

## **Business Psychology: Building an Interdisciplinary Bridge from the Ground Up**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper describes the building of an innovative multi-disciplinary, outcomes-based, master's degree program that integrates the fields of Business and Psychology. Historically, Business and Psychology have ranked among the top five majors chosen by undergraduate students. The program is theory-to-practice oriented and teaches the traditional disciplines of business including: economics, finance, marketing, human resources, strategy, and management from a human perspective. The Business Psychology program primarily emphasizes qualitative versus quantitative-oriented teaching methods. Students of the program analyze individual, group, and organizational level business issues through the application of both traditional and new brain-based tools. Individual and professional developments are also hallmarks of the 14 month program. Additionally, the program incorporates some of the latest findings in neuroscience as they relate to the individual business disciplines. The paper will be presented from three viewpoints; those of the developer and program chair, a participating student, and an adjunct professor teaching in the program. Beginning with a rationale for program development, the paper will proceed through research into potential competitive programs, considerations in the initial design of courses, inclusion of imbedded assessment, the selection of teaching faculty, a description of the internal and external steps that led to its approval by state and regional accrediting bodies, problems in initial delivery, and the program's incorporation into the sponsoring university's learning management system. Current status as well as initial student and faculty reactions will be presented along with complicating factors relating to its delivery in both face-to-face and online formats. The paper will conclude with lessons learned from this point in its early history.*

### **1. What is Business Psychology? Why now?**

In recent years business schools have received a lot of criticism related to their lack of relevance, impracticality, growing costs, and use of outdated teaching methods (Starkey & Tiratsoo, 2007; Khurana, 2007; and Mintzberg, 2004). For many institutions, declining enrollments, rising expenditures, reduced support from public and private sources, and intense competition for students among public, private, and for-profit institutions has led to heightened survival pressures. These factors, coupled with the increased fractionalization of knowledge and a need to better synthesize across disciplines, has led to a search for viable growth opportunities

One institutional response has been the rise of inter-disciplinary programs. Business Psychology is a representative example. Business Psychology as taught at Franklin University is a complex hybrid of the disciplines of Business and Psychology.

Not very well known in the United States, recent research (Franklin University, 2010) uncovered only two graduate level programs using the title “Business Psychology”. This new field attempts to meld traditional business disciplines such as economics, finance, strategy, management, human resources, and marketing with elements of positive psychology and neuroscience.

The MS in Business Psychology program was developed to fill a perceived need for advanced practitioners who could apply behavioral science concepts and tools to the problems of business organizations. The program emphasizes the qualitative over the quantitative, weighs analysis with synthesis, and balances traditional disciplinary knowledge with neuroscience-oriented applications. The integration of Business and Psychology in a common educational program challenges some of the basic assumptions that currently serve to differentiate management and psychology. See Table 1. (Forbes, 2012) for a comparison of managerial and psychological assumptions.

## **2. Why not an MBA or a degree in Industrial-Organizational (I/O) Psychology?**

MBA education, for the most part, has relied heavily on cognitively oriented, objective, analytical, and quantitative approaches to teaching and learning. Primarily, it appears to benignly neglect the affective and cognitive components of the educational process. In a complex rapidly morphing environment the success premium seems to favor the innovative, risk-taking, and action-oriented. The bias of many MBA programs appears to be toward producing numerically-skilled analysts rather than pragmatic managers who can effectively operate in the messy world of organizations.

At present Industrial-Organizational Psychology appears to be in the midst of an identity crises (Ryan & Ford, 2010). Originally created to help solve the problems of the industrial age, industrial psychology has been struggling to stay both current and relevant and find its niche in the information age. It still maintains a heavy focus on test construction, statistical analysis, research design, and conducting validation and reliability studies. The organizational side emphasizes human dynamics such as complex decision making, group dynamics and leadership. In the main, I/O Psychology seems to lack a holistic viewpoint and is two sub-disciplines that are not well integrated.

## **3. What makes this Business Psychology Program so Different?**

- Practical integration of business and psychology
- Teaches traditional business disciplines from a human standpoint
- Theory-to-practice orientation emphasizing Positive Psychology
- Accomplishable in 14 months
- Available in both face-to-face and online formats with the same outcomes
- Incorporates the latest findings in neuroscience

### **3.1 Program Purpose**

To provide a life-enhancing educational experience that leads to realizing career and personal objectives. This inter-disciplinary program has been developed for working professionals seeking practical engagement with the fields of psychology and business.

