



**Second Annual**

**Advances in Business Education  
Conference**

**2026**

**Proceedings**

© 2026 Lincoln Memorial University

This volume is a compilation of abstracts and presentation summaries from the second annual Advances in Business Education (ABE) Conference. Individual authors retain the copyright to their respective contributions. This document may be shared for educational and non-commercial purposes with appropriate citation.

# Table of Contents

Conference Overview .....	5
Acknowledgements.....	6
Conference Planning Committee .....	7
Keynote Speaker .....	8
Best in Track Awards .....	9
Presentation Abstracts .....	10
Track 1: Pedagogy and Teaching Excellence .....	11
Building a Data-Driven Culture: Using Key Performance Indicators to Strengthen Assessment and Strategic Decision-Making in Business Schools .....	12
Small Tool, Big Impact: Designing a Credit Hour Calculator to Simplify Policy Compliance.....	14
Thinking Fast and Slow in the Age of AI: Implications for Managerial Decision-Making and Managerial Education .....	15
Maintaining Compliance with SACSCOC as a Faculty Member or Academic Administrator.....	17
Educating and Leading in Unprecedented Times: A Participative Discussion Panel ...	18
Sink or Swim: A Fishbowl Discussion Workshop for Developing Risk-Taking and Professional Communication in Introductory Business Courses.....	19
Constructing the Case: An Ethnographic Study of a Faculty Member's First Instructional Case Study in Business.....	21
Making Management Real: Bridging the Theory–Practice Gap with In-Class Exercises	23
Making Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) Real.....	25
Testing the Persistence of Information Cascades using Large Language Model Generative AI .....	26
Real Tools, Real Skills: Embedding Workplace Technologies Across the Business Curriculum .....	28
Cultivating Student Ownership Through Peer-Led Learning: A Cross-Disciplinary Approach in Business Education .....	30
Retrieval-Rich Course Design: Applying Learning Science to Improve Durable Understanding in B. Ed. ....	32

Learning Through Mentorship: Graduate Student Growth in a Community-Engaged Teaching Program.....	34
Bearwear: Student Made, Student Lead Retail.....	36
Alumni as Strategic Partners in Experiential Education: Designing the TEC-USA Advertising Project .....	38
Track 2: Business Research .....	40
Perceptions of Factors from MBA Students at Small Regional Universities that Enhance, Improve, and Impact Individual Behavior as Measured by Environmental Working Scales .....	41
Machine Learning vs. Traditional Benchmarks: Predicting Stock Directional Movement .....	43
10 Common Myths About AI and Managerial Decision-Making.....	45
From Classroom to Company: Closing the AI Skills Gap for Appalachian Businesses and Business Students .....	47
Organizational Culture’s Relationship to Small Business Employees’ Attitudes Towards Artificial Intelligence.....	48
Examining the Effects of Formal and Informal Learning on Employee Attitudes Toward Artificial Intelligence.....	50
Lincoln’s Penny in Transition: Business Practice and Currency Change in the United States.....	53
Track 3: Regional and Community Development .....	55
Federal Funding Outlook FY26: Opportunities to Support Students, Innovation, and Workforce Pathways.....	56
The Changing Face of Accounting.....	58
Track 4: Student Research .....	59
Decentralized Cognition: A Framework for Enhancing Collective Sensemaking with Blockchain Federated Technology .....	60
Music for the Sale: Cognitive and Economic Considerations for Background Music in Advertising .....	62

# Conference Overview

The Second Annual Advances in Business Education (ABE) Conference was held on May 21–22, 2026, at Lincoln Memorial University in Harrogate, Tennessee. Hosted by the LMU School of Business, the ABE Conference exists to promote teaching excellence, scholarly inquiry, and regional engagement through innovation and collaboration in business education.

With a focus on fostering meaningful dialogue among educators, researchers, students, and industry professionals, the conference welcomed more than 70 attendees representing 11 institutions from across the Appalachian region and beyond.

The event was structured around four key tracks:

- **Pedagogy and Teaching Excellence:** Showcasing innovative teaching methods, instructional technologies, assessment practices, and strategies designed to enhance student learning and engagement.
- **Business Research:** Presenting theoretical and applied research focused on advancing knowledge, informing practice, and addressing emerging challenges within business and society.
- **Regional and Community Development:** Exploring the role of higher education and business organizations in fostering economic development, workforce advancement, community engagement, and regional prosperity.
- **Student Research:** Highlighting student-led scholarship and providing undergraduate and graduate students with opportunities to present their work, receive feedback, and engage with faculty and peers.

In addition to scholarly presentations, attendees participated in networking opportunities, collaborative discussions, and special conference events. These activities further strengthened connections among educators, researchers, students, industry leaders, and community stakeholders.

The ABE Conference reflects the LMU School of Business's mission by serving the Appalachian region through academic excellence, innovative pedagogy, theoretical and applied research, and community-engaged scholarship. By facilitating the exchange of ideas, experiences, best practices, and research findings, the conference seeks to enhance the quality and accessibility business education while contributing to the social and economic development of the communities it serves.

## **Acknowledgements**

The organizers of the Advances in Business Education (ABE) Conference extend our sincere gratitude to our presenters, attendees, keynote speaker, peer reviewers, sponsors, and volunteers whose contributions helped make this year's conference a success. The exchange of ideas, research, and best practices shared throughout the conference significantly enriched both the event and these proceedings.

We are especially grateful to our sponsors whose generous support helped make the conference possible. We extend special recognition to Technology for Energy Corporation (TEC-USA), our Title Sponsor, for its leadership and commitment to advancing business education throughout the region. We also thank our additional sponsors, including Ball Realty, Bodyswaps, Cengage, McGraw-Hill, Pearson, and Peregrine Global Services. Their investment in business education, student success, and professional development is deeply appreciated.

We also wish to acknowledge the unwavering support of the Lincoln Memorial University administration, faculty, and staff, whose dedication to academic excellence, innovation, and regional engagement continues to strengthen the mission of both the university and the LMU School of Business.

## **Conference Planning Committee**

The success of the Advances in Business Education (ABE) Conference was made possible through the dedication and collaboration of the following individuals:

- Dr. Kelsey Metz – Conference Chair, Program Co-Chair, and Proceedings Editor
- Dr. Joshua Ray – Program Co-Chair
- Dr. Richard Lane – Program Co-Chair
- Ms. April Anderson – Conference Operations Coordinator
- Dr. Lisa Cox – Conference Planning Support
- Ms. Barbara Hipsher – Conference Planning Support
- Mr. Ethan Dyer – Conference Planning Support

# Keynote Speaker

Dr. C. Allen Gorman

Associate Professor of Management, University of Alabama Birmingham

Chief Science Director, Personality Pool



Dr. C. Allen Gorman is an Associate Professor of Management in the Collat School of Business at UAB, where he teaches classes in Leadership and Human Resource Management. Dr. Gorman is an Associate Editor at Leadership and Organization Development Journal and Organization Management Journal, and he is on the editorial boards of Human Performance, Journal of Business and Psychology, and the Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development. In addition to his academic role, Dr. Gorman provides consulting services within the domains of human resource management and organizational development, particularly in the areas of employee selection, performance management, and leadership development. His expertise and experience make him a sought-after speaker and consultant in the field.

## Best in Track Awards

We are pleased to recognize the following individuals for their outstanding contributions in each of the conference tracks:

- **Best in Pedagogy & Teaching Excellence:** Dr. Melinda Turner
- **Best in Business Research:** Dr. Jenae Matikke
- **Best in Regional and Community Development:** Dr. Bob Thomas
- **Best in Student Research:** Mr. Adam Brambley

Their exceptional work exemplifies the mission of the Advances in Business Education (ABE) Conference to promote innovation, scholarship, and excellence in business education.

## **Presentation Abstracts**

## **Track 1: Pedagogy and Teaching Excellence**

# **Building a Data-Driven Culture: Using Key Performance Indicators to Strengthen Assessment and Strategic Decision-Making in Business Schools**

**Ms. April Anderson, Lincoln Memorial University**

Business schools are increasingly expected to demonstrate accountability and continuous improvement in ways that align with accreditation expectations, institutional strategic plans, and evolving workforce needs. Similarly, many institutions struggle to translate large volumes of assessment data into actionable insights that inform decision-making and operational improvement. This presentation contributes to the Pedagogy & Teaching Excellence track of the Advances in Business Education (ABE) Conference by presenting a practical framework for integrating Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) into a structured reporting process that supports continuous improvement, faculty engagement, and strategic alignment in business education programs.

The primary purpose of this presentation is to demonstrate how business schools can move beyond compliance-oriented assessment practices toward a more integrated and data-inundated culture of decision-making. Specifically, the presentation introduces the development and implementation of an Internal Assessment Report (IAR) as a complementary tool to the traditional Outcomes Assessment Report (OAR). While the OAR focuses primarily on student learning outcomes and curricular effectiveness, the IAR expands the scope of assessment by incorporating operational and strategic performance indicators that reflect broader institutional priorities and programmatic goals.

The approach presented in this session is grounded in applied assessment practice within a school of business that maintains multiple accreditation requirements and institutional reporting obligations. The methodology involves identifying meaningful KPIs aligned with the business school's strategic plan and key performance indicators across areas such as student success, program quality, enrollment trends, faculty engagement, and external benchmarking measures. These KPIs are then systematically compiled into an annual Internal Assessment Report that allows leadership and faculty to monitor trends, evaluate progress toward strategic objectives, and identify opportunities for improvement. The report structure emphasizes clarity, accessibility, and consistent reporting practices so that assessment results can be effectively shared with stakeholders across the institution.

Key innovations discussed in the presentation include strategies for selecting relevant KPIs, aligning assessment metrics with accreditation expectations, and creating reporting structures that support evidence-based planning. The presentation will also highlight how consolidating multiple data sources into a single report can improve transparency and streamline annual reporting processes with business faculty. By organizing performance indicators within a cohesive framework, the Internal Assessment Report enables business schools to track progress toward strategic goals while

simultaneously supporting accreditation documentation and continuous improvement initiatives.

