

September 15, 2015

Dear Members of Congress:

**We, the undersigned 203 business school faculty members from 88 institutions across the country, write this letter in support of making paid family and medical leave available to all working families.\*** Sound business practices, data from other countries, our own research with employers, employees and organizations, and our experiences teaching the business leaders of tomorrow compel our conclusion that the United States must adopt a national paid family and medical leave policy.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 13 percent of the United States workforce has access to paid family leave through their employers, and less than 40 percent has access to personal medical leave through employer-provided short-term disability insurance.<sup>1</sup> And while the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) provides important job protection for workers taking unpaid time off to care for new children and serious personal or family illnesses, less than 60 percent of the workforce is eligible for its protections – and many workers who are eligible and need FMLA leave cannot afford to take it.<sup>2</sup>

Even among the most highly paid and sought after employees, business policies, practices and culture too often discourage or prevent women, and men, from taking the time they need to care for a new child or address a serious health condition. As a result, the future business leaders we teach are deeply concerned about the challenges that could thwart their family and career ambitions. Millennials are experiencing more intense conflicts between family and career. They often face increased time requirements at work, higher student debt loads, and stronger competition in the labor market.<sup>3</sup> Being a parent is still very important for most young people, but there are indications that many simply do not see how they can manage it. Increasingly, some men and women are opting out of parenthood altogether.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Business Benefits of Paid Leave**

Some companies have experienced success in proactively implementing practices designed to improve employee performance at work and at home, such as offering paid parental leave. These businesses find that when workers are able to devote more time and attention to their home lives, they experience a stronger sense of control, less stress, and are more efficient, engaged and productive at work. Workers feel greater loyalty and commitment to their organizations and improve their leadership skills.<sup>5</sup>

Across the private sector workforce, first-time mothers who take paid maternity leave are more likely than mothers who do not take maternity leave to return to work – and to return to the same employer.<sup>6</sup> People who are dealing with personal health issues or caring for a loved one are better able to stay employed when they have paid leave and other family friendly policies.<sup>7</sup>

Businesses also experience cost-savings and other benefits when workers can take paid leave to address family and medical needs. For example, paid family and medical leave aids retention. Retention is critical for employers seeking to control costs and maximize productivity. For high-wage, high-skilled workers in fields including technology, accounting and law, turnover costs can amount to 213 percent of workers' salaries.<sup>8</sup> Across all occupations, median turnover costs are estimated to be 21 percent of workers' annual wages.<sup>9</sup>

Experiences at companies like Google and Ernst & Young show clear relationships between paid leave and retention.<sup>10</sup> The accounting firm KPMG estimates that businesses worldwide could save up to \$19 billion annually in recruiting and training costs by offering 16 weeks of fully paid maternity leave.<sup>11</sup> Higher retention rates mean saved separation costs, unemployment insurance savings, lower temporary staffing costs, fewer costs associated with searching for and interviewing new workers, and training costs for new workers.<sup>12</sup> Higher retention rates also reduce the indirect costs that can arise from lost productivity leading up to and after employee separations, diminished output as new workers ramp up, reduced morale and lost institutional knowledge.<sup>13</sup> Paid leave reduces employee turnover and workers who cover for employees on leave get a chance to take on new responsibilities and further their development.<sup>14</sup>

### **Lessons from Successful State Programs**

Evidence from the private sector's voluntary policies is reinforced by the experiences of the three states that have adopted paid family leave insurance programs. California, New Jersey and Rhode Island have successfully implemented paid family leave programs that demonstrate how well paid leave insurance works.<sup>15</sup>

California's program, in place for more than a decade, is the most studied. In California, workers have filed approximately 1.7 million leave claims since the state implemented its family leave insurance program in 2004.<sup>16</sup> California families have experienced positive economic and health effects.<sup>17</sup> Parents who use the California paid family leave program are much more likely than those who do not to report that leave has a positive effect on their ability to care for their new children and arrange child care.<sup>18</sup> Newborns whose mothers take at least 12 weeks of paid leave are more likely to be breastfed, receive medical checkups and get critical immunizations.<sup>19</sup> A recent review of international literature concludes that there are benefits for maternal health when fathers take paid leave, including a reduction in maternal illness and depression and an increase in well-being.<sup>20</sup> In California, the number of fathers filing leave claims increased by more than 400 percent between 2005 and 2013, as the state's program became better established and known.<sup>21</sup>