### **3.2 Program Outcomes**

- Assess the value of neuroscience tool for use in the workplace
- Assess the business intelligence of an organization
- Evaluate psychological assessments for use in leadership and organizational development
- Create behaviorally based measures of economic performance
- Apply psychological principles in new product marketing
- Differentiate job applicants using behavioral science methods
- Design a process to stimulate organizational innovation
- Employ coaching techniques to deal with dysfunctional individuals

## **4. The Tortuous Path to Program Approval**

From concept to final official approval the program encompassed a period of over three years.

Internal steps required about one year and included departmental approval, college approval, approval by the provost's cabinet, approval by the academic programs review board, approval by the curriculum review committee of the Faculty Senate, approval by the university president, and approval by the education committee of Franklin's Board of Trustees.

Two external approvals were required, one at the state level and one at the regional accrediting body level that required an additional two years. The program received approval from the Ohio Board of Regents on February 23, 2011 and final authorization from the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association on July 18, 2012.

### **5. *The Program Manager-Developer Perspective***

With advanced degrees in both Psychology and Business, the program manager's perspective has been informed by work experience in all three sectors of the economy plus over 30 years of teaching in graduate business schools. Reflection and review of that experience identified two persistent long-term trends: (1) a growing student interest in the human side of business and, (2) for many students, a pronounced aversion to the numerical and quantitative. The 1990 "Decade of the Brain," further enhanced by President Obama's twenty-first century brain exploration initiatives, also appears to have sparked curiosity in how brain function influences work behavior.

In its original conception of the MBA in 1993, Franklin University attempted to balance quantitative and qualitative coursework with a stress on leadership. A more recent expansion internationally has swung the pendulum more toward the quantitative side. Additionally, the university developed a highly successful undergraduate degree in Applied Psychology that has attracted individuals interested in applying psychological principles to work at the graduate level. Therefore, a confluence of factors, supported by market research (Eduventures, 2010), led to the idea of creating a graduate program that would teach business functions from a psychological perspective.

### **6. *Student Perspective***

The program has already provided fresh insights on students' leadership styles and areas for improvement, and helped identify new ways students can contribute to their respective organizations. For example, one of the authors elected to enroll in this program as a student to gain additional skills to meet the growing leadership challenges of the dynamic higher education industry. Other students enrolled in the Master's in Business Psychology program have noted that the neuroscience tools and perspectives are immediately applicable to complex professional challenges.

#### **6.1 Student Perception of Instructors**

Instructors in the program have both academic credentials and extensive experience. Students have appreciated two consistent things about these instructors:

1. They articulate how the program addresses "gaps" that they are aware of in hindsight, having observed how people really behave in organizations and how things happen in the "real world."
2. They continue to learn, showing real enthusiasm in delving into the latest research and practical applications of the concepts they teach, and do so in an interdisciplinary fashion.

#### **6.2 The Interdisciplinary Nature of the Program**

The M.S. in Business Psychology program provides valuable interdisciplinary training in assessing business intelligence and in other key management skills that support effective leadership in today's dynamic professional environments. Ringleb and Rock (2008) define neuroleadership as an interdisciplinary field that focuses on "how individuals in a social environment make decisions and solve problems, regulate their emotions, collaborate with and influence others, and facilitate change". Their brief functional definition is that "Neuroleadership engages people, as opposed to the functional side of business" (2008, p. 2). Management psychology provides frameworks for understanding how human behavior shapes organizations and how behavior within those organizations in turn enables and constrains human behavior within them (Ghadiri, Habermacher, and Peters, 2012).

#### **6.3 Interactive Small Assignments**

The courses are structured with one major assignment weekly plus an additional three or four small assignments per week that function as a springboard to foster collaborative learning. In-class and on-line discussion provide an opportunity to share insights about how the concepts are applicable in various industries and jobs.

One example of a small assignment is analyzing a work conflict and using the tool of reframing to gain insight on the individual motivations and values that may have fostered the conflict. A second small assignment example is evaluating gender differences in persuasive appeals used in advertising and content articles in current magazines.

#### **6.4 The Neuroscience Element**

All of the courses and assignments are connected to an appreciation for how the brain works, applying those insights to the activities of an organization. In terms of its evolution, the brain is not well suited to the hyper-paced complex environments human beings have created, yet individuals need to navigate and work in these environments.

One model that demonstrates how neuroscience research can be practically applied to work situations is the SCARF model. The SCARF model presented by Rock (2009) highlights the fight/flight response associated with threats to our Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness. Imagine participating in a marketing campaign meeting that seemed to have a clear agenda and straightforward goals, experiencing dismay as certain individuals in the meeting react in strongly negative ways to the activities proposed. The proposed plan may be logical and based on thorough market research. Psychologically, it is possible that the individuals opposed to the plan feel threatened, although they may not be able to overtly acknowledge that fact. Having an awareness of how human beings are “hard wired” to react in threat situations can help a manager coach team members in a way that will result in a better process and better product.