The implications of this work extend beyond compliance with accreditation standards. By developing a centralized and accessible reporting mechanism for KPI data, business schools can cultivate a culture in which faculty and administrators regularly engage with assessment evidence to guide program enhancement. This approach is particularly valuable for institutions serving regional communities or operating with limited resources, where efficient data use and clear performance monitoring are essential for sustaining program quality and responsiveness to workforce needs. Ultimately, the framework offers a scalable model that business schools can adopt to promote collaboration among faculty and administrators and reinforce a culture of continuous improvement in business education.

## **Small Tool, Big Impact: Designing a Credit Hour Calculator to Simplify Policy Compliance**

**Mr. Richard Bradley, Lincoln Memorial University**

This session presents a case study in designing a lightweight credit hour calculator that translates regulatory definitions into a consistent, easy-to-use compliance tool. Designed as a practical tool for faculty, curriculum committees, and administration, the calculator translates abstract policy into actionable guidance, making it easier to align course design with compliance standards. By guiding faculty and using estimates tailored to the “average student,” the tool enhances transparency, reduces credit hour assignment guesswork, and promotes consistency in credit hour assignment across academic programs.

# **Thinking Fast and Slow in the Age of AI: Implications for Managerial Decision-Making and Managerial Education**

**Dr. Petra Brnova, Lincoln Memorial University**

**Dr. Daniel Solon, Lincoln Memorial University**

This presentation integrates perspectives from strategic management and economics to examine how artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping managerial decision-making and, by extension, the design of managerial education. Positioned within the Pedagogy & Teaching Excellence conference track, the work addresses a growing challenge for business educators: preparing students to exercise sound judgment in environments where human cognition, organizational strategy, and economic decision processes are increasingly intertwined with algorithmic tools. The topic is particularly salient for institutions operating in resource-constrained regions, where AI-enabled tools may expand access to high-quality experiential learning and decision-support capabilities.

The purpose of this research is twofold. First, it revisits Daniel Kahneman's dual-process theory of cognition, known as intuitive (System 1) versus analytical (System 2) thinking, to explore how AI-based decision-support systems interact with, augment, or potentially distort these cognitive processes in managerial contexts. Rather than treating AI as a direct analogue to human cognition, the study conceptualizes AI as a tool that can approximate analytically intensive outputs at speed, thereby altering when and how managers and students engage in deliberate reasoning. Second, the research draws on insights from the heuristics and complexity literatures to identify decision environments in which AI support is likely to enhance judgment and those in which reliance on AI may be less effective or even counterproductive.

Methodologically, the study combines conceptual analysis with qualitative evidence drawn from classroom interventions piloted in undergraduate and MBA-level management courses. These interventions include AI-supported case analyses, decision simulations contrasting human-only, AI-only, and hybrid human-AI decision processes, and structured reflective decision journaling aimed at fostering metacognitive awareness. Student and instructor feedback will be analyzed to identify patterns in perceived learning value, changes in decision framing, and the development of strategic and economic reasoning capabilities.

Expected insights from this work suggest that AI tools can compress analytically demanding tasks, which may both support and inadvertently discourage sustained deliberative thinking if used uncritically. Preliminary classroom observations indicate that AI is most pedagogically valuable in complex, information-rich decision environments where structured analysis is required, while overreliance on AI in fast-moving or intuition-dependent contexts may undermine judgment. Students exposed to hybrid decision-making exercises are expected to develop clearer awareness of when to rely on intuition,

when to slow down for deeper analysis, and when to leverage AI as a complementary decision aid.

The implications for business education are substantial. Rather than focusing solely on technical AI literacy, curricula should emphasize cognitive complementarity, the disciplined integration of human judgment and machine-supported analysis. By reframing dual-process theory for the AI era, this work offers educators actionable strategies to enhance decision quality, strengthen strategic thinking, and prepare students for leadership in increasingly algorithmic organizational environments.

**Keywords:** artificial intelligence, dual-process theory, managerial decision-making, strategic reasoning, economic reasoning

# **Maintaining Compliance with SACSCOC as a Faculty Member or Academic Administrator**

**Dr. Jacob Carver, Lincoln Memorial University**

**Dr. Robert J. Stubblefield, Lincoln Memorial University**

Maintaining compliance with an institutional accrediting agency (like SACSCOC) is crucial for higher education institutions. This allows higher education institutions to be eligible for Title IV funding (financial aid). After a brief overview of SACSCOC standards pertaining to faculty, the presenter will provide practical tips for faculty members and academic administrators to help their institutions maintain compliance with SACSCOC standards.

# **Educating and Leading in Unprecedented Times: A Participative Discussion Panel**

**Dr. Eva Cowell, University of Tennessee – Knoxville**

**Dr. Joshua Ray, Lincoln Memorial University**

**Ms. Cheri Jones Flynn, Carson-Newman University**

These are unprecedented times in which we are living. As educators we are navigating through situations that are throwing even seasoned and tenured professors through a loop. Whether it is the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), continual changes in federal mandates or regulations, loss of funding, elimination of departments or positions, splintering and loss of communities we are a part of-due to division or turn in organizations, it is difficult to find footing and meaning for many in the industry.

People are leaving the profession at a high rate, in part due to rampant grade inflation, political pressures abound both internally and externally to the organization, and AI has literally changed the landscape of instruction. These are just a few situations that may be creating failure of value alignment for many. This panel will discuss how we, as individuals, are coping and what do we use to mediate our struggles. The purpose is to establish a safe place for participants to discuss what we are currently going through and share strategies. There is power in discussion- be it the act of venting or sharing, realizing you aren't alone in the situation, and hearing how others are coping with similar situations. This information/discussion can be used as a resource for participants in current and future situations.

This panel would act as a guided discussion of the participants. 1. The panel will summarize the objectives of the session. 2. The panel will ask participants what is concerning to them in the current climate. 3. The "Session List" of concern from the participants will be created. 4. The Session List will be cross-referenced to prepared potential topics (as listed above). 5. From the initial discussion the group would choose the top three to four topics to work through. Depending on size of participant group we will either break into groups before sharing discussion-or the entire group will work through all. 6. Participants will be provided with a recap of the session via email after the session, so they can keep the contacts they have made as well as the strategies discussed.

The leaders aren't presenting any formalized answers for any of these situations, but as we know, even programmed solutions are situation dependent. The outcome is to leave participants with knowledge that can be applied going forward as well as potentially creating a network and community of support, that isn't organization dependent-rather one created on shared experiences and concerns.

# **Sink or Swim: A Fishbowl Discussion Workshop for Developing Risk-Taking and Professional Communication in Introductory Business Courses**

**Ms. Ashley Dotson, University of Pikeville**

Introductory business courses play an important role in shaping how students communicate professionally, yet many students enter these courses hesitant to speak, participate, or take risks. Fear of public speaking, uncertainty about professional expectations, and discomfort with feedback often lead to passive classroom engagement. These challenges are particularly evident among first-generation, rural, and underrepresented students who may have limited prior exposure to professional environments. When students stay passive, they miss out on the very skills they need to succeed in the workplace. This interactive workshop introduces a “fishbowl” discussion model as a practical, low-cost strategy for increasing engagement, confidence, and communication competence through structured risk-taking.

The purpose of this workshop is to actively demonstrate how fishbowl discussions can be used to transform classroom participation. Rather than describing the strategy in theory alone, participants will experience the fishbowl model as it is implemented in an introductory business course. During the session, attendees will participate in a live fishbowl discussion using a business-relevant prompt. A small group of volunteers will form the inner discussion circle, while remaining participants observe from the outer circle using guided observation prompts focused on communication behaviors, participation strategies, and professionalism. Roles will rotate briefly to illustrate how the model ensures equal participation and reduces anxiety over time. Following the demonstration, participants will engage in a facilitated reflection process focused on both student learning and instructional application.

The fishbowl model demonstrated in this workshop emphasizes intentional scaffolding. Early discussions are designed to be low-stakes opportunities to normalize discomfort and risk-taking, while later discussions increase expectations for depth, professionalism, and leadership. This session draws on instructor observations, informal assessment data, and student feedback collected across multiple sections of BUS 105 – Nature of Business to illustrate the effectiveness of the approach.

Key innovations of this pedagogical strategy include the use of structured observation to support hesitant speakers, the normalization of productive discomfort as a learning tool, and the alignment of discussion activities with real-world business communication expectations. Students exposed to this model demonstrate increased willingness to speak in class, greater confidence in articulating ideas, and improved ability to think on their feet and defend a position. From an instructional perspective, the fishbowl format increases accountability, deepens engagement, and helps create a safe, collaborative classroom culture that encourages students to take educational risks.

The impact of this approach extends beyond the classroom. Fishbowl discussions help students develop transferable skills such as active listening, professional discourse, and adaptability in unfamiliar environments. These skills are particularly valuable in regions where students may have limited access to professional networks or experiential learning opportunities. Utilizing this approach in the classroom does not require expensive resources or technology; all you need is a well-structured prompt and a bit of floor space.

Participants in this workshop will leave with ready-to-use materials, including setup instructions, sample prompts, observer checklists, reflection questions, and tips for adapting the model to different class sizes and disciplines. By experiencing the fishbowl process firsthand, attendees will see how this “sink or swim” model challenges students to take communication risks in a structured, supportive environment. Instead of avoiding participation, students learn to speak up, defend ideas professionally, and engage confidently in the types of discussions they will face in the real, risky world of business.

# **Constructing the Case: An Ethnographic Study of a Faculty Member's First Instructional Case Study in Business**

**Ms. Cheri Jones Flynn, Carson-Newman University**

## Purpose and Objectives:

Business case studies are recognized as a cornerstone pedagogical tool in business education due to the ability to bridge theory and practice through detailed, contextualized narratives of organizational decision-making. Despite their prevalence in business school classrooms, relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to the process of case authorship itself - particularly when experienced faculty members venture into case writing for the first time. This autoethnographic study examines my experience as a long-time accounting faculty member with over 20 years of traditional academic teaching, scholarship, and service who is now preparing, writing, and publishing her first instructional case study. This research aims to clarify the knowledge, challenges, and learning processes involved in crossing this disciplinary boundary.

