EVOLVING CASE STUDIES
A GUIDE TO ANIMATION FOR EDUCATORS

2018 ANZAM PROMOTING EXCELLENCE IN LEARNING AND TEACHING PROJECT

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PREFACE

Modern education organisations, educators and students are looking to and expecting modern methods of teaching. As a key tenant of tertiary education is to develop critical thinking, narrative case studies are becoming standard across subjects in most disciplines.

While being effective pedagogically, developing narrative case studies can be both expensive and time consuming and these constraints limit their use. There is ongoing complexity in providing focused real-world perspectives of business scenarios so that students can actively engage and apply theories and concepts to support their learning.

The use of tools to provide animated case studies, provides educators with new possibilities in presenting the narrative, with distinct perspectives of the different characters involved in the case being able to be shown with additional visual cues.

When making decisions around the use of any new tools, the education factors of the organisation, educator and student each need to be considered and each tool assessed. The criteria for assessing an animation tool for use in an education setting is provided in this guide, along with a current assessment of several popular tools currently available.

An overview of the capability of some of the current tools is provided, along with a link to a completed case, with the case's transcript provided as an appendix to this guide.

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INTRODUCTION

Educators use a range of techniques to challenge students to think critically. Case studies provide educators one such technique in which students can access information in a narrative form that they can access. This allows students to use theories and concepts being taught in a unit to provide insight into the case study. Used as both a teaching and assessment tool, case studies are common in many disciplines.

As many educators are using this technique, it may be that students are consistently reading and assessing many case studies at the same time within any teaching period. This can provide the benefit of allowing students to develop skills in time management, but it can also lead to bored students through overuse of the same tool when the dominant delivery mechanism is a written case study.

> *"HAS IT NEVER STRUCK YOU THAT THE CONCEPT OF A WRITTEN NARRATIVE IS SOMEWHAT STRANGE? said Death."*
>
> — *Terry Pratchett, Thud! (2005)*

The authors are not recommending a reduction in using narrative case studies in education, but a consideration as to how students access the narratives. With the advent of new technology, tools are now available that provide educators with the ability to produce animated case studies for students with only a small investment of time and money.

PURPOSE

This document will provide an overview of how to implement case studies using story narratives: specifically, by using short animated films. A methodology for creating narratives will be presented along with an assessment of several tools that can be used for the animation. Additional components that support the narrative for an educational case study will also be suggested and two sample animated case studies are provided for use.

AUDIENCE

Any educator that uses case studies may find value in transitioning from a written case study to an animated version.

GENERAL PROCESS

HISTORY

Educational case studies originated in the Harvard Law School in the 1870s (Doyle, 1990) and have since been introduced in many higher education disciplines. Doyle (1990) describes three frameworks of teaching approaches, 'precept and practice', 'problem-solving and decision-making', and 'knowledge and understanding'.

Within the precept and practice framework, case studies are short and specific to a learning object, more often than not highlighting an answer rather than challenging students to look at the information and make an assessment.

The problem-solving and decision-making framework aims to not provide an answer, but rather a precedent of how the students can assess a problem domain. Case studies are longer and have narrative components including characters, settings and plot.

The knowledge and understanding framework provide complete prototypes that describe how to work in a specific environment using the theories and concepts that has been determined to be best practice within the domain.

NARRATIVE PROCESS

Doyle (1990) specifies that the problem-solving and decision-making framework describes the use of narrative case studies. These may include the use of music, video and additional data – essentially becoming an animated case study that provides more depth and a richer context for students to analyse. Despite these suggestions a literature search has shown very limited, if any, research into the efficacy of animated case studies compared with traditional written case studies. Yet anecdotal evidence including comments by students and educators during the PELT project suggest that an animated case study does add value compared to a traditional written case study.

To produce an animated case study, it is necessary to first write a narrative case study. Lind (2001) recommends the following process for the development of a case study for use within an educational   context.

| Selecting a Case | → | Gathering Data | → | Analysing Data | → | Writing the Case Study | → | Using Case Studies |

Figure 1 - Narrative Process

SELECTING A CASE

"A case study developed for use in the classroom should describe a situation requiring analysis, planning, and/or action." (Lind, 2001)

It is important when selecting a case study to write within the problem-solving and decision-making framework that does not only provide one 'answer'. Using theses style of case studies provides students with the chance to apply theories and concepts to the information presented in the case and make their own assessment. By using characters with different motivations, students can also think critically by looking at different perspectives of the one case.

GATHERING DATA

"By using multiple methods of data collection, we are better able to study the complexity of the case." (Lind, 2001)

When writing a case study to be used for management students, case studies should generally be formulated using qualitative data, as it is not desirable to have only one perspective or one right answer (this would be the outcome of many quantitative data sets). Qualitative data is collected using interviews, observations and domain-related data from real individuals taking part in the real-life scenario that has been selected for the case. This data may be used to create the setting, plot and characters of the narrative.

ANALYSING DATA

"[I]f the researcher wants to develop case studies that stimulate thinking and provide for a variety of answers, it is important that we assume the role of an impartial reporter." (Lind, 2001)

The case study should be developed from the actual perspectives of real individuals in the scenario that the case is aiming to provide insight into. By analysing the data collected, the author can select the themes that will be the focus of the case. The themes provide context to the case, without putting emphasis on any viewpoint that the writer sees as 'correct'.
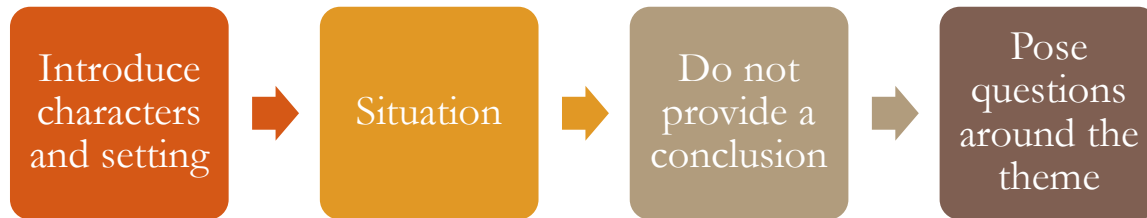
WRITING THE CASE STUDY

Introduce characters and setting	→	Situation	→	Do not provide a conclusion	→	Pose questions around the theme

Figure 2 - Writing the Case Study Process

> *"The goal in promoting critical thinking is to allow students to do their own analysis and come to their own conclusions." (Lind, 2001)*

The case study is a narrative. Therefore, narrative writing techniques should be used to introduce the characters and the setting that the case study frames. The situation should then be explained in relation to the chosen themes. It is important to not provide any closure or conclusion. Rather, pose a set of questions to allow the students to reach their own conclusions.

