

Personal Brands: Scaffolding a Longitudinal Learning Outcome

Abstract

Personal brand development is an important and often underdeveloped skill for business students entering an increasingly competitive workforce. This exercise will overview a scaffolded program learning outcome focusing on personal brand development. Definitions, assignments, and rubrics will be reviewed and discussed at the assessment levels of introducing, developing, and mastering personal brands. The scaffolding technique will be demonstrated as it was applied across a MBA program, utilizing three different courses in order to achieve the desired results in student learning. Participants will be challenged to come up with a draft plan for scaffolding a relevant learning outcome within their own programs.

Key words: Personal Brands, Program Learning Outcome, Scaffolded Assignments

Personal Brands: Scaffolding a Longitudinal Learning Outcome

Introduction. Scaffolding assignments across classes within graduate programs allows for students to fully engage with the learning outcome longitudinally with increasing levels of difficulty starting from introducing the concept, developing it, and then eventually to mastering. For our MBA program, we developed a new learning outcome (LO) centered around developing students' personal brands, using the scaffolding technique starting in the first year of the program (introduced), then reinforced in the first semester of the 2nd year (developed), and finally asked students to align their personal brand with the external environment (i.e., an organization that they would like to work for; mastered). This MBA program uses the cohort method of learning, but this technique could be implemented in non-cohort programs. It is also an in-person program, but the concepts could be used for online programs as well. Further, the personal brand LO being discussed would work best for traditional students with minimal work experience or mid-career; although the methodology for implementing LOs in general would be applicable for a variety of programs. The process and LO would be less effective for executive level graduate programming.

Learning Objectives. The Learning Objectives for this session are two fold. First, we will cover how we intend to teach a new accreditation related Program Learning Outcome (PLO) related to students' personal brands. We will go into detail about the definition of personal brands, why it is important for graduate students to develop them, and how our curriculum integrates personal brands through storytelling pedagogy and related assignments. Secondly, we intend to engage the audience in a deeper understanding of how scaffolding assignments across a program can be used to fully develop important PLOs.

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications. Personal branding is a relatively new form of "marketing communication through which individuals are the marketers and managers of

their own brand” (Girard, Pinar, Lysiak, 2020, pg. 137), using a conscious and intentional effort to create and influence public perception of an individual by positioning them as an authority in their industry, elevating their credibility, and differentiating themselves from the competition, to ultimately advance their career, widen their circle of influence, and have a larger impact (Rangarajan, Gelb, & Vandaveer, 2017). The Personal Brand Competency within our MBA program states that “Students will be able to *design and clearly articulate* their personal brand (i.e., how they express their core ethos that differentiates them professionally).”

Students’ underdeveloped professional identities and feelings of being an impostor pose a critical problem in graduate business education (Girard et al., 2020). The purpose behind this project is that MBA students, within our entry level program that enrolls students with minimal professional experience, should be confident and have a good sense of their personal and professional identity when applying for positions post graduation. They should also have a sense of what sets them apart as candidates on the job market and develop the skills which will help them convince employers they would be valuable employees. This is developed using the theoretically-informed storytelling intervention designed to help shape and reinforce aspects of graduate students’ self views.

In this proposal, we provide a literature review about storytelling, or developing a self-narrative, and how it relates to individual identity, personal reflection, and how it can develop professional skills, such as overcoming the imposter phenomenon; guided by theoretical frameworks of narrative identity (McLean et al. 2020) and multiple identity development (Gee 2000).

Literature Review

Self-Narratives. A narrative is a message format that describes a sequence of events with the purpose of making a point (Bruner, 1990; Weick, 1995). A self-narrative is a story that makes a point about the narrator, and is helpful for understanding and expressing one's identities (Bruner, 1990; Linde, 1993).

Identity and Professional Identity. Generating stories about memorable and significant events as they relate to the self, making sense of them, and connecting them with one's developing identity is a powerful and dynamic mechanism of psychological functioning (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; McLean et al., 2020). *Professional Identity* involves an individual's identification with the duties, responsibilities, and knowledge associated within a professional role, and can lead to improved career success (Miscenko & Day, 2016).

Reflection. The psychological process of reflection is one means by which people make meaning of their self-narratives. While telling stories about the self, reflection, and sense-making are processes that occur innately and spontaneously, they may also be triggered by outside forces: specifically, pedagogical efforts designed to harness and guide these powerful processes. The storytelling assignments described in the current work represent such efforts.

