

Review of HELM's Women in Leadership Pilot Programme

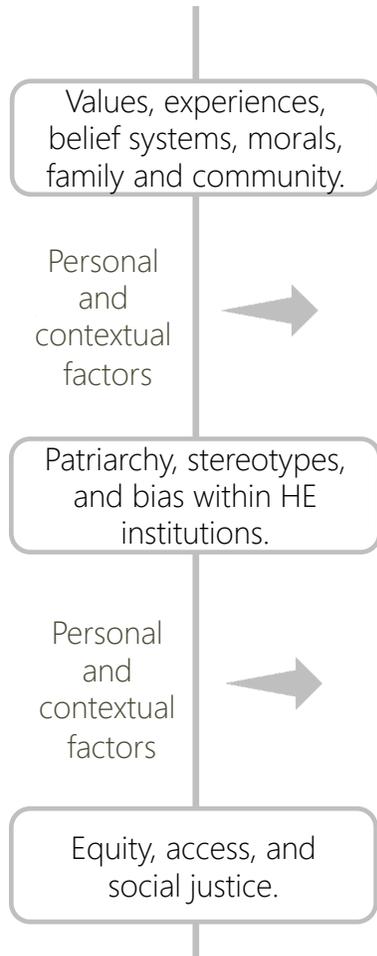
FINAL REPORT
JULY 2021

Undertaken by M&ESURE Research and Evaluation

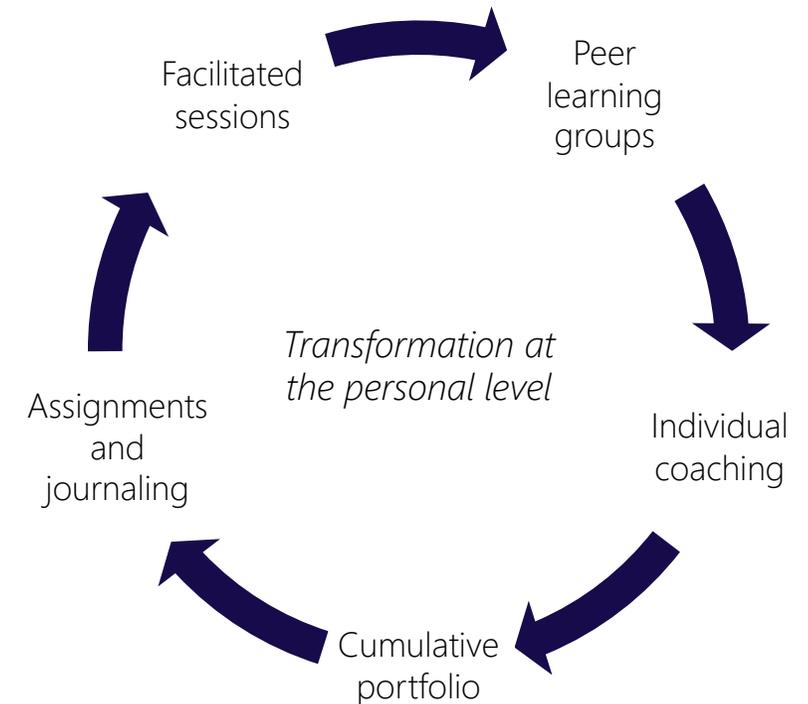
WiL's aims and objectives

- It aims to **advance gender equity** in the leadership of the South African HE sector by providing bespoke learning and development opportunity for women in middle and senior management positions at public universities in South Africa.
- WiL's goal is to **contribute to a more equitable, diverse and representative higher education environment**, in which multiple perspectives and ways of doing and being, create an enabling environment in which all who work and live in it can thrive.
- It focuses on **creating a pipeline and expanding the leadership pool** by advancing and supporting women to lead change in a complex higher education context.

Overview of the WiL pilot programme



- Informed by and designed to address key personal and contextual factors within HE
- Draws on international best practice and TNA completed
- Builds on HELM's Foundations of Leadership programme ('outside-in')
- It is structured around the individual ('inside out'), foregrounding the unique competencies, needs and contributions of each participant.
- Employs a humanising pedagogy that emphasises human agency and issues of social justice.
- WiL promotes self-directed learning and underscores the role of self-reflection.



