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I wanna walk you through sort of four relatively specific set of strategies and tactics um that we went through at my to you building out a core capability that profile uh and then talk a little bit about some of the trials and tribulations of that um and I'm gonna start with this notion of contextual research I hope I don't need to explain what contextual research is instead I'm gonna show how it works um but this was specifically contextual inquiry or ethnography in the context of college students um so we went into their dorm rooms um with their permission obviously we talked to them we went through their bags um they showed us around their apartments we watched TV with them we did their homework um and we spent a bunch of time with them learning what it's like to be you know 18 19 years old these days we did non traditional students um they're all non traditional by the way at this point um but we did non traditional students traditional students we did students of private colleges for profits the whole nine yards um and I'll share with you just a couple anecdotes um I'm gonna read this verbatim your resume is like your life it's your golden ticket to the chocolate factory I like to book customer service and management things and stuff like that on my resume everyone has a business degree these days so I'll always be able to get a job I found out about the international business major from a guy at the gap I didn't even know what it was I googled it and it sounded better than regular business so I just picked that my life decisions are based on stupid things well I hope you're applauding for Samantha

because I'm showing you this not to ridicule Samantha
I actually think that um Samantha is dead on
her life decisions are based on stupid things
so the rest of ours that's how it works
um she acknowledged it at 21 um
maybe took the rest of us longer than that um
but we heard this over and over and over
we heard college students tell us
they picked accounting
cause it was the first one in the drop down okay
I mean like if they pick they pick their degree
because it's time to pick your degree
not because they have any idea what they wanna do okay
and that's the norm
and you learn stuff like this
by spending time with them okay
so qualitative research
we also spent a bunch of time with recruiters
this
it's really hard to see in the washed out screen here
but it's actually a squirrel and purple
purple squirrel
it was hanging on the wall in a recruiter's office
and we asked about it um
and they explained to us that the purple squirrel is
is like the rare perfect candidate okay
I want a squirrel there's lots of squirrels
I want a purple squirrel
that means they got to be able to do coding
and design and marketing
and they have to be willing to work remote
and overseas
and they don't want a lot of money and they work for
you know crazy hours that purple squirrel
that's what I want okay um
in in her words one of the recruiters told us that um
when it comes to picking jobs
students say they say to themselves um
I could do anything I think I could do this
I could do that sort of a generalist approach
you couldn't say something worse to a recruiter okay
don't apply to five of my jobs
cause you're not gonna get any of them okay
so she observes students sort of aimlessly saying
I don't know what to do
so I will apply for every job on the internet
and she's going I'm looking for a purple squirrel
there's clearly a problem there okay
um
so the way that we went through this was pretty simple

straightforward contextual research
we identified our participants uh
we went through a plan
we talked to them and we observed behavior
and I think the key here
for this whole thing is observing behavior
not just having interviews okay
we actually watch them engage with the software
at their schools we watch them look for jobs
we watch them go through their coursework okay
and it's different
you build empathy not understanding okay
so then then we moved on to synthesis
this is my um
favorite part of the process mostly
cause it's just a mess this is our war room
it probably looks like the rest of y'all's war rooms
i'm gonna zoom in a little bit
these are individual utterances
I was pleased to hear a couple other speakers
sort of talk about the rigor of their synthesis
like that's starting to be a thing
which is awesome I'll zoom in even more
so we transcribe all of the research right
all of the three and a half or four hour long
individual sessions with all of our students
and then we blow them out using
here's the trick of the day
a male merge in Excel right
whoa now I can make labels just like that easy
um and you print the suckers out
you put them on the wall and you can move around
and you find patterns and you find anomalies
and you start to see the data
in a way that you didn't see it before
can you literally marinate in the data
and this is a quote from that recruiter right
this is the raw data
I don't know if you can tell in the corner
but it has a line number that references the transcript
so later when we come up with the world's best idea
we can cite it back to her
say thank you very much send her a nice card
um that's also a joke kind of um
and the method there is super simple right
it just takes forever you transcribe all the research
and you transcribe the research
rather than outsourcing it
because I can literally hear in my head
the voice of Samantha I can channel her

and I can start to anticipate
how she'd react to situations
with some degree of confidence okay
I can feel what it's like to be Samantha
because I spent hours hearing her voice
as she went through that interview
and I transcribed it word for word
hey then we explode that data
we identify the groupings
and we start to identify anomalies
again sort of standard
I suppose in design strategy circles like so far um
and then we get to behavioral insights
and I think this is actually where the magic happens
or where the rubber hits the rubber
whatever you wanna call it um
so really hard to see here
but I'm reiterating the Chocolate Factory
quote from Samantha okay um
and below that uh
also hard to see bullets around
how she emphasizes bullets on a resume
she went to the career service office
she wrote a resume and she bulleted out what she does
okay and she feels like that sufficient um
she thinks it's better to take the scattershot
Buckshot approach
okay
oh there you go
I can see it all on the other side of things
we have Meg right
our recruiter um
who's gonna say don't apply to any of my five jobs
cause you're not gonna get them right
give this Buckshot approach
I don't want it for her
she has the split second way of judging a candidate
and we watched her do it
based on the font they used on the resume
based on their hair based on their um
the way they describe themselves and her objective
uh nah
not a good fit not a oh
that's an interesting candidate
we'll put that over here okay
very quick she's looking for specific keywords
specific skills
and more than anything at a college level
she's looking for evidence
she doesn't believe them