USING CASE STUDIES

> *"[C]ase studies have allowed me to present typical teaching dilemmas to the students while avoiding the 'this is how I did it' lecture." (Lind, 2001)*

Case studies can be used as a set of individual learning tasks, small group discussion tasks or as formal assessment pieces, providing educators with a tool that can be used and reused in different contexts where the selected themes are present.

ANIMATED CASE STUDIES

The use of animation in the delivery of case studies provides further narrative constructs to the educator. With animation, a lot more information can be conveyed in a short time by providing visual representations of ideas, including but not limited to, a clock to show time passing, or body language and facial expressions of characters involved in conversations.

A sample animated case study and its related transcript can be found at the end of this guide in the appendix.

EDUCATION FACTORS

When selecting a new tool to use in an education setting, three perspectives: the student, the educator and the organisation, should be considered in the tool selection process.
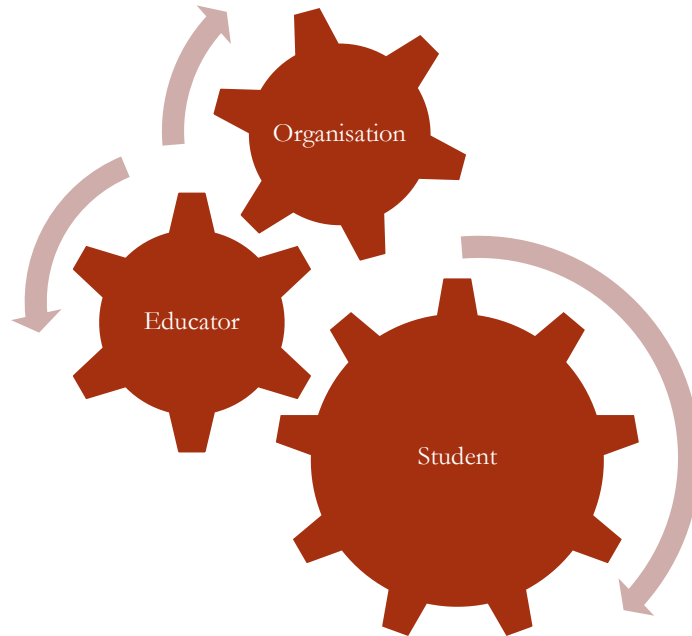

Figure 3 - Education Factors

ORGANISATION

When selecting a new toolset for use within the organisation, the following factors need to be considered:

PRIVACY

Any tool that will be used by the organisation's staff or students will need to adhere to the privacy requirements of the organisation (Schwartz, 2003). If organisational, student, or educator data is to be collected by the tool, then the mechanisms of storage and disposal of that data or other information produced by algorithms is required to be understood and meet the organisation's privacy principles.

REPUTATION

The reputation of the organisation is a key asset of any educational organisation and must be considered when selecting third-party tools that will be used in the learning environment (Sung and Yang, 2008). The tool should be assessed to ensure the following:

- the tool reflects the brand of the organisation
- content can be branded as belonging to the organisation, and
- whether the producer's social and education values are reflective of the organisation's values are considerations for selecting the tool.

INTEGRATION

Organisations have invested heavily in education platform technologies, and thus all new tools must work effectively within the implemented ecosystem (Phaal et al., 2000). The development of tools must be technologically feasible within the organisation's current infrastructure and allow technical support to be available quickly within the organisation's network. The content produced via the tool needs to be platform agnostic. This ensures that students are not disadvantaged by the content being dependent upon specific technology. The content should be available in formats that are appropriate for educators and students to consume.

COST

The ongoing cost to the organisation of the learning tool can be viewed from several different perspectives (Twigg, 2005). The financial costs to purchase, ongoing cost of maintenance of licences, training and usage support for educators, and the chronological cost of training and usage of the tool for educators.

ACCESSIBILITY

Any tool that will be used by the organisation's staff or students will need to adhere to the accessibility requirements of the organisation (Seale and Cooper, 2010). With the tools and technology that students and educators can now use in their day to day systems, each new tool must adhere to the requirements that make educational organisations a place of inclusiveness.

LEARNING

Paramount to all decisions made by an education organisation is that the tools and content that they choose to use allow educators to produce content that is appropriate for their courses and students (So and Kim, 2009).

EDUCATOR

As an educator selecting a tool to produce content for use in a course, consider the following factors:

COMPLEXITY

The time taken to learn and use the tool to produce usable content and the ability to maintain content over time, are major factors in determining if the educator will invest in and continue to use a toolset.

LEARNING

When selecting a tool for use as an educator, the individual should consider if the tool:

- creates opportunities for better teaching opportunities,
- addresses assessment requirements of the courses that the educators administer, and
- if the tool supports more efficient understanding of content for the students of the course beyond the tools already in use (Koehler and Mishra, 2005).

STUDENT

Students that are using tools selected by their educators and organisations should consider the following:

ACCESSIBILITY

The students in any course are aiming to learn the content of that course. Any accessibility issues or time required to learn additional tools may be considered a burden. Reasonable time to learn to use content from the student's perspective is key to them supporting its use. If there are any additional financial costs to access or use the content, that may limit its usefulness for all students.

LEARNING

All students want the tools provided by their educators and organisations to provide them with the most effective and efficient methods of supporting a deeper understanding of content of the course. Some may also benefit through the development of collateral technology skills using the selected technology.

