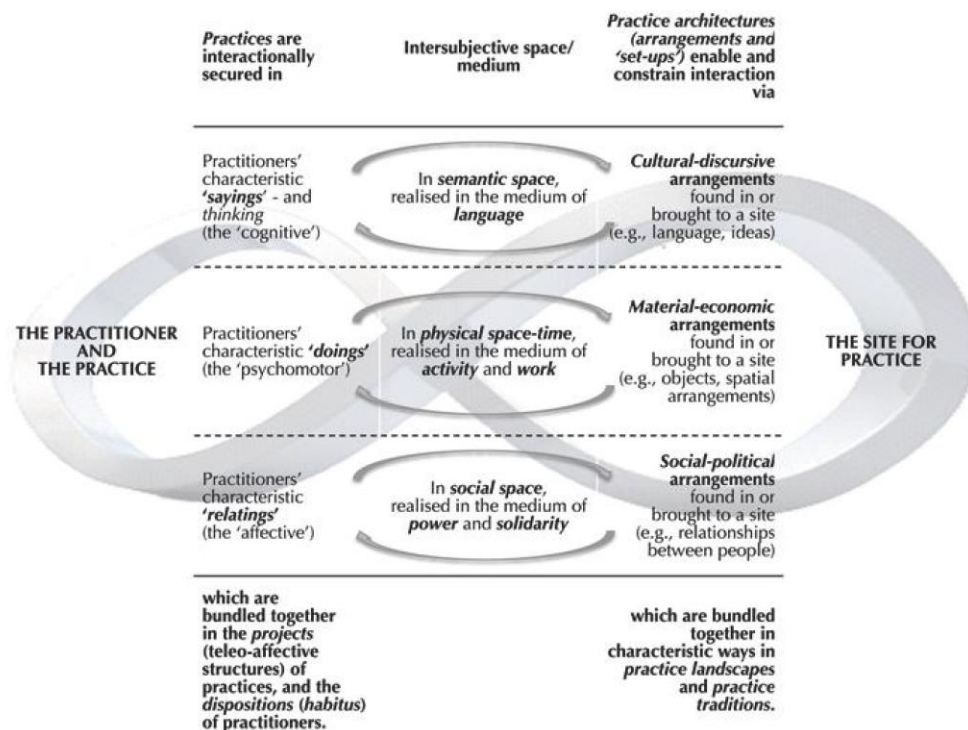
According to Kemmis & Mahon (2017) *practices* can be understood as comprising of "doings, sayings and relatings" (Kemmis & Mahon, 2017 p. 3). *Doings* refer to the actions of the practice. *Sayings* is how practitioners talk about their understandings of practice. *Relatings* is how practitioners engage and relate to others in the world around them as practice is enacted. The TPA therefore draws attention to doings, sayings and relatings and how these come to "hang together in a practice" (Kemmis & Mahon, 2017 p. 3); and in this case, we are interested in WIL practices for university learners. The TPA looks at how contextual conditions shape (enable or constrain) a practice, and at the same time, how that practice might shape those arrangements and conditions (Kemmis & Mahon, 2017, p.3). The TPA identifies three kinds of arrangements or contextual conditions: cultural-discursive arrangements (i.e., the language and discourses or sayings possible in/of a practice); material economic arrangements (i.e., the means of work or production, physical resources and spaces which make certain doings possible in/of practice); and social-political arrangements (i.e., the ways of relating among people and object in/of practice) (Kemmis & Grootenbouer, 2008). Within the TPA, "practice hangs together" when all its aspects (i.e., the practice, practitioner and the architecture) are present, and they hang together in an ecology of practice (Kemmis et al. 2009).