Experiences of businesses in California and New Jersey also show positive impacts and lay bare the claims of business opponents. The vast majority of California employers report seeing a positive impact on employee productivity, profitability and performance, or no effect.<sup>22</sup> Even the Society for Human Resource Management, one of the chief opponents of paid family leave in California, issued a report finding that the law had created "relatively few" new burdens for employers and that employers' concerns about the program "have so

far not been realized.”<sup>23</sup> Similarly, in a report prepared on behalf of the New Jersey Business and Industry Association, both small and large businesses said they had adjusted easily to the state’s family leave insurance law and experienced no effects on business profitability, performance or employee productivity.<sup>24</sup> Another survey of New Jersey employers found that most employers did not experience negative effects on profitability or increased paperwork, and no employers were aware of a single instance of the program being abused.<sup>25</sup>

## **A National Paid Leave Standard**

All of the available research – from employer-generated studies to analyses of the state paid family leave programs in California, New Jersey and Rhode Island, to data that reflect the experiences of people fortunate enough to work for employers that offer some form of paid leave, to analyses of parents’ experiences in other countries – demonstrates the clear benefits of paid leave.

It is time to ensure that the entire United States workforce has access to paid family and medical leave. The nation must adopt a policy built for the populations and workforces of today and tomorrow, one that recognizes that entrepreneurship, mobility and care needs are all on the rise but so is the creation of low-wage jobs that offer few benefits to employees.

The Family and Medical Insurance Leave Act (FAMILY Act) provides one such solution that we urge you to consider. The FAMILY Act builds on the lessons of California, New Jersey and Rhode Island and the lessons from international examples to create a national program that would set a basic paid leave standard for all workers, no matter where they live or work.

The FAMILY Act employs a familiar, tested insurance pool framework and spreads the cost of leave between employers and employees in a way that is affordable and responsible. Employers who offer generous benefit packages would, like some 60 percent of California employers, see a cost savings.<sup>26</sup> Employers whose profit margins are too thin to shoulder the full cost of an employee’s leave would have the peace of mind that their employees’ financial security is no longer jeopardized when a new child arrives or a serious illness occurs. And employers who want to go beyond the basic FAMILY Act benefit, would be free to do so, continuing to use a superior benefit package as a recruitment and retention tool.

For the sake of both the business leaders and professionals we teach and the workforces they will direct, it is well past time for a national paid leave policy. Our businesses and our people will thrive. Legislation such as the FAMILY Act would help people to care for themselves and their loved ones while promoting workplace climates that are supportive and respectful. The nation cannot afford to wait.

Sincerely,

Stewart D. Friedman  
Practice Professor of Management  
Director, Wharton Work/  
Life Integration Project  
Founder, Total Leadership  
The Wharton School  
University of Pennsylvania  
Philadelphia, PA

Manuel Adelino  
Assistant Professor  
Fuqua School of Business  
Duke University  
Durham, NC

Herman Aguinis  
John F. Mee Chair of Management  
Kelley School of Business  
Indiana University  
Bloomington, IN

Modupe Akinola  
Assistant Professor  
Columbia Business School  
Columbia University  
New York, NY

Deborah Ancona  
Seley Distinguished Professor of  
Management  
Faculty Director of the  
MIT Leadership Center  
MIT Sloan School of Management  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Cambridge, MA

Cameron Anderson  
Professor  
Haas School of Business  
University of California at Berkeley  
Berkeley, CA

James J. Angel  
Associate Professor of Finance  
McDonough School of Business  
Georgetown University  
Washington, D.C.

Wendy Angst  
Associate Teaching Professor  
Mendoza College of Business  
University of Notre Dame  
South Bend, IN

Michel Anteby  
Associate Professor of  
Organizational Behavior  
Questrom School of Business  
Boston University  
Boston, MA

Evan Apfelbaum  
W. Maurice Young (1961) Career  
Development Professor  
MIT Sloan School of Management  
Assistant Professor of  
Organizational Studies  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Cambridge, MA

Joseph Arvai  
Max McGraw Professor of  
Sustainable Enterprise  
Ross School of Business  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, MI

Steven R. Ash  
Professor and Chair  
Department of Management  
College of Business Administration  
The University of Akron  
Akron, OH

Lotte Bailyn  
T Wilson (1953) Professor of  
Management, emerita  
MIT Sloan School of Management  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Cambridge, MA

Christopher M. Barnes  
Assistant Professor, Management and  
Organization Department  
Foster School of Business  
University of Washington  
Seattle, WA

James Baron  
William S. Beinecke Professor of  
Management  
Yale School of Management  
Yale University  
New Haven, CT