#### **6.5 Building Nature of the Assignments**

The course assignments build on previous course work, promoting a continuing synthesis of theories and concepts. For example, the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI) is introduced in the first class (Herrmann International, 2009), and the Organizational Lifecycle Metric (Forbes, 2013) that combines elements of that model and the lifecycle model of organizations is applied in the second class. Students also create a self-development plan in the first class that is revised toward the end of the program.

One of the strengths of the program is that students gain hands-on experience with a variety of current tools including the Values-in-Action (VIA) Survey of Character Strengths (Seligman, 2002), the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI) Profile (Herrmann International, 2009), and the Organizational Lifecycle Metric (Forbes, 2013) to assess individual and organizational-level phenomena central to performance improvement. For example, the Organizational Lifecycle Metric (Forbes, 2013) can be used to assess the alignment between organizational members and the organization itself in terms of their respective life cycle stages. If managers are not providing the type of leadership needed at that phase of an organization’s lifecycle, the manager may need to evolve their approach or be moved to a position better matched with their strengths.

#### **6.6 Four Sample Tools Applied in the Program**

1. The Values-in-Action (VIA) Survey of Character Strengths is a research-based assessment tool founded on a classification system of strengths and virtues designed to assess how much of each of the 24 strengths one possesses (Seligman, 2002).
2. The Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI) is based on left-right brain research on the functions and types of thinking occurring in the two major hemispheres. Additionally, the developer, General Electric corporate training center manager Ned Herrmann, incorporated research on limbic region activity to develop a “whole-brain” four-quadrant model (see Appendix C) with different thinking preferences associated with each quadrant. The blue “A” or left-cerebral quadrant represents a preference for cognitive and rational approaches. The green “B” or left-limbic quadrant represents a preference for structure and procedure. The yellow “D” or right-cerebral quadrant represents a preference for holistic “big picture” thinking. And, the red “C” or right-limbic quadrant represents a preference for intuitive and emotional thinking (Herrmann International, 2009).
3. The Organizational Lifecycle Metric is based on a model of an organizational lifespan that consists of the stages of creation, launch, growth, maturity, renewal and closure (Forbes, 2013). The Organizational Lifecycle Metric (Forbes, 2013) is a useful tool for reflecting on the dynamics of one’s organization based on lifecycle stages and the alignment between an individual’s preferences for lifecycle stage and the status of their organization.
4. The Six Seconds Emotional Intelligence Instrument (SEI) is based on the concept of emotional intelligence (EI) described by Daniel Goleman (1995). The SEI model (Freedman, 2007) is comprised of eight fundamental skills divided into three “pursuits” – Know Yourself, Choose Yourself, and Give Yourself.

The primary limitations of using this instrument within an organization is that there may be interaction effects in terms of the conditions under which one works and their role in the organization. If one is a dental hygienist, they may get more opportunities to use EI to interact successfully with patients whereas a machinist might not interact with another human being during a shift. Additional limitations may include the climate and culture of the organization and accepted views of EI.

### **6.7 Applied Problem Solution Nature**

Many of the assignments require primary research in the form of in-depth interviews, document analysis, and on-site observations in real organizations. For a Business Logics assignment, one group analyzed Lifeline of Ohio, an organ transplant not-for-profit organization, sharing our summary presentation with the CEO. Students apply a variety of tools for self-development and learn how to leverage them as a consultant to support organizational assessment and change initiatives.

### **6.8 Cutting-edge nature**

Blending scholarly and applied “neuroleadership” perspectives with business perspectives is a cutting-edge approach to preparing flexible and skillful leaders. The application of neuro-science to organizations and communities has been growing in popularity in the U.S. for over a decade, punctuated by the publication of significant books including Martin Seligman’s book “Authentic Happiness” in 2002 and David Rock’s “Your Brain at Work” in 2009. The positive psychology-based theories and tools advocated by such thought-leaders are only now spreading in the application arena in the U.S. although they have a strong following in Europe. The neuro-leadership perspective of this program offers a scientifically grounded way to frame the challenges facing organizations today.

## **7. Instructor Perception**

Teaching and participating in the Master of Science in Business Psychology program has been an exciting and rewarding experience from a faculty perspective. At press time for this article, the first cohort of the program has reached its eighth course out of nine. The applied nature of the program allows faculty to use their real-world experience in a research-based program to help students think as scholar-practitioners and generate practical solutions to business problems for their own organizations, clients, and customers.