ANIMATION TOOL OVERVIEW

Animation tools have common narrative components. In this section, the general capabilities and components are outlined using screen shots from one tool (Vyond) as an example

MAIN PAGE

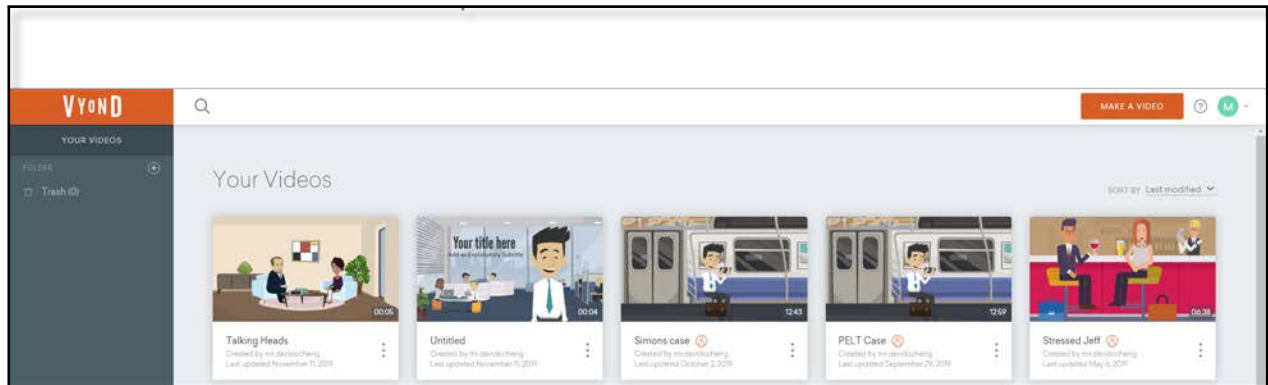The main page provides the ability to make and manage your videos.

Figure 4 - Example Main Screen

On this page are functions for:

- viewing and editing existing videos,
- sorting videos into folders,
- making new videos, and
- viewing videos that you have previously deleted.

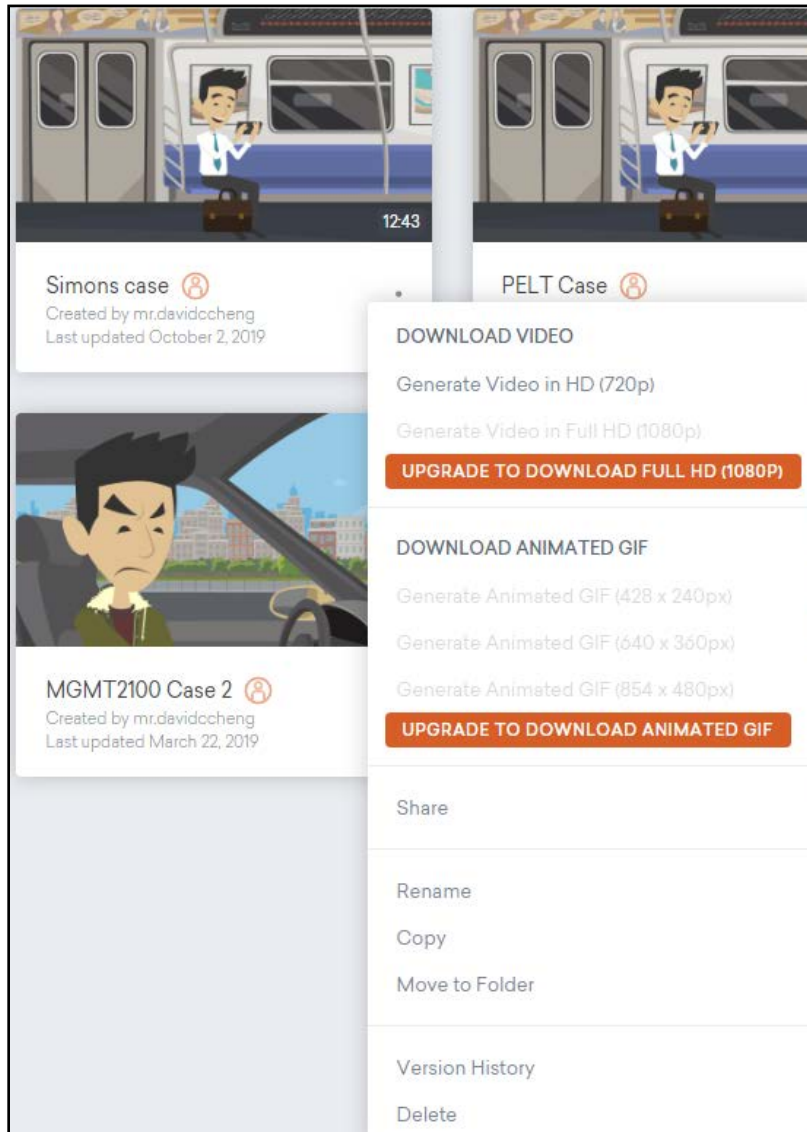Each video can be managed through the three-dot menu beside its name.

VIDEO MANAGEMENT

Figure 5 - Example Video Management

Once you have finished editing the video you can download a version that can be stored on the learning system of your organisation or shared via other means.

Like most document-based applications, there are options for:

• sharing,

• renaming,

• copying, and

• moving the video within the folder structure of the tool.

There is a version history system so that you can see different iterations of your creating and editing history, allowing you to move back to earlier versions if necessary.

You can delete entire videos if they are no longer required.

