Practicum Expectations and Overview

Master’s in Industrial-Organizational Psychology

Bellevue University

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Practicum Overview

Completing a practicum as part of your degree should be an extremely valuable experience towards both your academic and professional growth. As with most things, you will get from it as much as you invest. If you devote focused time, effort, and thoughtfully choose both your topic and professional contacts you have the potential to truly exercise the knowledge you have gained throughout the program in addition to seeing the value that you add in an applied setting.

What is a practicum?

The practicum course in the MIOP program at Bellevue University is designed to facilitate the application of Industrial/Organizational Psychology theories in a strategic and real-world setting. We seek to push students to understand how their degree can be utilized in a powerful and meaningful way by creating an opportunity for them to apply their value in a professional setting before graduation. Closing the gap between academics and application will offer our students a major advantage over other I/O graduates.

Key Tasks to Plan For

1. Reflect on a topic area that is of interest and how it relates to a career path that you hope to pursue.
    a. This practicum can be a launchpad to display your skills as an expert in Industrial/Organizational Psychology. Seize the opportunity to add this to your portfolio.
2. Identify a professional mentor that you will meet with throughout your practicum. You will need to connect and meet with this person right away to make progress in this course.
    a. It is recommended this person works either at a company or in a department that speaks to your topic/career of interest.
    b. Complete and submit the **Participating Professional Form** found in the course content.
3. Determine if completing a SHRM, HRCI, or other relevant certification would be beneficial as part of your practicum experience.

NOTE: If you have extreme difficulty identifying a contact reach out to your professor and/or the program director to assist with connecting you with someone so you do not fall behind.

Practicum Packet Requirements

The following items will be required at the end of the course. You will create pieces of the packet throughout the course, but all items will need to be turned in as a complete packet at the conclusion of your practicum.

1. An executive report (no more than 3 pages) of your project.
2. A 3-page reflection of your practicum experience that highlights:
    a. Your learning from the professional and from being in the field
    b. How your I/O knowledge may have assisted your professional mentor OR
    c. How you applied the mentor's knowledge in a given situation
3. Final presentation and any supplemental materials used and audio or visual recordings.
4. Final project write-up.
5. Practicum Hours tracking form (minimum of 120 hours).
    a. If you opted for the certification as part of your hours you must submit a copy of the certificate earned or proof of testing. Also, if you have chosen this option, please discuss the alternative requirements for your final practicum packet as they will be slightly different to accommodate the studying and testing requirements.

Common Questions

1. **Do I need to be hired somewhere to complete the practicum?**
    a. No. This is an independent study project. You are encouraged to work with an organization or experts in the topic area to understand trends, best practices, where your research might be used, or even to work to create an applied project, but your work in the practicum should not be tied to a formal hiring process.

2. **I am currently working in an I/O field, can I use one of my daily work items as my practicum?**
    a. No. You are welcome to utilize the experts around you, leadership, and the organization as a basis for your project, but you must create a project and topic outside the scope of work you are required to do for your job or internship.

3. **How much time do I need to plan to work on this project?**
    a. This course requires the same amount of time as all graduate 3 credit hour coursework, 120 hours. You will track your time and submit this with your final paper.

4. **What if I cannot think of a topic?**
    a. We want to support your research and networking based on your individual interests, but if you are having trouble coming up with an idea your professor and/or the program director will work with you to solidify a clear project topic and avenue to network with experts in this space.

5. **Can I use a survey instead of interviewing professionals?**
    a. No. This course is meant to have you practice gathering qualitative data and expand your professional network. Quantitative data collection via surveys will be done in your capstone courses (631 and 660).

6. **What if I do not complete the project within the 6 weeks of class?**
    a. The option for an incomplete will only be extended to students who have shown significant progress towards the practicum project at the end of the 6-week course, and simply need a small extension to wrap up final pieces of the project. We want to ensure you can get as much from this experience as possible, and acknowledge completing a practicum in 6 weeks can be difficult when coordinating interviews and presentations with professionals. Work with your instructor to determine if you are eligible to receive an incomplete. Approving an ‘incomplete’ will be at the discretion of faculty and the program director and a formal deadline must be agreed upon**. *Work will not be accepted beyond this date*.**

Previous Practicum Topics and Excerpts

Study 1—Proposal to Identify and Select Leading Indicators for the Health and Safety at American Water

The Health & Safety Department of American Water proposed to develop a leading metric system to determine what measures can reduce injuries before they happen. The concepts of identifying leading indicators has been discussed for many years but have never been studied to determine the relationship to outcomes. The structure of the indicators needs to be:

- Easily measurable metrics
- Auditable by internal audit due to the goal of basing performance and bonus upon outcomes
- Identify lagging indicators with which to correlated new indicators with outcomes
- Reportable to the senior leadership of the company, leadership of the individual business units, managers and employees in the individual business units. There should be 3-4 indicators used across the business, and individual units may add additional measures.

