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Identifying enabling and limiting experiences in female leaders at a NHS healthcare trust using Critical Incident Technique.

Author
Dr Karen Squires

Institution of affiliation
Liverpool University Hospitals Foundation Trust
Liverpool John Moores University

e-mail: k.squigsy@gmail.com

Abstract/

Purpose

To showcase the findings of a research project identifying positive and negative lived experiences of female leaders at a healthcare trust.

Findings

Critical Incident Technique is employed to identify the experiences of females in a lead role with a view to inform a future women leaders development project. Current literature is explored, and correlations are established from qualitative data gathered from the current female leadership cohort at a UK NHS healthcare trust.

Key lived experiences and factors influencing a leadership trajectory in this cohort are identified and aligned with current literature. Prominent individual, organisational and developmental aspects are highlighted.

Interpretation of the rich qualitative data intends to inform a women leaders development program in the same healthcare trust, which also aligns to national guidance and trust values. Relationships between elements can be inferred from the data in this instance and may be presented in the form of triads of interdependence, potentially adding a synergistic opportunity for development.

Type of paper: Research Paper

Limitations/implications: Limited to Females in Healthcare Leadership Experience using Critical Incident Technique

Originality/Value: All original work by Author

Keywords: Critical Incident Technique, Women in Healthcare Leadership, Enablers to Leadership for Women

Part 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION

It was almost 40 years ago that Working Women magazine coined the term “glass ceiling” in reference to the perceived unattainable executive promotion, despite being within sight, faced by women in leadership positions (Boyd 2008). The evolution of gender equity has gained significant traction since then (Goethals and Hoyt, 2016).

Guidance and recommendations towards a gender balanced working environment, particularly in the National Health Service (NHS) is well articulated in the literature, (Dacre et al 2020; Sealy, 2020). Unfortunately, the difficulty lies in gaining transformational purchase with such an ingrained, endemic, cultural legacy (Bolden et al, 2019; Dacre et al, 2020; Sealy, 2020). Broad stroke recommendation through policy at National level is crucial in steering cultural change (Bolden et al, 2019; NHS 2020) and for reasons such as intersectionality, the detail of how the change is delivered is left to local application (Bolden et al, 2019). Such guidance highlights the relevance of narrative and lived experience as an important facet to improvement, opens the conversation and informs the future (Bolden et al, 2019; Dacre et al 2020; Sealy,2020; McKinsey, 2022). Current clinical and operational demand pressures have made engagement with this narrative more challenging (Raven 2023; Stokel-Walker, 2023).

To inform a local Women Leaders Development Programme within a UK Healthcare Trust, a qualitative assessment of current practices could potentially benefit the bespoke creation of such a programme. It is with the intention of gaining access to the narrative of females on a leadership trajectory within this healthcare context that this research was undertaken. The rationale and methods employed along with results and consideration of findings in relation to a combined thematic framework taken from the literature will be discussed, along with deeper aspects of interdependence which may offer synergy to development efforts.

Part 2

2.1 PURPOSE

As development of an internal ‘Women in Leadership’ programme at a UK Healthcare trust in the Northwest of England has been postulated, it is assumed that some broad themes from national guidance such as talent management, mentoring schemes, networking opportunities and agile working practices are positive actions to be included or built upon within the programme (Dacre et al, 2020; Sealy, 2020; McKinsey 2022). Likewise, assumptions can be made on limiting behaviours or activities: The trust openly advocates fairness in its values (LUHFT, 2023) yet, everyday sexism (BMA, 2022), gender disparity (Dacre et al, 2020) and lack of succession planning (Sealy, 2020) are all well documented, potential contributors to offset a positive drive towards the development of female leaders in this way. The assumption that there are no negative forces at work would be naïve.

The narrative of the women in leadership positions currently within the trust could offer insight into the true nature of factors augmenting support or hindrance to a leadership trajectory for those in the pipeline or with leadership aspirations. With no targeted vehicle to capture this qualitative data, research intending to understand this narrative was devised. The path to leadership within the trust may already be well trodden and easy to gain access to, conversely, understanding the scope of the challenges may provide a focus for targeted improvement. (Dacre et al, 2020; Sealy, 2020).

Virginia Roth (2016), in her qualitative assessment of women leadership experiences of physicians in Canada, collated themes of issues and potential solutions into Individual, Organisational and Developmental strata. In addition to this, themes taken from existing qualitative verse, aspirational influence and national guidance align deeper into this framework.

[see Table 1]. This was thought to be useful yardstick for analysis to assess alignment or disparity with national guidelines and assumptions.