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Ecologies of practice are particularly important in this research as we sought to not only understand how WIL practitioners are enacting WIL in a higher education context, but also how the nature of the context and its features shape the WIL practice enactment. Ecologies of practice come to be when practices are interrelated; that is, when a *practice* forms the architecture of another practice (Kemmis et al., 2014). Such interconnections surface where the sayings, doings, and relatings of one practice shape those of another practice, becoming visible by considering practice changes and interrelationships. Furthermore, the concept of ecologies of practice helps in identifying how WIL practices coexist with and facilitate potential transfer from one context to another, thus enabling WIL to happen in higher education sites. This knowledge will inform institutions on how best to scale-up WIL effectively and sustainably now and in the future. As such we asked:

> Which current practitioner practices enable WIL's enactment in higher education?

> What are the implications of these WILs' practices and their ecology to scaling WIL in higher education?

Methodology

The site

Aligned with the ontological perspective of Kemmis' TPA, this study adopted a qualitative research approach. The research site is an Australian regional university. This university engages students in a variety of WIL experiences, including professional placements, industry-based projects, internships and simulations. The institution has a long history of established WIL in professional degrees and has been at the forefront of WIL's expansion. The driver for this expansion is based on desired employability outcomes connected to changes in the government funding models supporting WIL (Australian Government, 2017; 2019; 2021). Since 2015, there have been organisational attempts to coordinate a university-wide approach to WIL, including establishing a WIL advisory committee and associated sub-committees tasked with activities, including defining WIL and its potential categories (i.e., placements through to class-based workplace simulations or projects).

Participant selection

Six academic WIL practitioners were recruited and interviewed to represent prevalence and longevity in enacting WIL practices. Participants were recruited from across faculties and disciplines. They were involved in teaching at the undergraduate or postgraduate level and provided insights into a distinct technical or theoretical level of WIL practice at the institution. A range of industry accredited degrees (e.g., teaching and engineering) and non-accredited (e.g., business and science) were included encompassing different WIL activities (Table 1).

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Table 1

Participants at the WIL university site

Participants	Faculty/Division	Background Role/Responsibly
1. Joanne	Learning and Teaching – policy and governance	Early Career Academic in Central Learning Division (4.5 yrs.). PhD on WIL and work-focus is academic practice in teaching and learning for tertiary education. Contributes to university-level policy in teaching and learning
2. Marnie	Social Science	Subject Convenor - Education Senior Academic in School of Education (8 yrs.) - previous work experience as a classroom teacher in primary schools–remote location with students with disabilities.
3. Tom	Business	WIL Program Level – Business - Mid-Career Academic (PhD completed 10 yrs. ago) with strong industry focus and continuing consultancies. Focus on academics and students moving into and out of industry while participating in projects that generate outcomes for businesses.
4. Tanya	Careers Faculty	Professional Role - Careers, WIL-focused professional staff (6 yrs.) - directly engaged in design of subjects focused on career development learning. Previous work experience in industry in client relationship management and sales. Diverse prior roles and many career transitions
5. Mohammed	Engineering	Educational Program Developer – Engineering - Initially professional staff directly assisting students (13 yrs. ago), role evolved into academic role (5 yrs. ago) upon completion of doctoral studies (completed 2 yrs. ago). Current focus on harnessing academics to enact WIL in curriculum in Engineering.
6. Trish	Sciences	Subject Convenor - Science Careers Consultant - Professional staff role, at several universities (4 yrs.) previously with PhD and research focus in Science. Today drives readiness for higher degree research and/or science students.

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Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using a practice theory tool 'Interview to the double' (ITTD) informed by Nicolini (2009). In this approach, participants were asked to outline their WIL practices as if they were 'handing over' the role to a colleague; for example, "If I were to become a body-double for you, how and what would I do to fulfill the WIL components of your work?" The interviews began with orienting open-ended questions, followed by the ITTD technique which specifically asked participants what they do and how they do it. This type of questioning seeks to capture specific detail of practice and how it is enacted. The ITTD approach is semi-structured with the use of prompts to encourage dialogue. The use of the ITTD interviewing approach brings attention specifically to the practices of participants.