Background

Lagging indicators demotivates employees and managers. As bad as a metric recordable injuries and days away from work due to injury are, they are a measurable indicator of safety. For top management that is focused on rewarding and holding management accountable for poor performance, these are easily obtained metrics that many view a representative of safety.

There have been years of discussion about the development of leading indicators that relate to decreasing of injuries. The lack of consistent measurements has led to the continued discussion but no action. We want to develop a motivated H&S staff that is committed to driving this new initiative to show employees and management the success their safe behaviors can result in fewer injuries.

Recommendations for Further Action

The goal of this project is to develop a system that drives fewer employee injuries within American Water. Additional business units are also looking at metrics to drive their successful behaviors for both the company and the people it employs. We want to share our successful process with other departments (human resources, marketing, communications, environmental and others) so they can drive culture and performance change.

Study 2—On Ethos of Mindfulness in the Workplace

This case study seeks to understand how holistic wellness practices in the workplace are perceived, specifically through the lens of mindfulness. Semi-structured interviews of thirteen professionals associated with the local wellness community revealed perceptions or experiences of barriers and successes to reception and adoption of these practices. The outcomes of the interviews demonstrate strong themes characterized by attributes at the individual, company culture, and company prosperity levels. The study further looks toward the future of mindfulness in the workplace.

Based on findings throughout the review of literature and within the qualitative data yielded from this case study's interviews, it appears that there is general agreement and subscription to the idea of implementing mindfulness practices into the workplace. However, there exists a palpable hesitance of effort and thus initiation and momentum, especially as it relates to being embedded into the company's culture. Perhaps the surplus of attention, information, and opportunity is overwhelming and perceived as too challenging to navigate. In the event of a strain on resources, the thought of building a wellness program alone may not enter the minds of leaders who are unfamiliar with the benefits of mindfulness and how state of mind influences a host of variables related to the workplace. Also the perceptual polarity that tends to follow mindfulness, wherein an individual is either miserably unhappy or completely enlightened and one with the world, leaves the thought of striving towards absolute bliss proves so overwhelming that the idea stops there.

The tendency of interviewees to list barriers as opposed to successes, when the two questions are interchangeable in essence and allowed responses to be antonymic presents an interesting revelation that the perception of mindfulness and its imposition in the workplace, through the lens of the wellness community, may seem insurmountable. This is the Pygmalion effect at work – in essence, a preconceived notion held being projected into the environment, revealing and reinforcing the very thing one was looking for. This has implications for lack of movement or momentum of this advocacy as the attending audience may retreat in time.

This leads to the discussion of the brand of mindfulness. It is clear that mindfulness in the workplace is stymied in large part because of the language and communication surrounding it. The first barrier is that of definition, which must be broken down into the most succinct, relatable, understandable form. Internal communication and how it is tied to the overall culture is also critical. For example, if the initiative feels forced, it will be received by employees as forceful and thus resisted. If it is given lip service, the same scenario is presented in the form of a surge of initial action followed by a steady trajectory toward inaction. Alternatively, if the suggestion of mindfulness is relayed with enthusiasm and constantly reinforced with optimism, the tone of reception will follow.

Study 3—The Effects of Employee Engagement on Retention at Central State University

Employee engagement has quickly become a foundational component of business success (Mosely, 2011). Employers are rapidly understanding the value of an engaged workforce. This new-found interest has led to an increase in the study of the engagement theory (Mosely, 2011). The notion of employee engagement as a foundational component of business success lends itself to also be applied to other institutions such as higher education. Therefore, I propose a study on the engagement construct at an institution of higher education. The study will evaluate the effects of employee engagement on retention and look to find ways to leverage said engagement to reduce unwanted turnover.

Central State University (CSU) is a historically Black university located in Wilberforce, Ohio; the university is looking to find a link between employee engagement and retention as it has seen a spike in unwanted turnover. Simply stated, CSU is losing talented employees and the leadership team believes that finding ways to reach true employee engagement within the university can solve the issue of unwanted turnover. Through direction from university leadership, the Human Resources Department is seeking ways to become an industry leader in managing, capturing and assessing all things related to engagement in an effort to improve employee retention. The first priority is endeavoring to define engagement at the operational level. Kruse (2012) suggests "Employee engagement is the emotional commitment the employee has to the organization and its goals." This definition will be used throughout this study as the basis of the construct.

Key Indicators of Employee Engagement

This case study employs Fuller's (2014) key indicators to track the latent construct to aid in measuring employee engagement. The key indicators are:

* The amount of work that occurs outside of normal working hours as an indicator of discretionary effort,

* The number of network connections and time spent with people outside of the immediate team or region. Building broad networks beyond core teams is a sign of high engagement,

* The percentage of participation in ad-hoc meetings and initiatives vs. recurring meetings and processes. Participation in only highly structured events can be an indicator of low engagement, and

* Time spent collaborating outside the normal scope of work.