Table 1: Framework to classify themes for female leadership enablement (Roth, 2016)

<u>Individual</u>	Self Choice Role Modelling
<u>Organisational</u>	Awareness Transparency Training Redesigning Work
<u>Developmental</u>	Talent Management Succession Planning Mentoring Networking

Individual factors include ‘self’, ‘choice’ and ‘role modelling’. The ‘**Self**’ considers the individual lens perspective of an event. Roth (2016) describes the divide between the qualities perceived to be conducive to leadership and one’s own resonance with the role. Evaluation of qualities thought to be transformational in leadership, ie, compassion and empathy, are considered alongside a greater female tendency towards lower self-esteem and higher self-criticism, in comparison to male counterparts. This adds to compounding the archaic gender stereotype of masculine versus feminine (Moran, 2014; Roth, 2016; Bolden et al, 2019). ‘**Choice**’ encompasses the awareness and value women place on their position and if the workplace they choose offers a conscious work-life balance benefit (Spina 2015; Cader, Alsanag and Banerjee, 2021). Also, choosing to ‘have it all’ and not family or a career orientation may prove equally committed for some, exhausting for others (Hewlett, 2002; Sealy 2020). ‘**Role modelling**’ encompasses several aspects of potential influence (Gibson, 2003); others as role model to self, self as role model to others, timing of the interaction(s) within a career trajectory and internal versus external visibility (Sealy and Singh, 2010; Jamieson, 2016; Faloon 2020; Dobson and Clark 2021; Alwazzan and Al-Angari, 2022).

Organisational factors include ‘awareness’, ‘transparency’, ‘training’ and ‘re-designing work’. ‘**Awareness**’ brings to light the drive for equality, diversity and inclusion (Bolden et al, 2019; Dacre et al, 2020; McKinsey, 2022). This produces a much more complex profile to deal with as gender equality may be perceived as equity, when the truth involves a more in depth, contextual evaluation of individual concepts with a view to integration, not separation (Sharma and Chawla, 2021). Lack of ‘**Transparency**’ has been cited to exist at many points throughout the campaign for gender equality: Advertising of posts (Jamieson, 2016; Gilmartin, 2020), panel diversity profile (Gilmartin, 2020, Dacre et al, 2020), open selection (Boylan, Dacre and Gordon, 2019), fairness in advancement (Jamieson, 2016), awards and promotions (Dacre et al, 2020; Rotenstein et al, 2022) and conference panels (Penfold et al, 2019), are all opportunities for organisations to adopt complete transparency and accountability. Like sexism, legislation overtly lends itself to equality, yet there is high suspicion that attitudes and behaviours covertly dictate otherwise (Dacre et al, 2021). ‘**Training**’ incorporates concepts such as technical competence as a basic requirement for a particular role, therefore, if gender inequality is to be taken seriously, then the role of ‘manager’ requires knowledge beyond the technical (McKinsey, 2022). Suggestions include awareness training specific to equality, diversity and inclusion (Alwazzan, 2021), gender bi-linguality and specific needs relating to

gender and age (Wittenberg-Cox, 2019), policy and procedure around remote and hybrid working (McKinsey, 2022) and pay implications associated with career trajectory (Dacre et al, 2020, Alwazzan, 2022; McKinsey, 2022). A move towards 'better work and better working lives' is promoted by CIPD (2019). In the spirit of gender equity, the creation of a family friendly organisational process ensures an even footing for the complete workforce (Blau et al, 2000). '**Redesigning work**' is a term coined by Virginia Roth (2016) to account for an innovative response from organisations to alter working practices in favour of women where a culture of both men and women working flexibly or less than full time is the norm. More recently, the concept of 'agile' working has become popular post Covid-19 to account for a focus on output rather than when the task is performed (Roper et al, 2022). This is proven to increase productivity for workers and have a positive influence on team and individual performance as well as efficiency of workspace which has added economic benefit (Junker et al, 2021).