Interviews were conducted by two researchers. One researcher engaged directly in interviewing the participant, while the second researcher observed the interview, the work space of the participant and took field notes before and during the interview. It is important to state here that while each of the researchers brought expertise (e.g., WIL higher education, practice theory etc.) and a command of their relevant discipline field's literature, we recognised that it was critical to minimise potential interviewer bias. We did this by conducting the interviews in pairs and not interviewing participants from an interviewee's own faculty or discipline. This was important as it brought a degree of unfamiliarity resulting in better listening skills and greater curiosity and questioning by the interviewers. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, with interview transcriptions later reviewed, edited and re-approved by the participants. The application of these data collection protocols further reduced the potential of researcher bias, and provided the opportunity for participants to review transcripts to ensure they were comfortable with the information disclosed.

Data Analysis

Drawing on Kemmis model our transcript data was initially coded based on the two areas in Figure 1: *The Practitioner and the Practice*. Data was then organised into sayings, doings and relatings (on the left-hand side of the model). On the right-hand side of the model—*The site for practice* data was coded into the cultural-discursive, material-economic, social-political arrangements. However, we remained alert to the dialectical relationship and the ongoing interconnection between the two sides of the model (the practitioner and the practice and the practice architectures). Practices emerged from data analysis ('hung together') when the practice, practitioner and the architecture were present (Kemmis et al., 2009). An ecology of practice would be identifiable should practices be found to be interwoven and interdependent.

Findings

In response to our first research question*, Which current practitioner practices enable WIL's enactment in higher education?* It was found that six key interconnected practices existed that were consistently enacted by all our WIL practitioner participants (some of them so tightly interwoven that it became necessary to describe them together in the findings). These were: networking & selling, negotiating, collaborating & innovating, and legitimising.

Networking & selling

In *networking,* the WIL practitioners worked to secure WIL opportunities for their learners by enacting various activities where a mutually beneficial relationship was key: "*You need to build relationships with people. It comes back to relationship and presenting to them why this* [WIL] *is important*" (#2). The practitioner understood the 'why' of WIL; both the impact that such experiences

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have on learning for students but, crucially, could articulate the benefits for industry: "…*for the person in industry, it's a connection to academia, it's that networking, because you know, networking and sharing knowledge…that they need*" (# 3). Networking reflected a social-political arrangement, a way of relating for both industry and the academy.

Networking also constitutes elements of the practice architecture of *selling*. As a way of relating (i.e., social-political arrangement), *networking* creates opportunities to reshape existing relationships towards a different kind of exchange, one where industry becomes the 'customer':

> *"You need to have that account management focus. I see every academic that I speak to as my customer, and I see students as my customer, and I see industry as my customer. I have to manage those accounts appropriately. That includes guiding the sales aspect of that, into what's beneficial for this industry, for this student, and for this academic over here, or faculty even. It might be a whole faculty or a whole school" (# 4).*

In enacting the *selling* practice, and reconstituting industry as the 'customer', the WIL practitioners recognised the incentives necessary to 'close the deal'. This was achieved by: "...*understand*[ing] *what the incentive is for the industry and the industry has to see the positive aspects of having students in their workplace*" (# 2). In *selling,* the WIL practitioner created a value proposition to secure in-industry placements for students as well as an outcome valued by the industry 'customer'.

Negotiating

The second practice, *negotiating*, enabled the WIL practitioner to create common ground between industry and learners, and learners and the academics by *negotiating* meanings, understandings and action possibilities:

> *"It's hard to get everybody on board, it was hard to integrate all the ideas from everybody. It wasn't smooth sailing and the implementation is not smooth, but we are prepared for that, we understand that and you just need to learn and adapt, to move forward" (#3).*

They believed that student learning associated with WIL can only be achieved via *negotiating* new ways of relating not only to industry but also to students. To support and sustain the WIL site, the practitioners in the research talked about how they shifted what they said and did thus being shaped and shaping both the cultural-discursive and material-economic arrangements as they enacted practices in the WIL site: "*I have to navigate this line where I have to be like the friendly Auntie and not the scary lecturer. I have* [limits]*... but they have to be able to come to me.*" (# 6). They recognised their way of relating to be different from the traditional practice of interaction between an academic and a student and reflects more commonly experienced ways of relating in organisations such as how a senior practitioner may coach a less experienced practitioner.

