

Institution: University of Edinburgh		
Unit of Assessment: 17 Business and Management Studies		
Title of case study: Increasing Leadership Skills and Confidence to Enhance Career Success of Female Senior Leaders in Scotland		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014-2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Susan E Murphy	Professor in Organisational Studies	2013-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Murphy's research on the key issues in women's leader development shaped a UEBS women's executive leadership programme delivered in partnership with FWB Park Brown. The programme, running yearly from 2016 to 2019, provided a women's only programme to 220 women from 85 organisations, focusing on key challenges facing female leaders such as increasing leadership self-efficacy and reducing the deleterious effects of stereotype threat. Programme evaluations showed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants strengthened their confidence in their leadership abilities, which led to improved communication, strategic leadership, decision making, strategic thinking, team leadership, and networking skills, and higher career aspirations. • Women's improved self-efficacy and career aspirations led to substantial career development. <p>Organisations that sent multiple participants over the 4 years reported that these women's attendance helped them improve organisational leadership capability and led to them implementing fairer HR practices. The programme also led to the creation of the Executive Women in Leadership Network, a trusted and widely used resource to support alumni from the programme.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Although women's participation at the middle management level has grown to 40% of middle managers, only 29% of senior managers and 23% of executives are women. Women CEOs stand at around 5-7% in US and UK. Women's advancement rates to these higher management levels have changed little over the last decade across various industries and sectors (UK Office for National Statistics, 2018).</p> <p>Murphy's research has utilised a social cognitive model of behaviour change to identify barriers that prevent women from advancing into senior leadership positions, focusing on how self-views and stereotype threats can affect leadership development and motivation to take on leadership roles.</p> <p>A central premise of Murphy's research is that leadership development starts with aspects of self-views. These are the extent to which an individual views a leadership role as part of her self-identity and compares her own skillset to other effective leaders' exemplars. These views affect women's motivation to take on leadership roles (aspirations for leadership) and develop confidence (3.1; 3.2). In particular, Murphy has advocated the importance of tailoring a leadership development programme to the combination of participants' incoming levels of leader self-efficacy (the belief in one's ability to succeed as a leader) and levels of leader developmental efficacy (beliefs about ability to change and develop current leadership skills) (3.3).</p>		

Murphy's research also focusses on overcoming the harmful effects of stereotype threat for women in higher management positions (3.4). For example, Murphy demonstrated that women in-all male groups perform worse and experience a stereotype vulnerability response (higher levels of stress and lower performance) than women in women-only groups (3.4; 3.5). Furthermore, Murphy's research has shown that women leaders face stereotypical expectations of their gender role (3.1). This includes the characteristics of relationship-oriented and caring/nurturing instead of the agentic male stereotypes of achievement-orientated, competitive, and independent, which can reduce their effectiveness in some male-dominated organisations (3.5). She has shown that the effects of stereotype threat depend in part on the extent to which women see themselves as having, or being able to develop, leadership abilities. In turn she suggests that development programmes focused on increasing both leadership abilities and leader identity hold great potential in helping inoculate women from stereotype threat (3.4). She advocates the use of women-only programmes and access to female role models and networks as being crucial to developing leader identity and building confidence.

Building on her research into adolescent girls' leader development (3.1; 3.6), Murphy developed a framework which highlighted the importance of considering leadership development as a dynamic process whereby experiences interact with leader self-views and context (3.2). This approach advocates that participants are encouraged to bring in their own leadership challenges for discussion, allowing the participants to choose what they learn, and adapting the program to the changing needs of the cohort (3.6).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- 3.1. Eva, N., De Ceiri, H., Murphy, S.E., Lowe, K. (2020). Leader development for adolescent girls: State of the field and a framework for moving forward. *The Leadership Quarterly*, published online 23 September 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2020.101457>
- 3.2. Liu, Venkatesh, S., Murphy, S.E., & Riggio, R.E. (2020). Leader development across the lifespan: A dynamic experiences-grounded approach. *The Leadership Quarterly* published online 2 February 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2020.101382>
- 3.3. Murphy, S.E., & Johnson, S.K. (2016). Leadership and leader developmental self-efficacy: Their role in enhancing leader development efforts. In R. Reichard & S. Thompson, *New Directions in Student Leadership*, Jossey Bass. 2016(149) 73-84 <https://doi.org/10.1002/yl.20163>
- 3.4. Hoyt, C., & Murphy, S.E. (2016). Managing to clear the air: Stereotype threat, women, and leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 27 (3) 387-399. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2015.11.002>
- 3.5. Murphy, S.E., Jansson, M., & Hoyt, C. (2017) Implicit Theories and Leader Identity: Leadership Self Efficacy Effects for Women and Men Academy of Management 2017, Atlanta (Can be supplied by HEI on request).
- 3.6. Murphy, S.E. (2018) Leadership Development starts earlier than we think: Capturing the capacity of new leaders to address the leader talent shortage. In Riggio, R. (ed.) (2018) *What's Wrong with Leadership?* London: Routledge. (Can be supplied by HEI on request)