Zoe Barsness  
Associate Professor  
Milgard School of Business  
University of Washington Tacoma  
Tacoma, WA

Joy E. Beatty  
Associate Professor of  
Organizational Behavior  
College of Business  
University of Michigan – Dearborn  
Dearborn, MI

Beth Bechky  
Jacob B. Melnick Term Professor  
Department of Management and  
Organizations  
Stern School of Business  
New York University  
New York, NY

Scott Behson  
Professor of Management  
Silberman College of Business  
Fairleigh Dickinson University  
Teaneck, NJ

Peter Belmi  
Assistant Professor of Leadership and  
Organizational Behavior  
Darden Business School  
University of Virginia  
Charlottesville, VA

Jennifer L. Berdahl  
Montalbano Professor of Leadership  
Studies: Gender and Diversity  
Sauder School of Business  
University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, BC, Canada

Nicholas Bloom  
Professor of Economics  
Department of Economics  
Stanford Graduate School of Business (by  
courtesy)  
Stanford University  
Stanford, CA

Bryan K. Bollinger  
Assistant Professor of Marketing  
Fuqua School of Business  
Duke University  
Durham, NC

Lynn Bowes-Sperry  
Professor of Management  
College of Business  
Western New England University  
Springfield, MA

Neil Boyd  
Associate Professor of Management  
C. Graydon and Mary E. Rogers  
Faculty Fellow  
School of Management  
Bucknell University  
Lewisburg, PA

Janet M. Brady  
Haas School of Business  
University of California at Berkeley  
Berkeley, CA

Arthur P. Brief  
Presidential Professor and George S.  
Eccles Chair of Business Ethics  
David Eccles School of Business  
University of Utah  
Salt Lake City, UT

Gary Bronson  
Professor  
Department of Decision Sciences and  
Information Systems  
Silberman College of Business  
Fairleigh Dickinson University  
Madison, NJ

Robyn Brouer  
Director, WNY Prosperity Fellowship  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Management  
Canisius College  
Buffalo, NY

Shannon Brown  
Assistant Professor of Management  
College of Business & Health  
Administration  
University of St. Francis  
Joliet, IL

John Bruton  
Chair, Department of Management  
David Nazarian College of Business and  
Economics  
California State University, Northridge  
Northridge, CA

Jennifer Caleshu  
Lecturer  
Haas School of Business  
University of California at Berkeley  
Berkeley, CA

Kim Cameron  
William Russell Professor of  
Management & Organizations  
Ross School of Business  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, MI

Dawn S. Carlson  
Professor of Management  
H. R. Gibson Chair of  
Organizational Development  
Hankamer School of Business  
Baylor University  
Waco, TX

Jennifer N. Carpenter  
Associate Professor of Finance  
Stern School of Business  
New York University  
New York, NY

Wendy J. Casper  
Professor of Organizational Behavior,  
Research Methods, and Human  
Resource Management  
College of Business  
University of Texas at Arlington  
Arlington, TX

Emilio J. Castilla  
NTU Professor of Management  
Work and Organizations Group  
MIT Sloan School of Management  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Cambridge, MA

Amanda L. Christensen  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Management  
Carl H. Lindner College of Business  
University of Cincinnati  
Cincinnati, OH

Dolly Chugh  
Associate Professor  
Stern School of Business  
New York University  
New York, NY

Russell Clayton  
Assistant Professor of Management  
Donald R. Tapia School of Business  
Saint Leo University  
Saint Leo, FL

Taya Cohen  
Associate Professor of  
Organizational Behavior and Theory  
Tepper School of Business  
Carnegie Mellon University  
Pittsburgh, PA

Gwendolyn M. Combs  
Associate Professor  
College of Business Administration  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
Lincoln, NE

Amy E. Crook  
Assistant Professor of Management  
Jack C. Massey College of Business  
Belmont University  
Nashville, TN

Jannifer David  
Associate Professor of Human Resource  
Management  
Labovitz School of Business & Economics  
University of Minnesota Duluth  
Duluth, MN

Martin N Davidson  
Professor of Leadership  
Darden School of Business  
University of Virginia  
Charlottesville, VA

Gerald F. Davis  
Wilbur K. Pierpont Collegiate Professor of  
Management  
Ross School of Business  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, MI

Alison Davis-Blake  
Dean and Stephen M. Ross Professor of  
Business  
Ross School of Business  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, MI

