



Generating Routes for Women's Leadership Project (GROWL)

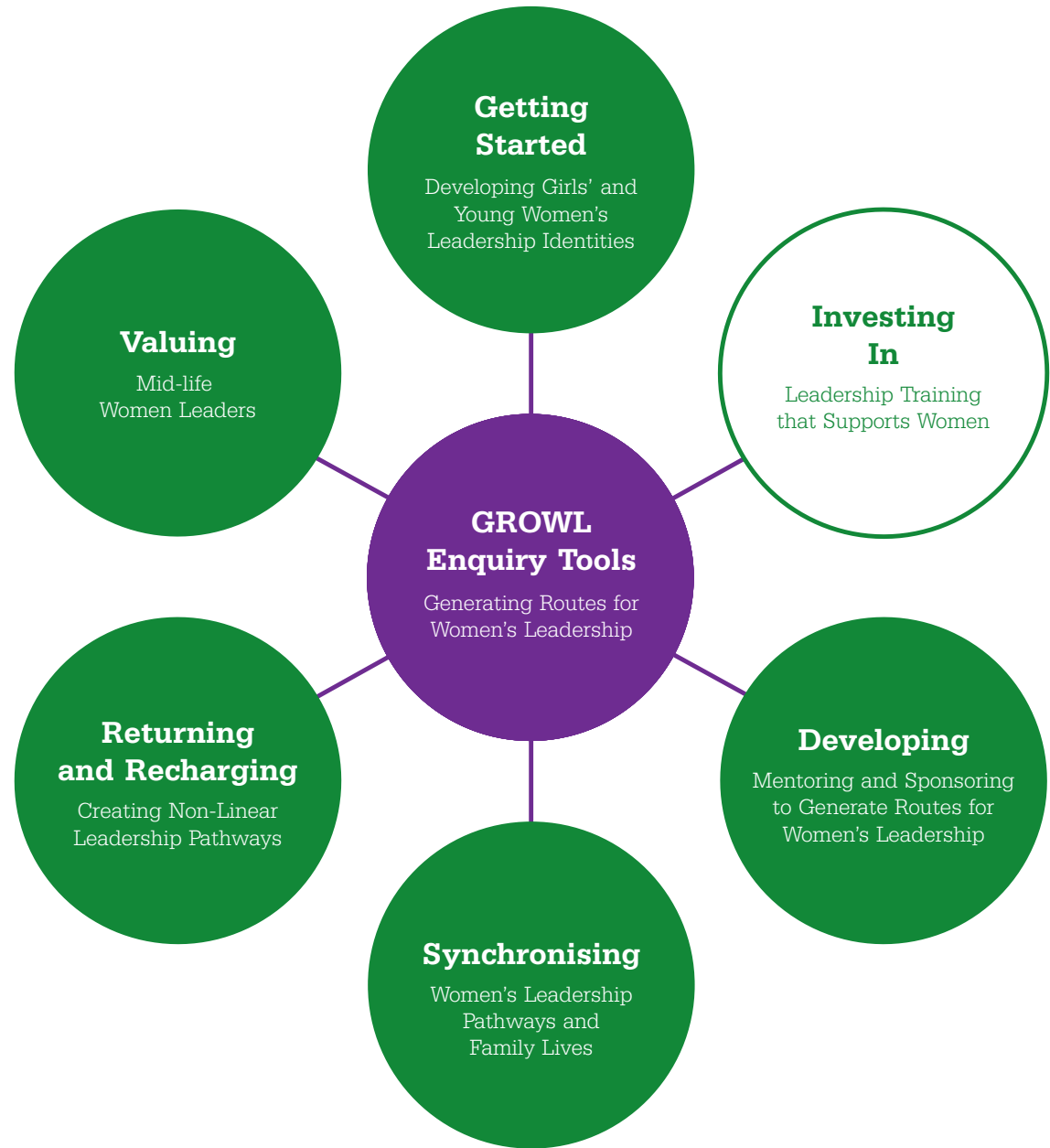
GROWL Enquiry Tool 2/6

Investing In Leadership Training That Supports Women



GROWL is Manchester Metropolitan University's Toolkit of Enquiry Tools, an Ideas Bank and a Network that supports organisations to engage with research evidence to Generate Routes for Women's Leadership.

We are taking research evidence out to organisations to create a dialogue about how they can Generate Routes for Women's Leadership (GROWL). Our approach involves supporting you to draw on six GROWL Enquiry Tools, a GROWL Ideas Bank of 'better practice' and a GROWL Network to reflect on your context and Generate Routes for Women's Leadership that fit with your organisation. We are learning about engagement as we go and invite you to learn with us and our network.





