

## Consent Form

**Title:** Disengaged Employees: The Death of Organizational Productivity

**Principle Investigator:** Shena Dixon Mason, Doctoral Candidate, School of Business, Organization and Management, Liberty University

### Key Information about the Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate you must meet the following criteria: be 18 years or older, must be employed by or have been employed within a U.S. based small business that employs fewer than 500 employees and has operated continuously since 2016 and 18, and must have served in the capacity as an employee within the organization between 2016 and 2018.

Participants are ineligible to participate in this research study if they have a familial relationship with any person holding a leadership role within the small business they worked for.

Things you should know:

- The purpose of this study is to explore how leadership behaviors, employee actions, and organizational practices influence employee engagement and productivity in small business post-2019. If you choose to participate, you will take part in a one-on-one, audio-recorded interview conducted through Zoom, this will take approximately 30–60 minutes. After the interview, you may review your interview transcript to confirm its accuracy. This review process will take approximately 15 to 20 minutes.
- Risks or discomforts from this research are minimal. You may experience mild discomfort when discussing workplace experiences, leadership behaviors, or organizational challenges.
- Participants are not expected to receive direct personal benefits from this study. However, the findings may help small business leaders better understand employees' psychological needs and desires in the workplace to improve engagement and workplace productivity.
- Taking part in this research project is voluntary. You do not have to participate, and you can stop at any time.

Please read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research.

### What is the study about, and why is it being done?

The purpose of this study is to explore how leadership behaviors, employee actions, and organizational practices influence employee engagement and productivity in small business post-2019.

### **What will happen if you take part in this study?**

If you choose to participate, you will take part in a one-on-one, audio-recorded interview conducted through Zoom, this will take approximately 30–60 minutes, and you may also choose to review your interview transcript approximately 10-15 minutes.

### **How could you or others benefit from this study?**

Participants should not expect a direct benefit from participating in this study.

The primary benefit of this study is societal and organizational, as research findings may contribute to the body of academic knowledge relating to employee engagement and organizational productivity within small businesses.

### **What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

This study will involve the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to assist with data analysis. While efforts will be made to ensure data accuracy and confidentiality, AI tools may carry minimal risks related to the misinterpretation of results and participant privacy. Any AI-assisted processes will follow strict ethical guidelines, and your data will not be used to train or refine AI systems.

I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

### **How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher and the faculty supervisor will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with alphanumeric codes.

- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and in a password-protected Google Drive. Physical data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. The researcher and her faculty supervisor will have access to the data. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer. The researcher and her faculty supervisor will have access to the recordings. Once participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the recording transcripts, the recordings will be erased.
- The data from this study will be analyzed using AI by NVivo, data will be stored on a password-locked computer. The researcher and her faculty supervisor will have access to the data. After transcript review or after three years, the data will be deleted.

#### **How will you be compensated for being part of the study?**

Participants will not receive compensation for participating in this study.

#### **Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question and you may withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

#### **What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address in the next paragraph. Should you withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and not included in this study.

#### **Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Shena Dixon Mason. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [smason61@liberty.edu](mailto:smason61@liberty.edu). You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Jeannine Bennett, at [jbbennett1@liberty.edu](mailto:jbbennett1@liberty.edu).

#### **Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and want to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) ensures that human subjects research will be conducted ethically as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

### Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Participant Name (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature & Date: \_\_\_\_\_