4. Details of the impact

In 2014, Murphy's leadership research attracted the interest of a partner in FWB Park Brown, a prominent Scottish executive search firm: "Professor Murphy's research spoke directly to the under-representation of women in senior positions" [5.1], the difficulties faced by senior women attaining executive positions and the importance to the Scottish Economy of addressing these problems. Following extensive discussions, FWB Park Brown and Murphy in 2015 co-created the *Edinburgh Women's Leadership Programme* (EWLP), a women-only executive development programme based on Murphy's research findings on self-efficacy, leader identity development, and stereotype threat. Between 2016-20, the EWLP ran four times, with 220 participants from 85 organisations. These included Standard

Life Aberdeen, Baillie Gifford, Diageo, Royal London, Scottish Enterprise, and the Student Loan Company, who between them sent 70 participants on the programme. The EWLP had impact on the individual careers of participants, as well as on the sponsoring organisations, as outlined below.

Raising Self-efficacy and Confidence leading to Career Advancement

Participants on the programme mainly held upper-middle management positions, seeking executive roles. A survey of all EWLP participants in 2020 (response rate 25%) revealed that 92% reported an improvement in confidence in their leadership abilities as a direct result of the programme [5.2]. This was manifested in improved communication, strategic leadership, decision making, strategic thinking, team leadership, and networking skills, and higher career aspirations. In addition, 56% of respondents experienced an increase in their leadership efficacy as a direct result of the programme [5.2]. A senior executive recalled “The Executive Women’s Leadership Programme was instrumental in helping me develop as a leader. My employer viewed it as preparation for taking on a senior executive position in the firm, a commonly held view across the course” [5.3]. Indeed, by 2020, 62% of EWLP respondents had secured a new job with increased responsibilities or were promoted internally, with three-quarters of these saying the programme had a direct influence on their success [5.2]. One course participant, who since secured a senior position in another company stated;

“Professor Murphy’s research had a profound impact on me in that it helped me allow myself to ‘think big’ in terms of career aspirations. It increased career confidence, which in my case and in the case of several of my peers resulted in concrete action... This resulted in an employment offer for a senior position” [5.4]

Similarly, another course participant, now serving as a senior executive [5.5] explained:

“The programme’s direct impact was it helped me be more influential in the workplace, especially in collaborating with others to find solutions and securing ‘buy-in’ for my ideas. Using Murphy’s ideas raised my profile, gave me confidence and helped me make a difference to the business as I took on a more strategic role”.

The Director of People at Scottish Enterprise [5.6], who sent 19 people on the programme, confirmed it helped their staff develop, identifying that “there have been more promotions than we would have otherwise expected”.

Improved confidence and self-efficacy enabled participants to develop their own authentic leadership style, which was instrumental to their advancement [5.7]:

“My elevated leadership skills resulted in a promotion to Vice President. The programme gave me confidence that my authentic leadership should not be changed and cloned to a typical male leadership style. ...I took these research insights very seriously, and they helped me develop as a senior executive”. [5.7]

A partner at FWB Park Brown’s observations support participants’ accounts of the pivotal role of the programme in enabling career advancement:

“I do not say this lightly, but Professor Murphy’s research has directly contributed to participants achieving impressive career promotions, which would probably not have happened had they not attended the programme” [5.1].

In addition to promotions, 23% of participants took on a board or advisory roles in another organisation as a Non-Executive Director, which they attributed to the programme [5.2]. Participants across the four cohorts consistently endorsed the value of the networks they had formed: “The EWLP has created a powerful and supportive network that is giving a generation of female leaders’ chances they may not have had otherwise.” [5.4].

To build on this momentum, Murphy and Wagner established the Executive Women in

Leadership Network [5.8] to continue the gains from the EWLP and increase opportunities for the participants. Launched in August 2020, the network provides ongoing alumni support across the four cohort years [n=220 in 85 companies]. The network has an Advisory Committee of two committee members for each cohort year. The network has an on-line portal – supported by the University of Edinburgh Business School – where information is shared, issues are explored and problems discussed. Metrics illustrate a high level of active involvement [2,856 subscriptions to different discussion groups, 784 replies sent to the discussion group, 60 to 120 participant registrations for online events] [5.8]. A senior executive who serves as a board member outlined the benefits of this “high trust environment” as primarily supporting “our network members in dealing with complicated workplace situations”, which helps women leaders’ in their careers. The network also plays an important role in recruitment as it “facilitates referrals for networks looking for talented people” [5.3].