Investing In Leadership Training That Supports Women

Summary

- Women continue to be under-represented in leadership roles and although advances have been made, women still face a complex array of challenges that slow or obstruct their access to leadership. If we are to generate better routes for women's leadership, we need to unpick what we expect from leaders, how we develop them and the context in which they work.
- To develop diverse leadership, organisations need to think creatively about how leadership training can support women navigating their leadership pathways or serve to perpetuate the status-quo and how organisational structures and institutional practices can create conditions to enable talented women to thrive.

Women's Leadership: Navigating the 'Labyrinth'

- A wealth of research reveals that people perceive female leaders to be and act differently from their male counterparts. These differences arise from the way that girls and boys are socialised and don't relate to men or women inherently. Ideas about men and women are over-simplified stereotypes and all attributes can be useful for leaders and warrant development and respect.
- Although alternative approaches to leadership have been developed and shown to be effective, even now ideas about productive leadership remain strongly associated traditionally male attributes i.e. competent, assertive and authoritative. Organisations can work to dispel myths around the 'ideal' leader by identifying and promoting a more diverse range of female role models, particularly those who have developed leadership careers flexibly and adaptively to synchronise work and family.

Supporting Women Through Leadership Training

- Well intentioned leadership training may perpetuate the idea that women need to be 'fixed' to fit into masculine workplaces, rather than challenging gendered stereotypes and structures.
- To promote better routes for women leaders, more realistic and innovative ideas should be incorporated into leadership training like using examples of successful leaders who flexibly and adaptively synchronise work and home life. Images and stories of successful teams of women, of women telling stories of returning to work after a career break or leading while working flexibly or part-time could help to disrupt norms that are out-of-date and unhelpful in enabling younger women see their future leadership selves.

What Does the Leadership Landscape Look Like for Women?

There is no doubt that women continue to be under-represented in leadership roles. In spite of advances, women clearly remain in a minority, in political leadership, corporate life and in the public and third sectors.

Where are we?

Although some advances have been made, women continue to face a complex and subtle 'labyrinth' of challenges (Eagly and Carli, 2007) that slow or obstruct their access to leadership. (Women on Boards, 2017).

Various strategies have been applied to accelerate and encourage talented women into leadership positions including women-only shortlists, boardroom quotas and calls for women themselves to 'lean in'.

But a broader re-examination of what we expect from leaders, how we develop them and the context in which they work, is required if we are to produce better routes for women's leadership.

There is a strong moral argument for tackling the injustice that women face despite having equal leadership potential. For example, the lack of women in positions of political or organisational power is detrimental because it means that decisions about women's lives are made in rooms too full of men.

Additionally, compelling research evidence highlights the economic and business benefits of gender diversity. Companies that promote diversity in the boardroom and within senior management teams are likely to see a positive return on 'bottom line' outcomes. Women's leadership talent is a valuable resource that should be harnessed for organisational productivity.

In recent years there has been focused political and business attention spearheaded by Lord Davies on increasing the representation of women on FTSE 100 boards to at least 25%, a figure achieved by 2015. In his summary report, Lord Davies recommended a new target of 33% female representation on all FTSE 350 boards by 2020.

Whilst this attention on enabling women to secure powerful leadership roles at the higher echelons of UK companies is welcomed, we need to exercise caution in that women counted in these figures may hold the less influential Non-Executive Director role, as opposed to Executive Director, directly employed by the company and charged with overall business operation.

In this respect, organisations need to look beyond the figures and examine gender disparities in director level roles. Ensuring women just below executive level are fully supported to develop themselves and engage women and men in that process as mentors and sponsors can help women break through into Executive Directorships.

The common assertion that organisations simply seek to recruit the 'best person for the job' masks deep rooted gender inequalities that prevent women from operating on a level playing field to their male counterparts.

Early research on women's leadership from Schien (1973) highlighted the 'think manager-think (white) male' paradigm and – over 45 years on – the leadership landscape still reflects this (white) male dominance.

'A broader re-examination of what we expect from leaders... is required if we are to produce better routes for women's leadership.'

In general, the higher up the organisational ranks you go, the less chance you will have of finding a woman in a senior role.

There are also differences in sectors and across organisational roles, with women likely to experience more challenges in male dominated industries and traditionally male dominated roles.

