

Participant Information Sheet - Expert Stakeholder:



This is an official notification by a student of the University of Hertfordshire in respect of a study involving human participants.

Title of study:

From Paradox to Practice: A Design Science Study Developing the Adaptive Leverage Model (ALeM) to Overcome the Generative AI Adaptation Paradox through Dynamic Capabilities in UK Micro-Businesses

Protocol Number:

1263 2025 Jul SSAH

Approving Committee:

Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee, with Delegated Authority

If you have any queries concerning this document, please contact me (Principal Investigator), Bear McBlack, Doctoral Researcher, Hertfordshire Business School, University of Hertfordshire (b.c.mcblack@herts.ac.uk) or my Supervisors, Dr Derek Ong (d.ong@herts.ac.uk) and Professor Amin Hosseinian-Far (a.hosseinian-far@herts.ac.uk), Hertfordshire Business School.

You are being invited to take part in a doctoral research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If anything is unclear or if you would like more information, please do not hesitate to ask. Take time to decide whether you want to take part. This Participant Information Sheet has been prepared by the University of Hertfordshire's regulations

governing the conduct of studies involving human participants (UPR RE01), which can be accessed via this link: https://www.herts.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/233094/Studies-Involving-Human-Participants-RE01.pdf. Additional information on the University's regulations regarding ethics and research integrity can be accessed via this link: <https://www.herts.ac.uk/research/research-management/ethics-and-research-integrity>.

What is the research about?

This research is part of a doctoral thesis employing Design Science Research (DSR) methodology to develop and validate a theoretically-grounded framework—the Adaptive Leverage Model (ALeM)—that addresses the Generative AI Adaptation Paradox in UK micro-businesses. The study examines the gap between Generative Artificial Intelligence accessibility and micro-businesses' ability to derive tangible value from it, grounded in Dynamic Capabilities Theory. The research involves two distinct sample groups: micro-business owner-managers who provide empirical grounding for the problem, and expert stakeholders who evaluate and validate the developed framework.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been invited because of your expertise in one or more of the following domains: (1) policy and SME advocacy, (2) academic research in Dynamic Capabilities Theory or Design Science Research methodology, or (3) practitioner experience in Generative Artificial Intelligence implementation and digital transformation. Your expert evaluation is crucial for validating the theoretical coherence, practical utility, contextual appropriateness, and completeness of the Adaptive Leverage Model (ALeM) developed from the primary research phase. We are seeking approximately 6 to 9 expert stakeholders across these three domains for the evaluation phase of this study.

What is the purpose of this study?

This study addresses the Generative AI Adaptation Paradox—the critical gap between the widespread accessibility of Generative Artificial Intelligence and UK micro-businesses' ability to derive tangible value from it. Using Design Science Research methodology, the research develops the Adaptive Leverage Model (ALeM), a practical framework grounded in Dynamic Capabilities Theory that provides structured guidance for resource-constrained firms to systematically develop the capabilities necessary for sustained Generative Artificial

Intelligence value creation. Your role as an expert stakeholder is to evaluate this framework's theoretical rigour, practical applicability, and contextual appropriateness, providing critical feedback that will refine and validate the model before its finalisation. The study aims to contribute both theoretical advancement (through the formalisation of the Generative AI Adaptation Paradox as a mid-range theory) and practical impact (through the validated ALeM framework).

Do I have to take part?

Participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without any negative consequences. If you choose to withdraw from the study, your data will be removed if requested, as long as this request is made before the analysis is completed. Your consent will be formally documented through a signed consent form before the interview, which will be securely stored separately from your interview data. This formal consent process ensures compliance with the University's ethical standards while protecting your rights as a participant.

What are the selection criteria?

To participate in this study as an expert stakeholder, you must meet one or more of the following criteria:

- **Policy/Context Expertise:** Professional experience in SME policy development, business advocacy organisations (e.g., FSB, TechUK), local government SME support, or related policy-making roles with direct knowledge of UK micro-business operational contexts.
- **Academic/Methodological Expertise:** Published research or teaching specialisation in Dynamic Capabilities Theory, Design Science Research methodology, technology adoption in small firms, or related academic domains relevant to evaluating the theoretical grounding and methodological rigour of the ALeM framework.
- **Practitioner/Technology Expertise:** Senior-level professional experience in Generative Artificial Intelligence implementation, digital transformation consultancy, technology adoption strategy, or related practitioner roles with direct knowledge of GenAI integration challenges and opportunities in resource-constrained business environments.
- Be willing to participate in a single structured evaluation interview lasting approximately 60-90 minutes.

- Be willing to review summary materials about the ALeM framework prior to the interview (estimated 30-45 minutes preparation time).