These WIL practitioners were increasingly *negotiating* between different departments and faculties within the university:

> *"[Careers Services leaders] went out and actually negotiated with different stakeholders across the university…we went to academics and said okay, let's now talk about WIL. Here's how it can happen. Look, there's all these people that can do it for you, all you need to do is drive it, and you've got the concepts and theories. That's your speciality, let's work on that. … negotiate with [industry] hosts. … make sure students have ticked the right boxes" (# 4).*

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The WIL practitioners, in response to the evolving challenges of workplaces needed to continually negotiate leverage on existing material-economic arrangements of the practice architectures, necessary for WIL teaching (i.e. how to make organisational-work learning-work).

Collaborating & Innovating

Collaborating and innovating emerged in response to workload challenges, which required the WIL practitioners to construct *innovative* ways in which to work. This was done to help them achieve scalability or efficiencies in a time- and resource-constrained environment, particularly where WIL was not embedded as part of existing subject workloads and budgets. This was done through innovation, specifically by collaborating with others as indicated by the following statement: "*We help our academic staff improve the quality of the experience, to make things more efficient. Like, introducing new technologies or new processes that not only improve the learning but also make it more efficient for academic time.*" (#5).

Our participants were often early adopters of online or teaching technologies to enable the other necessary practices of WIL to occur for their learners amid the already existing practices and architectures of the university site:

> "*I am now taking all the subject matter and doing a slow-release model. So, students will have a little video that they watch that may have some questions to answer, and once they've answered those questions, it unlocks their reading. They do their reading... So instead of having to come in to do it here, they have six of those modules to complete*" (#5).

Alongside the practice of *innovating*, the participants were *collaborating*. It was recognised by the participants that open collaborations with likeminded people, no matter their role and/or rank, sustained the WIL site's unique practices:

> "*...we talk to each other like everybody in the WIL space...Because it's always new. Because a new student, a new host, the new combination of people who could create a situation. Just how should I approach this? How can I do it in the most diplomatic, professional way? What would you do in this situation? How do you interpret this? That sort of thing...*" (#4).

Participants harnessed the already established collaborative ways of relating practices within the WIL community in addition to seeking out new WIL opportunities.

Legitimising

The final practice was *legitimising* where the WIL practitioners talked about how they were feeling pressure to legitimise their own position in higher education:

> "*I'm a different kind of academic. I just am. I'm about teaching and I'm about people. I'm about relationship. And sometimes I go, am I an academic imposter and should I really be here? If somebody really showed up at the door and said, "How we got you? We know that you're not really supposed to be here." I wouldn't be surprised.*" (#2).

To justify WIL as a site of authentic practice, participants sought to re-interpret academic expectations:

> "*So I put that [positive student feedback] in the little folder that's called my fan mail, and I just put it in my folder so when I'm having a crappy day...I pull out my*

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> *fan mail and go, "But actually, I'm actually a good teacher." So those kinds of things I know that it's worth the time and effort that you have to put in at the beginning." (# 2).*

Others drew strength from the social political arrangements sustained by their community of WIL practitioners and their own work-values alignment: "*It's more about identifying opportunities and aligning with your own values and really taking that time to define what your values are…*" (#6).

