**Example research project**

Dear participant,

With this information letter we would like to ask you if you want to participate in our research. Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) is conducting this study in collaboration with the University of Amsterdam (UvA) and Leiden University (LU). The research is funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO).

In this letter you will receive an explanation of what the investigation entails. Here you can read what the purpose of the study is, what data we want to collect, how much time or effort the study requires of you and what the advantages and disadvantages are of participating in the study. Read this information carefully and ask the researcher for an explanation if you have any questions.

Once you have read the information carefully and asked any questions you may have, you can decide whether you want to participate in the study. Participation is voluntary. If you would like to participate, please complete the consent form attached.

**1. What is the purpose of the research?**

The purpose of this study is to examine hierarchical relationships in the workplace and assess whether age plays a significant role in determining workplace hierarchy. The research is being conducted across three universities and will involve both a survey and interviews. The interviews will include audio recordings to ensure accurate data collection. Participants’ insights will help us better understand how age influences professional dynamics and career progression.

**2. Why are we conducting this research?**

In many workplaces, hierarchy plays a key role in decision-making, leadership, and career growth. However, it is unclear whether age is a major factor in determining workplace hierarchy. Some believe that experience, often linked to age, naturally leads to higher positions, while others argue that skills and qualifications matter more. This study, conducted in collaboration by the VU, Uva and LU, aims to explore how age influences workplace relationships and career progression. Through surveys and interviews, we hope to gain insights into whether age is a determining factor in workplace hierarchy and how it shapes professional dynamics.

**3. How does the research work?**

Are You Eligible to Participate?

To determine if you are eligible to participate in this study, we will ask a few initial screening questions. These may include questions about your role in the workplace, years of experience, and hierarchical position within your organization. This helps ensure that we gather relevant insights into workplace hierarchy and the role of age in professional dynamics. No sensitive personal information, such as ethnicity, political preference, or sexual identity, will be required for eligibility.

The Nature and Design of the Research

This study, conducted by three universities, explores whether age is a determining factor in workplace hierarchy. The research consists of two parts:

* Survey: Participants will complete a questionnaire about their experiences and perceptions of workplace hierarchy, leadership, and career progression.
* Interviews: A select group of participants will be invited to participate in one-on-one interviews to discuss their experiences in more detail. These interviews will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy in data collection.

**4. What is expected of you?**

As a participant in this study, you will be expected to:

* Complete a Survey – You will be asked to fill out a questionnaire about your workplace experiences and perceptions of hierarchy. This will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.
* Participate in an Interview (if selected) – Some participants may be invited for a one-on-one interview to discuss their experiences in greater detail. The interview will be audio-recorded and will last about 45 minutes.

There are no physical requirements or restrictions for participation. However, we ask that you provide honest and thoughtful responses. If selected for an interview, we kindly ask that you choose a quiet environment to ensure clear audio recording. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without consequences.

**5. What are the possible advantages and disadvantages?**

You likely won't experience any direct benefits from participating in this study. However, the research may provide valuable data for the future. Your participation could contribute to a greater understanding of how age influences workplace hierarchy, career progression, and professional relationships. The insights gained from this study may help organizations develop more inclusive and effective workplace structures, fostering better opportunities for employees of all ages.

Potential disadvantages of participating in the study could include:

* Time Investment: Participating in this study will require your time. Completing the survey will take approximately 30 minutes, and if selected for an interview, it will last around 45 minutes.
* Possible Discomfort: Some questions may prompt reflection on workplace experiences, which could lead to mild discomfort or frustration. If you experience any distress, you are encouraged to take a break or withdraw from the study at any time. If needed, we can provide contact information for an independent professional to discuss any concerns.

If you have any concerns, please feel free to reach out to the research team for further clarification or support.

**6. What if you no longer want to participate or want to stop the study?**

You decide whether to participate in the study. Participation is voluntary. If you decide not to participate, you do not need to do anything else. You do not have to sign anything, and you don't need to explain why you don't want to participate. If you do participate, you can always change your mind and withdraw participation, even during the study. The data collected up to that point will still be used for the study.

**7. When is the study end for you?**

Your participation in the study will end when all measurements are taken or when you have completed all questionnaires, if you choose to stop or if the researchers think it is better for you to stop. The entire study is over when all participants have finished.

**8. How is your data used, stored and processed?**

What data is collected?

For this study, we will collect the following types of data:

* **Survey Data**: Participants will provide responses about their workplace experiences, perceptions of hierarchy, and the role of age in professional settings.
	+ Directly identifiable: name, email address.
	+ Demographic data: age, job position, years of experience, and workplace sector. However, no sensitive personal data (e.g., ethnicity, political views, or health information) will be gathered.
* **Interview Data** (if selected): A subset of participants will take part in recorded interviews discussing their workplace experiences in more detail. These recordings will help ensure accuracy in data analysis.
	+ **Audio Recordings**: If you participate in an interview, we will record the conversation for transcription and analysis. These recordings will be securely stored and only accessed by authorized researchers.

All collected data will be stored securely and used solely for research purposes. Identifiable information will not be shared in published findings, and participants can request to withdraw their data at any time.

How do we protect your privacy?

We handle your personal data with care and secure it properly. In reports and publications about the research, no data that can be traced back to you will be included. Additionally, all employees involved in this study are required to maintain strict confidentiality. To further protect your privacy, we replace your directly identifiable personal data, such as your name, with a unique code. The key linking your name to the code is stored separately in a secure location. When analysing the collected data, we only use that code and not your name. All your data remains confidential. Only the research team knows what code you have.

Your data will be securely stored and used only for research purposes, and your identity will never be shared in any public findings.

Who can see your data?

Researchers involved in the study can view and use your personal data to conduct the research. If these are researchers from different research institutions, clear agreements are made to ensure that your data is processed securely. Sometimes students or additional researchers also participate in the research. Agreements will also be made with them regarding the safe use of your data. Those who can view your data are required to keep it confidential.

Additionally, it is possible that the research or the scientific publications resulting from it may be subject to review. If access to the data is necessary for this purpose, agreements will be made to ensure that your data is processed securely. Those who can view your data are required to keep it confidential.

How long do we keep your data?

The researchers will retain your data for up to 10 years after the last publication related to the study.

In the attached privacy statement, you will find more information about how we process your personal data in this study.

Can we use your data for other research?

Your data may still be relevant for other scientific research in the field of workplace dynamics, hierarchy, and the role of age in professional settings. If you agree, your data could be used for future studies exploring similar topics (organizational psychology, human resource management, workplace relationships).

In the consent form, you will have the option to indicate whether you consent to the reuse of your data for other research purposes. If you choose not to consent, you can still participate in this study, and your decision will not affect your participation or any other aspects of the study.

**9. Is there a fee for participating?**

Participation in the study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for participating in this study.

**10. Ethics Review and Complaints**

The research design has been assessed by the Scientific and Ethical Review Board (VCWE) of the Faculty of Behavioural and Movement Sciences, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and complies with the faculty’s ethical guidelines. If you have any complaints, you can initially contact the researcher. If your complaint is not resolved, you can file a complaint via vcwe.fgb@vu.nl. If you have any questions about the privacy of your data, please contact *functionarisgegevensbescherming@vu.nl.*

**11. Do you have any questions?**

If you have any questions, you can contact:

Jan Jaanson (J.jaanson@vu.nl, 061010101)

**12. How do you give consent for this research?**

You can take your time to think about participating in this study. Afterward, you can tell the researcher whether you understand the information and whether you would like to participate. If you agree to participate, you will fill out the consent form that you will find with this information letter.