By clicking on the video, you can access the editing studio.
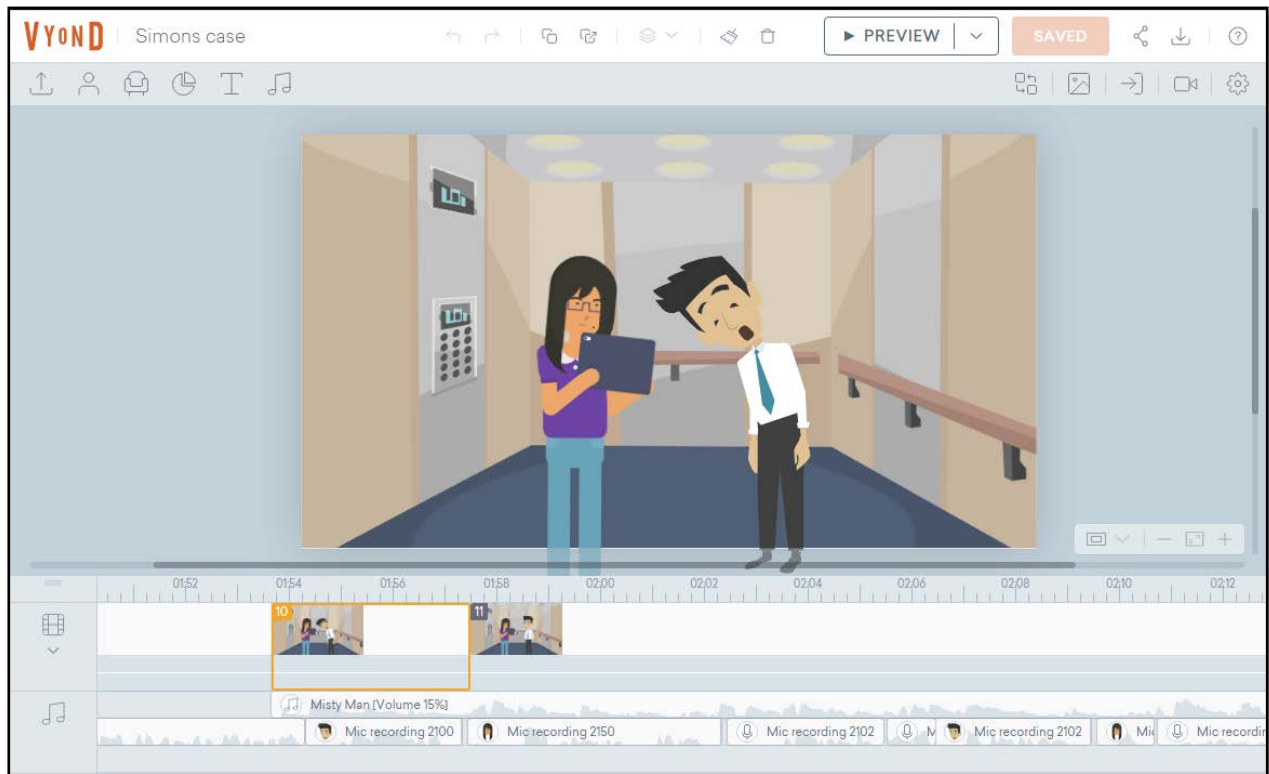
VIDEO EDITING

Figure 6 - Example Video Editing Studio

The online video editing studio includes several tools:

- video menu bar,
- video component bar,
- video editing window, and
- scene editing timeline.

This covers both the visual and sound components of the video.

VIDEO MENU BAR

Figure 7 - Example Video Menu Bar

The video menu bar provides functionality for editing and managing the video:

- the renaming of the video,
- undo and redo functionality during editing,
- copying and pasting of animation components,
- ordering (layering) of animation components so that they are shown correctly,
- clearing the scene,
- deleting components or scene,
- options for previewing the video or a scene,
- a status of whether the video has been saved recently, also allowing you to save,
- an option to share the video,
- and an option download the video.

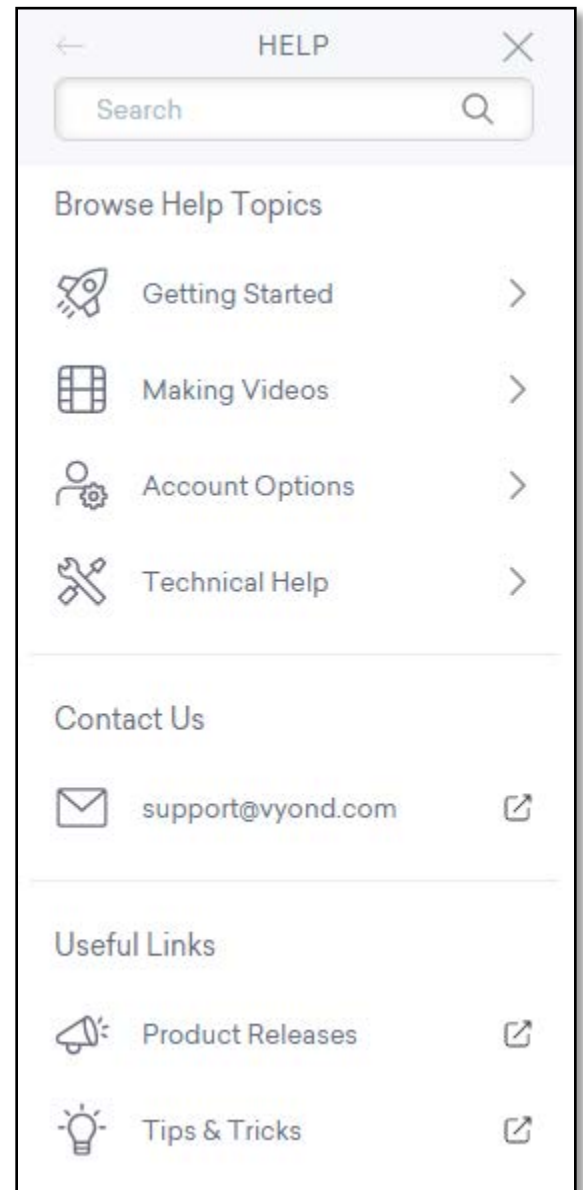A Help menu can also be accessed from here.

Figure 8 - Example Help Options

VIDEO COMPONENT BAR

Figure 9 - Example Video Component Bar

The video component bar includes functionality for narrative building:

- Uploading of images, audio and fonts to use in the animation,
- Creation and management of characters* in the scenes,
- Management of props and scenery,
- Creation and management of charts and graphs,
- Creation and management of text-based components,
- Creation and management of audio,
- A template management system,
- Management of the background of each scene,
- Functionality for scene transitions,
- Ability to add different camera angles, and
- Scene settings.