## Methodology:

This study employs analytic autoethnography which is particularly appropriate for studying academic practice where insider knowledge is essential for understanding tacit dimensions of scholarly work. Three data sources are employed in triangulation:

1. A reflective research journal as the primary data source with daily/weekly entries documenting thoughts, decisions, challenges, and learning moments recorded immediately after key activities (artifact review, writing sessions, feedback discussions)
2. Process documentation - including all drafts of the case and teaching notes, correspondence with interview subjects, editors, and reviewers, submission materials and editorial decisions, and calendar data showing time allocation, and
3. Artifacts - including published guidelines from case publishers, sample cases used as models, feedback from colleagues who reviewed drafts, and student responses from pilot-tests.

## Key Insights:

This research exemplifies the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning by examining pedagogical practice through systematic inquiry. More specifically, case writing is positioned as a legitimate form of scholarly work worthy of methodological reflection. While extensive resources exist on using cases in the classroom, the craft of case authorship remains largely transmitted through mentorship, editorial feedback, and trial-and-error. By documenting this learning process, this research details the competencies, challenges, and developmental stages involved in becoming a case author. Finally,

autoethnography remains underutilized in business scholarship. This study may provide direction to faculty and students who are considering similar methodological expansions.

Impact and Implications:

The study's findings will have practical value for faculty considering case writing, administrators supporting pedagogical scholarship, and case teaching organizations seeking to expand their author pool. More broadly, it demonstrates the value of turning our scholarly methods back on our own academic practices and using the tools of ethnography to better understand the work of education itself.

# **Making Management Real: Bridging the Theory–Practice Gap with In-Class Exercises**

**Mr. Aaron Fraustro, Lincoln Memorial University**

In management education, foundational concepts such as motivation, efficiency, coordination, and teamwork are often difficult for students to understand through didactic methods alone. Unlike the natural sciences, which benefit from established laboratory coursework and hands-on experimentation, management courses are often taught through abstract models and lectures that can feel disconnected from real-world organizational settings. As a result, students may understand theories at a conceptual level but struggle to see how those ideas operate in actual practice. This challenge can be more pronounced at universities or institutions with fewer resources, where access to costly simulations or external experiential learning opportunities may be limited. Accordingly, the primary purpose of this presentation is to demonstrate how well-designed classroom activities can enable students to experience management concepts rather than hear about them through lectures or case studies. These activities are intended to complement traditional instruction by making abstract concepts more tangible, observable, and meaningful for undergraduate learners.

The presentation centers on two in-class activities currently used in an introductory management course. The first activity, the Cup Stacking Motion Study, is inspired by the early motion studies of Frank and Lillian Gilbreth and introduces process improvement through a timed team challenge. Students begin by completing a baseline task, then identify sources of inefficiency such as wasted motion or poor coordination. After redesigning their workflow, teams complete a second trial to compare results and measure performance gains. This activity helps students move beyond abstract discussions of efficiency by engaging in hands-on problem solving and experiencing the principles of continuous improvement in practice. The second activity, the Card Tower Reinforcement Challenge, draws on foundational ideas from behavioral psychology and reinforcement theory. Student teams complete the same construction task under different feedback conditions, including continuous, intermittent, non-contingent, or no reinforcement. Through direct participation, students observe how variations in feedback influence persistence, communication, and overall team performance. Rather than memorizing reinforcement concepts, students experience firsthand how managerial approaches to feedback and motivation shape worker behavior and performance outcomes.

This presentation aligns with the Pedagogy & Teaching Excellence track of the Advances in Business Education Conference by showing how structured, low-cost in-class management activities can help students bridge the gap between theory and practice. Methodologically, the session adopts a pedagogical demonstration approach rather than a traditional empirical research design. Emphasis is placed on activity structure, facilitation, real-time performance measurement, and guided debriefing. Attention is also given to how

instructors can use structured reflection to help students connect classroom experiences to broader management concepts. The impact of these in-class management activities lies in both their accessibility and adaptability. They require minimal materials, can be implemented within a single class period, and work well across a range of course formats. By offering a practical, replicable teaching model, this session seeks to support a more engaging, practice-oriented approach to business education that is attainable for instructors and institutions of varying sizes and resources.

# **Making Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) Real**

**Dr. Richard Lane, Lincoln Memorial University**

Recent federal guidance and accreditation standards have elevated Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) as a defined requirement for high-quality online and hybrid education. While the intent of RSI is to ensure meaningful faculty to student engagement, many instructors struggle to move beyond compliance-driven checklists toward interaction that is pedagogically sound, sustainable, and authentic. This presentation examines the core requirements of RSI, including instructor-initiated engagement, timely and substantive feedback, and ongoing academic interaction, and situates them within established learning theories such as social constructivism, cognitive presence, and learner motivation.

Building on both regulatory guidance and classroom practice, the session presents innovative and evidence-informed strategies faculty can use to meet and exceed RSI expectations without increasing burnout. Examples include structured instructor presence models, AI-supported feedback workflows, guided discussion facilitation techniques, short-form video and audio interventions, experiential simulations, and reflective feedback loops that reinforce learning outcomes. Special attention is given to distinguishing substantive interaction from mere activity frequency and to designing interaction that aligns with course modality, discipline, and student demographics.

Participants will leave with a practical framework for operationalizing RSI, adaptable templates for course design, and concrete examples of how purposeful interaction can enhance student engagement, persistence, and learning while remaining compliant with evolving regulatory and accreditation expectations.

# Testing the Persistence of Information Cascades using Large Language Model Generative AI

Dr. Corey Pendleton, Lincoln Memorial University

Large language models (LLMs) are increasingly becoming embedded in education as tools for tutoring and problem-solving. This paper uses the behavioral economics concept of information cascades to design classroom experiments to determine how emerging group-chat features of generative LLMs, such as ChatGPT, create an environment of cognitive offloading in which students, whether intentionally or unintentionally, withhold private information from the group when the LLM contradicts them. Group chat is a novel instructional environment because the LLM's responses serve as a visible public signal that students jointly observe, discuss, and often treat as authoritative, which can alter willingness to voice disagreement and reshape what participants choose to contribute. The core premise of this paper is that learners face a utility-maximization and cost-minimization problem in which the LLM can reduce the effort costs of searching for information and externalizing their reasoning. This paper assumes that a reduction in effort costs leads to offloading cognitive tasks from students to LLMs, resulting in reduced conceptual understanding, diminished error detection, and poorer retention of the material presented. In a group setting, an LLM serves as a public anchor signal for information, especially when it provides information early in the chat, before participants have adapted to established information and formed strong opinions. The public anchor may conflict with private information held by the students, who may strategically withhold it, either because they infer that the LLM must "know better," because social conformity discourages dissent, or because the reputational risk of being wrong in public outweighs the benefit of challenging the group's direction. This experiment further hypothesizes that the LLM is not a neutral information channel. Even if students do dissent from the information provided by the LLM, there is a risk that the LLM may be overly sycophantic and affirm the student's information regardless of the accuracy of the information, thereby functioning as an amplifier that converts an erroneous idea into a new anchor for the group. This is particularly pertinent, as it is unclear whether LLMs will remain neutral, agree with a single student, or defer to groupthink when generating tokens. The proposed contribution of this paper is a theory-driven experimental design that treats the LLM as an endogenous social signal generator and asks if the group chat feature of LLMs improves learning or creates information cascades that spread misinformation. The research design uses repeated randomized classroom experiments in which students complete structured analytic research tasks in small groups using a shared LLM chat, with groups assigned to one of three conditions that vary in instructor involvement. The first setting is an unmoderated condition where students interact freely without instructor involvement. The second setting is a lightly moderated condition in which the instructor intermittently prompts for justification and alternative hypotheses. The third environment is a highly moderated condition in which the instructor imposes structured checkpoints that require participants to articulate their private reasoning before consulting the LLM and to surface disagreement explicitly. The levels of instructor involvement are designed to

have a second “expert opinion” to which students may or may not anchor. Outcomes will be measured through the accuracy of group solutions, how students respond to public information, persistence of any misconceptions, frequency and timing of corrections, and behavioral indicators of private information suppression, complemented by coding of chat transcripts for patterns such as early anchoring, deference to the LLM, and instances where the LLM mirrors or validates incorrect claims. Observing when individuals do or do not reveal private information in an LLM-mediated group setting has value beyond classroom learning, as the same behavioral mechanism governs performance in firms where teams must aggregate dispersed knowledge under time pressure and where generative AI can be used for training. The implications of this paper are practical and transferable. If light moderation by an intellectual authority reduces information cascades, instructors and corporate trainers can enhance critical thinking and AI literacy while preserving the efficiency gains of generative AI, which is especially relevant for regions and institutions with limited access to specialized faculty support, tutoring infrastructure, or small class sizes.

*JEL classification:*

C92, D80, D81, D83, D90

*Keywords:*

Generative AI, Behavioral Economics, Information Cascades, Social Learning, Field Experiment

Statements and Declarations: I have not received any funding for this research. I have no competing interests. Large language artificial intelligence models were used in this research.

# **Real Tools, Real Skills: Embedding Workplace Technologies Across the Business Curriculum**

**Dr. Sheree Schneider, Lincoln Memorial University**

Modern business students must be prepared to collaborate digitally, analyze information, and make informed decisions using the same technologies that shape modern workplace practice. As employers increasingly expect graduates to use digital collaboration platforms, data-analysis tools, and AI-supported decision aids effectively, educators must design learning experiences that build these competencies in authentic, pedagogically sound ways. This presentation examines a curriculum-wide pedagogical approach that integrates real-world business technologies into both face-to-face and online courses to strengthen applied learning, decision-making, and career readiness.

The purpose of this presentation is to show how embedding workplace technologies across the curriculum can enhance student engagement, improve analytical and collaborative skills, and better align business education with employer expectations. The session draws on a systematic literature review of research on digital collaboration, data literacy, AI-supported learning, and experiential pedagogy in business education. Findings from the literature are synthesized with practical classroom applications to illustrate how technology-integrated assignments support both qualitative and quantitative decision-making skills.