Courses are currently taught in both face-to-face and online formats, with expectations that courses will eventually be available in a hybrid option. One course period was taught in a hybrid format but was discontinued due to difficulties with the selected web conferencing software package. The University is committed to the use of technology to increase the learning experience of both the face-to-face and online or remote location user and has dedicated classrooms for that purpose.

### **7.1 Faculty Selection and Mentoring**

Adjunct faculty members are selected based on their academic credentials, their practical experience with the subject matter, and their ability to successfully interact with students in a learning environment. Currently, both full-time and Adjunct faculty teaching face-to-face are mentored and co-teach their first class with the chair of the program. Adjunct faculty members that are new to the program also have access to a trained faculty mentor. They meet with the mentor as frequently as needed, and communicate often regarding questions, ideas, and impressions of their assigned course. The mentoring program allows new adjunct faculty members to be paired with an experienced adjunct faculty member. Mentees have the opportunity to meet in an online or face-to-face setting to ask questions, review content, receive faculty manuals and PowerPoint presentations, and learn about available resources. Mentees also have the chance to review policies and procedures and discuss what is currently working as well as what might need to be revised in upcoming course sections. Having immediate access to a faculty mentor allows the new faculty member to maintain focus on the quality and consistency of their teaching, grading and student communication and contributes to higher student satisfaction and educational quality (Johnson, 2007). As part of the student-centered culture of Franklin University, to maintain active teaching status, all faculty members are expected to maintain high student satisfaction scores on regular course evaluations.

### **7.2 Resources and Enrichment**

Neuroscience research is progressing at a lightning fast pace (Hortsman, 2010). In order to maintain pace with current research, the Master’s in Business Psychology has opted to use mass market books as opposed to text books that require longer editing and printing cycles.

Books such as “The Buying Brain” by Dr. A.K. Pradeep (2010) are selected for their emphasis on neuroscience applications and allow students to further develop the scholar-practitioner mindset by observing it in action.

The students and faculty also have access to high quality university sponsored resources. For example, the Franklin Library has created a “LibGuide” for business psychology students that include pages dedicated to current resources such as journals and newly published resources, style guides and graduate writing tips. This guide may be viewed at <http://guides.franklin.edu/businesspsych>.

One of the most beneficial resources to the students and new faculty has been the embedded enrichment material in each module of every class. Enrichment materials include articles, TED talks, books, websites, and annotated bibliographies that provide additional information for the student or faculty member to use about a given topic.

### **7.3 Instructional Design Model**

The instructional design model for the Master’s in Business Psychology is unique and fluid. All of the courses were created and initially designed by the chair of the program, Dr. Ray Forbes, with the assistance of a program advisory panel and smaller expert advisory groups for individual courses. An in-house instructional designer reviewed the course materials and loaded the courses into a proprietary, object-based, Learning Management System (LMS). Because of the newness of the both the LMS and the program, a decision was made early on in the launch of the program to have an adjunct faculty member participate in each of the face-to-face classes to identify and recommend small design changes to the courses as they were being delivered and to facilitate communication with the instructional designer for any large scale design changes being proposed. It is common for program chairs or lead faculty members to use content experts to contribute to courses, but this is typically done for just one course at a time. The use of an adjunct faculty member to supervise the flow, content, and changes during the entire program is new. The adjunct faculty member also coordinates supplying faculty support materials such as PowerPoint presentations and grading rubrics to be loaded into the learning management system and also continues to support the mentoring model already discussed.

### **7.4 Outcomes/ Grading Rubrics/ Mastery Demonstration**

Measuring the outcomes for the program is done at various levels. Program outcomes were developed by the program chair, specifying one major outcome for each course as well as the outcomes that will be reinforced from prior courses. An evaluation rubric is developed for one major assignment per course (typically the final cumulative project) that demonstrates the purpose of the course outcome. This rubric clearly identifies criteria for the faculty member to score the assignment as “Unacceptable, Acceptable, or Proficient.” The evaluation rubric will also be given to Franklin’s Director of Assessment for purposes of data collection and reporting.

Grading rubrics are embedded into each course for the faculty to score each graded assignment. Each rubric further specifies the number of points assigned for each specific action item of the assignment and allows for the student to easily see how a given grade has been calculated. The use of grading rubrics allows the faculty member to provide very specific feedback on any section of an assignment, with the intent to help the student strengthen and polish graduate writing skills. The intention is for program outcomes to direct course outcomes which will then direct assignment outcomes. The cascade of outcomes is shown in Table 2.

