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Ally with AI: An Icebreaker to Unlock Career Aspirations for Online or Hybrid Organizational Behavior Cohorts

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Abstract. Modern organizational behavior classrooms, which are increasing in size, diversity, and complexity, are shifting to online and hybrid learning environments, challenging the use of traditional icebreaker activities. This paper introduces a 15-minute icebreaker designed to address these issues while integrating the principles of Kolb's experiential learning theory and fostering social capital through peer engagement in an online setting. By leveraging the availability of generative AI, students prompt a template code to unlock their career aspirations and stimulate social connections among their classmates. This provides an innovative teaching model for meeting the foundational icebreaker goal while serving as a suitable tool for exploring technology, creativity, and personal branding. It also serves as a prelude exercise to the individual-level analysis of the OB framework. A detailed, step-by-step procedure is provided, along with a discussion of the activity's pedagogical advantages and its alignment with the evolving management outlook.

Keywords*:* icebreaker, generative AI, organizational behavior, experiential learning.

I. Introduction

Icebreakers are a long-standing feature of the organizational behavior (OB) classroom, serving to establish rapport, build trust, and create natural participation (Hoseini Shavoun *et al*., 2024). However, the pedagogical landscape has become increasingly complex. Traditional icebreakers, while effective for building connections, often fail to strike a balance between technological competencies and personal impact (Reardon and Walsh, 2017). OB educators also face larger class sizes, more diverse student population profiles (Woods, 2023), and a growing reliance on hybrid and online learning environments (Clancy *et al*., 2021; Raes, 2022). These shifts demand innovation in traditional icebreaker formats, which were often designed for small, homogeneous groups (Serey, 1990).

In today's dynamic management landscape (Dwyer, 2023; Triviño, 2024), OB students must also develop both interpersonal skills and technological adaptability to succeed (Clayton and Embry, 2023). The increasing prevalence of artificial intelligence (AI) in business operations makes it essential for

management educators to integrate new tools (Agarwal *et al.*, 2024) that aim to foster human connections and active learning, which remain fundamental in any classroom setting (Watson, 2024).

While integrating generative AI into management education is recognized, existing icebreakers do not effectively integrate new technology to achieve the fundamental goal of fostering rapid social connection in a digitized setting (Akben *et al.,* 2025; Ramsey *et al.,* 2025). In essence, contemporary OB icebreakers typically fall into two categories. They are either human-centric but technologically dated or technology-focused, yet lacking a deliberate mechanism for self-disclosure and connection (Clancy *et al*., 2021; Raes, 2022).

This paper introduces "Ally with AI", an icebreaker activity that leverages the power of generative AI to unlock career aspirations that promote social connection online. It is specifically designed to meet the fundamental objective of encouraging self-disclosure and fostering peer engagement by using an anonymous process that allows students to share their goals and challenges, thereby initiating the process of building connections.

This teaching innovation is particularly valuable for hybrid and online learning environments, which are not effective if implemented in a traditional face-to-face setting due to its internet or data connectivity requirements and asynchronous setting without an instructor's guidance. The exercise targets undergraduate and graduate students in OB, accommodating both traditional and non-traditional learners in diverse, cross-cultural settings. It serves a dual purpose by accomplishing the foundational icebreaker goal of helping students know each other while simultaneously integrating technology (Ramsey *et al.,* 2025; Crowl, 2024). Instructors can intentionally connect the activity to the individual-level analysis of the OB framework, which emphasizes understanding how personal characteristics, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of individual employees influence workplace outcomes and organizational effectiveness (Robbins and Judge, 2019).

In the following sections, this paper first establishes the theoretical foundation of the icebreaker, linking it to Kolb's experiential learning and the role of social capital in online education. Next, it outlines the learning objectives that focus on social connection, technological literacy, and individual-level analysis in OB. The paper then provides step-by-step instructions for implementing the exercise in hybrid or online settings, followed by practical variations, tips for transition, and common student responses.

II. Theoretical Foundation

Icebreakers are structured activities that facilitate initial interaction, reduce anxiety, and promote engagement among students (Reardon and Walsh, 2017). Their importance in management education is underscored by evolving