Erin DeCurtis  
Lecturer  
School of Management  
Simmons College  
Boston, MA

Vontreese Deeds  
Lecturer  
Kellogg School of Management  
Northwestern University  
Evanston, IL

Rellie Derfler-Rozin  
Assistant Professor  
Management & Organization  
Robert H. Smith School of Business  
University of Maryland  
College Park, MD

D. Scott DeRue  
Associate Dean and  
Professor of Management  
Ross School of Business  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, MI

Sreedhari Desai  
Assistant Professor of  
Organizational Behavior  
Kenan-Flagler Business School  
University of North Carolina  
Chapel Hill, NC

Gina Dokko  
Associate Professor  
UC Davis School of Management  
University of California, Davis  
Davis, CA

Glen Dowell  
Associate Professor of  
Management and Organizations  
Center for Sustainable Global Enterprise  
Samuel Curtis Johnson Graduate School  
of Management  
Cornell University  
Ithaca, NY

Soumitra Dutta  
Anne and Elmer Lindseth Dean and  
Professor of Management  
Samuel Curtis Johnson Graduate School  
of Management  
Cornell University  
Ithaca, NY

Jane E. Dutton  
Robert L. Kahn Distinguished University  
Professor of  
Business Administration and Psychology  
Ross School of Business  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, MI

Marion Eberly  
Assistant Professor of Management  
Milgard School of Business  
University of Washington Tacoma  
Tacoma, WA

Raj Echambadi  
Senior Associate Dean  
College of Business  
University of Illinois at  
Urbana-Champaign  
Champaign, IL

Amy C. Edmondson  
Novartis Professor of  
Leadership and Management  
Harvard Business School  
Boston, MA  
Robin Ely

Diane Doerge Wilson Professor of  
Business Administration  
Senior Associate Dean for  
Culture and Community  
Faculty Chair, Gender Initiative  
Harvard Business School  
Boston, MA

Edwin M. Epstein  
Professor Emeritus  
Haas School of Business  
University of California at Berkeley  
Berkeley, CA

Kent D. Fairfield  
Bartlett Professor of Teaching Innovation  
Associate Professor of Management  
Silberman College of Business  
Principal, Institute for  
Sustainable Enterprise  
Fairleigh Dickinson University  
Teaneck, NJ

Marjorie N. Feld  
Associate Professor of History  
Babson College  
Babson Park, MA

Pnina Feldman  
Assistant Professor  
Haas School of Business  
University of California at Berkeley  
Berkeley, CA

Roberto M. Fernandez  
Professor  
MIT Sloan School of Management  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Cambridge, MA

Donald L. Ferrin, Ph.D. (US Citizen)  
Professor of Organisational Behaviour  
and Human Resources  
Lee Kong Chian School of Business  
Singapore Management University  
Singapore

William P. Ferris  
Professor of Management  
College of Business  
Western New England University  
Springfield, MA

Mark Fichman  
Associate Professor of  
Organizational Behavior and Theory  
Tepper School of Business  
Carnegie Mellon University  
Pittsburgh, PA



Janice Fine  
Associate Professor  
School of Management and  
Labor Relations  
Rutgers University  
New Brunswick, NJ

Sydney Finkelstein  
Steven Roth Professor of Management  
Faculty Director, Tuck Center for  
Leadership  
Tuck School of Business  
Dartmouth College  
Hanover, NH

Gavan J. Fitzsimons  
R. David Thomas Professor of  
Marketing and Psychology  
Fuqua School of Business  
Duke University  
Durham, NC

Richard Florida  
Director, Martin Prosperity Institute  
Professor of Business and Creativity  
Rotman School of Management  
University of Toronto  
Toronto, Canada

*and*  
Global Research Professor  
New York University  
New York, NY

Lucy R. Ford  
Managing Human Capital Assistant  
Professor of Management  
Saint Joseph's University  
Philadelphia, PA

Jeanie M. Forray  
Professor of Management  
Coordinator, Global Scholars Program  
Director, The Management Institute  
College of Business  
Western New England University  
Springfield, MA

Alison R. Fragale  
Mary Farley Ames Lee Scholar and  
Associate Professor of  
Organizational Behavior  
Kenan-Flagler Business School  
University of North Carolina  
Chapel Hill, NC

Frances Frei  
Senior Associate Dean  
Faculty Recruiting & Planning  
UPS Foundation Professor of  
Service Management  
Harvard Business School  
Boston, MA

Halina Frydman  
Professor of Statistics  
Stern School of Business  
New York University  
New York, NY

Cindi Fukami  
Associate Chair, Professor of Management  
Daniels College of Business  
University of Denver  
Denver, CO