Developmental factors include 'talent management', 'succession planning', 'mentoring' and 'networking'. Both Sealy (2020) and Bolden et al (2017) cite focussed '**Talent Management**' as crucial in fostering female leadership. The remit of talent management programmes consists of the identification, attraction, acquisition, development, deployment and retention of human capital and can be viewed from practice and strategic perspectives (Yildiz and Esmer, 2023). By adopting positive working practices and developing staff, the organisation will appear attractive and retain staff (Boylan, Dacre and Gordon, 2019; Dacre et al, 2020, McKinsey, 2022). '**Succession Planning**' for women includes the emergence and development of female talent and assumes role modelling at higher levels according to Alwazzan and Al-Angari (2020). Dacre et al (2020) stipulate that greater access to senior roles by women is a crucial step in facilitating gender equity. As no overt evidence of quantitative discrimination against women was found in the study by Clark Blickenstaff, (2005), conclusions were drawn about covert biases within evaluations, informal networks and responsibilities that contribute to the 'leaky pipeline' of women seeping out of the talent pool, effectively withdrawing them from succession. The benefits of '**Mentoring**' reach far beyond just the scope of female leadership as it is widely recognised as a useful development tool for both mentee and mentor (Baugh, 2006). It is recommended by Both Bolden (2017) and Rice (2022) as a crucial tool to enable the advancement of women into lead positions as reported by Bruce et al (2023), also with indirect benefits of establishing networks, bolstering accountability and gaining trust, both important features in development programmes. Elias (2018) in her narrative following conversations with female leaders from business, suggests women are inherently more resistant to '**Networking**' due to not wanting to ask for favours, yet cites the advice of several female leaders to create and nurture a professional network of men and women to open the door to opportunity. Bolden (2017), Rice (2022) and McKinsey (2022) all offer networking as a fundamental facet to leadership progression and advocate connectedness to open the door to new opportunity. Including leaders plus the next generation of leaders ie followers into this network may add further opportunity for mentoring, succession planning and the 'lift as you climb' mantra cited by Sealy (2020).

2.2 METHOD

Critical incident technique (CIT) is an inductive, mono-methodology tool for conducting focussed qualitative research, first derived by Flanagan (1954) which is particularly helpful in healthcare settings where significant positive and negative behaviours are to be identified (Viergever, 2019). An incident is deemed critical if it makes a significant contribution, either positive or negative, to an experience or activity. (Flanagan 1954).

Advantages of utilising this technique within this context are clear, focussed questioning, aimed at identifying precise, significant information and facilitating observation

and subsequent categorisation of human behaviours (Chell, 1998) whilst offering a guided 'efficient' and 'deep dive' into the experience of the participant (Cunningham et al, 2020). It is expected that a more focussed approach may present as more attractive in terms of participation and time to complete.

Inclusion criteria for participants included females in lead roles across four domains of the hospital hierarchical structure at one of three hospital sites within the trust: Medical, Nursing, Operational and Support Services. One hospital was chosen due to convenience of location and appropriate number of qualifying participants. Consideration was given to gender fluid possibilities and a decision was made to include all individuals identifying as she/her as the likelihood would be enriched data.

In the rhythm of qualitative research, a CIT questionnaire was circulated to the identified participant pool alongside a participant information sheet and consent. Framing the research in the style of CIT; only two lines of inquiry were inferred; positive and negative experiences (see Annex 4.1). Questions were to focus on the first hand, reflexive experiences of female leaders in this trust and deliberately open ended to encourage the emergence of an unprescribed narrative (Cunningham et al 2000). Participants were encouraged to be open and honest with their accounts, have autonomy over the length and breadth of the reply to facilitate responses, in even the most time pressed of candidates. Anonymity is assured to further encourage an open and honest dialogue that remained unjudged (Viergever, 2019).

Anonymised answers to two questions were collated on a database. Thematic content analysis was performed by two independent persons including the primary researcher. Groups of incidents and overarching themes were then collated and discussed together. This was to reduce misinterpretation of answers and aid prediction of utility in relation to aims and objectives.

Two aspects of data analysis were conducted: a quantitative account of numbers of respondents followed by a content analysis using the matrix of themes as a template for both positive and negative responses (see Table 1). Once completed, themes were grouped and explored alongside the literature with one of three outcomes expected: alignment or disagreement with the literature or new emergent themes. This process fits with the five-step approach befitting analysis of CIT as described by Flanagan (1954).

2.3 RESULTS

Quantitative: A population of 55 individuals were identified from open access sources. 15 immediate out of office replies were received. Over the course of 10 days, 12 of a possible 40 responses were received, equalling a 30% response rate. All 12 participants supplied narrative for both arms of the questionnaire, amounting to almost 7,500 words for analysis.

Qualitative: Using the Roth framework concept as a matrix for thematic analysis (see Table 1), the volume of narrative was explored by 2 parties and notes compared. Particular attention was also paid to emergent themes and the language used to articulate the significance of the events described.

2.4 ANALYSIS

Broadly speaking, in terms of events, those cited in a positive experience included 9 out of 12 relating to successful change management and 3 out of 12 relating to influence or recognition for their efforts from external sources.

Of those evoking negative connotation, 7 out of 12 involved the actions of specific individuals whereas, 4 out of 12 involved the repercussion of organisational action. Only 1 involved the action of team dynamics. (See Table 2).