The systematic literature review highlights several consistent themes. First, employers across industries report that new graduates often lack competence with the digital tools that structure modern business workflows, including platforms such as Microsoft Teams, shared drives, project boards, and Excel. Second, communication skills, particularly the ability to write concise emails, present ideas clearly, and communicate appropriately for different audiences, remain among the most valued competencies. Third, research emphasizes the importance of critical thinking, data interpretation, and evidence-based decision-making, especially as organizations adopt AI-supported tools. Finally, studies consistently suggest reliability, coachability, and collaborative professionalism as differentiators in early-career success.

These findings align closely with the needs of students in regions with limited access to business education resources, such as rural Appalachia. Many students enter business programs with uneven exposure to workplace technologies, limited professional networks, and varying levels of digital readiness. Embedding real-world tools directly into the curriculum helps close these gaps by giving students structured, supported opportunities to practice the skills employers expect.

Examples from multiple course levels illustrate how this approach functions in practice. Early-level projects introduce students to collaborative data analysis and digital communication using Microsoft Teams and Excel. Students learn to coordinate tasks, share files, manage deadlines, and interpret datasets within a professional workflow

environment. As students advance through the curriculum, assignments incorporate AI-supported analytics, structured problem-solving frameworks, and business simulations that require iterative decision-making and strategic reasoning. These experiences help students evaluate AI-generated insights alongside human judgment, assess the reliability of information, and integrate multiple data sources into coherent recommendations.

Together, these assignments create a progression of real-world skill development that mirrors modern business practice. Students move from foundational digital collaboration to advanced analytical reasoning, gaining confidence with tools and processes that define contemporary organizational life. By the time they reach upper-level courses, students are able to apply a combination of technical competence, communication skills, and collaborative problem-solving to complex, ambiguous business challenges.

The impact of this curriculum-wide approach is significant. Students report greater confidence with workplace technologies, stronger communication skills, and a clearer understanding of how business decisions are made in professional contexts. Faculty benefit from a scalable, adaptable framework that can be implemented across modalities and course levels. For institutions serving rural or resource-limited regions, this approach offers an accessible way to strengthen workforce readiness and expand students' professional opportunities.

This presentation offers practical strategies for embedding workplace technologies across the business curriculum, grounded in both research and classroom experience. Attendees will leave with adaptable assignment designs, scaffolding techniques, and implementation insights that support teaching excellence and prepare students for the expectations of today's data-driven business environment.

# **Cultivating Student Ownership Through Peer-Led Learning: A Cross-Disciplinary Approach in Business Education**

**Dr. Jake Simms, Lincoln Memorial University**

**Ms. Joy Williams, Lincoln Memorial University**

This presentation examines the implementation and outcomes of a peer-led learning framework across marketing and sport management courses, demonstrating how strategically designed peer interactions can enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. Grounded in project-based learning (PBL) and experiential learning, our approach positions students as active co-creators of knowledge rather than passive recipients, fostering internal ownership that supports both academic performance and personal development.

Within the broader experiential and PBL framework, course-specific, theory-driven models guided the design of peer-led learning structures. In marketing courses, social interdependence theory informed assignment design by emphasizing positive interdependence, shared goals, and individual accountability within group learning contexts. In sport management courses, self-determination theory served as a guiding framework, prioritizing autonomy, competence, and relatedness as key drivers of student motivation and engagement. Together, these theories aligned with peer-led learning by supporting collaboration, intrinsic motivation, and meaningful student ownership.

Drawing on Kolb's experiential learning cycle and constructivist principles that emphasize learning through doing and reflection, we designed complementary pedagogical interventions that integrate three core peer-led elements: peer teaching, collaborative projects, and student-led meetings and discussions. These components work synergistically to create learning environments where students assume responsibility for both their individual learning and their peers' development.

In both courses, students engage in structured peer teaching sessions that require them to develop and deliver content to classmates, prompting deeper understanding and pedagogical clarity. Collaborative projects challenge student teams to navigate ambiguity, negotiate roles, and produce professional-quality deliverables that mirror industry expectations. Student-led meetings and discussions further shift classroom dynamics, with faculty transitioning from information providers to facilitators who guide rather than direct the learning process.

Our implementation has yielded measurable improvement across multiple indicators. Student engagement increased through higher participation rates and more sophisticated class discussions. Academic performance data indicate stronger retention and application of course concepts, while course evaluations reflect increased student satisfaction. Qualitative feedback highlights students' recognition of their learning ownership, increased confidence, improved teamwork skills, and stronger connections to course material.

This presentation will provide insights into experiential learning and PBL while illustrating how theoretical frameworks, social interdependence, and self-determination can be used to design peer-led learning structures. Attendees will gain examples of assignments, evidence of learning outcomes through performance data and student testimonials, and strategies for implementing peer-led learning in their courses. We will address challenges in shifting from instructor-centered to student-centered pedagogy and offer solutions developed through collaborative practice.

# **Retrieval-Rich Course Design: Applying Learning Science to Improve Durable Understanding in B. Ed.**

**Dr. Melinda Turner, Lincoln Memorial University**

Business education increasingly requires students to integrate complex concepts, think strategically, and apply knowledge to ambiguous, real-world scenarios. Yet many students continue to rely on passive study behaviors—such as rereading, highlighting, and reviewing slides—that give the appearance of comprehension without producing durable learning or meaningful transfer. This presentation addresses this challenge by introducing an evidence-based, retrieval-rich approach to course design grounded in adult learning theory and cognitive psychology. The session will demonstrate how applying research-supported strategies such as retrieval practice, interleaving, spaced repetition, schema activation, and cognitive load management can significantly improve students' long-term understanding and their ability to apply business concepts in professional contexts.

The purpose of this presentation is to provide business educators with a practical framework for redesigning instruction in ways that directly strengthen how students learn. Rather than focusing solely on content delivery, the approach emphasizes creating structured opportunities for students to generate knowledge, connect new concepts to prior schemas, and practice cognitive skills repeatedly over time. By modeling the design decisions behind retrieval-rich learning environments, the session aims to equip instructors with actionable methods they can implement across disciplines including accounting, marketing, leadership, data analytics, entrepreneurship, and management.

The session will outline a clear set of objectives. First, participants will understand why retrieval-based learning strategies are more effective than traditional, passive approaches commonly observed among business students. Second, attendees will learn how to evaluate their own courses to identify opportunities for embedding retrieval practice and related principles. Third, they will examine models for redesigning lectures, assignments, and assessments to support long-term retention and deeper cognitive processing. Finally, attendees will explore strategies for teaching students how to adopt more effective study behaviors that align with the demands of business curricula and the realities of modern workplaces.

While this presentation is practitioner-oriented, it draws from established methodologies in course redesign, faculty development, and student learning assessment. Examples from implementation across multiple professional programs illustrate how learning science principles can be operationalized at the course and institutional levels. Through these examples, educators will see how formative assessment, low-stakes retrieval opportunities, and structured spaced practice schedules can be incorporated without increasing workload or sacrificing curriculum coverage. Evidence from faculty development initiatives demonstrates how these changes can improve student engagement, elevate performance, and reduce misconceptions and learning gaps.

Key innovations presented in the session include a retrieval-rich instructional design blueprint, adaptable templates for in-class and online retrieval activities, and models for sequencing concepts to reduce cognitive load and strengthen schema formation. The presentation also introduces a flexible spaced-repetition scheduling structure that can be implemented in learning management systems to support ongoing practice and reinforcement.

The impact of this work extends beyond individual courses. By improving how students learn, business programs can strengthen overall academic performance, increase readiness for internships and early career roles, and expand access to high-quality business education, especially in regions with limited educational resources. Retrieval-rich course design supports equity by giving all learners, regardless of prior preparation, tools to succeed through evidence-based strategies rather than intuition or trial and error.

This session ultimately contributes to the field of business education by providing a practical, research-aligned approach for elevating pedagogy, strengthening student learning outcomes, and equipping educators with tools to prepare students for the complex problem-solving required in today's business environments.

# **Learning Through Mentorship: Graduate Student Growth in a Community-Engaged Teaching Program**

**Ms. Taylor Weber, University of Tennessee – Knoxville**

**Ms. Brianne McGee, University of Tennessee – Knoxville**

## **Relevance to the ABE Conference Tracks**

This presentation aligns with the *Pedagogy & Teaching Excellence* and *Regional & Community Development* tracks of the Advances in Business Education (ABE) Conference. The Peer Writing Mentors (PWM) project demonstrates an innovative, community-engaged approach to experiential learning that supports graduate student development while addressing local educational needs. Although situated in an educational mentoring context, the project foregrounds competencies central to business education, including leadership, communication, collaboration, reflective practice, and program design. The work is particularly relevant to regions with limited access to educational and professional development resources, as it highlights how university–community partnerships can be leveraged to create mutually beneficial learning opportunities.

## **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this presentation is to examine how participation in a community-involved teaching and learning program contributed to graduate students' professional growth and to identify design considerations for improving future iterations of similar programs. The presentation has two primary objectives. First, it explores how graduate student mentors perceived their growth in instructional confidence, adaptability, communication, and mentoring skills as a result of their participation in the PWM project. Second, it analyzes participants' reflections on what they appreciated about the program and what they wished had been different in order to generate practical insights for running effective, sustainable community-engaged learning initiatives. Together, these objectives contribute to ongoing conversations in business education about experiential learning models that bridge theory and practice while fostering community impact.

## **Methodology**

The PWM project was implemented over the course of one academic semester and paired graduate student mentors with elementary-aged students for structured, recurring writing support sessions. Following program completion, graduate student participants engaged in post-program interviews and provided written responses reflecting on their experiences. These data sources were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis to identify patterns related to professional growth, mentorship development, collaboration, and program design. Particular attention was paid to participants' perceptions of how the program supported their learning and how structural elements of the program influenced their experience.

## **Key Findings and Innovations**

Findings indicate that graduate students experienced meaningful growth across multiple professional domains. Participants described increased confidence in facilitating learning, greater responsiveness to student needs, and an enhanced ability to adapt instruction in real time. Many also reported growth in communication, leadership, and reflective practice—skills that are highly transferable across educational, business, and organizational contexts. An important innovation of the PWM project was its emphasis on reciprocal learning, positioning graduate students not only as mentors but also as learners who benefited from sustained engagement with community partners.

