

REVIEW OF HELM'S WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP SIX-MONTH PILOT PROGRAMME

SEPTEMBER 2020 - MARCH 2021

Women in Leadership (WiL) forms part of the Higher Education Leadership and Management (HELM) programme offerings, located at Universities South Africa (USAf). USAf entered into a strategic partnership with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), who provides financial support through the University Capacity Development Grant (UCDG). In efforts to explore workable solutions to higher education leadership and management needs, the British Council partnered with USAf/HELM in 2020 to implement the first phase of the WiL programme. This partnership leverages the British Council and USAf's shared objectives and priorities in terms of the development of female leaders within higher education and the advancement of gender equality and inclusion in the sector.

GOAL AND AIMS

26

participants representing

17

SA public universities

- 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 in it can thrive
- to advance gender equity in the leadership of the South African Higher Education (HE) sector by providing bespoke learning and development opportunity for women in middle and senior management positions at public universities in South Africa
- to create a pipeline and expand the leadership pool by advancing and supporting women to lead change in a complex higher education context

DESIGN AND STRUCTURE

COVID-19 resulted in an adapted roll-out that consisted of:

- online and face-to-face facilitated sessions (depicted alongside)
- peer learning groups
- coaching sessions
- assignments, portfolios
- journaling exercises



OVERARCHING FINDINGS

Related to 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.
- 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 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.

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.

Related to implementation

- Participants were highly satisfied with WiL's offering and design, its content and structure, and the reflective nature of its delivery.
- Opportunities for self-reflection deepened participants' experience.
- The coaching and peer learning groups were well received and rendered significant benefits for participants.
- Close-to-perfect attendance and no attrition during the pilot.
- All participants submitted a cumulative portfolio.

Related to results

These concentric circles show the interconnectedness of the changes participants reported. They emphasise the importance of the self in relation to context, as well as how participants realise their agency and start to proactively apply strategies to address their contexts. The cumulative effects of personal change in terms of increased self-awareness and enhanced leadership capacity and capability can have catalytic effects in the immediate and broader contexts in which participants operate. These changes are also felt by others as participants start to plan for, and action, changes.

RESULTS REPORTED

- shifts in self-perception
- proactively striving towards professional goals
- strengthening of strategic relationships

RESULTS REPORTED

- Enhanced self-reflection and self-awareness

RESULTS REPORTED

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

RESULTS REPORTED

- strengthened leadership capacity and skills
- established networks and relationships
- enhanced understanding of the HE context
- value of self-care recognised
- reflections on career trajectories



REVIEW OF HELM'S WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP SIX-MONTH PILOT PROGRAMME

SEPTEMBER 2020 - MARCH 2021

UNPACKING THE CHANGES REPORTED BY PARTICIPANTS

The themes emerging were grouped into immediate/short-term changes that participants experienced with regards to personal and professional development; those that related to longer-term individual transformation and growth; and examples and experiences that related to changes in participants' immediate and broader contexts.

Related to 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**.
- 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**.

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.

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

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.

Related to 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.

Related to changes in 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.

(SOME) OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

- HELM, British Council and other stakeholders should consider the following broader recommendations regarding the development of similar programmes in the future, particularly in a partnership context: the design of the intervention should be clearly understood through the undertaking of a situational analysis and drafting of a problem analysis, theory of change and logic model; a detailed project plan should be developed showing how each partner's activities/contributions are mapped and how these contribute towards the goal of the programme; and it is crucial that the programme aligns with each organisation's strategic imperatives/focus areas to ensure sustained buy-in and support.
- WiL should continue to be responsive to the prevailing needs as identified by future participants.
- HELM should continue to advocate for management buy-in 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.
- As HELM considers WiL's expansion, it should consider ways in which it can bolster and scaffold the efforts of other programmes; as well as how WiL can be strengthened and sustained by the efforts and outcomes of other programmes.