### **7.5 Ongoing Revision and Process Improvement**

It is expected that the courses will continue to be revised and refreshed as more research on neuroscience and related topics comes to light. The University already has in place a schedule for course redesign, and it has been found to be extremely beneficial to include a teaching faculty member in this process. The instructional design model and mentorship program allows for flexibility and input and the achievement of a quality program to ensure student success. Additionally, the University is in the early stages of pursuing additional special program accreditation with International Assembly of Collegiate Business Education (IACBE) and the American Institute of Business Psychology (AIOBP).

## **8 Some Lessons Painfully Learned**

- Things always take longer than either expected or anticipated
- The use of new technology comes with inherent risks
- The more complex the learning system the more likely it is to break at unexpected points
- Political processes outside your control can negatively impact the best laid plans
- Hybrid programs can be a difficult sell both internally and externally

8. Summary

This paper has reflectively considered Franklin University’s innovative new master’s degree in Business Psychology from the viewpoints of the course developer and manager, a student, and an adjunct professor teaching in the program. The MS in Business Psychology was differentiated from the MBA and Industrial/Organizational Psychology degrees. The extensive use of neuroscience concepts and practices was Articulated as a central differentiating factor.

The program was further described as a pragmatic integration of the disciplines of business and psychology that intends to graduate advanced scholar-practitioners. Numerous examples of tools, instruments, assignments, and activities used in the program were provided. Additionally, this paper has chronicled some of the key issues associated with program creation, design and development, accreditation, staffing, and assessment.

The MS in Business Psychology remains a work-in-progress. The first cohort of students is expected to graduate in the Spring of 2014.

Table 1: Management –Psychology Comparison

The M (Management) part	The P (Psychologist) part
Work can always be made more efficient and effective	>Individuals seek meaning and learning in their work
The essence of the role is objective decision-making consequences	>Decisions always have subjective unintended human
Structure is both a blessing and a curse than structure	>Relationships are more important
Opportunity drives change	>Pain relief drives change
The buck (Responsibility) stops here	>No trust, no progress

Table 2: Cascade of Program Outcomes to Course Outcomes to Assignment Outcomes

Program Outcomes (Partial Example)

Required Courses/Experiences	Program Learning Outcomes							
	Outcome 1	Outcome 2	Outcome 3	Outcome 4	Outcome 5	Outcome 6	Outcome 7	Outcome 8
PSCY 601	I,R,A							
PSCY 602		I,R,A						

Program Outcomes							
Outcome 1	Assess the value of a neuroscience tool for use in the workplace.						
Outcome 2	Diagnose an organizational culture.						

Course Outcomes (Partial Example)

**MBE Evaluation Rubric: PSCY 602**

The following rubric is designed to assist with the evaluation of student learning for both course outcome and program outcome (as indicated below):

- MBE Program Outcome: Apply neuroscience, psychological principles, and business skills to understand, diagnose, and design effective organizational outcomes.
- MBE Course Assignment: Assess the business intelligence of an organization.

Please use the rubric to evaluate the following assignment and submit criteria scores to gradebook:

**PSCY 602 Assignment: Business Intelligence Assessment Presentation (Due Week 9)**

Criteria	1 (Unsatisfactory)	2 (Satisfactory)	3 (Appropriate)	4 (Excellent)
1. Demonstrates the ability to conduct outside research on a previously unknown organization.	1.1 Demonstrates little or no ability to locate and synthesize research sources were to conduct or not conduct.	1.2 Demonstrates some ability to locate and synthesize research sources were to conduct or not conduct.	1.3 Demonstrates some ability to locate and synthesize research sources were to conduct or not conduct.	1.4 Demonstrates strong ability to locate and synthesize research sources were to conduct or not conduct.
Range of scores: 0-10	Range of scores: 0-27	Range of scores: 28-31	Range of scores: 32-40	

Assignment Outcomes (Partial Example)

**BUS PSCY 602 – INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL INTELLIGENCE**  
Assignment 6-1: Business Intelligence Assessment Presentation

**Grading Rubric**

Presenting Group/Student’s Names \_\_\_\_\_  
Instructor Name \_\_\_\_\_

Assessment by Instructor – Did the Presenting Group Meet the Following Criteria?	Points Available	Points Earned	INSTRUCTOR EVALUATOR	
			Comments	Suggestions for Improvement
a. Presentation involves all group members.	25			
b. Presentation reasonably meets time allowed (15-25 minutes) (15-25 minutes).	10			
c. Group provided brief background information on the selected organization.	10			
d. Offers rationale used to choose this organization, and level of detail used to describe it.	10			

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