Adam D. Galinsky  
Chair, Management Division  
Vikram S. Pandit Professor of Business  
Columbia Business School  
Columbia University  
New York, NY

John Gallagher  
Professor of the Practice of  
Business Education  
Associate Dean of  
Executive MBA Programs  
Fuqua School of Business  
Duke University  
Durham, NC

Claudine Gartenberg  
Assistant Professor of Management  
Stern School of Business  
New York University  
New York, NY

Karen Golden-Biddle  
Questrom Professor of Management  
Professor of Organizational Behavior  
Questrom School of Business  
Boston University  
Boston, MA

Melissa E. Graebner  
Associate Professor of Management  
McCombs School of Business  
University of Texas at Austin  
Austin, TX

Danna Greenberg  
Professor of Organizational Behavior  
Babson College  
Babson Park, MA

Jeffrey H. Greenhaus  
Professor of Management and  
William A. Mackie Chair  
LeBow College of Business  
Drexel University  
Philadelphia, PA

Paula Gutlove  
Professor of Practice  
School of Management  
Simmons College  
Boston, MA

Maria Riaz Hamdani  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Management  
College of Business Administration  
The University of Akron  
Akron, OH

Lora Mitchell Harding  
Assistant Professor of Marketing  
Jack C. Massey College of Business  
Belmont University  
Nashville, TN

Joel Harmon  
Professor of Management and  
Executive Director, Institute for  
Sustainable Enterprise  
Silberman College of Business  
Fairleigh Dickinson University  
Madison, NJ

Heather A. Haveman  
Professor  
Department of Sociology and  
Haas School of Business  
University of California at Berkeley  
Berkeley, CA

Mary Ann Hazen  
Professor Emerita, Management  
College of Business Administration  
University of Detroit Mercy  
Detroit, MI

Emily Heaphy  
Assistant Professor of  
Organizational Behavior  
Questrom School of Business  
Boston University  
Boston, MA

Morela Hernandez  
Associate Professor  
Darden School of Business  
University of Virginia  
Charlottesville, VA

Hal Hershfield  
Assistant Professor of Marketing  
UCLA Anderson School of Management  
University of California, Los Angeles  
Los Angeles, CA

Tammy Bunn Hiller  
Professor of Management  
School of Management  
Bucknell University  
Lewisburg, PA

Raymond L. Hogler  
Professor, Department of Management  
College of Business  
Colorado State University  
Fort Collins, CO

Elaine Hollensbe  
Professor of Management and  
Doctoral Program Coordinator  
Department of Management  
Carl H. Lindner College of Business  
University of Cincinnati  
Cincinnati, OH

Kate Kellogg  
Professor of Work and  
Organization Studies  
MIT Sloan School of Management  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Cambridge, MA

Erin L. Kelly  
Professor of Work and Organization  
Studies and Institute for Work and  
Employment Research  
MIT Sloan School of Management  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Cambridge, MA

Stacey R. Kessler  
Associate Professor  
Department of Management  
School of Business  
Montclair State University  
Montclair, NJ

Andrew P. Knight  
Assistant Professor of  
Organizational Behavior  
Olin Business School  
Washington University in St. Louis  
St. Louis, MO

Thomas A. Kochan  
George M. Bunker Professor of  
Management  
Co-Director, Institute of Work and  
Employment Research  
MIT Sloan School of Management  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Cambridge, MA

Ellen Ernst Kossek  
Basil S. Turner Professor of Management  
Director of Research and Practice  
Susan Bulkeley Butler Center for  
Leadership Excellence  
Associate Director, Work Family Health  
Network Center for Work-Family Stress  
Safety & Health  
Krannert School of Management  
Purdue University  
West Lafayette, IN

Maria Kraimer  
Professor and Leonard A. Hadley Chair in  
Leadership  
Henry B. Tippie College of Business  
University of Iowa  
Iowa City, IA

David A. Kravitz  
Professor of Management  
School of Business  
George Mason University  
Fairfax, VA

Jamie Ladge  
Associate Professor of Management  
Management and Organizational  
Development Group  
D'Amore-McKim School of Business  
Northeastern University  
Boston, MA

Nan S. Langowitz  
Professor of Management  
Babson College  
Babson Park, MA

Barbara Zepp Larson  
Executive Professor of Management  
Management and Organizational  
Development Group  
D'Amore-McKim School of Business  
Northeastern University  
Boston, MA