The *legitimising* practice for some participants was found in the scholarship of teaching and learning and the associated social political arrangements, which were useful in sustaining the WIL site, because it is:

> *"...really important to have a model that you can show and say this is why this is important. I think it's important to collect data from the students who have done it so that others can read what it is and what the students are saying, and why this is meaningful to them" (#2).*

This was particularly important when WIL practitioners who enacted *legitimising* via existing university practices of recognising good teaching through awards and prizes: "*When it comes to applying for awards and grants, I go back to that list* [of teaching and learning articles] *and it's like, aha, I've got that evidence, I've got that evidence*" (#2). This interconnection between WIL practitioners and existing university practices led to a level of credibility and enrichment of the WIL practice.

Research partnerships were another way in which WIL practitioners were enacting *legitimising*, by showing that they could form a legitimate connection between already existing academic practices of research and their own practitioner practices of engaging with industry. One example of this was:

> *"Actually, this role helps me also for my research, because I'll say, 'Can we collect some extra data from industry?' So my research benefited from it, but it's time-intense to set it up and these days I don't think there's a lot of time given for these kind of activities" (# 3).*

In some ways, *legitimising* practices also interrelated with *selling* practices as WIL practitioners sought not only to sell WIL to industry but also within their university, thus legitimise WIL work for academia.

Discussion

In order to address our second research question: *What are the implications of these WIL practices and their ecology to scaling WIL in higher education?* First, we must consider the implications of the six distinct practices and how they may "hang together" in a practice ecology prior to considering the implications for the scalability of WIL in higher education.

Contextualising and understanding the WIL practices

Work integrated learning can only be successfully achieved when the aspirations of academia, industry and the learner are met with shared, beneficial, outcomes (Jackson et al. 2016). In our study, what became clear was that shared, beneficial outcomes required *negotiation*. The WIL practitioners were increasingly *negotiating* between different departments and faculties within the university seeking to leverage on existing practice architectures and drawing on existing material-economic arrangements to *legitimise* WIL, and consequently, themselves.

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In an environment where academics are struggling to manage workloads (Dredge & Wray, 2012), time management was seen as critical (McCarthy 2013). What was evident from our research was that the WIL practitioners not only needed to juggle the workload demands of research, teaching, and other academic administrative duties, but also the demands of their ongoing practices in sustaining industry connections (i.e., networking, selling etc). In response to workload challenges, we found that WIL practitioners were *innovating* the ways in which they worked, often enhancing existing systems and/or becoming early adopters of new technologies. We found there was a strong connection between the practitioners practice and the material-economic arrangements of teaching and learning.

While the focus here is not on teaching and learning practices, there was a clear interconnection between teaching and learning practices and material-economic arrangement, such as online technologies that enabled the necessary practices of WIL to occur within workload constraints. The practitioners' practices of *innovating* to 'fit' WIL into their busy schedules, contributed to the re-shaping of arrangements already in existence in the university site (e.g., social-political arrangements).

This re-shaping was made possible with the increasing legitimacy of WIL, underpinned by Federal Government endorsement (e.g., Australian Government, 2017; 2019; 2021). This in turn, led to the formation of natural relationships amongst the WIL practitioners fostering the establishment of political influence through WIL advisory committees to which the WIL practices of *networking* and *collaborating* became interconnected. *Networking* and WIL practitioners' *collaboration* was a means of sharing the outcomes of *innovation* and identifying and sharing of resources and new innovations (i.e., material-economic arrangements). Collaboration helped to achieve system efficiencies and subsequently supported and *legitimised WIL* practices. In turn, this built relationships to support pre-existing practices of the academe, such as conducting research and the writing of academic papers.

Legitimising of WIL as authentic work was in contrast to academics' previous experiences of the traditional practices of promotion and tenure processes (McDonald & Mooney, 2011). To counteract the career-related disadvantage of engaging in WIL, practitioners often sought to re-interpret academic expectations into outcomes that were achievable in the WIL 'site', which in turn reinforced the practitioners' sense of professional 'self' (Sheridan et al., 2021).