Research evidence does not support the contention that the paucity of female leaders is due to women's lack of education, interest in leadership and challenging work or commitment to their jobs. Rather, inequalities in domestic and care work, stereotyping and discrimination and gendered organisational cultures, all serve to favour the progression of male employees (Carli, 2015).

But let's also be positive. Some women do break through into higher leadership positions which shows us that women make very capable leaders and that not all organisations are as difficult to navigate as others. There is hope for change!

Key findings from the Women Count Report (The Pipeline, 2017)

The *Women Count* Report tracks the number of women on Executive Committees in the FTSE 350 (an index composed of the 350 largest companies listed on the London Stock Exchange) and their resulting economic impact. The key findings are:

- FTSE 350 companies with 25% or more women on their Executive Committee perform financially better.
- Worryingly, more FTSE 350 companies since 2016 (an increase of 8) have no women on their Executive Committee.
- The percentage of FTSE 350 women executives in important Profit and Loss roles, roles that matter to a company's bottom line outcomes, has dropped from 38% to 35%. Women predominate in functional roles such as HR, marketing, legal or compliance.
- If all the FTSE 350 performed at the same level as those with at least 25% women on their Executive Committee, the impact could be a **£5bn gender dividend** for Corporate UK.

Manning Leadership

From childhood, girls are still given gendered messages about the kinds of jobs they should pursue (not IT or construction, for example), how they should behave (e.g. caringly, not assertively) and the clubs they belong to (not the rugby or cricket clique).

Women also face very strong expectations that they will take the lead role in domestic work, childcare and eldercare and that their competence as a woman will be judged by these roles and their feminine appearance.

Male partners and the state have been slow to respond to women's increased uptake of paid work with more support in managing domestic and care responsibilities.

Women face a double burden of work or know that this prospect is on the horizon. At the same time, organisations tend to value, and reward jobs, behaviours and appearances more typically demonstrated by men and equate leadership with willingness to prioritise work over family.

Women navigating organisations and careers do not require investment in leadership training because they are inherently deficient but because they face a context that is less favourable to them than men, with socialised ideas about themselves, gendered power play and a double burden of work. They face real dilemmas about 'how to get on' that are of society's making, not their own.

- **Enquire: Work out what data you have at each level in your staffing structure. At what level are women under-represented? Could you also use data to track career trajectories to identify places where women are finding it hard to get ahead? Are ideas like the 'sticky floor' or 'glass ceiling' useful to make sense of your organisation?**
- **Enquire: Dashboard monitoring can help maintain management attention on women's leadership pathways. Talk to your senior managers about choosing a 'dashboard' of statistics that summarise the position of women in your organisation that you will track on an annual basis. For example, the proportion of women in the organisation, on the senior management board and in one of the lowest grades. Also, your gender pay gap.**

Women's Leadership – Navigating the 'Labyrinth'

A growing body of research shows that women excel in collaboration, empathy and team-building, as well as taking initiative and driving results, and that these are vital skills to tackle 21st Century business problems. Generating better routes for women leaders promotes diversity of thought and challenge and leads to more productive leadership teams. But let's not stereotype. Leadership practices are likely to vary, regardless of sex. Perhaps gender sensitive leadership training that emphasises the value of skills that have traditionally been thought of as feminine and 'unbusinesslike' can help to create inclusive leadership cultures, no matter who is being trained?

You Can't Be What You Can't See

Research consistently highlights the powerful and inspirational effect of role models. Seeing other women in charge gives aspiring women hope that they can achieve the same, particularly if those women in leadership roles demonstrate that effective leadership can be flexible and feminine. Where female role models are scarce or non-existent, aspiring women are less likely to feel confident about their own career prospects. This problem is particularly acute for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women who consistently cite a lack of role models of the same race or ethnicity to be a major barrier to career advancement.

- **Enquire: Can you identify and promote a more diverse range of female role models, particularly those who have developed leadership careers flexibly and adaptively to synchronise work and family?**

Male advantage – Perpetuating the Myth of the 'Ideal' Leader

A wealth of research reveals:

1. People perceive male leaders to be agentic – e.g. competent, assertive and authoritative. People also perceive women to be communal – e.g. warm, helpful and nurturing. These differences arise from the way that girls and boys are socialised and don't relate to men or women inherently. Nor are men always (and exclusively) agentic or women communal. Ideas about men and women are over-simplified stereotypes. The important issue to remember is that all of these attributes can be useful for leaders and all warrant development and respect.
 2. Although alternative approaches to leadership have been developed and shown to be effective, even now ideas about productive leadership remains strongly associated with agency.
 3. Because of doubts about women's agentic competence, women are expected to repeatedly show more evidence of their abilities than men before others believe they are fit to lead. Women leaders regularly receive lower evaluations than men for comparable levels of performance, leaving women to feel they must supra-perform to secure career progression.
 4. Women who adopt agentic behaviours are often penalised. Women can face a double-bind of needing to demonstrate leadership ambition and likeability.
 5. When men display more communal behaviour they receive more rewards than women for engaging in the same behaviour.
- **Enquire: How alive are stereotypes of what 'ideal' leaders should be like in your work culture?**