Analysis of participant feedback revealed several program strengths, including the relational nature of the mentoring experience, opportunities for autonomy, and the authenticity of working with real students in a community setting. Participants also identified areas for improvement, such as clearer expectations, more consistent communication, and additional preparatory support. These insights offer concrete guidance for refining community-involved teaching and learning programs.

### **Impact and Implications**

This work advances knowledge and practice in business education by offering a model for experiential, mentorship-based learning that supports professional growth while addressing community needs. The findings underscore the value of centering participant voice when designing and refining community-engaged initiatives. For regions with limited access to educational and professional development resources, the PWM project illustrates how partnerships between universities and local communities can foster innovation, build capacity, and create sustainable learning opportunities. The presentation concludes with practical implications for educators and program leaders seeking to design impactful, community-centered experiential learning programs within business education and related fields.

# **Bearwear: Student Made, Student Lead Retail**

**Dr. David Wetzel, University of Pikeville**

This presentation explores the design, implementation, and pedagogical outcomes of a student-run, student-made retail management course developed for undergraduate entrepreneur students. The course departs from traditional lecture-based instruction and instead immerses students in a predominantly hands-on, experiential learning environment in which they collectively operate a real retail enterprise. Students are responsible for planning, launching, and executing on-campus pop-up retail events as well as engaging in community-based selling opportunities, providing them with authentic exposure to the complexities of modern retail and entrepreneurship without the financial risk of raising or investing personal capital.

Grounded in experiential and project-based learning principles, the course positions students as both learners and operators. From the first weeks of the term, students work collaboratively to define a shared retail vision, develop product themes, and establish operational systems. Rather than relying on hypothetical case studies, students are required to engage in real-world entrepreneurial activities, including cold-call sales to potential partners or customers, brand storytelling, and the creation of a personal business web presence. These activities require students to articulate value propositions clearly, adapt messaging to different audiences, and respond to rejection and uncertainty—core entrepreneurial competencies that are difficult to replicate in simulated environments.

A defining feature of the course is its role-based organizational structure. Students assume responsibility for key functional areas such as accounting and finance, inventory management, sourcing and supplier relations, administration, marketing, e-commerce, and social media. These roles are stationary over the term, however students experience both specialization and cross-functional collaboration. Faculty serve primarily as facilitators and mentors, offering strategic guidance, accountability frameworks, and reflective prompts, while decision-making authority remains largely with the students. This structure mirrors startup and small business environments, fostering ownership, peer accountability, and leadership development.

The course also integrates design thinking and product development by requiring students to conceptualize and produce themed merchandise aligned with the brand narrative they create. Through iterative prototyping, pricing decisions, and merchandising strategies, students confront trade-offs related to cost, quality, aesthetics, and market demand. The inclusion of e-commerce platforms alongside physical pop-up retail exposes students to omnichannel retail strategies and highlights the interconnected nature of digital presence, logistics, and customer engagement.

Assessment in the course prioritizes learning through doing and reflection. Student performance is evaluated based on role execution, team contribution, professional deliverables (such as websites and marketing campaigns), and reflective analyses that connect experience to entrepreneurial theory. Preliminary outcomes indicate increased

student engagement, stronger self-efficacy in entrepreneurial skill sets, and deeper understanding of retail operations compared to traditional classroom-based approaches.

This presentation contributes to the Pedagogy & Teaching Excellence tract by offering a replicable model for experiential entrepreneurship education that balances student autonomy with instructional support. It demonstrates how a student-run retail course can provide a comprehensive entrepreneurial experience—encompassing strategy, operations, sales, and branding—while mitigating financial barriers. Attendees will gain insight into course design, scaffolding strategies, challenges encountered, and lessons learned, with the goal of inspiring innovative, practice-driven approaches to teaching entrepreneurship and retail management.

# **Alumni as Strategic Partners in Experiential Education: Designing the TEC-USA Advertising Project**

**Ms. Joy Williams, Lincoln Memorial University**

**Mr. Mitch Turner, Technology for Energy Corporation (TEC-USA)**

**Dr. Kelsey Metz, Lincoln Memorial University**

Experiential learning has become an essential component of contemporary business education as institutions seek to better prepare students for increasingly complex and collaborative professional environments. This roundtable presentation discusses the design and implementation of an experiential consulting project that leveraged alumni partnerships to create meaningful, real-world learning opportunities for students. By engaging an alumnus as an organizational partner, the project connected classroom learning with industry practice while strengthening alumni relationships with the Lincoln Memorial University School of Business. Collaboration with the university's advancement office also allowed the initiative to support broader alumni engagement strategies while expanding opportunities for student–industry interaction.

The roundtable reflects on the implementation of a semester-long experiential consulting project conducted in partnership with an alumnus serving as president of TEC-USA. The project focused on the development of product advertising campaigns for the organization and gave students the opportunity to apply marketing and advertising concepts within an authentic organizational context. In this initiative, the organizational partner presented a real advertising strategy challenge for student teams to analyze and address. Students were required to develop campaign concepts that supported both market penetration and market development strategies.

The consulting engagement was structured throughout a full academic semester and incorporated scaffolded submissions and structured checkpoints to guide student progress. Student teams worked collaboratively to define advertising objectives, conduct market and consumer analysis, and design comprehensive product advertising campaigns for TEC-USA. The campaigns required students to develop messaging strategies, media plans, and promotional concepts aligned with strengthening the firm's position within existing markets or expanding awareness among new market segments. Iterative instructor feedback ensured that student work maintained academic rigor while aligning with expectations commonly associated with professional consulting and marketing engagements. The project culminated in formal presentations delivered to the organizational partner.

The project was implemented within an online course environment that intentionally mirrored the collaborative dynamics of modern workplaces. Students worked in distributed teams, coordinated tasks through digital collaboration tools, and participated in scheduled virtual meetings with instructors designed to simulate supervisor

check-ins. These elements allowed students to develop competencies related to remote collaboration, professional communication, and project management within a technology-mediated environment.

Finally, the initiative generated meaningful benefits for both students and the organizational partner. Students completed the course with portfolio-ready deliverables, including advertising campaign materials and strategic recommendations, while also gaining documented experience working with an external organization. These outcomes strengthened student resumes and enhanced career readiness. The roundtable will share best practices and lessons learned from the project's implementation and invite discussion on strategies for integrating alumni-supported experiential consulting projects into business curricula.

## **Track 2: Business Research**

# **Perceptions of Factors from MBA Students at Small Regional Universities that Enhance, Improve, and Impact Individual Behavior as Measured by Environmental Working Scales**

**Dr. John Alpers, Tusculum University**

Problems can occur when individual goals and the various factors employed in institutions such as engagement, leadership style, and reward systems do not direct employee's behavior as intended toward organizational objectives. Proper coordination and alignment of these factors and intended outcomes are essential for both the participants and organization to achieve mutually desired outcomes. Those organizations that can more effectively identify what influences their employees have a much greater chance of efficiently using their resources to achieve organizational objectives.

Organizations spend an enormous amount of time, money, and exert large amounts of effort in trying to direct people to act in a certain way (Babcock, 2005; Herzberg, 1986; Mir et al., 2002; Nohria et al., 2008). Those organizations which are more effective in using their resources to produce the desired outcomes will have a competitive advantage over those that cannot (Lussier, 2011; Williams, 2013). This competitive advantage can help the organization in many different ways as they compete for business.

Some organizations can develop dysfunctional behavior within the group due to the levels and types of engagement, leadership methods, and reward systems employed (Armandi, Oppedisano, & Sherman, 2003; Babcock, 2005; Pearson, 2010). As departments and/or areas compete for limited resources, this struggle for resources can create harmful behavior to the organization as a whole (Hammer & Champy, 2009; Pearson, 2010). The problem revolves around the perception of the various factors such as engagement, leadership, and reward systems, which are employed (Bouckenoghe et al., 2015). The question is defining whether these systems motivate people toward the desired and intended behavior.

Research has suggested people are motivated by five basic emotional drives (Nohria et al., 2008). These five areas include the drive to:

- Acquire, (such as the means to buy things)
- Obtain things (the means to get things by other methods)
- Form bonds, such as between people and groups
- Comprehend, to find answers to questions
- Defend, so as to protect what we have (Nohria et al., 2008).

These drives could motivate and direct behavior if correctly aligned. "Unless you discover what really matters to your employees, you'll never know if your compensation and benefits outlays are really working for you" (Babcock, 2005, p. 15). Identifying these motivators is critically important to all organizations. "[A] motivated workforce means

better corporate performance” (Nohria et al., 2008, p. 1). The objective of any of these factors such as engagement, leadership, and reward systems, is to motivate all affected parties toward organizationally desired outcomes.

Aligning the behavior of their employees with the desired outcomes for an organization is critical to the success of all parties (Babcock, 2005; Herzberg, 1986; Mir et al., 2002; Nohria et al., 2008). The goal is to find out which of the factors mentioned have the strongest relationship to employee behavior. Identification of these relationships can help focus time, effort, and money into those rewards having the largest impact on employee behavior (Babcock, 2005). These savings can be evidenced in retention, for example,

The costs to replace an employee vary by their earning level, so training costs also vary. The Sasha Corporation averaged the results of 15 studies that determined average costs to replace an \$8 per hour employee, determining an average cost of \$9,444.47 per turnover. Even when the 33 percent of estimates with the highest prices were removed from calculations, replacement costs were \$5,505.80 per turnover. (Hettmannsperger, Müller, Scheid, & Schnotz, 2011, p. 10)

The objective for all organizations is to align the employee behavior with institutional goals so all parties are working toward the same goal or objective (Hettmannsperger et al., 2011). If goals are in alignment, people will be motivated to stay at their jobs and work toward achieving the mutually beneficial goals. Since motivated people are less likely to change jobs (Nohria et al., 2008), the result is cost savings as organizations do not need to train new workers.

The purpose of this study was to measure the relationship between the perceptions of graduate students toward the factors of engagement, leadership methods, and rewards systems employed by organizations to enhance, improve, and impact individual behavior as evidenced by students’ cumulative scores on the work environmental scale

# Machine Learning vs. Traditional Benchmarks: Predicting Stock Directional Movement

Dr. Chitsun Chen, Lincoln Memorial University

**Track Relevance:** This research is submitted for the Business Research track, as it explores the application of advanced machine learning techniques to financial market analysis and tactical investment strategies. The study contributes to the field by evaluating how computational intelligence can enhance traditional financial modeling and decision-making processes.