R. David Lebel  
Assistant Professor of  
Business Administration  
Katz Graduate School of Business and  
College of Business Administration  
University of Pittsburgh  
Pittsburgh, PA

Lisa Leslie  
Associate Professor  
Department of Management and  
Organizations  
Stern School of Business  
New York University  
New York, NY

Margaret Levenstein  
Adjunct Professor of Business Economics  
Ross School of Business  
Research Professor, Institute for  
Social Research  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, MI

Natalia Levina  
Associate Professor  
Information, Operation, and Management  
Sciences Department  
Stern School of Business  
New York University  
New York, NY

Linda Y.C. Lim  
Professor of Strategy  
Ross School of Business  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, MI

Nataly Lorinkova  
Assistant Professor  
Management Department  
McDonough School of Business  
Georgetown University  
Washington, D.C.

Mary Frances Luce  
Senior Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs  
and Robert A. Ingram Professor  
Fuqua School of Business  
Duke University  
Durham, NC

Joe Magee  
Associate Professor of  
Management and Organizations  
Stern School of Business  
New York University  
New York, NY

Anne M. Magro  
Associate Dean for Undergraduate  
Programs  
School of Business  
George Mason University  
Fairfax, VA

Erin Makarius  
Assistant Professor  
College of Business Administration  
The University of Akron  
Akron, OH

Colleen Flaherty Manchester  
Assistant Professor  
Carlson School of Management  
University of Minnesota  
Minneapolis, MN

Eric C. Martin  
Associate Professor of Management  
School of Management  
Bucknell University  
Lewisburg, PA

Suzanne S. Masterson  
Professor of Management  
Carl H. Lindner College of Business  
University of Cincinnati  
Cincinnati, OH

Linda M. Matthews  
Professor of Management  
College of Business & Entrepreneurship  
University of Texas Rio Grande Valley  
Brownsville, TX

Richard McGahey  
Professor of Public Policy and Economics  
Milano School of International Affairs,  
Management, and Urban Policy  
The New School  
New York, NY

Kathleen L. McGinn  
Cahners-Rabb Professor of  
Business Administration  
Harvard Business School  
Boston, MA

Gordon W. Meyer  
Professor and Chair  
Department of Management  
Canisius College  
Buffalo, NY

David Mick  
Robert Hill Carter Professor of Marketing  
McIntire School of Commerce  
University of Virginia  
Charlottesville, VA

Katherine L. Milkman  
Associate Professor of Operations,  
Information, & Decisions  
The Wharton School  
University of Pennsylvania  
Philadelphia, PA

Cynthia A. Montgomery  
Timken Professor Business  
Administration  
Harvard Business School  
Boston, MA

Patrick S. Moreton  
Professor of Practice  
Fuqua School of Business  
Duke University  
Associate Dean for Graduate Programs  
Duke Kunshan University  
Durham, NC/Kunshan, China

Elizabeth W. Morrison  
Vice Dean of Faculty and Professor of  
Management and Organizations  
Stern School of Business  
New York University  
New York, NY

Kristin Mugford  
Senior Lecturer  
Harvard Business School  
Boston, MA

Susan Clark Muntean  
Assistant Professor of Management  
Department of  
Management and Accountancy  
University of North Carolina, Asheville  
Asheville, NC

Robert A. Nakosteen  
Professor of Economics and Statistics  
Isenberg School of Management  
University of Massachusetts Amherst  
Amherst, MA

Giacomo Negro  
Associate Professor of Organization and  
Management and Goizueta Term Chair  
Goizueta Business School  
Emory University  
Atlanta, GA

Terry Nelidov  
Managing Director  
Erb Institute for Global  
Sustainable Enterprise  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, MI

Noel Nellis  
Adjunct Professor  
Haas School of Business  
University of California at Berkeley  
Berkeley, CA

Mindell Reiss Nitkin  
Associate Professor  
School of Management  
Simmons College  
Boston, MA

William D. Novelli  
Professor  
McDonough School of Business  
Georgetown University  
Washington, D.C.

Terrance Odean  
Rudd Family Foundation Professor of  
Finance  
Haas School of Business  
University of California at Berkeley  
Berkeley, CA

Jennifer Oetzel  
Associate Professor of  
International Business  
Kogod International Business Professor  
Kogod School of Business  
American University  
Washington, D.C.