Practicum Roles & Responsibilities

Practicum mentors provide an invaluable source of expert knowledge in the student's chosen topic of study. The purpose of the practicum is to provide applied knowledge on the topic of study in order to provide the student with real-world insight to an area of interest.

The individual that ultimately agrees to accept a student for a practicum experience also assumes an educational role. One person, a Practicum Mentor, must agree to meet with the student periodically throughout their practicum project to provide expertise knowledge, guidance on direction, recommendations for improvement, and additional connections as it is appropriate. The practicum, however, is not meant to burden the mentor with extensive supervisory demands. The roles and responsibilities for students and supervisors are outlined below:

Mentor

- Assist in defining scope and focus of the practicum topic
- Discuss and develop a meeting schedule with the student to provide consistent feedback and insight throughout the project. Holding scheduled meetings is highly suggested, and time commitment will vary depending on the nature of assignments. It is typical to have a minimum of 4 meetings throughout the duration of the practicum course.
- Oversee the student's work, provide feedback, and discuss progress and any issues related to the student's activities.
- Many supervisors also enjoy providing students with broader exposure to their organization through allowing students to participate in and/or observe meetings, setting up informational interviews with colleagues, and providing career development advice.
- Complete a final evaluation form at the end of the practicum after the student presentation and discuss it with the student

Student

- Discuss the scope of the practicum project and topic with mentor
- Provide the start and end dates of the practicum course
- Ask for specific background reading or other information as required
- Discuss her/his work schedule and progress with mentor on a regular basis
- Document her/his involvement in the project(s) to meet practicum hours required (e.g. project activities, report writing, etc.)
- Perform in a manner appropriate to the expectations of the supervisor, adhering to policies and regulations of the organization (including dress code and work hours) and to ethical and professional standards
- Ensure mentor has a copy of the mentor final evaluations to complete at the appropriate time
- Schedule meetings in advance in order to accommodate the schedule of the mentor while also meeting the course required deadlines

Once a student commences his/her practicum, the mentor supports the student's work and learning. The mentor agrees to orient the student to their area of expertise and to meet with the student periodically between the start and end of the course.

During the practicum, the student is responsible for performing according to the finalized, approved project focus and for fulfilling the usual responsibilities of punctuality, accountability, and initiative expected of all Industrial/Organizational psychology practitioners.

The first few weeks of the practicum the student will confirm acceptance of mentorship and provide the ‘Participating Professional Form’ to the course professor. In addition, meetings are recommended to be scheduled in advance in order to meet the project deadlines.

If there are any problems or concerns the course professor listed on the form or the program director is available to meet with the student and/or the student’s mentor at any time during the practicum. If for any reason the student or the mentor is unable to fulfill his or her responsibilities, plans and activities for the practicum may be changed or modified with the approval of the course professor.

Questions, concerns and comments can be directed to:

JoDee Goracke

Program Director, Graduate I/O Psychology

Office: Learning Center 538

Work Phone: 402-557-7831

Email: jgoracke@bellevue.edu

Common Mentor Questions

1. **Do I need to have a degree in I/O to be a mentor?**
   a. No. The only requirement of a mentor is to provide expertise on the student's topic of choice. I/O is a diverse field of study and there are numerous ways in which professionals can support student learning outside of formal academic background.

2. **How much time will it entail to be a mentor to a student?**
   a. The mentor role is not meant to be burdensome with the typical number of meetings ranging from 4-6 for the entirety of the project course. It is asked that you provide advance scheduling for critical deadlines such as the final presentation of the project in order for the student to complete all requirements on time.

3. **What is my role to the student as a mentor to a practicum project?**
   a. The roles and responsibilities are outlined above, but in a more simplistic overview the role of a mentor is to be a sounding board for the student as they learn more about an area of interest. You should help guide students in ways such as: offering applied experience on the research topic, noting trending topics, gaps in the workplace, areas of research, key contacts that might further develop their understanding, and redirect/refocus their project as needed.

Partnering with Organizations

For organizations that would like to partner with the MIOP program to utilize student research projects to tackle real, meaningful, and relevant problems within the organization it is asked that they connect with the program director, JoDee Goracke, at jgoracke@bellevue.edu to help match students and also define a manageable scope of work.

Key items to consider prior to these discussions:

- What area(s) of research your organization, teams, or leaders would be most interested in learning about? What would you do with the knowledge to take action or make decisions?
- Who are the experts internal to the organization that could connect with students to provide organizational insights to these topics, processes, or policies?

Student research

Please note that the purpose of the practicum is to explore real-world topics, complete in-depth research, and gather applied insights. Therefore, the nature of the product of student work is exploratory and not prescriptive. However, there are likely best practice recommendations, and applicable research that can be shared as a product of the work done.