WiL commenced in September 2020 with 26 participants representing 17 universities.

Review purpose

Design

- Explore whether the Programme is relevant and its design feasible

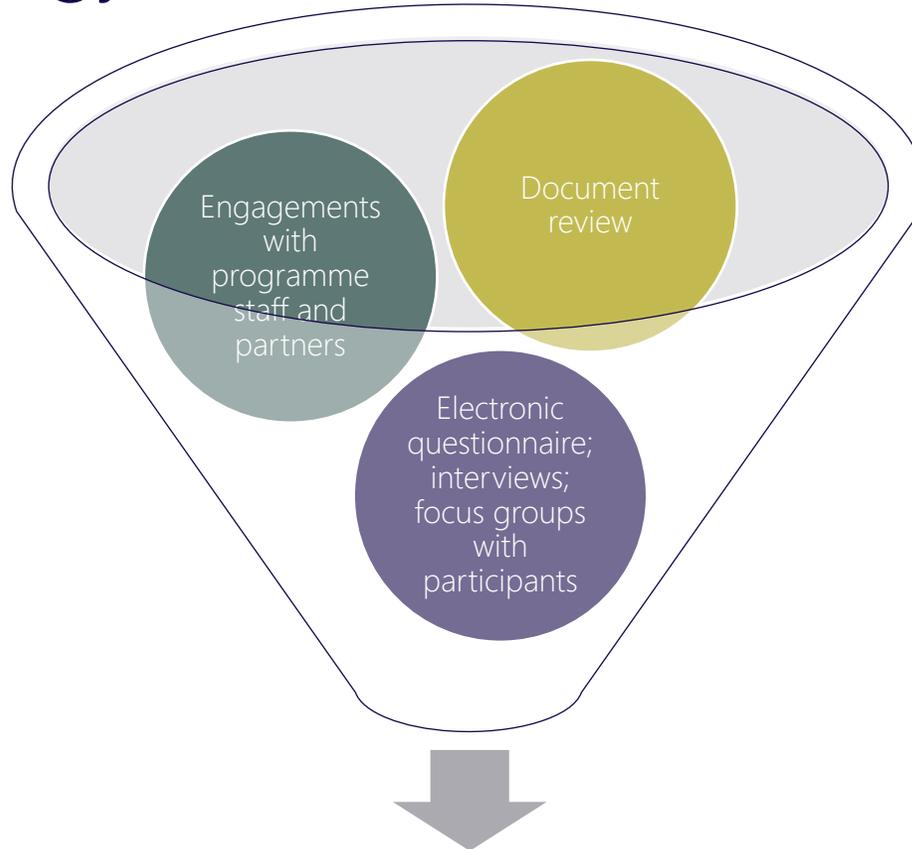
Implementation

- Explore whether the Programme was implemented as planned
- Explore the successes, challenges and lessons learnt in the implementation of the pilot

Results/ changes

- Explore the immediate impact of the Programme on the 26 participants by assessing the contribution of the programme workshops and other components to their professional and personal development;
- Explore whether and how the Programme provides a longer-term foundation for women academic leaders to contribute to transformation initiatives in their 'spaces' within the universities, drawing on the network developed as part of the programme

Methodology



- Load shedding interrupted interviews
- Participants' personal and work-related commitments limited participation
- Timing

An enhanced understanding of the changes/benefits participants experienced in order to inform the planning for future cohorts and the development of the M&E framework

Key findings related to WiL's design

- WiL's relevance in response to the challenges that women leaders are facing within the higher education context, was confirmed by all role-players.
- The motivation cited by many participants for their interest in WiL aligns with HELM's understanding of the challenges within HE institutions.
- The conceptualisation and alignment of the programme's curriculum (by virtue of its content, delivery components, support, etc) translates into an integrated, holistic programme that was appreciated by participants.

The experiences that I was going through in my current space really nudged me to participate. I had gotten to a point where I felt quote isolated. Gender...but also the race aspect of it. I always say that one has to manage the double whammy of race and gender – and it doesn't get easier, it actually gets quite difficult the more one progresses in their professional spaces.