Exercise Overview. This exercise will begin with an overview of PLO personal brands and include a discussion on how we scaffolded assignments in order to achieve the desired results in student learning. Handouts will be given out at the beginning of the session and include: overall timeline of scaffolding assignments with associated level of learning outcome (Appendix A); the three personal branding assignments and their associated rubrics (Appendix B), and resources for implementing the storytelling pedagogy (Appendix C).

Participants will be asked to engage in a “Think/Pair/Share” exercise in which they will attempt to identify a PLO that could be implemented using the scaffolding technique across their programs. Pairing participants to leverage their ability to understand and apply the material in dyads will increase the likelihood that each participant will be able to walk away with an idea of how they could apply similar strategies within their institutions. Ideas will be shared and discussed within the entire group to leverage the experience in the room on resources that could ignite some of the concepts. Due to the depth of discussion and sharing a smaller group of 30-40 would be most appropriate with round tables to enhance dialogue.

Session Description.

- Welcome, Introduction, Overview: 5 minutes
- Question: What are personal brands?: 10 minutes
 - Ask participants to identify/define personal brands
 - Assess who has similar LOs within their programs
 - Why or why not?
- Overview of longitudinal design: 15 minutes (see Appendix A)
 - Discuss impacts of scaffolding LO assignments across programs
 - Introducing, developing, and mastering concepts
 - Review briefly associated assignments and rubrics (see Appendix B)
 - Answer remaining questions
- Think (5 min)/pair (10 min)/share (10 min): 25 minutes (facilitator revolving around answer questions and encouraging engagement)
 - Individual prompt includes:
 - How could you implement something similar in your own institution?

- What program would it be implemented in?
- What LO would you focus on?
- What potential courses could be leveraged for each level of introduction, development, and mastering?
- Pairing to discuss ideas
- Volunteer sharing of ideas/discussion
- End with connecting participants: 5 minutes
 - Share resources that will aid in other's ability to implement ideas at their institutions (e.g., statements of learning outcomes, assignments, rubrics, etc).
Storytelling resources will be used as an example, see appendix C.

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Appendix A - LO implementation timeline

- Spring 2022 (INTRODUCE)
 - Introduction to personal brand concepts (Story Collider workshop)
 - Assignment 1
 - Assessment 1
- Fall 2022 (DEVELOP)
 - Relate to mock interviews
 - Assignment 2
 - Assessment 2
- Spring 2023 (MASTER)
 - Relate to using in career/job seeking activities
 - Assignment 3
 - Assessment 3

Appendix B - Assignments & Associated Rubrics

1. Introduction assignment

People buy branded products or services because they perceive the brand will provide the most benefits for their money. Similar to purchases, people at work or school “buy” your brand when they ask you to join their team and help on various projects. They think you’ll bring value. Much like organizations seek to communicate a brand image that is distinct from competitors, your personal brand image should set you apart from your peers. This assignment is designed to help you start thinking about what your personal brand might be.

Task 1 (Before the Storytelling Workshop):

1. Read the [linked](#) HBR article on re-branding yourself. It’s almost ten years old now and a few of the examples are a little dated, but the concepts are still true today.
2. Think about your own career. What is your current personal brand? What are you known for at work (or at school) right now?
3. Think about your hoped-for next career step? What do you want to be known for? Where would you like to evolve?
4. Identify a step (or a couple of steps) you could kick off now that would start moving your personal brand from where it is now towards what you’d like to be known for in the future.
5. Create a FlipGrid video that’s NO LONGER THAN two minutes (120 seconds) and post it on the course site. video should include:
 - a. Your name
 - b. State your current personal brand image. How do you think others see you, in a professional context? How do you see yourself?

- c. Describe your hoped-for future state. What would you like them to think about you in the future?
- d. State an action or two you want to undertake that you think will help move your personal brand towards your hoped-for future state.

Task 2 (After the Storytelling Workshop)

Understanding effective storytelling will improve your communications in myriad ways. Most directly relevant to the present assignment, you will find yourself in professional situations (networking events, interviews) where you will need to tell stories about yourself. Having a prepared story to tell that illustrates a key point about your personal brand will set you up for professional success.