she's looking for evidence that the student can do
what they say they can do
or proof bullets on a resume don't cut it for her
and then she creates a mental narrative
of what a candidate can do
and carries that with her okay
so we have two sides of the story here um
and they bubble up to these insight statements okay
these insight statements are the magic
so let me read them out loud on the student side
our student insight is that
students think they have an idea of what employers
wanted a candidate and they're wrong
on the employer side or recruiter side
recruiters make snap judgments about candidates
and that directly impacts their chance of success
these are provocative statements of truth
even though we're basing them on a really small
totally biased qualitative research study
we're creating a scaffold you call the house of cards
if you want upon which we're gonna build a great idea
and we're treating it like it's a fact
right this is where
we just moved into the stuff of abductive reasoning
or intuition
cool so that's the fun stuff
here's how you do it just ask why right
provoke the question why and then answer it
even if you don't have enough data
don't go I need to do a
you know a quant survey or law student study
I'm just not really ready
answer it answer it
channel the person you spent time with
and answer it as if they were there
and make that influential leap
and frame it as a declarative
definitive statement of truth this is a fact
and then those behavioral insights
directly lead us to our value proposition
and the value proposition is where
you can fully put on your product
management hat these are our insights
we're gonna sort of build on top of them
and reflect them
and we have the student here is thinking things like
I don't know if I have any skills
I don't think I have any skills
I don't know how to show skills um
we heard that over and over and over

as people were showing us capabilities and going
I'm not skilled in anything yeah
it's right it's right in front of you
you're doing it you're doing it Peter
it's important
to be viewed as having a broad set of interest
they view they view this generalist approach
as much more critical than being a specialist
I think college students are convinced that
the entire recruiting process is like
a big black box
and magic
black magic and people are waving their hands and
and they've been told over and over and over
that if you have a good cover letter and resume
you're in
this is the mental space in which students operate
in terms of jobs and
and recruiting on the other side of things
we have this recruiter who's like um no
give me the purple squirrel
I'm looking to match that really specific skill set um
and I need to see evidence
or proof that you can do the things
you say you can do all right um
I'm gonna build this story of you
that may or may not be true
but then I'm gonna stick to it and by the way
don't waste my time cause I'm really busy okay
so we have this ecosystem
and the ecosystem actually creates a what if
opportunity
because there's a chasm between these two people
these two roles these two constituents
and so we get asked the question
what if we help students identify their skills
and present them to employers
in a credible way
that's our what if moment
recast that as a value proposition
my Edu
help students identify the skills and present them to
employers in a credible way
that's a promise it it becomes a promise right
but put another way I use my ID
my ID you
and my expectation is that it's gonna help me do this
and if it doesn't
I'm let down just like when my electricity goes out
well great now we have a value proposition

it's grounded in behaviour and it makes sense
so let's do something with it
uh let's define some features
and now we're in pragmatic product management mode um
this is some somewhat of a bucketing exercise of hey
what are all the capabilities
we could do to help achieve that value proposition
and you can see on the side we're saying well
we got this profile card
what if students can add skills to it
and at the end we're like
well we want to display the skill on the profile well
what are all the mechanisms
we can use in our product suite
to do that um
they could browse for skills
they could search for skills
we could recommend skills um
you could acquire skills through your e learning
you could buy skills at the skills store
I don't know there's all sorts of different ways
that you could get this to happen
and so we brainstorm it all
here's just a couple you know small subset of it
and then we downselected that
because like everyone else who's building product
especially the startup
we had a development resource issue
we didn't have enough developers to do it all
because you never have enough developers to do it all
um and so we said alright
here's the critical path sometimes this is called MVP
I don't I don't necessarily like MVP um
because it implies that you're sort of done
at the minimal stage um
I want that the maximal viable product
um this is just the first step toward it hey um
and so we built this out um
and when we build it out
we do our standard product devs
like this is agile stories
G or the whole crappy nine yards of like the
the sloth of building software um
a little bit different you know
designer still do their thing
we're attaching comps and they look like this
and they're beautiful um
and uh
and thinking through the visual aesthetics
and wire frames and all that

kind of you know
sporting artifacts um
but fundamentally
all of this backs up to the value proposition right
the features were selecting match the value proposition
which was extracted from the ID sites
which came directly from the behavioral research
and then we launched it
and this is where when your product manager
you're like oh my God this is crack
this is the best thing in the world
launching product is amazing
we built into our launch plan a daily report
and so this is the daily metric of profile growth
and membership growth um
because when your
product is out in the world and people are using it
you can get data about what they're doing
it's different than when you create a flashlight
um it goes to tooling
six months later
it arrives on a ship and they sell it at Walmart right
the customer insights are delayed
their lag and they're not very rich
um I get all the customer insights from this right
I get all the data I want
um this is an overview
of the skills that students were adding
I'll let you sort of absorb it
and then make your own determinations
about the future of our country um
I mean leadership is in the top three
so that's good right
yeah okay
so we get data right
you become a wash in data
which is awesome
because now you can start to change the product
you can actually iterate and create product extensions
and you can do it quickly