Gerardo A. Okhuysen  
Professor, Organization and Management  
Associate Dean, Masters Programs  
Paul Merage School of Business  
University of California, Irvine  
Irvine, CA

Siobhan O'Mahony  
Associate Professor, Chair Strategy and  
Innovation  
Questrom School of Business  
Boston University  
Boston, MA

Paul Osterman  
Nanyang Technological University (NTU)  
Professor of Human Resources and  
Management  
MIT Sloan School of Management  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Cambridge, MA

Judith H. Owens  
Visiting Professor  
Jesse H. Jones School of Business  
Texas Southern University  
Houston, TX

Minjung Park  
Assistant Professor  
Haas School of Business  
University of California at Berkeley  
Berkeley, CA

Tae-Youn Park  
Assistant Professor  
Owen Graduate School of Management  
Vanderbilt University  
Nashville, TN

Margaret A. Peteraf  
Leon E. Williams Professor of  
Management  
Chair, Strategy and Management Group  
Tuck School of Business  
Dartmouth College  
Hanover, NH

Trond Petersen  
Professor, Haas School of Business  
Professor, Sociology  
Associate Dean, Division of  
Social Sciences  
University of California at Berkeley  
Berkeley, CA

Jeremy Petranka  
Associate Professor of the  
Practice, Economics  
Fuqua School of Business  
Duke University  
Durham, NC

Jeffrey Pfeffer  
Thomas D. Dee II Professor of  
Organizational Behavior  
Graduate School of Business  
Stanford University  
Stanford, CA

Katherine Phillips  
Paul Caello Professor of  
Leadership and Ethics  
Senior Vice Dean  
Columbia Business School  
Columbia University  
New York, NY

Sandy Kristin Piderit  
Lecturer  
Department of Management  
Leavey School of Business  
Santa Clara University  
Santa Clara, CA

Marcie Pitt-Catsoupes  
Professor, School of Social Work  
Director, SSW Doctoral Program  
Carroll School of Business  
Boston College  
Chestnut Hill, MA

Jo-Ellen Pozner  
Assistant Professor of  
Management and Organizations  
Haas School of Business  
University of California at Berkeley  
Berkeley, CA

Priya Raghurir  
Dean Abraham L. Gitlow Professor of  
Business  
Chair, Marketing Department  
Stern School of Business  
New York University  
New York, NY

Lakshmi Ramarajan  
Assistant Professor  
Harvard Business School  
Boston, MA

Erin M. Reid  
Peter Paul Career Development Professor  
Assistant Professor of  
Organizational Behavior  
Questrom School of Business  
Boston University  
Boston, MA

Hettie Richardson  
Associate Professor and Chair  
Neeley School of Business  
Texas Christian University  
Fort Worth, TX

Jorge Rivera  
Professor of Strategic Management and  
Public Policy  
School of Business  
The George Washington University  
Washington, D.C.

Nancy Rothbard  
David Pottruck Professor of Management  
The Wharton School  
University of Pennsylvania  
Philadelphia, PA

Denise M. Rousseau  
H.J. Heinz II University Professor of  
Organizational Behavior and Public  
Policy; Director, Project on  
Evidence-based Organizational Practices  
Heinz College and  
Tepper School of Business  
Carnegie Mellon University  
Pittsburgh, PA

Joyce E. A. Russell  
Senior Associate Dean  
Robert H. Smith School of Business  
University of Maryland  
College Park, MD

Neha Shah  
Assistant Professor  
Rutgers Business School-Newark &  
New Brunswick  
Rutgers University  
Newark, NJ

Amanda Sharkey  
Associate Professor of  
Organizations and Strategy  
Booth School of Business  
University of Chicago  
Chicago, IL

Eesha Sharma  
Assistant Professor of  
Business Administration  
Tuck School of Business  
Dartmouth College  
Hanover, NH

Ofer Sharone  
Assistant Professor  
MIT Sloan School of Management  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Cambridge, MA

Tracey Honeycutt Sigler  
Associate Professor of Management  
Haile/US Bank College of Business  
Northern Kentucky University  
Highland Heights, KY

Lakisha L. Simmons  
Assistant Professor  
Management Information Systems  
Jack C. Massey College of Business  
Belmont University  
Nashville, TN

Sim Sitkin  
Professor of Management and Faculty  
Director of the Fuqua/  
Coach K Center on Leadership and Ethics  
Fuqua School of Business  
Duke University  
Durham, NC

Nagaraj Sivasubramaniam  
Associate Professor of Leadership  
Marketing & Management Department  
Palumbo-Donahue Schools of Business  
Duquesne University  
Pittsburgh, PA

Adam R. Smith  
Assistant Professor of Management  
School of Business  
Indiana University Kokomo  
Kokomo, IN