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will participate in a single structured evaluation interview conducted via Microsoft Teams at a time convenient for you, lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. Prior to the interview, you will receive summary materials outlining the Adaptive Leverage Model (ALeM) framework, its theoretical foundations in Dynamic Capabilities Theory, and its design rationale based on the primary research findings (estimated 30-45 minutes preparation time). During the interview, you will be asked to evaluate the framework across four key dimensions: (1) theoretical coherence and grounding, (2) practical utility and actionability, (3) contextual appropriateness for UK micro-businesses, and (4) completeness and potential gaps. The interview will be structured to elicit your expert judgment on these dimensions whilst allowing flexibility to explore insights specific to your domain of expertise. With your explicit permission, the interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. There will be no financial compensation or incentives provided for your participation in this study. You are invited to participate entirely free of charge, with the understanding that your expert contribution will help validate and refine a framework designed to support micro-businesses in effectively leveraging Generative Artificial Intelligence technologies.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

This research poses minimal risks to expert participants. The primary cost to you will be the time required for reviewing the framework materials (30-45 minutes) and participating in the evaluation interview (60-90 minutes). Your expert opinions and critique will be anonymised in all research outputs, and no attributable statements will be made without your explicit permission. There are no professional risks associated with providing critical or negative evaluations of the framework—indeed, constructive critique is essential for rigorous validation.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

While there are no immediate direct benefits, participating in this research will provide you with early access to a novel framework addressing Generative AI adaptation in micro-businesses, potentially offering insights relevant to your professional work in policy, research, or practice. Your contribution will directly shape the refinement and validation of the ALeM framework, ensuring it meets rigorous standards of theoretical coherence and practical utility. You will also contribute to advancing Design Science Research methodology in the context of emerging technology adoption. If you are interested, you will be offered the opportunity to receive the final validated framework and research findings upon completion of the study.

Additionally, upon successful completion and acceptance of this PhD research, you will be able to acknowledge that you contributed to the creation of the Adaptive Leverage Model (ALeM) and the theoretical development of the Generative AI Adaptation Paradox. Your expert evaluation and feedback will be instrumental in refining this academic framework, and you may reference your contribution to this research in your professional profile or communications. While you will not be listed as a co-author, your role as an expert evaluator who shaped the final validated artifact represents a meaningful contribution to advancing knowledge in this emerging field.

Will my information be kept confidential?

All information collected during the research will be kept strictly confidential. Your data will be anonymised, and your organisation (if applicable) will be given a pseudonym in all research outputs unless you explicitly agree otherwise. The research team will take the following measures to ensure confidentiality:

- Interview recordings and transcripts will be stored on secure, encrypted drives (specifically, University of Hertfordshire-supplied OneDrive).
- Identifying information (names, specific organisational names, unique details) will be removed from transcripts and replaced with domain-specific descriptors (e.g., "Policy Expert 1," "Academic Expert 2," "Practitioner Expert 3").
- Only the researcher and supervisory team will have access to the raw data (prior to anonymisation).
- Data will be processed in compliance with GDPR regulations.

Anonymised data will be retained for 5 years following the completion and submission of the doctoral thesis, after which all data will be securely deleted in accordance with the University's data management protocols. This specific retention period is chosen to allow for academic publishing and potential verification of research findings, while ensuring your privacy is protected over the long term.

How will my data be used?

Your anonymised expert evaluation data will be used for:

- A doctoral thesis (specifically, the artifact evaluation and validation chapter)
- Academic journal articles and conference presentations focused on Design Science Research methodology and the validated ALeM framework
- Refinement of the Adaptive Leverage Model (ALeM) based on expert feedback to ensure theoretical rigour and practical utility

Findings will be shared through academic publications, policy briefings (where appropriate), and accessible summaries for the micro-business community.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results will form part of a doctoral thesis, specifically contributing to the artifact evaluation and validation phase of the Design Science Research process. Findings may be published in academic journals focused on technology adoption, small business management, or Design Science Research methodology, and presented at academic and practitioner conferences. If you are interested, a summary of the findings and the final validated ALeM framework can be sent to you upon completion of the study.

Who is organising the research?

This research is being conducted as part of a doctoral programme at the University of Hertfordshire.

Who has reviewed the study?

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee Delegated Authority. This approval confirms that the study meets the University's ethical standards for research involving human participants as outlined in UPR RE01.

Contact for further information.

If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact:

- **Researcher:** Bear McBlack, Ph.D. Doctoral College, Hertfordshire Business School, University of Hertfordshire, De Havilland Campus, AL10 9EU, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, UK Email: b.c.mcblack@herts.ac.uk
- Although we hope it is not the case, if you have any complaints or concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during this study, please write to the University's Secretary and Registrar, who has ultimate responsibility for resolving ethical concerns and disputes. Any unresolved concerns will be referred to the University's Secretary and Registrar for formal investigation by the University's ethical standards procedures. Contact information for the University Secretary and Registrar, University of Hertfordshire, College Lane, Hatfield, Herts, AL10 9AB.

Thank you very much for reading this information and giving consideration to taking part in this study.