Women's Leadership – Navigating the 'Labyrinth' (continued)

The lack of women in leadership roles compared to their male counterparts means that women who do make it into senior positions are often faced with being 'token women.' Without support, this can be a heavy burden, particularly in male dominated environments. Research has shown that being the 'token woman' and the accompanying social isolation that this status affords, can be bad for health and well-being, leading to considerable stress and anxiety at having to consistently operate within the dominant masculine culture (Taylor, 2014).

This problem of 'token women' is not just restricted to senior leadership levels. Women are sometimes the only female on otherwise all male panels at certain company and industry events, particularly in traditionally male dominated sectors. Once identified, the same 'token women' are routinely called upon, which may take its toll on those perennially expected to act as beacons of hope and change for other women, and may restrict opportunities for other capable women, perhaps those who are on pathways to leadership, to showcase their talents.

Authentic leadership

In recent years, authentic leadership has become a hot topic in academic research. This is because this approach to leadership is particularly beneficial during times of uncertainty and change. Given the recent banking crisis, Brexit and 'newer' 21st Century business problems such as corruption and cyber-security, interest in authentic leadership as a way to rebuild employee and consumer trust and confidence has increased. Authentic leaders are said to reliably reflect who they are – being open and honest with a strong moral compass.

An interesting study by Liu, Cutcher and Grant (2015) which examined media representations of CEOs, found that whether leaders are regarded as authentic or not depends on how women and men perform authenticity in line with what it means to be a man (independent, strong, active and decisive) and a woman (nurturing, caring, outgoing and communal). In this respect, authentic leadership is not something that women and men inherently have, or are, it is something they 'do' or 'perform' and their authenticity can be called into question by followers if their behaviours are not in keeping with traditional gender norms.

This can be challenging for women developing their leadership identities. Where dominant masculine leadership behaviours remain the norm, women are faced with a dilemma: adhere to a range of acceptable behaviours or enact those potentially regarded by others as contradictory and face implications for authenticity and future career progression.

► **Enquire:** Reflect on what it means to be an authentic leader in your organisation. What work can be done to ensure women leaders are seen as effective and authentic? What would this mean? What work can you do as being seen as authentic? Is it more about embracing and 'shining' different leadership styles, whether advocated by men or women, when used appropriately?

Supporting Women Through Leadership Training

Gendering leadership education

We know that gender inequalities appear early in a woman’s career and research has found that the gendered content of leadership education, in business schools and beyond, is a contributory factor (see the *Getting Started* GROWL Enquiry Tool for more discussion on this).

Women are, significantly under-represented from mainstream business and management textbooks and from the research which informs these materials (Paris and Decker, 2015).

The content of leadership training utilised by organisations can also reinforce damaging stereotypical ideas. For example, representations of men and women in leadership training materials can provide powerful visual and textual imagery which may promote the ‘ideal’ that leadership is

a practice largely done by men and in a stereotypically masculine way.

To promote better routes for women leaders, more realistic and innovative ideas should be incorporated into leadership training like using examples of successful leaders who flexibly and adaptively synchronise work and home life. Images and stories of successful teams of women, of women telling stories of returning to work after a career break or leading while working flexibly or part-time could help to disrupt norms that are out-of-date and unhelpful in enabling younger women see their future leadership selves.

This approach can also break the silence around the considerable work of synchronising work, career and family. Leadership training should involve developing these skills and innovating ways of working that empower and are productive.

➤ **Enquire: Does the leadership training your organisation provides promote more realistic and innovative ideas around developing leadership careers?**

Important research on women’s leadership development programmes concludes that:

‘Women-only programmes foster learning by putting women in a majority position, and this contrast with the more familiar, male-dominated work context can provoke powerful insights’ (Ely, Ibarra and Kolb, 2011).



Leadership development as a way to ensure women are fairly included

Organisations have increasingly invested in leadership training for women to develop more diversity and support talented women to reach their potential.