The information from different sessions also fit perfectly with each other, like the pieces of a beautiful puzzle.... I found that the concepts covered in the programme is like a bag of skills and knowledge and the deeper I put my hand into the bag, the more I can take from it. I will keep this bag with me and keep on putting my hand in it again and again.

Key findings related to WiL's implementation

- The adapted programme was thoughtfully executed and the possible negative impact of a reduction of in-person engagement was mitigated as far as possible.
- Overall, participants were highly satisfied with WiL's programme offering and design, its content and structure, and the reflective nature of its delivery.
- Participants reflected on how the structured and unstructured opportunities for self-reflection deepened their experience and that they felt safe enough to share of themselves in the process.
- The coaching has been cited as a major success, particularly in terms of being a mechanism for self-reflection.
- The PLGs were also successful as they created spaces where participants in similar contexts could share their work and life experiences.
- Close to perfect attendance, no attrition.
- All participants submitted a cumulative portfolio.

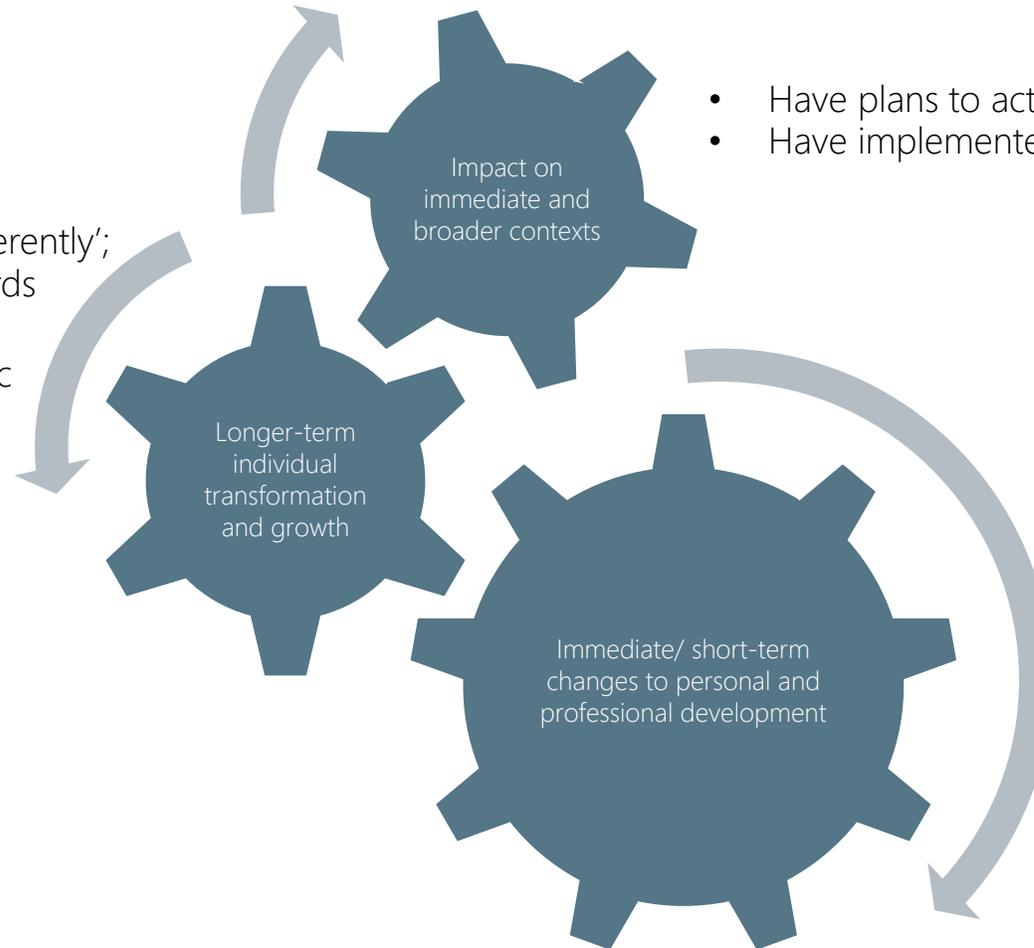
The programme was well put together... Various creative methodologies including World Café discussions, free writing exercises, reference to favourite songs and writing palindrome poems were used and I felt inspired and empowered by it – to the extent that I have, and will continue to, use these methodologies in my own work.