The practice of *legitimising* is also shaped by the pre-existing practices of the university (i.e., publishing research). For the WIL practitioners, this involved engaging in the practices of research in teaching and learning in lieu of discipline-centred research. This met the requirements of the academe as well as those of the WIL site—producing academic publications and, subsequently, further legitimatising WIL research as a field of study. It provided a means for practitioners to showcase WIL work providing a sense of pride and professional purpose. This aligns with Susskind's (2013) argument on the need for commensurate recognition for field-based practices in higher education. By engaging in approved academic activities, including research and publications, the WIL practitioner is both satisfying the national WIL agenda and legitimising the role of the WIL in universities, potentially shifting WIL practices from mis-fit to strong-fit for modern academia *legitimising* practices. When the *legitimising* practices were then interrelated with *selling* practices, this created a value proposition to sell WIL to industry, thus creating a value proposition for scaling in higher education.

The commitment of WIL practitioners in seeing students participate in authentic WIL experiences is not dissimilar to Beaton's (2016) belief in the value of drawing satisfaction and motivation from students' success. With higher education funding increasingly being derived from student satisfaction (Australian Government 2019), research focused on student learning and satisfaction

derived from WIL has become an effective strategy not only to legitimise the work of WIL practitioners but also in changing practices in higher education organisations (e.g., awards and promotions). Legitimisation of WIL occurs through recognition of WIL teaching and learning practices, ultimately providing credibility while linking WIL experiences to theory components (Colwell 2015; Posner 2009).

WIL as a practice ecology

The WIL practices of *networking* and *selling, negotiating, collaborating* and *innovating* and *legitimising* together formed a WIL *ecology* of practice. Nicolini (2016) defines ecology as "*an interconnected web of human social activities that are mutually-necessary to order and sustain a practice*" (p.104) as based on Kemmis and Mutton (2012) . It is suggested that to date, WIL practitioners have 'survived' rather than 'thrived' when enacting WIL. It is, thus, important to consider the practices that are needed to expand WIL and to consider what conditions must change in order to enact sustainable WIL into the future. As such, it is important to consider the implications of WILs practices and its ecology for scaling WIL in higher education.

The WIL practices consisted of six distinct ideas—an ecology shaped by both industry and higher education. The practices of *innovating and collaborating* not only enabled WIL practitioners to 'do', but also interconnected these practices with pre-existing higher education organisational practices (e.g., online learning). The practice of *selling* helped to formulate key activities like *negotiating* and *legitimising* practices enacted by the WIL practitioners. This assisted in not only sustaining WIL in the academe, but also *legitimising* WIL as a key enactment of WIL practitioners. In *legitimising,* WIL practitioners worked to interconnect WIL practices with the 'practice arrangements' of traditional academic practices of researching and publishing—they did this through engaging in the discourses of research as it relates to the field of WIL (i.e., cultural-discursive arrangements) via research and publications (i.e., material economic arrangements). The publication of research was seen as a means of relating to the academe (i.e. social-political arrangements) and connecting to the profession.

All of the distinct WIL practices share particular qualities under the umbrella of a common WIL practice ecology, as described by Kemmis' practice architecture conceptual framework (Figure 1). For 'the practitioner and the practice', WIL involved certain ways of speaking with certain terms to express ideas (placements, simulations, industry-engagement) and terminology that related to the students (experiential learner, intern). There were also certain ways of '*doings things'* that constitute WIL ways "*of relating"* with students, ways of structuring classes (e.g., workshops, employability); ways of designing assessments (e.g., engaged feedback), ways of relating to others (e.g., WIL committees and networks within and external to the organisation). Finally, the ecology was about reconciling understanding of oneself both as an academic and as an enactor of a WIL professional practice (Sheridan et al., 2021).