**Purpose and Objectives:** The primary objective of this research is to rigorously investigate the efficacy of supervised machine learning algorithms in predicting the directional movement of stock prices. Traditional forecasting approaches often struggle to capture the non-linear dynamics and inherent volatility of financial markets. This study specifically focuses on Support Vector Machines (SVMs) to identify promising algorithms for stock price forecasting and to estimate prediction accuracy across multiple short-to-medium-term horizons. Furthermore, the research aims to conduct a comparative analysis against a traditional Buy and Hold benchmark to ascertain the practical utility of these models for tactical equity positioning.

**Methodology:** The study utilizes a dataset comprising daily closing prices of FedEx Corporation (FDX) from February 3, 2004, to December 31, 2023. Following standard machine learning practices, 75% of the data was allocated for training and 25% for out-of-sample testing. The predictive model incorporates a comprehensive set of eight features: fundamental indicators (book-to-market ratio and market capitalization), market benchmarks (S&P 500 index level), and technical indicators (13-day, 34-day, 55-day, and 200-day moving averages, plus trading volume). A total of 23 classification algorithms were implemented and compared, including decision trees, discriminant analysis, k-nearest neighbors, and various SVM kernels (linear, polynomial, and Gaussian). The modeling framework assesses directional accuracy (+1 for upward movement, -1 for downward) across forecasting horizons ranging from 10 to 50 days.

**Key Findings:** The empirical results demonstrate that non-linear kernel-based classifiers, specifically the Cubic SVM and Fine Gaussian SVM, consistently deliver the most stable and accurate performance. These models achieved directional accuracy exceeding 50% for horizons up to 40 days, with the Cubic SVM peaking at 67.8% accuracy at the 45-day horizon. Comparative analysis reveals that the Fine Gaussian SVM yields superior predictive accuracy over the Buy and Hold benchmark in short-term windows (10-40 days). Additionally, the study found that a parsimonious 3-feature model (excluding technical indicators) could rival or even outperform the 8-feature configuration, suggesting that fundamental and market-level indicators carry significant predictive power when paired with appropriate kernels.

**Impact and Implications:** This research advances knowledge in business education by providing a replicable methodology for applying machine learning to real-world financial challenges. It underscores the importance of non-linearity in market relationships and the need for horizon-specific model selection. For practitioners, these findings validate the potential of SVM-based models to support tactical asset allocation. Crucially, the discovery that effective models can be built using a reduced set of static, publicly available features has significant implications for business education and practice in regions with limited access to high-frequency or expensive financial data resources. By demonstrating that parsimonious models can achieve competitive results, this study promotes more accessible and inclusive quantitative financial research.

# 10 Common Myths About AI and Managerial Decision-Making

**Dr. Cheryl R. Hild, Lincoln Memorial University**

**Dr. Joshua Ray, Lincoln Memorial University**

As improved decision-making is an essential aspect of managerial development, this work is relevant for business research to promote making better decisions supported by artificial intelligence (AI) tools. As AI becomes increasingly embedded in managerial decision processes, it is often promoted as an improvement to decision quality by correcting human biases, automating judgments, and simplifying complex choices. This paper challenges these assumptions by examining ten common myths surrounding the use of AI in decision-making. The overarching myth is that known fallacies in human decision-making are inherently mitigated through AI use, often framed by positioning AI as a neutral “devil’s advocate.” AI does not make decisions nor improve them autonomously; it reshapes the decision environment by ranking, scoring, predicting, and generating output based on explicit and implicit design choices. These outputs are governed by objective functions, loss functions, training data, and proxy metrics. Despite being constrained by design choices and technical structures, AI outputs are often interpreted as objective evidence and affirming judgment to support a decision. This interpretation has given rise to several persistent myths about the role of AI in decision-making.

The ten myths examined include:

- I. AI improves decision quality through Large Language Models.
- II. AI effectiveness is primarily a technology-choice decision.
- III. AI makes and improves decisions effectively if provided the “right” prompt.
- IV. Once deployed, AI improves its output on its own through refined information.
- V. The expected or “most likely” outcome is the most useful.
- VI. If I explain my objective clearly and thoroughly, AI will understand it.
- VII. AI outputs are mostly correct, and I’ll recognize or know when they’re wrong.
- VIII. AI results remain valid and are refined as conditions change.
- IX. AI simplifies complexity and replaces judgment.
- X. AI offsets known human decision fallacies.

A central premise of this paper is that AI systems do not think or reason critically to replace human experience, judgment, contextual understanding, or the ability to reason causally. Without governance, retraining, and human intervention, errors propagate, biases accumulate, and decision quality degrades over time. Both generative and agentic AI systems favor what is most probable, typical, or historically consistent, often at the expense of novelty, weak signals, and contextual dissimilarities. As a result, AI outputs may

appear locally plausible while being globally incorrect, particularly under conditions of uncertainty or incomplete input specification.

This research is based on a structured review of literature on managerial decision-making theories and AI's operational systems that transform inputs into outputs. The findings integrate insights into the foundational technical structures and methods of AI, established principles and theories on managerial decision-making, and AI's performance and strengths in a decision process. This research integrates evidence across these three domains to refute the overarching assumption of imminent machine cognition and provide evidence-based rebuttals to each myth. The conclusions emphasize that effective AI-augmented decision-making requires sustained and significant human involvement to frame problems, interpret outputs, evaluate consequences, and intervene as assumptions and environments evolve.

# **From Classroom to Company: Closing the AI Skills Gap for Appalachian Businesses and Business Students**

**Mr. David Hite, Tusculum University**

This applied research examines how higher education institutions can close the artificial intelligence skills gap facing Appalachian businesses while simultaneously preparing college business students for AI-enabled careers. Drawing on a regional, practice-based model, the study documents a multi-layered approach that integrates curriculum design, workforce training, experiential learning, and industry partnerships. Key initiatives include collaboration with a local AI training academy, Cloudwise AI Training Academy, engagement with both global and regional AI service firms such as Intico.ai, and the delivery of community-based AI workshops for small businesses, supervisors, and nonprofit leaders.

The research also explores the role of applied internships, including specialized AI marketing and operations placements, which allow students to work on real business problems using contemporary AI tools. Central to the model is the development of a Minor in Applied AI in Business, designed to align employer needs with student learning outcomes through hands-on labs, ethical AI instruction, and applied problem solving across marketing, operations, and management contexts.

Findings suggest that intentional alignment between academic programs, workforce training partners, and regional employers can accelerate AI readiness, reduce adoption barriers for small businesses, and create a sustainable talent pipeline for rural economies. The study offers a replicable framework for Appalachian institutions seeking to bridge education, industry, and community impact through applied AI education.

# **Organizational Culture's Relationship to Small Business Employees' Attitudes Towards Artificial Intelligence**

**Dr. Jenae Matikke, Johnson University**

## **Relevance**

This study is relevant to business research as it provides insights into the relationship between organizational culture factors and small business employees' attitudes towards AI. Additionally, these findings can help small business owners in the United States understand their firm's organizational culture factors and AI adoption preparedness based on employee attitudes. Furthermore, this research is relevant because it provides students with a unique understanding of the relationship between the specific organizational culture factors assessed in this study and employee attitudes towards AI.

## **Purpose and Objectives**

This study was grounded in Tornatzky & Fleischer's Technology Organization Environment (TOE) framework, which was created in 1990 to better understand the process of technological adoption. The adoption process of newly developed technologies has been observed through the lens of the TOE framework for decades; therefore, the original TOE model has evolved with technological developments. Moreover, some researchers have expanded the TOE model to include culture as an important factor of the organizational context of TOE. The culture of an organization is recognized as a critical factor that influences its success or failure and its ability to accomplish its objectives. Furthermore, organizational culture has been identified as crucial for stimulating innovation and for determining whether a firm benefits from it.

To prevent monopolistic behavior, positively impact the United States' economy and GDP, and compete with larger businesses, small businesses must adopt AI. Unfortunately, many businesses are not reaping the anticipated rewards of AI. Moreover, their obstacles tend to be more organizational than technological. The process of adopting AI is complex and impacted by the individual employee.

Various qualitative studies have identified the impact of cultural factors on AI adoption, and firms that approach AI adoption from an organizational perspective rather than solely a technological one are more likely to reap the benefits of their investment in AI. This research study makes a unique contribution to the field of business by quantitatively assessing the relationship between specific organizational culture factors and small business employees' attitudes towards AI.

## **Methodology**

This research was grounded in a thorough analysis of pertinent literature around TOE, organizational culture, and AI. Next, a conceptual model was formed to depict the

relationships hypothesized in this study. Then, a survey containing validated instruments was developed, approved by the IRB, and deployed. Next, a multivariate statistical analysis was performed on the collected survey data using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Lastly, conclusions were drawn from the analysis results, and recommendations for future studies were provided.

### **Key Findings**

AI adoption differs from other technological adoptions because AI is more complex, and successful adoption is also influenced by employees, especially in small firms. Businesses that focus on the organizational components of AI adoption are more successful than those that focus only on the technological components. Several organizational culture factors have a strong relationship to small business employees' attitudes towards AI.

### **Impact and Implications**

These research implications will provide empirical evidence about the relationship between organizational culture factors and small business employees' attitudes towards AI. Furthermore, this study will provide small business owners, managers, and employees with insight into which organizational cultural factors are most strongly associated with positive attitudes towards AI among employees. This study can positively impact small businesses in the United States by contributing knowledge that facilitates more successful adoption of AI, thereby positively impacting the United States economy and GDP. Additionally, this research will provide students with a foundational understanding of organizational culture, AI, and the TOE framework.