Task (How): The FlipGrid assignment you completed earlier this week should give you a starting point for this assignment: you have identified the brand you embody or want to work towards. The Story Collider workshop will also help you in developing a story you can tell to illustrate this. This assignment is to finish polishing and to submit a finalized version of your story - both in written and video form.

- Step 1. Start with the general story idea you generated from the storytelling workshop in class that illustrates your personal brand.
- Step 2. Edit the written story "script" until it is polished enough for you to perform at a storytelling event.
- Step 3. Practice performing your story, verbally. Your story should be no longer than 5 minutes.
- Step 4. Record a video of yourself performing the story.
- Step 5. Submit BOTH your written story script and video of your story performance.

Make sure your story contains the follow features (you will receive two points for each item listed below):

Assignment Rubric

- Your submission illustrates something about your personal brand as it applies in a professional domain
- Your submission is a story (and not a fact-based or descriptive message)
- Your submission contains a story arc (features change from the beginning to the end)
- Your submission clearly illustrates why the event in the story matters - what are the stakes? (In other words, why should your audience care - what would go wrong if you don't succeed at the challenge in the story? This is a key characteristic of an engaging story)
- You submit BOTH a written and video version of your story.

2. Developing assignment

Interviews are one of the most heavily weighted, and most important, selection tools companies use to hire successful employees. A sound structured interview with valid and reliable questions is the key for anyone in the human resource area (Campion, Palmer, & Campion, 1997). Additionally, behavioral interviews, ones that ask questions about how an applicant has behaved in different organizational situations (e.g. conflict), are the most effective means to discovering the most meaningful information from candidates (Barclay, 2001).

One of the primary characteristics employers are looking for in potential hires is *organizational fit* (Kristof, 1996). When individuals fit the organization's culture, they are more engaged (Alfes, Shantz, & Alahakone, 2016), have more positive attitudes about their work (Chen, Sparrow, & Cooper, 2016), and experience less job stress, which leads to higher motivation and less turnover (Mackey, Perrewé, & McAllister, 2017). Behavioral interviews are much more likely to provide information about a candidate that will help managers to assess how well they will fit with the organization's culture. They also help to overcome the common challenge that faking has in interviews (Melchers, Roulin, & Buehl, 2020), since the interviewer is asking about behaviors in which they have actually engaged.

Given the importance of interviewing generally, and specifically that of behavioral interviews, it is critical for job seekers to learn how to navigate employee interviews. The present assignment is designed to help students to do that using *Storytelling* principles.

Task: Building on the *Storytelling* strategies presented in the previous semester's Marketing class, students will complete the following project:

- Step 1: Generate a list of 8 – 10 interview questions that are likely to be asked in an interview. Of those, half must be behavioral questions.

- Step 2: Individually, each student scripts out answers to the questions developed in step 1. Using concepts from the previous semester, students are to consider that general story about themselves they would like to use to illustrate why they would be a good person for the job and a good fit.
- Step 3: Students pair up with one other student, who will help them role play a job interview. One student asks the interview questions, and the other provides answers to those questions using the scripts created in step 2. Student pairs then reverse roles so that each student has a chance to complete the mock interview.
- Step 4: Record a video of the interview and submit it for grading.

Assignment Rubric

Students are graded on three criteria: developing questions, the content of their responses to interview questions (scripted), and their presentation/interview skill.

	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Below Expectations	Score
Appropriate Questions / Script [5 points]	All questions were relevant and explained <i>why</i> this story matters. [4 - 5 points]	Most questions were relevant and partially explained <i>why</i> this story matters. [2 - 3 points]	Few questions were relevant and inadequately explained <i>why</i> this story matters.. [0 - 2 points]	
Answers were well thought out and gave the appropriate level of depth. [30 points]	Answers were well thought out, clearly articulated, and gave the appropriate level of depth to answer the question. A compelling “story” was given, that not only matched the question, but also made a strong connection to your individual brand. [20 - 30 points]	Articulates a basic analysis and understanding of the problem from an organizational behavior perspective. Basic description of what went wrong and why those issues are related to the problem was provided. Demonstrates some understanding of course material and how the problem relates to them. [10 - 20 points]	Provides an explanation of some of the major issues and problems from an organizational behavior perspective. Lacked a clear description of what went wrong and why the issues relate to the problem. Demonstrated a lack of understanding of course material and how it relates to the problem. [0 - 10 points]	

