

JESSE-BURTON NICHOLSON, PhD

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SUMMARY

Executive-leverage operator with more than a decade running the mechanism that turns a leader's priorities into coordinated action — representing principals in writing and in the room, board-level material preparation, initiative accountability across units with no formal authority, and follow-through closed without reminders. Executed a business school's five-year AACSB reaccreditation, managed an \$11M department, and ran a family company end to end. PhD in Strategy & Entrepreneurship with a dissertation on how organizations adopt radical new technology; hands-on AI fluency as an OpenAI contractor evaluating model responses — AI-native by habit, using LLM tools daily to automate my own routine work. A career built on trust with sensitive information — promotion cases, personnel actions, executive-level correspondence.

EXPERIENCE

Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, Department of Management — University of Bologna (remote) 2024-2025

- Synthesized complex research into executive briefs, decision frameworks, and options analyses for non-technical leaders — framing decisions with data, context, and judgment as a weekly deliverable.
- Managed international collaborative research programs across institutions and time zones, from scoping through delivery — initiative accountability without positional authority.
- Conducted NLP-driven research on how language patterns drive technology adoption, using a Python text-analysis stack across a program of working papers on innovation diffusion.

Independent Contractor, AI Response Evaluation & Ranking — OpenAI 2024

- Evaluated and ranked AI model responses across diverse domains under structured frameworks for quality, accuracy, and alignment — disciplined analysis under ambiguity, documented with precision.

Adjunct Professor & Graduate Teaching Fellow — University of Pittsburgh 2022-2025

- Taught the strategic management capstone in person, hybrid, and online.
- Supervised student consulting teams through real client engagements — scoping, stakeholder management, and final executive presentations.

Project Manager, Dean's Office — University of Pittsburgh, Katz Graduate School of Business 2016-2018

- Ran the executive operating system for the school's successful five-year AACSB reaccreditation — intake, prioritization, owners, cadence, and on-time deliverables across every unit of the school, with no direct authority over any of them.
- Produced correspondence and reports on behalf of the Dean — the school's chief executive — including annual review letters, promotion reports, job offers, contract renewals, and responses to the university's senior leadership; planned meetings of the school's external advisory board (Board of Visitors) end to end — consolidating inputs, shaping executive narratives, and packaging decision-ready materials.
- Team Lead for a three-day kaizen, "Digitizing University Faculty Personnel Actions" — assembled and motivated a focused internal team against an urgent, cross-functional problem, then drove the redesign through the resistance that followed.
- Transitioned promotion and personnel-review processes from paper to electronic systems; handled sensitive personnel records with the discretion, accuracy, and secure delivery that board-level work demands.
- Planned multi-day strategic-planning and process-optimization events for school leadership — the quarterly-business-review and annual-planning muscle, built by hand.

Department Administrator — University of Pittsburgh, Department of English 2014-2015

- Ran all business operations for a department of 300+ faculty, staff, and student employees; managed budgets exceeding \$11M annually — including 30+ restricted gift and endowed accounts — with forecasts, variance reports, and risk analyses.
- Restructured administrative positions and streamlined processes — role redesign with measured outcomes: higher productivity and a 0.5 FTE reduction.
- Supervised all full-time department staff: hiring, training, professional development, and evaluations; coordinated renovation projects with Facilities Management.

Assistant to the Chair — University of Pittsburgh, Department of English 2012-2014

- Digitized annual performance reporting, contract renewals, and departmental reviews — a department-wide behavior change adopted by long-tenured professionals with strong opinions, cutting ~\$1,500/month in costs.
- Ran all faculty hiring searches end to end; prepared every promotion and annual-evaluation case file in the department.

- Managed payroll; served as the department's liaison to executive leadership on all personnel matters; maintained the department's websites; served as interim Department Administrator before permanent appointment to the role.

Student Development Specialist — American University of Afghanistan, Kabul 2012

- Built two programs from scratch that outlived my tenure — the Student Ambassador Program and the Extra-Curricular Transcript — while teaching three sections of University Success.
- Implemented policies bringing transparency and accountability to student-activity-fee spending; designed an accounting system to track student organization finances; advised students on academic planning and career preparation.

Office Assistant / Assistant Program Manager, First Year Experience — University of Pittsburgh 2009–2012

- Helped supervise, mentor, and develop 15–17 student workers across 100+ events a year, including the week-long New and Transfer Student Orientation.
- Managed \$350k+ in annual budgets across two offices; built the budget for a newly created Office of Parent and Family Programs; authored the "Virtual FYE" proposal — accepted and fully implemented.

President — Data Mapping, Inc. (family business), Crescent Township, PA 2005–2008

- Ran all facets of a mapping company serving the cable television industry — operations, finance (QuickBooks, payroll, AP/AR, taxes, P&L), and marketing to 14,000+ industry contacts.
- Redeveloped the company website, launching its first online store; trained family members as successors in operations and accounting before transferring control.

EDUCATION

PhD, Business Administration — Strategy & Entrepreneurship, University of Pittsburgh, Katz Graduate School of Business, 2025. Dissertation on how language and strategic framing shape the adoption and diffusion of radical technological innovations.

MEd, Higher Education Administration, University of Pittsburgh, 2011 — completed while working full time; thesis on first-year student retention.

BA, Political Science, University of Pittsburgh, 2007, *cum laude* — certificates in Global Studies and in Russian & East European Studies; Pi Sigma Alpha.

RESEARCH & PUBLICATIONS

Published: Ao, Nicholson, Blatman, Madhavan & Prescott (2022). "Relational competition: Interesting idea, questionable construct." *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 36(4), 1033–1048.

Working papers: four papers on language and the diffusion of innovation — computational text analysis and behavioral-experiment methods — targeting the *Academy of Management Journal*, *Journal of Business Venturing*, *Journal of Management*, and *Strategic Management Journal*.

Presentations: INFORMS Annual Conference (invited, 2023); Strategic Management Society (2023); Academy of Management (2023); Babson College Entrepreneurship Research Conference (2022); Aalto University Competitive Dynamics Conference (2021).

UNIVERSITY SERVICE & LEADERSHIP

- Member, School Planning & Budget Committee, University of Pittsburgh (2020–2024); participant in Dean and faculty search committees (2018–2022).
- Team Lead, HR kaizen "Digitizing University Faculty Personnel Actions" (2017).
- Founding Chair, Diversity & Inclusion Committee, Staff Association Council (2011); Member, Board of Trustees Affirmative Action Committee (2011).
- Hearing Officer, University Judicial Board (2010–2011).

SKILLS

Executive operations — operating cadence design (quarterly business reviews, annual planning, initiative accountability); board and executive material preparation (consolidated inputs, executive narratives, decision-ready packaging); cross-functional program leadership without formal authority; strategic analysis and decision framing for executives; organizational change management (kaizen team lead, process reengineering); complete discretion with sensitive records (promotion cases, personnel actions).

AI & analysis — LLM response evaluation under quality and alignment frameworks (OpenAI); LLM-assisted text analysis (Python: pandas, scikit-learn, nltk, spaCy, transformers); multiple scheduled daily automations run in Claude; continuous uptake of advances in AI; advanced Excel and PowerPoint; Stata; NVivo.

Business operations — budget management (\$11M+), forecasting, and variance reporting; payroll and personnel administration; people leadership — hired, trained, and supervised both professional staff and student teams; QuickBooks, PeopleSoft, COGNOS.