TEXAS MCCOMBS RESEARCH CLASSIFIEDS

Are you interested in having professors from the McCombs School of Business conduct a research study of your organization? If so, there are a number of opportunities in which McCombs faculty are looking for organizations to conduct studies on specific topics with. There is no cost whatsoever to your organization; all that is needed is a willingness to provide access for research and a context that fits well for the relevant questions. The goal of research projects like these from McCombs: to have a positive impact on employees and organizations. By being part of a study, you will both contribute to improving the business world, as well as gain early access to the research results that are specific to your organization.

Enhancing Hiring Practices to Capture the Benefits of "Non-Traditional" Candidates

There is some evidence that employees with more non-traditional professional backgrounds and experiences may be more successful in the long run because they have a unique set of skills and abilities. However, hiring employees with more unique or "non-linear" backgrounds often feels risky because we have such a limited understanding of what types of professional diversity actually have a positive impact. In other words, we still don't completely understand what aspects of a diverse professional and training background actually predict long-term success in an organization. For example, does having formal education in unrelated fields matter? Working with organizations with varying levels of resources and prestige? Coming from a highly different career path or job profile? These variables are all indicative of more unusual backgrounds, but it is unclear whether and how they shape employee performance. Additionally, different types of experiences may be more or less complimentary, suggesting a more complex relationship between background experiences and performance that we have not yet acknowledged. In order to provide more insights into this puzzle, we are looking to partner with an organization with at least 200 employees that has data on: (a) the professional backgrounds and experiences of candidates, and (b) the performance outcomes of these individuals (e.g., hiring, evaluations, raises, promotion, termination). We hope that by exploring this question, we can provide the partnering organization with insights into how to better select candidates and potentially satisfy Diversity & Inclusion objectives by drawing attention to candidates who may otherwise fall under the radar. We will provide partnering organizations with a detailed report on our findings and recommendations at the conclusion of the study.

If your organization is interested in being a part of this study, please contact Dr. Shefali Patil (shefali.patil@mccombs.utexas.edu) and Dr. Paul Green (paul.green@mccombs.utexas.edu).

The Impact of Virtual Work on Employee Innovative Communication

COVID-19 has substantially transformed the way that employees interact with one another. Casual in-person interactions around the office and water cooler are long gone; in their place are now formally-scheduled Zoom meetings and a substantial increase in emails. Organizations are only beginning to understand the tradeoffs that these new communication patterns bring and what may be lost now that work interactions rarely occur in person. The aim of this study is

to examine how virtual work impacts one of the most important categories of employee communication: employee voice, or raising ideas that challenge the status quo. Specifically, research has shown that for sensitive topics, informal in-person communication is vital for putting employees at ease in sensitive situations, such as when noting that they see something wrong in the workplace or raising innovative ideas that may challenge current organizational processes. Given that virtual communication may severely reduce the degree to which employees are willing to communicate innovative ideas, this study seeks to explore and develop 'best-practices' for how organizations can ensure that employees are willing—and empowered—to speak up, even at a distance. Organizations in any industry with at least 200 employees would qualify for this study. As part of the study, the participating organization will receive a detailed report of the findings of the study within their organization, as well as research-based recommendations for improvement based on these findings.

If your company is interested in being a part of this study, please contact Professor Andrew Brodsky (Andrew.brodsky@mccombs.utexas.edu).

Leading Diverse Teams

The Black Lives Matter protests, history-making elections of women and minorities to high office, and a host of other recent developments in society and business have heightened the importance of effective management of diversity and inclusion in organizations. Leaders, in particular, have been identified as playing a critical role in creating organizational and team cultures in which employees of all backgrounds feel included and are able to perform their best. Given the outsized role that leaders play in shaping the success of their teams, the goal of this study is to examine how leaders think about diversity in terms of both its promise and challenges, and relate that thinking to dynamics and outcomes in their teams. Results of our study will inform organizational best practices for shaping team leaders' ideas and assumptions around diversity, based on examining the relationships between those assumptions and critical team outcomes, such as performance and employee engagement. Organizations in any industry with at least 200 employees would qualify for this study. Participants sought for the study are supervisors/managers responsible for at least four employees. Participating organizations will receive a detailed report of findings once the study is completed, along with research-based recommendations for how to better manage workplace diversity.