# **Examining the Effects of Formal and Informal Learning on Employee Attitudes Toward Artificial Intelligence**

**Dr. Kelsey Metz, Lincoln Memorial University**

**Dr. Lisa Cox, Lincoln Memorial University**

**Dr. Joshua Ray, Lincoln Memorial University**

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become an integral component of contemporary organizational systems, and has shaped how work is performed, decisions are made, and value is created (Jarrahi, 2018; Azzam et al., 2022). Advances in machine learning, large language models, and automation have accelerated AI integration across industries, yet organizational outcomes remain inconsistent. While some organizations experience productivity gains and improved decision support, others encounter employee resistance, anxiety, and underutilization of AI-enabled systems (Kim et al., 2025). These mixed outcomes suggest that employee evaluations of AI are central to understanding adoption and sustained use, rather than technological capability alone (Čaić et al., 2019; Ninaus et al., 2015).

Organizational learning provides an important lens for examining how employees develop perceptions of emerging technologies. Formal learning, such as structured training, offers intentional exposure to AI systems and their organizational implications, while informal learning develops through everyday work activities including peer interaction, observation, and experimentation (Marsick & Watkins, 2015; Grosemans et al., 2020). Both forms of learning are cumulative and reflect the frequency of engagement over time rather than discrete events (Levitt & March, 1988; Fiol & Lyles, 1985). At the same time, organizations increasingly operate across traditional, remote, and hybrid work settings, which differ in communication patterns, access to support, and opportunities for learning (Surma et al., 2021). Despite this complexity, limited empirical research has examined work-related learning, employee attitudes toward AI, and work setting within a unified analytical framework.

Drawing on organizational learning theory and technology adoption research (Basten, 2018; Davis et al., 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2003), this study examines how formal and informal work-related learning predict employees' positive and negative evaluative responses toward AI and whether these relationships vary across work settings. Using a quantitative survey design, data were collected from 252 full-time U.S. employees working in traditional, remote, and hybrid arrangements. Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to assess measurement quality and test structural relationships, and multi-group analyses were conducted to compare effects across work settings (Hair et al., 2022).

Results indicate that work-related learning significantly predicts how employees evaluate AI in the workplace. Formal learning frequency demonstrated a positive effect on positive attitudes toward AI ( $\beta = 0.365$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ) and a stronger positive effect on negative attitudes toward AI, including anxiety and perceived job insecurity ( $\beta = 0.432$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ). These findings suggest that structured learning intensifies employees' engagement with AI by strengthening favorable evaluations while simultaneously heightening awareness of potential risks and implications. Informal learning frequency was positively associated with positive attitudes toward AI ( $\beta = 0.203$ ,  $p = 0.015$ ) and was not significantly related to negative attitudes ( $\beta = 0.005$ ,  $p = 0.942$ ), indicating that experiential learning embedded in daily work supports favorable perceptions without increasing concern. Multi-group analyses revealed no statistically significant differences in these relationships across traditional, remote, and hybrid work settings.

This study contributes to the AI and organizational learning literature by integrating multidimensional work-related learning attitudes toward AI constructs within a single empirical framework. The findings highlight the importance of sustained learning environments that balance capability development with attention to employee concerns and offer practical insight for organizations seeking to support effective and responsible AI integration.

## References

- Azzam, M., & Beckmann, R. (2022). How AI helps to increase organizations' capacity to manage complexity—A research perspective and solution approach bridging different disciplines. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, 71, 2324-2337. DOI: [10.1109/TEM.2022.3179107](https://doi.org/10.1109/TEM.2022.3179107)
- Basten, D., & Haamann, T. (2018). Approaches for organizational learning: A literature review. *Sage Open*, 8(3), 2158244018794224. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018794224>
- Čaić, M., Mahr, D., & Oderkerken-Schröder, G. (2019). Value of social robots in services: social cognition perspective. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 33(4), 463-478. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-02-2018-0080>
- Davis, F. D., Bagozzi, R. P., & Warshaw, P. R. (1989). User acceptance of computer technology: A comparison of two theoretical models. *Management science*, 35(8), 982-1003. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.35.8.982>
- Fiol, C. M., & Lyles, M. A. (1985). Organizational learning. *Academy of management review*, 10(4), 803-813. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1985.4279103>
- Grosemans, I., Smet, K., Houben, E., De Cuyper, N., & Kyndt, E. (2020). Development and validation of an instrument to measure work-related learning. *Scandinavian Journal*

- of *Work and Organizational Psychology*, 5(1), 1-16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/sjwop.99>
- Hair, J., Hult, G., Ringle, C. & Sarstedt, M. (2022). *A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM)* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Jarrahi, M. H. (2018). Artificial intelligence and the future of work: Human-AI symbiosis in organizational decision making. *Business horizons*, 61(4), 577-586. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2018.03.007>
- Kim, Y., Jeong, H., Chen, S., Li, S. S., Lu, M., Alhamoud, K., ... & Breazeal, C. (2025). Medical hallucinations in foundation models and their impact on healthcare. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2503.05777*. LeCun, Y., Bengio, Y., & Hinton, G. (2015). Deep learning. *Nature*, 521(7553), 436-444.
- Levitt, B., & March, J. G. (1988). Organizational learning. *Annual review of sociology*, 14(1), 319-338. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.14.080188.001535>
- Marsick, V. J., & Watkins, K. (2015). *Informal and incidental learning in the workplace (Routledge Revivals)*. Routledge.
- Ninaus, K., Diehl, S., Terlutter, R., Chan, K., & Huang, A. (2015). Benefits and stressors—Perceived effects of ICT use on employee health and work stress: An exploratory study from Austria and Hong Kong. *International journal of qualitative studies on health and well-being*, 10(1), 28838. <https://doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v10.28838>
- Park, J., Woo, S. E., & Kim, J. (2024). Attitudes towards artificial intelligence at work: Scale development and validation. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 97(3), 920-951. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12502>
- Surma, M. J., Nunes, R. J., Rook, C., & Loder, A. (2021). assessing employee engagement in a post-Covid-19 workplace ecosystem. *Sustainability*, 13(20), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su132011443>.
- Venkatesh, V., Morris, M. G., Davis, G. B., & Davis, F. D. (2003). User acceptance of information technology: Toward a unified view. *MIS quarterly*, 425-478. <https://doi.org/10.2307/30036540>

# **Lincoln's Penny in Transition: Business Practice and Currency Change in the United States**

**Dr. Christi H. Sayles, Lincoln Memorial University**

The continued use of the one-cent coin (penny) in the United States has long been questioned as its purchasing power has declined and the cost of producing it has steadily increased. These concerns reached a critical point in 2025, when the U.S. government announced the cessation of new penny production for circulation, signaling a significant shift in the future role of the coin in everyday commerce. Although pennies remain legal tender, the end of production has accelerated ongoing changes in how businesses manage cash transactions and low-denomination pricing. This scoping review synthesizes existing academic literature, government publications, industry analyses, and grey literature to examine when and why the penny is being functionally eliminated from U.S. cash transactions, which types of businesses continue to rely heavily on cash, what options are available to businesses as pennies disappear from circulation, and the legal and practical challenges associated with these changes. Particular attention is given to whether experiences in the Appalachian region differ from national patterns.

Using a scoping review methodology, sources were identified and charted to capture a broad range of perspectives on penny use, cash handling practices, and business responses to declining coin circulation. Rather than evaluating outcomes or effectiveness, this review emphasizes developments surrounding the 2025 production halt while mapping key themes, identifying convergence across sources, and highlighting gaps in the existing literature, particularly at the regional level.

The reviewed literature suggests that the move away from the penny is driven by a combination of economic, technological, and behavioral factors. These include the rising cost of minting relative to face value, the declining use of cash and coins by consumers, increased adoption of electronic payment systems, and the operational inefficiencies associated with handling very low-value currency. The 2025 halt in penny production reflects these broader trends and is expected to further reduce the availability of pennies in circulation over time.

Despite these shifts, several business sectors continue to conduct a substantial share of transactions in cash. Convenience stores, laundromats, small independent retailers, personal service providers, and certain food and beverage establishments often serve customers making low-dollar purchases or relying on cash due to preference, habit, or limited access to banking services. For these businesses, eliminating the penny presents both operational opportunities and challenges.

Common strategies identified in the literature include rounding cash transaction totals to the nearest five cents, adjusting pricing structures to avoid penny amounts, encouraging non-cash payments, and implementing exact-change or coin-minimization policies. However, businesses must also navigate legal and practical considerations,

including consumer protection regulations, transparency in pricing and rounding practices, employee training, point-of-sale system limitations, and customer perceptions of fairness.

Evidence specific to the Appalachian region is limited, but available sources suggest that higher levels of rurality, infrastructure constraints, and greater reliance on cash in some communities may shape how penny elimination is experienced locally. The lack of detailed regional research represents a notable gap. Overall, this scoping review highlights the complexity of the penny's decline in U.S. commerce and underscores the need for further research on regional variation, equity implications, and business adaptation as penny circulation continues to diminish.

## **Track 3: Regional and Community Development**

# **Federal Funding Outlook FY26: Opportunities to Support Students, Innovation, and Workforce Pathways**

**Ms. Natalie Sweet, Lincoln Memorial University**

While federal funding priorities have rapidly evolved over the past year, business educators should be encouraged that opportunities forecasted for FY 2026 emphasize workforce development, innovation, regional competitiveness, and strategic academic–industry partnerships. This landscape presents not only challenges but a variety of underutilized opportunities to secure external resources that directly support and empower students. This presentation examines the FY26 federal funding outlook and provides a strategic framework for business educators who seek to identify and pursue grants that advance student success, institutional mission, and community impact.

This topic aligns with the Regional & Community Development and Business Research tracks of the Advances in Business Education (ABE) Conference by highlighting how external funding can enhance student opportunities and strengthen institutional capacity in regions with limited access to business education resources. Indeed, the primary objective is to demonstrate how attendees can transition from passive observers of federal priorities to active participants in the grants ecosystem. Specifically, the presentation will (1) define key federal funding areas relevant to business education — including workforce development initiatives (e.g., Good Jobs Challenge and implementation grants), small business support, economic development partnerships, and innovation-oriented programs (particularly those tied to artificial intelligence); (2) outline a practical approach for educators to map institutional strengths and student needs to these opportunities; and (3) share tactics for building cross-sector collaborations that strengthen competitive proposals.

Methodologically, this work synthesizes current federal funding program priorities and grant mechanisms with insights from successful proposal strategies and institutional case examples. A comparative funding analysis approach that examines program eligibility criteria, anticipated outcomes, and student-centered deliverables across multiple agencies will be shared with the audience.