*Characters added to scenes can have actions, emotions and audio assigned to them within a scene. Audio can be assigned to a narrator or any character that has been assigned to that scene. Audio that is assigned to a character, will be matched to their mouth moving so that it is obvious who is speaking.
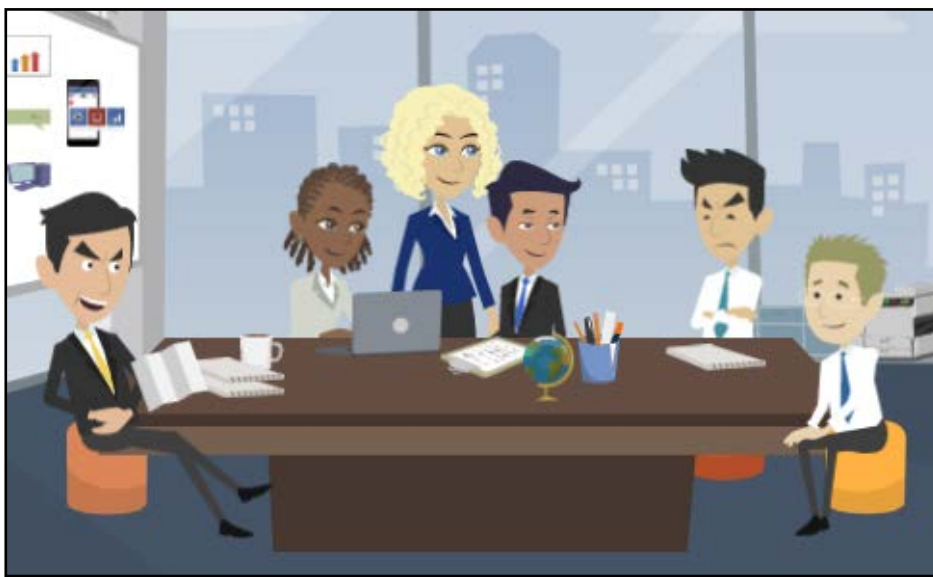

Figure 10 - Example Characters
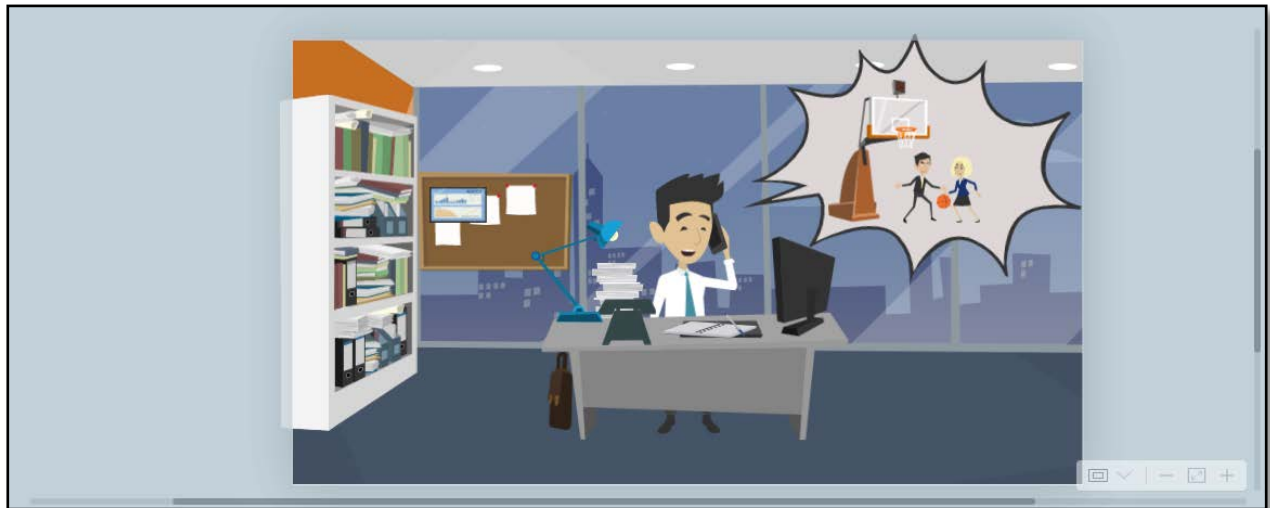
VIDEO EDITING WINDOW

Figure 11 - Example Video Editing Window

The video editing window allows you to place backgrounds, props and characters. Characters can be given movement patterns in a scene, either doing an action (like working on a tablet or cooking) or walking around based upon a path and timing provided by the content creator.

SCENE EDITING TIMELINE
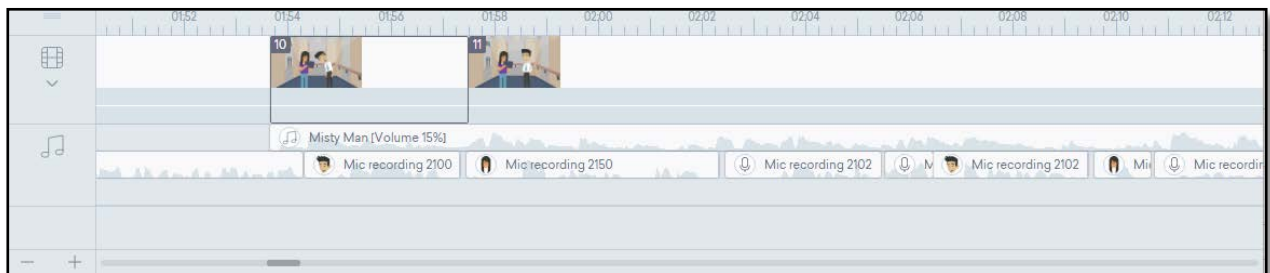
Figure 12 - Example Scene Editing Timeline

The scene editing timeline allows you to control when things happen in a scene and the overall animation. You can specify when each character is speaking, moving or interacting with props.

Audio can be layered, as in the case above where a low volume elevator music is playing in the background while the characters are having a conversation. By assigning audio to the character they will move their mouths in relation to the spikes in the audio volume, making it appear that they are speaking the audio. Audio assigned to the narrator will be played without any of the characters appearing to speak.

TOOL EVALUATION

METHODOLOGY

Using the education factors outlined, a synthesised set of criteria will be used to assess potential toolsets for use in different settings. Each organisation and educator may set a different weight on each of these criteria, and so this is provided as a guide for producing an assessment of tools that may be used to produce animated case studies.

Please note that the final evaluation of the tools as set out here was conducted in October 2019. Animation tools change often and rapidly with improvements in each update.

