

Interdisciplinarity@WMU- Phase One Planning Template

1. **Brief Overview:** Provide a brief overview of the proposed interdisciplinary initiative. What types of questions would the initiative ask? What types of complex problems would it seek to solve?

Workforce and Organization Development Innovation

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The transforming world of the 2020s is marked by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA). This new environment requires organizational leaders, more than ever, to explore strategies that enhance their adaptive capacity to respond to the emerging era of digitalization accelerated by events such as COVID-19. Our lives are changing at an exponential rate, and the result is a multi-faceted deeply interconnected world that is leading to unprecedented paradigm shifts in the economy, business, and society. Given the confluence of dramatic changes in organizational life and emerging technology breakthroughs such as robotics, the internet of things, biotechnology, materials science, data science and big data, and quantum computing the nature of work and organizing is changing dramatically. Interestingly, reports that stipulate the demand for future jobs highlight jobs such as organizational development specialists, workforce development experts, and digital transformation authorities, in addition to what is apparent—jobs such as data analysts and scientists, big data specialists, and AI learning specialists. With VUCA it is clear that our assumptions about how to develop students who have the knowledge and skills required to develop today's workforce and organizations are being challenged. The purpose of this proposal is to engage faculty from disciplines across the university to discuss the changing nature of organizations, work, and the workplace, and to explore programs that will better prepare students to be successful leaders of development and transformation in a new age of work and organizing.

2. **Impacted units:** What existing units, programs, and colleges would be involved in the proposed initiative? What other possibilities for collaboration across campus or in the broader community might exist now or in the future?

As the fourth industrial revolution emerges, to effectively understand the changing nature of work and organizations multiple disciplines are required. Currently, the study of work and organization development innovation is mostly studied by scholars and practitioners working in the field of organization studies and management, with contributions among psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists. These siloed specializations are limiting how workforce and organization development practitioners are developed and how organizational problems are addressed. Given VUCA, the time is ripe to bring together faculty of programs (both undergraduate and graduate) in psychology, communication, data science, public health, organizational change leadership, workforce education and development, and business administration to discuss work and organization development innovation and to explore how WMU can better prepare students interested in pursuing the “organizational helping professions” as stated earlier, organizational development specialists, workforce development experts, and digital transformation authorities.

3. **Impact on teaching, learning, and curricula:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on teaching, learning, and curricula. How might this initiative help to grow enrollment, including by reaching new audiences of learners through continuing education, dual enrollment, or professional certification? How will the proposed initiative positively impact the training of undergraduate and graduate students? How does it enhance our institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion?

A discussion among the faculty from the disciplines presented in this pitch should generate many ideas about how an initiative that centers on workforce and organization development innovation can positively affect the teaching, learning, and curricula currently in place at WMU. By engaging different disciplines, we can begin to explore how we can shift how we teach, how our students learn, and how to design curricula in efforts to prepare our students for jobs with a high demand for years to come, i.e., workforce development, organizational development, and transformation specialists. Will our students be able to effectively solve organizational problems by completing a program in a specific discipline, for example, psychology or management or education? Interdisciplinary posits “no.” Multiple perspectives are needed to solve the most pressing problems of organizations that students will be dealing with in the future. The suggested interdisciplinary engagement discussed in this proposal could lead to new or merged programs with new audiences, dual enrollment, and professional certifications (e.g., executive coaching, change management) that could help students to develop the needed expertise to successfully develop and educate individuals and groups and advance the organizational strategies, structures and processes needed in a changing world.

4. **Impact on research and creative activity:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on research and creative activity. How will this initiative promote discovery and creative scholarship? How might it result in increased external funding?

This initiative certainly will stimulate research and creative activity that centers on workforce and organizational development innovation. For example, research could:

- Build awareness of the breadth, depth, and velocity of the digital era transformation and its multifaceted impact on the practice of workforce and organization development
- Explore frameworks and methods for researching organizational consulting in the digital era that outlines core issues and highlights possible responses and implications
- Provide a platform from which to inspire research and practice partnerships on issues related to re-imagining the practice of workforce and organization development

Consider the many research questions that could be explored:

Drivers and Effects: What are the key drivers for the changing nature of work? What effect is the changing nature of work and organizations having on societies (e.g., on education, class, equality, etc.)?

Organizational Structure and Culture: How is an organization defined in a digital realm? How are organizational structures and relationships changing? How are organizational beliefs, values, and norms changing?

Nature of Work: How is work changing for individuals? What competencies are required (i.e., cognitive competence)? How is work changing for groups? What competencies are required (i.e., social and interactive competence)? How is the meaning of work changing?

Psychological Contracts: How is the nature of the relationship between the employer and employee changing (i.e., reduced loyalty)?

Workplace: How is the workspace changing? How are technology solutions being applied? How is work carried out?

5. **Efficiencies and/or cost savings:** How might the proposed initiative contribute to increased efficiencies and/or cost savings, for example by reducing administrative positions (e.g. chairs/directors), sharing staff support services and/or by sharing facilities?

There are many opportunities to increase efficiencies and to reduce costs. Depending on the outcomes of the conversations that would take place across the disciplines discussed in this proposal, administrative positions could be reduced, and staff could be shared across the programs. In addition, moving toward self-directed and self-managed teams could eliminate the need for chair positions.

6. **Impact on course offerings and workload:** At present, proposed initiatives will only be feasible and sustainable if they can be supported by existing resources, including instructional capacity, faculty and staff time, and facilities. Will the proposed initiative streamline existing course or program offerings? Could the initiative help create more equitable and sustainable workload for faculty, for example, by reducing the need to offer under enrolled courses, reducing the frequency of course offerings or eliminating the need to teach some courses?

This initiative is certainly feasible and sustainable as it would engage existing resources, including instructional capacity, faculty and staff time, and facilities. An analysis of the programs discussed in this proposal could certainly impact program and course offerings. Programs could be merged and reinvented, and repetitive courses could be eliminated which would reduce the need to offer under enrolled courses and reduce the frequency of course offerings. New courses would also need to be created. More equitable and sustainable workloads would result. All of these issues could be discussed by bringing together the faculty of the programs listed in this proposal and engaging them in round table conversations to break down existing silos and explore how we can offer more interdisciplinary and relevant educational experiences for those students interested in the organizational helping professions.

7. **Additional Information:** What additional information would you like to provide in support of this proposal?

A search in Monster.com generated the following jobs indicating that there is an immediate need to begin a conversation with the faculty of the disciplines discussed in this proposal.

- Training Jobs (1348137 Jobs Found)
- Organizational Development Jobs (70468 Jobs Found)
- Change Management Jobs (47147 Jobs Found)
- Consulting Jobs (28366 Jobs Found)

- Digital Transformation Jobs (13664 Jobs Found)

8. Contact

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