Adapting offices to support COVID-19 secure workplaces and emerging work patterns**:**

Participant Information Sheet

We are researchers from the University of Leeds funded by the UK’s Economic and Social Research Council conducting research to document the ways in which offices have been adapted in response to COVID-19, e.g., to incorporate social distancing, greater hygiene. We are also exploring how offices will change as more workers return to the office and different ways that offices and working practices may change, e.g., to support more hybrid and remote working.

As part of our research we are generating ideas for future offices and ways of working and testing how these may work in practice using the experiences of industry experts, business leaders and other stakeholders. We would like to invite you to take part in a workshop.

***What’s the purpose of the research?***

Homeworking offers flexibility and work-life balance but is not without cost – e.g., information exchange, relationships and workflow. Lack of physical interaction can inflict damage on people’s capacity to share information, build trust, be creative and innovate (e.g., Bank of England, 2020). Office designs also influence interaction patterns, organisational culture, social networks and knowledge sharing - design changes may be detrimental, but can also leverage strategic advantage. Accepting high-levels of homeworking and releasing/adapting office space without assessing potentially lagging effects on performance may harm competitiveness. This projects aims to gather an evidence base to help organisations to make informed decisions about who to bring back into offices, when, under what work patterns, and the level of office estate to retain.

***What’s involved?***

We would like to invite people involved in the design, provision and operation of offices, business leaders and other stakeholders to take part in an online scenarios planning workshop – these would be conducted online (using Zoom or Microsoft Teams). The workshop uses discussion tasks, rating and design exercises to understand the factors important in supporting effective work practices. The scenarios will focus on the design and use of offices, but will also consider the role of work patterns, technologies and management practices. The aim is to develop different scenarios (imagined future offices) and consider how these might be used to support different types of work and industries. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. We would like to record the workshops (audio, messages and virtual whiteboards), to help us accurately interpret the answers. No-one outside of the project will have access to the recording and the recordings will be deleted once they have been transcribed and checked.

***What’s the benefit?***

The study aims to produce guidance regarding possible office design adaptations, lessons learned regarding adapting to COVID-19 restrictions, approaches to support hybrid and new ways of working. We will produce reports as well as podcasts, blogs, webinars and infographics. We would like to share the anonymised findings, particularly areas of good practice with project participants such as yourselves and you will be sent a copy of the results before public dissemination.

***How is data kept and reported?***

All the personal information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept securely and will be deleted at the end of the project. We would like to contact you later in the project to share our findings and to highlight other opportunities to take part in the project. Consent forms will be retained securely for five years in case of audit.

You will not be named in any reports or publications. Where any quotes are used, these will be anonymised. The analysis and output from the research will be aggregated so that individuals and organizations are not referenced unless prior permission is given. You can read the University of Leeds Research Participant Privacy Notice here: <https://dataprotection.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/48/2020/11/Research-Participant-Privacy-Notice.docx>

As you will be taking part in group discussions, it will not be possible to guarantee confidentiality or anonymity as the other people in the workshop will also have been part of the discussions. To help everyone feel comfortable in being able to share their views openly, we ask you not repeat what other people in the group have said and not to share anything that you would be uncomfortable having attributed to you.

In line with UK Research Council requirements for publicly funded research, we will upload anonymised copies of our data to Research Data Leeds for transparency and to support further related research. Only researchers who agree to preserve the anonymity of the data will be granted access. We will not share data that may identify individuals or organizations.

***Can I withdraw?***

As the discussions and tasks are group based, it is not possible to withdraw your data. You are free to stop participating in the discussions at any point and to leave the workshop if you wish.

***Are there any risks or disadvantages?***

We do not envisage any risks over and above those encountered in day-to-day life. The interview will focus on changes you or your organization made in response to COVID-19. If reflecting on the pandemic is likely to cause distress, please do not take part.

***Who is funding the research?***

Research funded by the UK’s Economic and Social Research Council (ref: ES/W001764/1).

If you have any questions or would like to discuss the project further, please contact us using the details below.

**Thank you for taking the time to read this information and for your interest in the study.**

**Dr Matthew Davis**

On behalf of the project team.

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