Table 2: Critical Incident Themes

Theme	Positive		Negative
Successful Change Management	9/12		
External Recognition	3/12		
Actions by Individuals			7/12
Organisational Repercussion			4/12
Team Dynamic			1/12

When considered alongside the framework:

Significant content alluded to the positive influence of self and role modelling from ‘Individual’ factors, awareness and training from ‘Organisational’ factors and all 4 elements, Talent management, succession planning, mentoring and networking, from ‘Developmental’ factors.

Interestingly, content cited as having negative influence was restricted to self and role modelling for ‘Individual’ factors, Awareness from ‘Organisational’ factors and mentoring from ‘Developmental’ factors. (See Table 3)

Table 3: Framework to classify themes for female leadership enablement.
modified to include topics relevant to positive and negative responses.

	Initial template	Positive	Negative
<u>Individual</u>	Self Choice Role Modelling	Self Role modelling	Self Role modelling
<u>Organisational</u>	Awareness Transparency Training Redesigning Work	Awareness Training	Awareness
<u>Developmental</u>	Talent Management Succession Planning Mentoring Networking	Talent management Succession planning Mentoring Networking	Mentoring

2.5 DISCUSSION

Individual

All 12 responses gave a wealth of narrative fitting the individual category in both positive and negative questions. Much of the narrative concerned ‘self’ with some reference given to role modelling. Language relating to self-awareness, self-confidence, and empowerment were frequent in both respects. Reference to supporting, empowering and including others was made frequently throughout almost all positive experiences, whilst a resulting conscious awareness of supporting and empowering others as a direct result of their own unfavourable experience was uniform throughout negative experiences. Due recognition for, and acknowledgement of, attributable success was highly valued as an important contributor to increasing self-confidence for a longer lasting benefit. Conversely, having the frequent impression of being undermined during normal working practices, being denied access to information, or feeling unsupported in groups or in specific situations evoked feelings of demoralisation.

The wealth of input regarding the ‘self’ theme is unsurprising given the nature of the approach, thus; self-reflection was evident throughout the text. This further enabled genuine

deep-rooted emotions and perspective from the event accounts. As demonstrably powerful information, this resonates with the heightened self-awareness associated with female styles of leadership described by Boylan (2019) and Roth (2016). Associated with this enduring quality, and more concerning, is the possibility that this exposes the individuals to the vulnerability of self-criticism, also described. A vehicle for managing the fragility of both aspects, throughout an emergent leadership trajectory feels imperative to career progression to use reflection and reflexivity positively and offset any potential self-deprecating traits. Assigning a regular one to one session with a suitable mentor may be a valid method to do this (Roth, 2016; Bolden et al, 2019, Alwazzan and Al-Angari, 2020; McKinsey, 2022; Rice 2022).

The extremely positive impact of an important role model was illustrated by several contributors with two examples of role models demonstrating negative behaviour. Interestingly, in both, along with adverse events relating to other issues, 8 out of 12 participants took a positive message away from the negative experience discussed, either by having increased awareness of the impact on others of poor behaviour or as an example of how not to behave.

The subject of internal role modelling, as described by Alwazzan and Al-Angari (2020), emerges in two ways; either as having had an encounter with an inspiring individual who left the impression of wanting to emulate them, or having developed such self-awareness that recognises the potential for themselves to be role models for other candidates. Both offer important qualities and impact on a wide scale; however, both resonate with the internal everyday practice offering leadership in a positive light for others to emulate (Elias, 2018 and Harris 2019). Alwazzan and Al-Angari (2020) points out that the 'pipeline' assumes role models which has bearing on succession planning and beyond. It may be inferred from these points that the role modelling potential within the trust is powerful, particularly the everyday internal role modelling provides and the varying impact at certain career inflections as described by Gibson (2003), may have could be a valuable addition to a leadership programme (Alwazzan and Al-Angari, 2022).

Organisational

Lack of organisational awareness featured heavily, either from an individual perspective or lack of awareness of shallow undercurrents of microaggression.

One participant notes the lack of awareness of staff potential as a hindrance to development. Another feels the trust has little in the way of awareness of the real-life obstacles the staff have, not only in their daily lives, but the everyday difficulties and challenges in performing their jobs to a "*satisfactory level*" or "*in its entirety*". Frequent examples of lack of strategic direction highlight a potential lack of awareness on behalf of the trust to the clarity of its communication to the leadership teams. This fits, also with the potential lack of awareness on behalf of the trust as to the impact of strategic decisions for all stakeholders in that fact that 4 out of 12 cite a repercussion of a seemingly benign organisational decision in their account of a negative experience.