Key findings related to design and implementation challenges

- Effects of COVID-19 re. networking, focus, connectivity
- Coaching sessions were too few
- Limited structure for PLGs was challenging
- Uncertainty about how the network will continue after WiL
- Confusion about the requirements for the submission of the cumulative portfolio

Key findings related to achievement of WiL's results

- 'see the same things differently';
- proactively striving towards professional goals;
- strengthening of strategic relationships



- Have plans to action in the foreseeable future and/or
- Have implemented activities/action plans already

- Enhancing self-reflection and self-awareness;
- strengthening leadership capacity and capabilities;
- establishing networks and relationships;
- enhanced understanding of the HE context;
- recognising value of self-care;
- reflecting on career trajectories

Findings re. personal and professional development

- All participants reported that the programme added value to their personal and professional development.
- Participants shared examples of how specific sessions contributed towards **increased levels of leadership awareness, knowledge and skills.**
- Almost all participants spoke of gaining significant insight through the opportunities for self-reflection in WiL and examples were cited of how self-reflection has led to an **enhanced sense of self.**

Fundamentally, it was how to relate to higher ups and to understand clearly the areas that are within my control in those relationships, so that I don't feel heavily burdened with issues I don't have control over and being more explicit with my interactions with the higher ups in terms of what I can do and what I can't do – and what I will not be accountable for...getting back my voice.

My coach helped me realise my weaknesses [in addition to] those I shared with her, and I learned how to regain my confidence as a leader and gain influence.

Findings re. personal and professional development (2)

- The **establishment of a network** through WiL was noted as a significant outcome for some participants.
- Some participants indicated having an **increased awareness of and/or a renewed appreciation for how the systemic challenges within HE directly affect women.**
- Participants indicated that the programme **raised awareness about the importance of self-care.**
- WiL provided an opportunity for participants to **explore their potential and desire to advance further in leadership positions within their institutions.**

The experience of a very negative, hostile environment of my workplace...the [WiL] platform is like a safe haven [in comparison]. It allowed us to open and share similar ideas that made me realise that something needs to be done in the space of higher education, because we all had similar experiences...

I didn't have the desire to be a Dean, I thought 'after this, I'm done'. But after this programme... I want to stay in management. I thought that I could actually make a difference, being motivated in making a change... in a meaningful way.

Findings re. individual transformation and growth

- Individual transformation and growth seem to have taken place at a varied pace, based on the individual.
- Many spoke of a **fundamental shift in the way they perceived themselves** within their workspaces and a change in how they applied themselves to the challenges therein.
- A number of participants highlighted that due to WiL, they have **realised the importance of being clear and intentional about their professional goals** and taking practical steps towards achieving these professional goals.
- Some participants have **strengthened and improved their relationships** with their direct reports and team members

This new understanding of power has made me realise that I am not powerless. This for me was really empowering because it also facilitated a shift in mentality from being a victim of a system to rather being someone who can change a system by initiating ripples of change by yielding the power I have in my circle of control.