Enhancing leadership capacity of organisations and introducing fair HR practices

EWLP participants’ enhanced confidence and skills led them to change their behaviours to benefit their organisations, and organisations reported that they noticed a difference in their staff who attended the programme [5.1]. For example, 98% of respondents reported that they had put into practice new leadership skills and thinking at work, and 77% reported that the programme had helped them influence strategic change in their organisation [5.2]. A CEO of a charity who participated in the programme stated:

“It’s allowed me to engage at a different level from what I was doing before. Even things like trying to get a loan for the organization. I’m much more confident about who we are and who I am and how I can make a difference and lift the organization. ... I feel that my leadership is much clearer, I’m much clearer about what I do” [5.9]

The EWLP aided organisations in the development and promotion of staff. For instance, the EWLP helped Standard Life Aberdeen’s efforts to include more women in their talent pipeline and resulted in women who were more confident, enhanced their self-efficacy and could be themselves, a critical requirement for successful leadership [5.10].

83% of participants reported that they were able to influence their organisation’s culture as a consequence of the programme [5.2]. In particular, this influence was directed at tackling gender inequality in the wider organisation: “I see organisations working hard to ensure a level playing field for all employees that did not exist before. Professor Murphy’s research mediated through the programme has participating organisations doing something about gender discrimination” [5.1]. For example, some of the discussions in class permeated into participants’ organisations:

“Professor Murphy’s research on stereotype threat featured prominently in the EWLP. This encouraged the group to bring forward topics that are still largely taboo (e.g. managing through menopause) or issues that still have insufficiently improved (e.g. highly educated and ambitious women unable to return from longer career breaks after children). This was incredibly important and has opened up conversations that matter” [5.4].

“The programme also resulted in significant benefits for the company I work for, as my involvement in gender equality initiatives intensified. I became a mentor to several young women in my company and have spearheaded *Women in Energy* platform, where I advocated the benefits of gender balanced boards in the fight against climate change” [5.7]

The effects of the programme on an investment management firm were substantial, most notably in the area of diversity:

“In support of a workshop session in the programme, a colleague conducted a very detailed analysis of diversity in the firm. On the basis of her findings, we changed some of our hiring practices and have focused on driving culture change in the firm... ..In summary, the programme gave a cohort of women executives the confidence to push through the changes in the business with the result that we are becoming a more diverse organisation, with far more opportunities for women to advance their careers” [5.5]

A former senior executive at Standard Life Aberdeen recalled that the EWLP helped create a “turning point” where women were able “to compete as themselves and succeed” [5.10]. The broader influence on organisational culture manifested itself specifically through changed HR practices. In the 2020 survey [5.2], 83% of participants reported that the EWLP had helped improve Equality and Diversity policies within their organisation. For example, the programme's influence on Scottish Enterprise extended into shaping HR policy: “We have used Murphy’s research insights to promote our equality and diversity agenda within Scottish Enterprise. Murphy and Wagner’s work has been timely and aided Scottish Enterprise enormously” [5.6]. A senior executive concluded: “The EWLP, underpinned by Susan Murphy’s research, has been beneficial to the participants, their organisations, and, more broadly, to corporate Scotland. It has ushered in new expectations and ways of working, and has changed the conversation around diversity and leadership in the workplace” [5.5].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1. A Partner at FWB Park Brown, co-architect of the Executive Women’s Leadership Programme.
- 5.2. Questionnaire to all Executive Women’s Leadership Programme participants, distributed and analysed in October 2020.
- 5.3. Senior Executive in Financial Services and Executive Women in Leadership Network Advisory Board Member.
- 5.4. Tesco Bank Senior Executive.
- 5.5. Senior Executive, Investment Management Company.
- 5.6. Director at Scottish Enterprise.
- 5.7. Wood Mackenzie, Vice-President.
- 5.8. Leadership Network website pages and analytics
<https://uebs.connectedcommunity.org/home>
- 5.9. Interview with CEO of a Charity, conducted by FWB Park Brown. 5th February, 2020 (p8).
- 5.10. Former Senior Executive at Scottish Life Aberdeen, currently Chief Executive of Scottish Financial Enterprise.