Criteria	Description
Accessibility	Does the content comply with the accessibility requirements for your students?
Complexity	What is the learning curve for the tool and its ongoing use for the creation of case studies?
Cost	What is the upfront and/or ongoing costs for the use of the tool for the development and use of case studies?
Integration	What integration is required for the product to work with the delivery platform you have in place for your students?
Learning	Does the tool allow the development of content that supports the learning outcomes of students?
Privacy	Does the tool meet privacy policies you have in terms of user accounts, tracking of organisation, educator and student user data?
Reputation	How will this product reflect on your organisation?
Support	What is known about the supplier regarding continuity of product, support and costs?

Figure 13 - Evaluation Criteria

TOOLS
MOOVLY

https://www.moovly.com

Teachers may find it hard to use. Students will be able to quickly learn to make the videos. Though videos can be impactful, the tool may be specialised for marketing/advertisement rather than education.

Criteria	Description
Accessibility	Subtitling can be included on the (Edu Max) plan.
Complexity	Teachers may find it hard to use. Students will be able to quickly learn to make the videos. Though videos can be impactful, the tool may be specialised for marketing/advertisement rather than education.
Cost	Has educational plans for organisations and teachers. Prices range from $US99 (Edu Pro) to $US249 (Edu Max) for a year's subscription.
Integration	With the tool able to export into standard video codecs, the content will be usable on most modern computing platforms.
Learning	Can be very impactful on student's learning. Tool is aimed more at marketing, unsure about animation for teaching.
Privacy	Moovly doesn't claim ownership of "content" but owns all assets. Private display options. https://www.moovly.com/termsandconditions https://www.moovly.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2018-05-28_Moovly-Customer-DPA-SaaS-SIGNED-1.pdf
Reputation	All branding can be removed from the content on both subscriptions.
Support	Priority/premium support (unclear of the difference) are provided respectively on the (Edu Pro) and (Edu Max) subscriptions.

Figure 14 - Moovly Assessment

POWTOON

https://www.powtoon.com

Good array of animations/characters etc to choose from. However, students and teachers may take a long time to learn the functions. At times, it takes a long time to load/process animations.

Criteria	Description
Accessibility	Subtitles can be added manually as captions on a scene.
Complexity	Long time for training user groups.
Cost	Has educational plans for teachers that include the ability to allow a certain number of students to also produce content. Prices range from $US72 (Teacher) to $US120 (Classroom) for a year's subscription.
Integration	With the tool able to export into standard video codecs, the content will be usable on most modern computing platforms.
Learning	Yes. Entertaining and interactive. Students can develop their own videos which fosters creativity and a dynamic teaching environment.
Privacy	Only available for the Enterprise Plan. https://static.powtoon.co/cms-assets/lp/enterprise/Enterprise_Generic_Security_FAQ.pdf Powtoon retains ownership of all Powtoon assets used in creation of content - https://www.powtoon.com/terms-and-conditions/
Reputation	All education plans include Powtoon education branding of content.
Support	Premium support 24/7.

Figure 15 - Powtoon Assessment

VYOND (FORMERLY GOANIMATE)

https://www.vyond.com

Very simple and easy for students/teachers to navigate around and learn functions. Lip sinc, facial features, hand gestures are unique functions that make Vyond stand out.

Criteria	Description
Accessibility	Subtitles can be added manually as captions on a scene.
Complexity	The system can be used quite quickly to produce simple videos, with further options able to be learnt to make the videos more detailed as the user becomes comfortable with the tool.
Cost	Doesn't have educational plans beyond the normal tiered plans. The Premium plan is used for this assessment. Subscription costs $US649 a year.
Integration	With the tool able to export into standard video codecs, the content will be usable on most modern computing platforms.
Learning	Due to limited number of animation templates, videos may end up being repetitive and students may not be intrigued. However, the tool is relatively straightforward and easy for students to understand concepts.
Privacy	Content owned by organisation, but created videos are owned by GoAnimate. http://goanimate.com/termsofuse
Reputation	Branding on content can be changed to match organisation colours.
Support	Priority service queue, online guides, live chat. Priority queue for professional plan.

Figure 16 - Vyond Assessment

WIDEO

Simple and like Microsoft Powerpoint but lacking in animation features. Does have a nice interactive call to action feature. Also cheap for educators and students to use.

Criteria	Description
Accessibility	Subtitles can be added manually as captions on a scene.
Complexity	Short time for training, like MS Powerpoint layout.
Cost	Pro Plan - $USD 99/mth or $USD 39/mth billed annually.
Integration	With the tool able to export into standard video codecs, the content will be usable on most modern computing platforms.
Learning	Only serves basic functions of animations. Little room for opportunities. Animated characters are limited. Only shows basic gestures which may not be engaging.
Privacy	Private user content licensing is restricted to the purpose of providing the educator with the service. http://www.wideo.co/en/html/terms-and-conditions https://wideo.co/wideo-privacy-policy/
Reputation	All branding can be removed from the content on Pro subscription.
Support	No premium support, ticket system, online FAQ.

Figure 17 - Wideo Assessment

ASSESSMENT

The tools will be assessed using the following;

1 – Inferior capability or compares very unfavourably with most other tools

2 – Limited capability or compares unfavourably with most other tools

3 – Average capability or compares similarly with most other tools

4 – Improved capability or compares favourably with most other tools

5 – Superior capability or compares very favourably with most other tools

Tool	Moovly	Powtoon	Vyond	Wideo
Accessibility	4	3	3	3
Complexity	3	2	4	5
Cost	3	4	2	4
Integration	5	5	5	5
Learning	4	5	3	2
Privacy	4	1	4	2
Reputation	4	2	4	4
Support	3	5	4	2
Overall Rating	3.8	3.4	3.6	3.4

As the overall averages are so close, it is suggested that a weighting system is applied based upon any specific requirements for the organisation, educators and students when conducting an individual assessment.

* As mentioned earlier animation tools improve often with each update. Earlier evaluations of the tools during the project placed Vyond as the most preferred tool and the sample case study provided at the end of the guide was therefore developed in Vyond.