<p>Presentation/ interview skill [15 points]</p>	<p>Interview is clear, concise, and articulate. Body language was appropriate to the situation. Language was clear and void of grammatical mistakes. [10 - 15 points]</p>	<p>Provides a basic explanation of how issue(s) could be resolved or done differently. Lacked strong connection to OB topics. Demonstrates basic understanding of course material and how it relates to avoiding the problem. [5 - 10 points]</p>	<p>Lacking an explanation of <i>how</i> the issues could be resolved or done differently. Lacked a connection to OB topics. Showed lack of understanding of course material and connection to the problem. [0 - 5 points]</p>	
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3. Mastering Assignment

Content. Thinking back to your HR class assignment: Utilize a *Storytelling* strategy to come up with a compelling story of your personal brand that you would want to tell during an interview. Telling our stories helps us define ourselves, and telling it to others helps solidify and amplify the effects. You need to match your values and competencies with the priorities of audiences that matter to your career, but you should expect to modify your brand over time given different audiences and different circumstances. You need distinctiveness (i.e., how are you unique) to beat out the competition, so use your distinguishing characteristics to your advantage; even if they're not strictly relevant to the work.

- Step 1. Imagine that you made it past the first round of interviews. You are now on the 2nd round of interviews at a luncheon with the executives of the company. You briefly introduced your story at the first interview with only one of those in attendance at this lunch. This individual asks you to share even more of the story to the group!
- Step 2. Identify a potential employer (someone you actually would want to work for) and tailor your personal brand story for them. Demonstrate how your personal brand relates to the overall organization's mission, vision, or culture and the job you are applying for. In other words, demonstrate how you fit with this company and position.
- Step 3. Record a presentation (around 10 minutes) and submit it in Canvas. Perfect your personal brand story that you would want to tell at this interview, using the *Storytelling* strategy. Start your presentation with an overview of the organization and the job you're interested in applying for.

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Criteria	Ratings			Pts
Persuasiveness	<p>4 pts Proficient Presentation was very persuasive, uniqueness of candidate is clear, organization likely to hire student.</p>	<p>3 to > 2 pts Competent Presentation was somewhat persuasive, uniqueness of candidate is somewhat clear, organization might want to hire student.</p>	<p>1 to > 0 pts Novice Presentation was not persuasive, uniqueness of candidate is unclear, organization unlikely to hire student.</p>	4 pts
Organizational Fit	<p>4 pts Proficient Clearly relates to the organization's mission, vision, and culture, correlates skills and interest to job role, demonstrates fit with selected company.</p>	<p>3 to > 2 pts Competent Somewhat relates to the organization's mission, vision, and culture, somewhat correlates skills and interest to job role, somewhat demonstrates fit with selected company.</p>	<p>1 to > 0 pts Novice Does not relate to the organization's mission, vision, and culture, does not correlate skills and interest to job role, does not demonstrate fit with selected company.</p>	4 pts
Energy & Presentation	<p>2 pts Proficient Well practiced, excitement displayed, little to no fillers, inspiration or interest displayed, and professional dress.</p>	<p>1 pts Competent Somewhat practiced, some filler verbiage, some inspiration or interest, and/or average dress.</p>	<p>0 pts Novice Not practiced, lots of filler verbiage, lack of inspiration or interest, and/or poorly dressed.</p>	2 pts

Appendix C - *Storytelling Resources*

A) Our top recommendation: <https://www.storycollider.org/>

Story Collider workshops offer an in depth look into the theory behind effective storytelling with field tested examples and methodologies for developing true, personal stories about science. Their training retreats employ a combination of lecture, discussion, reflective exercises, and hands-on practice. Participants learn about narrative structure, identifying and developing story leads, improving performance, and connecting to audiences. Formally, objectives include:

- Introducing relevant psychology, neurocognitive, and social science theory and literatures;
- Teaching basics of story structure and composition, including elements of narrativity;
- Increasing appreciation of storytelling as a process and perceived self-efficacy in creating stories;
- Providing opportunities and a process for identifying possible stories and developing them; and
- Offering intensive, personalized editing and coaching on story development and delivery.

B) Other relevant storytelling sources:

- <https://wp.wvu.edu/storytelling/storytelling-resources/>
- <https://storynet.org/resources/>
- <https://ethicalstorytelling.com>
- https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/brss_tacs/samhsa-storytelling-guide.pdf