Leadership development programmes specifically for women provide participants with the opportunity to interact with similar others who have shared understandings of the issues women face and who are uniquely fit to give the support and social comparison they need as they develop their leadership identities and look to future leadership roles.

The focus and content of leadership training for women can vary in its creativity and effectiveness and it may be that well-intentioned leadership programmes serve to perpetuate the existing status quo rather than challenge underlying gendered stereotypes and structures.

Research suggests that some leadership development is gender-blind in that it assumes that women and men can benefit from the same type of training. It has long been established that this ‘add-women-and-stir’ approach (Martin & Meyerson, 1998: 312) does not provide women with the tools they need to overcome organisational barriers and successfully navigate pathways to leadership.

Equally, women-only approaches can focus on ‘fixing-the-woman’. This is detrimental to women because it positions them as inherently deficient, rather than recognising the gendered context in which they must operate. Women themselves may be resistant to attending leadership training that singles them out and highlights women as ‘special cases’ requiring additional support.

➤ **Enquire: Develop your leadership training with gender in mind. How do you ensure that you are investing in leadership development that adequately prepares and supports women to navigate pathways to leadership?**

Experts suggest that effective leadership development programmes for women should:

- Clearly articulate that women do not require investment in leadership training because they are inherently deficient but because they face a context that is less favourable to them than men.
- Be open to women bringing a different type of leadership to the table.
- Help women to understand and reflect on the subtle and pervasive ways in which underlying gendered stereotypes and structures can disrupt their leadership trajectories.
- Encourage women to focus on developing and enacting identities based on their purpose and values.
- Create a strong network of peer support.
- Promote mentoring and sponsoring to generate better routes for women.

Is there a danger in separating women from men to develop them as leaders, however? Does it mean that your ‘normal’ leadership training is left alone – to be male-centric? Are there losses to women’s networks and opportunity to access mentoring and sponsoring from powerful men when they are developed in all-female contexts?

These are tricky dilemmas and there is no one right approach. But you might think about providing both ‘safe spaces’ for women to grow together and innovations to your mainstream leadership training so that it supports women (and men who want to defy stereotypical ideas of the highly masculine leader) better.

Responses to this highlight that women should be encouraged to attend both women-only and mixed-sex training to achieve different objectives, just as individuals receive training in various technical skills over their leadership life courses.

Are you missing out on female talent?

The ways in which organisations identify and support those to start or progress on leadership pathways plays an important part in their career trajectories. Organisations are likely to invest in those who are noticed as demonstrating motivation and leadership ability.

Considerable research evidence highlights that women have less opportunity to showcase their talents – for example, women are less likely than men to be offered challenging or high-profile assignments or to be acknowledged for their ideas. If women fall under the radar, they may not be selected for leadership development.

Research also tells us that women are overlooked for training and development opportunities at certain times in leadership life courses such as when working part-time or when they become mothers.

- **Enquire: Review the processes through which women are selected to start or progress on leadership pathways in your organisation. What work can you do to ensure you identify and foster female talent at different times in leadership life courses?**

PLEASE HELP US BUILD THE GROWL IDEAS BANK

Do you have a ‘better practice’ idea that relates to one of our GROWL themes?

Please get in touch so we can add it to the GROWL Ideas Bank and share it with the GROWL Network!

Just drop an email to Dr Helen Woolnough at h.woolnough@mmu.ac.uk to get started.

All images herein have been licensed for use.

References to research are published on our website at www.mmu.ac.uk/growl.

GROWL is led by Professor Julia Rouse, Dr Helen Woolnough and the Sylvia Pankhurst Gender and Diversity Research Centre at Manchester Metropolitan University. It is sponsored by Faculty Pro-Vice Chancellor, Professor Julia Clarke, and the Governing Body.

GROWL is passionately supported by Northern Power Women and advised by academics and practitioners.



(From left to right) GROWL project leaders Dr Helen Woolnough and Professor Julia Rouse are joined by Lindsey Watkin, Faculty Director of Global Programmes at Manchester Metropolitan Business School, at the Northern Power Women Conference 2017.

We are interested in researching all issues covered by GROWL and the process of engagement. Get in touch to talk about commissioning research or consultancy in your organisation by emailing Dr Helen Woolnough at h.woolnough@mmu.ac.uk.

To join the Network, find out more about the rest of the Enquiry Tools, and contribute to the Ideas Bank, please email Dr Helen Woolnough at h.woolnough@mmu.ac.uk

For more information on GROWL, visit our website at www.mmu.ac.uk/growl or see us on Twitter [@mmu_sylvia](https://twitter.com/mmu_sylvia).