CONCLUSION

This guide aimed to provide information around the use of story narratives in case studies and using animation tools now available in education settings. While a literature search revealed little if any research into the efficacy of animated case studies over traditional case studies, the use of short animated videos in case studies should allow educators to provide a richer learning experience for students, where they can practice critical thinking techniques.

The problem-solving and decision-making framework aims to provide students with case studies that show precedents rather than answers, allowing them to apply various theories and concepts to cases to look for solutions.

The general process of developing case studies gives educators the ability to take the perspectives and observations of individuals in real situations and give those viewpoints to characters in short animated films. This technology can quickly show the different perspectives in a case to students without needing to use complex written cases studies.

To understand what is important to organisations, educators and students in selecting a tool to create and manage the animated case studies, a range of factors can be used to assess individual tools. The factors include:

- accessibility for users of the technology;
- complexity of learning and using the tools;
- costs incurred in the purchase, subscriptions and maintenance of the tool and assets;
- the integration costs of incorporating the tools into the learning environment;
- whether the learning outcomes of the students are enhanced using the tool;
- how the tool manages the privacy of data and content;
- the potential impact to the reputation of the organisation using the tool; and,
- the support provided by the vendor for the users of the tool.

The tools used to create the animated case studies are similar. Each can quickly create scenes, add audio and have characters interact with each other and props in the environment. Some of the assessed tools are more refined in telling the narrative story while providing interest through emotional and body language cues, that reflect real-life in a way that may not be as easy to explain in a written case.

Tools can be assessed generally in terms of the factors provided, but it is necessary for each organisation and educator to consider the requirement and weighting of each of the factors to ensure that the most effective toolset is selected in each case.

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APPENDIX A – ANIMATED CASE STUDY SCRIPT

The animated case that the below script describes can be found here.

https://youtu.be/PDeq1trcNac

Scene 1: On the way to work

Characters: Narrator, David (speaking)

While travelling on the train and watching Netflix on my phone a meeting notification flashed up on my screen - another "URGENT" meeting. As the pop-up slowly disappeared, I had a sinking feeling that the meeting conflicted with another on my calendar. Checking my calendar, I realised that it did conflict with my long-delayed interview with Jackie, the Head, Asia Pacific Divisions (H-APD).

I wasn't surprised that my boss—the "CHIEF" as we called her — had, at the last second, decided she needed my presence. She had a sixth sense for when one of her staff was attempting to further their career. Once, when I was sitting at the same lunch table as another director, she had called my mobile phone with a desperate request for a document I'd e-mailed two weeks before.

Now the director seemed to have done it again. This would be the second time in two weeks I have had to cancel on Jackie. I didn't deserve to be treated like this. I couldn't put up with it any longer. I wanted to quit. If it weren't for the fact that my partner and I were trying to buy a house and had been scrimping and saving diligently for months for a deposit. No trip Bali, no smashed avo at the café. I had even cut back on buying real coffee, resorting to that pod coffee stuff they had in the office kitchen.

I was pondering how I would yet explain another cancellation to Jackie. It had been much easier to flee bad bosses when I was without responsibility. I recalled one episode when I'd gleefully resigned by screaming at a terrified manager who'd micromanaged me. But now I was 28 in a rotten economy. Quitting wasn't an option.

Scene 2: Arriving at work

Characters: Narrator, David (speaking), Jackie (speaking)

Entering the office, I got myself ready for this "urgent meeting" as I took the lift up to the meeting room floor. When I stepped into the lift, I bumped directly into Jackie, almost knocking her to the ground.

"Sorry, I, ah, have, um—"

"Sorry important meeting with the big wigs, can't stick around."

I saw my app on her tablet. And relieved I asked.

"So, should we reschedule today's meeting?"

"Today?"

She was wearing a blue jeans and weird purple top. For Senior GM, she seemed to be out of touch with the other execs when it came to dressing. And she seemed to have forgotten our appointment. But if she was taking my app to the leadership committee, who was I to complain?

"I'll have Barb set up something,"

She headed off to the executive level.

Scene 3: Team meeting

Characters: Narrator, David (speaking), Chief/Louise (speaking), Rajiv (speaking)

"Nice of you to join us, David,"

The Chief said as he walked in—late, as usual. We called her the Chief because she had worked for the government where almost every manager (Junior or senior) was called a "Chief". She had moved to the private sector to become manager at this company. The chief's voice sounded like toads being strangled at midnight. It haunted my dreams, and whenever I bent to retie my shoelaces, I could hear her croak her catchphrase: "We've got a lot to do."

"We've got a lot to do,"

Like she was reading my mind.

"So, Darren?"

Darren, whom I'd known for years, rattled through his status report in two and a half minutes with including several "as you have approved" and "as you asked us to do"—thus pre-empting further inquiry. It was one of the methods Darren had developed to manage the unmanageable Chief. The next few participants aimed to be concise. Occasionally one would misstep, and the Chief would ask,

"And why would you do that?"

Rajiv was near the end, and I roused myself for whatever bullets he might shoot my way. Just yesterday he had yelled at me over the phone.

"Where are my numbers? You know Louise wants them!"

He liked to call the Chief by her first name, which I found unsettling—as if she were just another member of our after-work basketball team.

"I'd explained to Rajiv that the Chief had specifically directed me to consolidate her numbers with those of other departments."

"My numbers?"

"he'd shot back, arching his eyebrows."

"These are the statistics on shipping costs for the whole global enterprise worldwide!"

"I thought better of pointing out that "global" and "worldwide" were synonymous and that "whole" was redundant. He was clearly under stress."

Scene 4: A hug for the intern

Characters: Narrator, David (speaking), Chief/Louise (speaking), Rajiv (speaking)

Now Rajiv was seething over my report on the meeting room table like a psychopath.

"I've been working on the reports for shipping, and I'd like to see if they work in the 'new' app."

His way of dealing with the Chief was to be insanely cranky—the more angry the possible so that the Chief wouldn't ask him to do anything.

"We really need to fix this app so that it actually works properly… better yet we should just buy one that works"

Hey, did he just take a swipe at me in front of everyone?

"Excellent, but we've got to keep this meeting moving. I've got an important announcement."