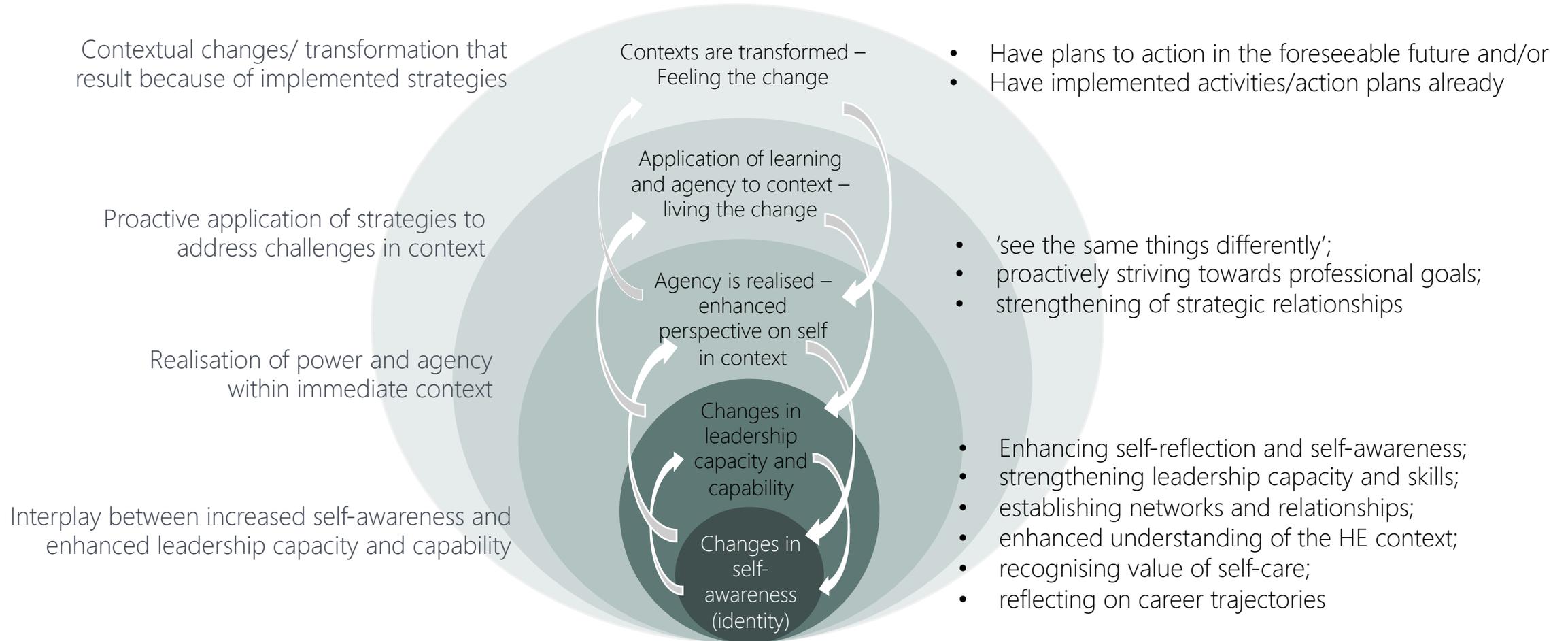
Coaching helped me individually to focus on my own wellness and to plan my career trajectory. It encouraged me to apply for a promotion. At a group level it helped me to say "no" to things that are not my responsibility. At an institutional level I was able to use the skills that I learnt during the coaching session in my Department to support, guide and coach my staff members.

Findings re. changes to immediate and broader contexts

- Participants spoke of being inspired by WiL to become champions for other women leaders or future leaders.
- WiL contributed towards feeling a sense of responsibility for the development of other women.
- WiL created a 'microcosm' of how participants could replicate different components of the Programme in the real world among their colleagues or other stakeholders in their own contexts.

I was able to use lessons learnt from the sessions in my day-to-day workspace - such as: sharing some of the literature and practices with the team; being mindful and intentional in my interactions with the team members and colleagues; taking back my power re. my voice and not shying away from speaking up and out, especially regarding issues that may not necessarily affect me, but have an impact/implication on colleagues. I felt more empowered to use my voice productively and not be covered into silence that is endemic within our institution.

Moving forward... understanding the WiL change process



(Some) Recommendations by participants, programme staff and partners

- Recommendations re. programme design and relevance; implementation; continuation and expansion; and the broader HE environment.
- Participants' recommendations related to the broader HE environment included the need for HELM to enhance and strengthen its role in the HE sector to support systemic change.
- Coaches recommended that universities should to create environments that are enabling for women to thrive by, amongst other strategies, creating safe spaces for dialogue and embedding coaching opportunities in leaderships structures.

(Some) Recommendations by evaluators

- WiL continues to be responsive to the prevailing needs as identified by future participants.
- HELM should continue to advocate for management buy-in to FoL and WiL to ensure that there is sufficient interest and representation from all HEIs; and to ensure that participants are sufficiently supported during and after WiL.
- HELM should implement the M&E framework arising from this review process in order to determine the longer-term impact of the programme.
- HELM should examine ways in which to acknowledge/share the promotion and advancement of women in HE by possibly tracking past participants and showcasing career successes within the sector.
- As HELM considers WiL's expansion, it should examine what is *not* being done and what target group is currently *not* being sufficiently 'serviced' through WiL and other interventions.