The presentation will include a framework for assessing grant readiness and preparing for application within business education units. Key approaches include:

- Opportunity scanning: systematic methods to identify relevant federal NOFOs (Notices of Funding Opportunity) tied to workforce development, entrepreneurship, and regional innovation;
- Proposal alignment tools: techniques for aligning student outcomes (e.g., paid internships, applied research experiences, credential attainment) with evaluation metrics used by federal reviewers;

- Partnership cultivation strategies: guidance on developing collaborations with industry, community organizations, and workforce boards to enhance proposal competitiveness.

The insights shared will help attendees reconceptualize federal grants as multiplier tools for expanding student access to real-world learning, enhancing professional networks, and creating career pathways. Rather than treating grant seeking as ancillary administrative work, this session foregrounds it as a pedagogical and institutional growth strategy that reinforces business education's role in workforce readiness and economic development.

Finally, the presentation will illustrate the impact and implications of engaging with federal funding for business education. Participants will gain actionable knowledge that advances their ability to write competitive proposals, integrate grant-supported activities into academic programming, and demonstrate measurable outcomes for student success. By demystifying the federal funding landscape and offering a roadmap for strategic engagement, this session empowers business educators to secure and deploy external resources that support the larger business education endeavor.

# **The Changing Face of Accounting**

**Dr. Bob Thomas, Lincoln Memorial University**

As a institution in a rural area surrounded by closely spaced small communities, our institution plays a key role in helping to turn out a sufficient number of high-quality accounting graduates well-prepared to take on the challenge of an evolving profession that's experiencing a global talent shortage to meet the needs of our region and beyond. We as educators share a responsibility to forge relationships with businesses professionals in our region and to introduce our students to those connections thereby helping them to forge ties with the profession and the community early on. This study is an examination and exploration of: the shortage of accountants (including Certified Public Accountants/CPAs), current efforts to address the shortage, impacts (and potential impacts or consequences) of said efforts, impacts on the profession of technological advances (including artificial intelligence), and potential changes to college curricula to better prepare students for the changing profession that is accounting. College educators play a key role and are in the best position to help influence and reshape accounting and business program curricula to best prepare the next generations—the future of the profession. In addition to influencing curricula, educators also have vital roles in attracting students to the major/profession and in advising students on choices of electives as well as concentrations/secondary majors/minors and/or advanced degrees that can help them to improve their readiness to enter and advance in the profession while maximizing their value to the profession. This study draws on literature review to provide updates on the state of the profession and initiatives underway while considering the evolution of the profession (and its workforce), fostering ideas and discussion, and suggesting potential opportunities for educators to help their graduates distinguish themselves as uniquely qualified to enter and excel in the profession. Some of the topics covered include the restructured CPA Exam (specializations), the alternative pathway to CPA licensure, trends in accounting, the aging of the profession's workforce (retirement of Baby Boomers), the temporary relief afforded the profession by Baby Boomers working past historical retirement age on a full or part-time basis (although this is a limited reprieve), the need for students to develop increased technological skills (such as: data analytics/artificial intelligence), the value of accounting internships, the need for early and continued involvement in the profession, the need for mentoring relationships (the need to start early as a mentee and then advance to a mentoring role), the need to leverage ties with alumni, the need for students to develop soft skills (networking, public speaking, etc.), etc. Much has been done to address the shortage situation, but more is still needed. All educators are familiar with the concept of continuous improvement, and it's especially relevant to a field such as accounting where a workforce shortage exists and where both accountants and educators must always continue professional development to stay abreast of changing legislation, rules, and standards. Educators must remain ever cognizant of the state of the profession, the workforce shortage, opportunities to help alleviate the shortage, and ways to better prepare our students for the changing face of accounting.

## **Track 4: Student Research**

# **Decentralized Cognition: A Framework for Enhancing Collective Sensemaking with Blockchain Federated Technology**

**Mr. Adam Brambley, Lincoln Memorial University**

## **Relevance**

This research aims to explore how blockchain technology, the technology behind Bitcoin, can be combined with Federated Learning (FL), a privacy-focused AI training technique that allows models to learn from decentralized data without moving data to a central location. Today's information landscape is not only overwhelming in the amount of data but also in the misinformation that runs rampant across physical and digital realms. This study addresses the student track of the ABE Conference, which is student-led research, aiming to enhance data privacy, secure records, and enable collaborative AI development without sharing sensitive information to enhance collective sensemaking.

## **Purpose and Objectives**

This research aims to explore how blockchain technology and federated learning (BCFL) models can enhance collective sensemaking, specifically in organizational contexts. This study aims to offer recommendations to the research community and insights for organizations to improve and enhance organizational sensemaking. This study will contribute to the existing literature on improving organizational collective sensemaking.

This study aims to comprehensively understand how emerging technologies, such as blockchain technology and federated learning, enhance the processes of collective sensemaking through a literature review. If enough existing literature supports this theory, a secondary objective may become necessary. This secondary objective would be to propose a BCFL framework to enhance collective sensemaking.

## **Methodology**

This study will primarily focus on reviewing existing literature to understand how a combination of emerging technologies can comprehensively improve collective sensemaking. Two powerful yet distinct decentralized technologies, such as blockchain and federated learning, are examined to develop a framework that supports and enhances a distributed cognitive sensemaking process. Blockchain provides a foolproof, independent foundation that allows for the creation of a trustworthy ledger of the sensemaking process. In a Blockchain Federated Learning (BCFL) architecture, a novel system is developed that aligns with the needs of collective sensemaking.

## **Key Findings or Innovations**

Initial findings indicate that implementing a Federated Learning (FL) model can eliminate the need for large data centers and allow for a collective intelligence of distributed data without compromising privacy or security. FL can offer powerful benefits, such as enhanced privacy, empowering collaborative learning, and promoting resource efficiency.

As powerful as FL is, it is still susceptible because it relies on a central server to aggregate model updates. The server presents itself as a single point of failure that can lead to privacy and performance bottlenecks. In a BCFL, the blockchain replaces the central server, serving as a decentralized and immutable network.

### **Impact and Implications**

The aim of this study is not only to recognize how a BCFL system can enhance sensemaking but also to propose a BCFL-powered framework to improve sensemaking classifications. This framework will map the features of using BCFL onto the challenges of misinformation, cognitive bias, and information overload to demonstrate how these emerging technologies can be leveraged to create a more resilient and trustworthy ecosystem for sensemaking. The default model in the blockchain space is the Decentralized Autonomous Organization (DAO), which uses smart contracts to encode rules and allow organizational members to make secure collective decisions. A closer look at DAOs reveals several issues that must be addressed for a proper blockchain network to support collective sensemaking.

# Music for the Sale: Cognitive and Economic Considerations for Background Music in Advertising

Mr. Logan Lowery, Cumberland University

**Relevance:** A student-led literature review for the Master of Business Administration program at Cumberland University, this abstract reflects upon the importance of music as a key element in advertising and marketing contexts. Music is a well-known driver of emotion in visual media ranging from full length film to pop-up advertisements. Despite being an effective driver and communicator of emotion music remains underutilized in advertising contexts compared to larger narrative mediums such as film or television. This literature review compiles compelling evidence across existing literature in disciplines such as consumer behavior, cognitive neuroscience, marketing, and economics to examine the strategic application of music in advertising.

**Purpose and Objectives:** The explicit goal of this literature review is to provide marketing practitioners tangible steps to optimizing music as a strategic investment rather than an incidental afterthought. Marketers are faced with managerial decisions regarding the production of brand specific content that involve a multi-medium approach. Music and sonic strategy can create a competitive advantage for brands when thoughtfully applied to marketing campaigns. This review seeks to provide marketing practitioners with the necessary awareness to effectively incorporate musical elements into their advertising by asking the following three primary questions: Does music created or licensed specifically for content produce greater emotional impact (communication of brand personality) and recall (brand salience)? How can marketers strategically use a balance of music editing, licensing, and creation to enhance brand salience? How can marketers make the most of their economic constraints to create the best background soundtrack for an advertisement?

**Methodology:** To answer the above questions a methodological literature review was conducted using the following keywords: *Music, Visual Media, Content Creation, Advertising, Cognitive Musicology, Marketing, Sonic Branding, Neuroscience, Consumer Behavior*. Following abstract and text screening, this database search revealed twenty-five primary inclusions and fifty-two additional supporting references. Criteria for these inclusions ensured that all papers were published between 2000-2025, written in English, empirically measured outcomes of results or provided theoretical framework, peer-reviewed, and related to pairing of multiple senses. The impact that certain musical elements have on consumer emotions and recall in advertisements are discussed in conjunction with psychological and cognitive models before being passed through economic considerations to reveal practical application for marketers.

**Key Findings:** Music can be broken down into structural and non-structural components. Research reveals that the emotional impact of an advertisement can be traced to structural musical components such as tempo, melody, or harmony while specific brand personality can be traced to non-structural elements such as instrumentation, timbre, or

cultural aspects. One key point of examination in this study is the synchronization of musical and visual action through editing choices. The effects of musical fit (such as personality congruence between a brand and musical selection) and timing of a song's structural components (such as the synchronization of musical and visual action) are seen to be the two most impactful dimensions of music in visual media.

Certain economic constraints exist when identifying the best musical fit for a particular advertisement or branding campaign. The three primary approaches to sourcing music are commissioning original music, negotiating synchronization licenses through royalty-free music libraries or individual rights holders, and digital piracy which exposes brands to ethical and legal risks. Marketers must find music that they are legally cleared to use, works with their brand, and works with their specific content choice. All of these considerations incur various time and financial expenses.

**Impact and Implications:** A cost-benefit framework is suggested to assist in managerial decision-making by weighing financial investment against the potential investment value of sourcing music. This leads to practical recommendations that include prioritizing sonic branding within an organization to ensure a higher brand impact, investing in staff with expertise in music production and marketing, and considering catalogue commissioning as a long-term economic strategy. Future research opportunities include the empirical mapping of structural musical components to specific brand personality dimensions, the impact of music saturation in digital and social media environments, and the development of AI-assisted tools for sonic brand management.