She was skipping Rajiv and, by default, me. I didn't know whether to be offended or thankful that her intense dislike of public confrontation saved me from having to defend myself.

"Today I'd like to recognize an employee whose contribution to this department's success has been significant and is an example to all of us of the results you can get from dedication and resolve."

She held up a plaque.

Me? Could it be me? My app had been well received by Jackie.

"I think you know who you are."

Maybe the Chief hadn't praised me before in order to save it for a public commendation.

"Katy, please stand up."

I coughed too loudly. Katy? *The intern?*

"Katy has done the unimaginable. She completely fixed my inbox. Reduced my email from 50,000 to 200 and programmed my computer to automatically delete the junk mail that I get sent."

I was sure everyone was thinking the same things: She'd dragged us all here for a summer intern whom she'd hired because her father was the Head of Sales. Another quarter hour was spent with the Chief's reminders that "we all have big responsibilities" and "we've got a lot to do,". Then we were free to go. As I got up, the Chief shouted,

"David, come by my office before you go at 5:30."

Scene 5: Waiting in the chief's office

Characters: Narrator, David (speaking), Barb (speaking)

When I arrived, she wasn't there and I had to wait. By 6PM she still hadn't arrived. Of course she'd vanished. I'd once spent two hours waiting by the Chief's lolly jar before James came by and told me he'd seen her leave the office a couple of hours ago.

"David?"

It was Barb, Jackie's assistant.

"Jackie apologizes. She has to head out to Zurich tonight, but she wanted you to have this."

She placed an inter-office mail envelope in my hand. The string had been wound tightly around the button and taped over for security.

Scene 6: Not pink, just lighter red

Characters: Narrator, David (speaking), Chief/Louise (speaking)

"What's in your hand?"

The Chief had snuck up behind me.

"Ah, er, a medical form from HR."

"Your back's not acting up again, is it?"

I recalled how she'd handled my back injury: The doctor had advised injections and physical therapy. The Chief had given me a heat pack and a "heads-up" that "people have been talking" about how much I was working from home. I shook my head.

"Well, good. We need you in top form. We've got a lot to do. Several things."

She had a tablet in her hands and was looking at my app. I took out a notebook.

"First, the red is too strong—too negative. Make it lighter."

"More pink?"

"No, not pink. Just lighter red."

She had complained that the last version was too pink—not masculine enough. And sometimes it made no difference. She flipped a few more screens.

"I thought you were going to make this better."

"On screen 3 the graphs are now 3-D and updated live,"

Her exact instruction had been "Make it sexier." How do you make a purchasing app "sexy"? The Chief examined the new graphs.

"Tim's group puts six lines on each graph. Can we do that?"

Well, not even a hawk could read that. But my coping mechanism was capitulation, so I replied.

"I'll put that together for you."

"Good"

she said and leaned back.

"Now, I'm just thinking that we haven't had a performance-review discussion in a while. Where do you want to be in five years?"

As I contemplated how to respond to this giant pothole of a query more likely from an annual HR reminder—she turned her attention back to her tablet and began typing.

"Ah, Well, I've found my time here—"

"Darren!, Darren! What's the number of Karen in Finance?"

I knew from experience, Darren would knock on the Chief's door, and say, "Do you need anything?" when the Chief yelled.

"So I would like—"

"Okay, so I'm going to need that updated App before tomorrow's meeting with Karen."

"I'll get it to you right away," I said.

"Good, you know what I want."

Scene 7: Escape route or dead end?

Characters: Narrator, David (speaking), Darren (speaking)

"She didn't leave already, did she?"

"Like a manager about to have a personnel discussion."

"Hey, what's the envelope?"

I tore off the tape and string.

"It's an offer letter from Jackie."

Darren raised his eyebrows. I read it quickly. But wait—this couldn't be right.

"It says level 10. I'm already level 10."

I handed it to Darren.

"Yep, a horizontal move, same pay, same level, just not working for the Chief."

I couldn't believe it.

"Jackie's a Senior GM. She can't have a level 10 working for her, can she?"

"Apparently she can. And you should take it."

Darren swigged his coffee.

"Whatever Jackie is like, she's got to be better than the Chief."

"And maybe she'll help me get promoted later,"

"Maybe. But if you don't take it, you'll never find out."

Darren returned to his desk. I wandered aimlessly into Ruth's cubicle, pondering what it would be like to get away from my tormentor.

Scene 8: Discussions

Characters: Narrator, David (speaking), Ruth (speaking), Rajiv (speaking)

"Lost?"

"Sorry, just thinking."

"About Jackie?"

There were no secrets among assistants.

"So, is it a good offer?"

"It's a lateral move."

She looked around to see if anyone was coming.

"Don't take it."

"But you know how difficult it is to be here."

"I know that they pay me. And I know that if you don't get more money when you change jobs, then you'll never get a raise."

"But maybe Jackie is different."

"When you've been here as long as I have, 'different' is a relative term. Do you remember when Louise first got here?"

It was true—she had been different then. She'd given several employees gifts of pens and post it notes.

"She was expecting a promotion. Then her boss got moved to Tasmania, and Michelle took the top job."

I realised she was right: When the Chief had lost hope for her own career, she'd become the downward-focused micromanager who loomed over our days.

"Bosses come and go. In the meantime, it's a job. Do it well and go home. I do, and so should you."

Suddenly we heard the sound of footsteps in the hall, and Rajiv strode in. I quickly excused myself, explaining that I had to work on the revised app.

"Make sure it gets done properly!"

Scene 9: Options

Characters: Narrator, David (speaking), Chief/Louise (speaking)

That night, watching Netflix in bed, I thought: Should I stay with a known bully? Or go to Jackie, who seemed better—but perhaps only because I hadn't yet worked for her. And what about that offer? It implied that Jackie wanted my app, not me, and as a result I wouldn't get any more pay or respect. At 6:00 Monday morning, my phone rang.

"David, why haven't you answered my e-mails?"

"I, uhhh…"

"Don't worry about it. I just wanted you to know I was looking through your latest app. It's good work. Really good."

A compliment? Even at this hour it was nice to hear.

"Can you be here at 7:30am to walk me through it?"

Should David make a lateral move into a job with uncertain prospects and a boss he doesn't know?