Ella L.J. Bell Smith  
Professor of Business Administration  
Tuck School of Business  
Dartmouth College  
Hanover, NH

Caitlin Sockbeson  
Adjunct Instructor  
Freeman School of Business  
Tulane University  
New Orleans, LA

Olav Sorenson  
Frederick Frank '54 and Mary C.  
Tanner Professor of Management  
Director of Core Curriculum  
Co-Director of Initiative on Leadership  
and Organizations  
Yale School of Management  
Yale University  
New Haven, CT

Sarah Soule  
Professor of Organizational Behavior  
Stanford Graduate School of Business  
Stanford University  
Stanford, CA

Gretchen M. Spreitzer  
Keith E. and Valerie J. Alessi Professor of  
Business Administration  
Professor of Management &  
Organizations  
Ross School of Business  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, MI



S. Srinivasan  
Associate Dean for  
Academic Affairs & Research  
Distinguished Professor of  
Information Systems  
Jesse H. Jones School of Business  
Texas Southern University  
Houston, TX

Susan J. Stehlik  
Associate Professor  
Management Communication  
Stern School of Business  
New York University  
New York, New York

John Sterman  
Jay W. Forrester Professor of  
Management  
Director, MIT System Dynamics Group  
MIT Sloan School of Management  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Cambridge, MA

Jay Stowsky  
Senior Assistant Dean for Instruction  
Haas School of Business  
University of California at Berkeley  
Berkeley, CA

Alva Taylor  
Associate Professor  
Director, Center for Digital Strategies  
Tuck School of Business  
Dartmouth College  
Hanover, NH

Gail Ayala Taylor  
Visiting Associate Professor  
Tuck School of Business  
Dartmouth College  
Hanover, NH

Vicki Taylor  
Associate Professor  
John L. Grove College of Business  
Shippensburg University  
Camphill, PA

Melissa C. Thomas-Hunt  
Associate Professor  
Darden School of Business  
Batten School of Leadership  
and Public Policy  
University of Virginia  
Charlottesville, VA

Cynthia Thompson  
Professor  
N. Paul Loomba Department of  
Management  
Zicklin School of Business  
Baruch College  
New York, NY

Tracy Thompson  
Associate Professor  
Milgard School of Business  
University of Washington Tacoma  
Tacoma, WA

Catherine Tinsley  
Professor of Management  
McDonough School of Business  
Executive Director Georgetown  
University Women's Leadership Institute  
Georgetown University  
Washington, D.C.

Spela Trefalt  
Associate Professor  
School of Management  
Simmons College  
Boston, MA

Selale Tuzel  
Associate Professor of Finance and  
Business Economics  
Marshall School of Business  
University of Southern California  
Los Angeles, CA

Laura D. Tyson  
Professor  
Haas School of Business  
University of California at Berkeley  
Berkeley, CA

Mary Uhl-Bien  
BNSF Railway Endowed  
Professor of Leadership  
Professor of Management  
Neeley School of Business  
Texas Christian University  
Fort Worth, TX

Sorin Valcea  
Assistant Professor of Management  
Monte Ahuja College of Business  
Cleveland State University  
Cleveland, OH

John Van Maanen  
Erwin Schell Professor of Work and  
Organization Studies  
MIT Sloan School of Management  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Cambridge, MA

Sabrina Volpone  
Assistant Professor  
Anderson School of Management  
University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, NM

Heather Vough  
Assistant Professor  
Lindner College of Business  
University of Cincinnati  
Cincinnati, OH

David A. Walker  
John A. Largay Professor  
McDonough School of Business  
Georgetown University  
Washington, D.C.

Emma Wendt  
Adjunct Lecturer  
Ross School of Business  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, MI

Alyssa Friede Westring  
Associate Professor of Management  
Driehaus College of Business  
DePaul University  
Chicago, IL

Toni Whited  
Dale L. Dykema Professor of  
Business Administration  
Ross School of Business  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, MI

Steffanie L. Wilk  
Associate Professor  
Management & Human Resources  
Department  
Fisher College of Business  
The Ohio State University  
Columbus, OH

Amy Wrzesniewski  
Professor  
Yale School of Management  
Yale University  
New Haven, CT

JoAnne Yates  
Distinguished Professor of Management  
MIT Sloan School of Management  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Cambridge, MA

Amy Young  
Faculty, Business Communications  
Ross School of Business  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, MI

*\*Signatories to this letter are expressing their personal views and make no representations about the views of the institutions with which they are affiliated.*

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