For the 'social site' of the practice architectures, the emergence of WIL in the higher education context has led to the introduction of new cultural-discourses as they relate to employability, assurance of learning and what constitutes the organisational discourse of WIL. The material-economic arrangements that are created can enable or constrain certain kinds of WIL (e.g., budget allocations, policy changes). An example of this is the establishment of simulation spaces, policies and administration infrastructures, which support students' off-site internships. Finally, how WIL is valued as an endeavour of higher education institutions, the kinds of broader formalised relationships that are established (e.g., professional and industry partnerships) connect to create important social-political arrangements that become a natural part of the social (Wilkinson et al. 2009). In this case, the WIL practice ecology has likely emerged in response to the localised site

(the university within which the study was undertaken)—the academia itself. Indeed, the WIL *ecology* appears to have emerged, sometimes uncomfortably, within various overarching higher education practice ecologies; those endemic to the traditional academic profession (i.e., teaching and learning, researching and publishing); and the practice of *legitimising*, in particular, was a pragmatic response to those conditions with an emphasis on the WIL funding model.

WIL and its ecology: Implications for the scalability of WIL in higher education

The emergent WIL practices have enabled WIL practitioners to 'survive' rather than 'thrive' but, with increasing validation and increasing Federal Government support of WIL, there is hope that some dysfunctional practices (such as *legitimising*) might morph into more effective ones that would enhance WIL (rather than justify WIL). There were inklings of this with *collaborating* coming to the fore in our research site, and the establishment of formal, university-level WIL committees. Moreover, *legitimising* was expressed often via scholarship of teaching and learning, but this is now becoming *informing*—as these same WIL practitioners are being called upon to present their experiences, learnings and insights to peers nationally and internationally. In order for universities to enhance WIL, and subsequently move forward from the findings, the implications of these practices for the scalability of WIL are now considered.

Seek out the WIL-ing: WIL does require time and effort, so a certain amount of intrinsic motivation will be required by any academic embarking on the WIL practitioner journey. We suggest that universities screen academics and professional staff for a natural pre-disposition towards WIL.

Investing in Professional Development: The practice lens has afforded us an opportunity to identify practices that can be coached. We recommend capacity building via professional development on how to *network*, *sell* and *negotiate*.

Enhancing the Institutional Environment: If universities have "WIL-ing" staff, they need to foster their intrinsic motivation by finding better ways to appreciate their work. Universities should consider the cultural-discursive, material economic and social-political arrangements they can foster to encourage *collaborative* and *innovative* practices. Importantly, the removal of barriers to WIL could also reduce *legitimising* practices, for example, doing WIL could be considered an advantage for promotion.

Policy Environment: Inevitably the Australian Commonwealth Government holds the lever so the "WIL-ing" will continue to lobby to further encourage WIL, and its opponents will resist it.

The future of WIL in higher education is closely tied to financial incentives and continues to lay in the hands of those who value learning by doing in a workplace setting. To date, higher education has achieved quite a lot simply through seeking out the WIL-ing and allowing them to contribute to the learning in their institution. However, hope for the future cannot rest on solely on these WIL practitioners. For WIL to continue to thrive, there must be professional and personal benefit for the practitioner and adequate resourcing of WIL activities in institutions.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is arguable that the six common practices identified from established, long-term, WIL practitioners (*networking & selling, negotiating, collaborating & innovating legitimising*) have been developed in response to an organisational and academic environment that historically has de-valued practitioner activity, and in some cases has worked against achieving WIL as legitimate practice in higher education.

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Yet, our study found that current WIL practitioners are transitioning from being organisational 'mis-fits' to 'strong-fits' in higher education driven by financial incentives by Australian Government. This shift in material-economic and social-political arrangements in higher education has seen the WIL practitioner role *legitimis*ed.

As such, we recommend that universities seek out the "WIL-ing", those staff most predisposed to having internal motivation to undertake WIL; invest in professional development for learnable practices such as networking, selling and negotiating; enhance their institutional environments by fostering situations where collaborating and innovative practices can thrive; and discourage legitimising practices through greater recognition of the value of WIL. Finally, higher education needs to encourage staff in their own higher education networks to continue to lobby for support (both financial and extrinsic) for WIL practices.

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