If your company is interested in being a part of this study, please contact Professors Luis Martins (Luis.Martins@mccombs.utexas.edu) or Insiya Hussain (Insiya.Hussain@mccombs.utexas.edu).

Developing Best Practice Recommendations for Virtual and Home Office Setups to Maximize Performance and Wellbeing

Research has shown that workplace design can affect firm performance through its impact on employee wellbeing, and productivity. For instance, spatial proximity between work teams has been shown to improve learning between workers, affect communication patterns between subordinates and managers, as well as improve collaboration outcomes. These effects result in

increased team performance and helps retain valuable human capital, providing substantial evidence that co-location of workers in a dedicated physical work environment can have important implications for firm performance. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, however, has disrupted work as we know it. Many firms have adopted remote work policies, and invested in technologies that enable workers to work from home and other virtual work settings such as cafes, co-working spaces, etc. Given the current investments, it is likely that firms may want to continue to offer remote work as a benefit to workers even after the pandemic, but the tradeoffs of these arrangements on desirable firm outcomes are just coming to light. Though we know that characteristics of physical work environments matter to firm performance, the ways in which spatial features of remote work settings such as home offices, cafes and shared /co-working spaces affect worker productivity and other desirable firm outcomes are still unclear. This study aims understand how features of remote work settings such as spatial layout, variety of work settings (i.e., availability of set-up options), spatial density, etc., may influence employee wellbeing, productivity and performance so that the conditions under which remote work benefits may yield a substantial return on investment for organizations will be known. To qualify for this study, organizations can be in any industry, have at least 250 employees that work in teams, and should have instituted remote work policies for a period of time since the pandemic began. Researchers will provide the participating organization with a detailed report of the research results, as well as recommend best practices for implementing remote work policies based on the features of the remote work location.

If your company is interested in being a part of this study, please contact Professor Bukky Akinsanmi (bukky@utexas.edu).

Investigating the Determinants of Street Smarts and Resilience in the Face of Adversity

Given the dynamic, competitive, and often contentious environment organizations face, leaders increasingly depend on their workforce to be resilient by bouncing back from adverse events and setbacks; to exhibit "street smarts" by skillfully managing multiple stakeholders and implementing practical solutions; and to be proactive by self-directing their own behaviors. However, these skills—resilience, street smarts, and self-direction—remain elusive "soft skills" that organizations greatly value, especially during situations like that posed by the COVID pandemic, but also struggle to identify and develop among employees. In other words, when recruiting and retaining employees, leaders struggle with determining what criteria predict these valuable, emergent individual competencies. To examine this question, we are launching a series of studies to identify potential indicators of these competencies such as people's diversity of professional experiences, backgrounds, and training, values and belief systems, and previous history of facing various forms of adversity. We are looking to partner with an organization with at least 200 employees to fulfill these research objectives, and hope to provide the organization with recommendations on criteria it can use to both select and develop personnel.

If your organization is interested in being a part of this study, please contact Dr. Shefali Patil (shefali.patil@mccombs.utexas.edu) and Dr. Paul Green (paul.green@mccombs.utexas.edu).

The Consequences of Virtual Work on Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

The substantial shift to virtual work has the potential to have meaningful consequences for diversity and inclusion at work. Given that differences in physical appearances are no longer as visible and salient when coworkers interreact less frequently in person, is it possible that virtuality may be a solution to greater inclusion? Or is the ease in which others can be avoided, when they are not physically collocated, likely to further drive disadvantages for individuals from underrepresented groups? This study seeks to examine the nature of workplace interactions, across a variety of modes of communication, to better understand the impact of diversity on the now evermore common virtual work contexts. Organizations in any industry with at least 200 employees would qualify for this study. As part of the study, the participating organization will receive a detailed report of the findings of the study within their organization, as well as research-based recommendations for improvement based on these findings.

If your company is interested in being a part of this study, please contact Professor Andrew Brodsky (Andrew.brodsky@mccombs.utexas.edu).