Several participants cite behaviour within and beyond the realm of nuanced microaggression, i.e., feeling habitually intimidated. Much of this negativity was attributed to individual line managers or a colleague. Resulting illness, absence, anger, upset and lack of self-confidence and self-belief have been cited as direct consequences of these interactions. Overt discrimination such as sexism (BMA, 2020) was not evident from this data, however, hostile currents and undercurrents are suggested from numerous sources. Trust policy absolutely does not condone such behaviours, (LUHFT, 2023), yet the evidence suggests it flies somewhat under the radar and unfortunately, may form part of a greater cultural message. Dacre et al, (2020) and McKinsey (2022) particularly cite this as a powerful detail of individualised persecution and almost certainly contributes to the 'cumulative disadvantage' and waning confidence for the of the person at the centre of the incursion (McKinsey, 2022).

Although anecdotal and illuminated opportunistically due to the research, these behaviours are unacceptable. And, despite the ultimate positive take away message, the trust would do well to consider investigating further on these matters with the intention of direct challenge due to the intimidating potential for anyone within the workforce.

The subject of 'training' was alluded to in several aspects of the data, largely around training for a specific role related to qualification and was brought forward in a positive light only and served to augment self-confidence and value. Formal leadership training was sparsely mentioned, which does not negate its existence and is likely to be assumed for the most part.

With the recommendations made by Sealy (2020) in mind, several factors affecting transition towards a more equitable future such as 'making the unknown accessible', 'scaffolding the transition' and having a 'system proactive talent management programme' which could provide a mechanism for ongoing managerial and leadership support for all lead roles.

Transparency and redesigning work were not mentioned in this instance. One possibility is that the issues that exist were of lower priority and not summoned from the data at this time, not that they are absent.

Developmental

All participants documented the powerful influence of development opportunities on their leadership journey. Even incidences perceived as negative have resulted in positive, demonstrable learning and development outcomes that have shaped the personal identity of the leaders questioned.

In terms of talent management, there were opposing comments around the same topic; powerful accounts of 'sponsorship', 'investment' and the added inertia this gave to self-development and lasting success were given leading to the further development of others. In contrast, easily accessible opportunities for growth and development that were missed or denied without clear rationale were outlined. The latter resulted in progress via other means by leveraging a higher level of determination to succeed because of the event. Although positive in outcome, it appears not without unnecessary upset to have made a powerful impact.

There is little doubt that the value of effective talent management within any organisational structure has tremendous value which resonates critically in the development of women leaders (Bolden et al, 2017; Sealy, 2020; Dacre et al, 2021; McKinsey, 2022). In the context of this research, the practice and strategic perspectives may be extrapolated into self-development and the development of others (Yildiz and Esmer, 2023). The data narrative around self-development is rich with positive accounts citing recognition of potential, targeted growth objectives and personal sponsorship as providing the greatest element of momentum towards leadership development. This then augments the desire to develop others in similar ways. From the negative viewpoint, accounts of missed or misdirected opportunity gave insight of the willingness of the cohort to develop if given the chance. In this context, the data is in complete agreement with the literature and provides a powerful contribution towards a women leader's development programme. The variance is in the method and how success is achieved.

Succession planning plays an important part in talent management (Yildiz and Esmer, 2023) and was mentioned by several contributors. Linking education and training in this respect to a more formal talent management initiative may confer further benefit to the organisation in the longer term. This aligns with recommendations from the literature in several respects: sealing the 'leaky pipeline' (Burns, 2022) and facilitating a future female orientated leadership culture (Bolden et al, 2017).

Mentorship was highlighted as fundamental to positively augmenting leadership development, with examples even of unfavourable behaviours by mentors feeding into the positive learning outcome of the mentee. Following on from this and unsurprisingly, there was

significant overlap with mentors cited as role models which benefitted personal growth and self-confidence when seen in a positive light. Amongst those who discussed mentorship, their own role as mentor to others was seen as a privilege and an important addition to their own growth as well as others.

In a similar fashion to talent management, recognition of the self-perpetuating value of effective mentoring for leadership development is evident from the literature (Baugh, 2006), and is deemed 'crucial' by Bolden et al (2017) and Rice (2022). The data narrative from the research also resonates with this important aspect of development, with evidence of positive experience of mentorship and a willingness to perpetuate mentorship. The outcome of any negative experiences fed into positive actions to take forward. Once again, variety of application is where success may thrive or wither. The clear content, structure and goals to a female mentorship programme cited as crucial by Karcher et al (2006) would feed the 'lift and you climb' and 'scaffold the transition' mantras recommended by Sealy, (2020) and the immersion of women into their own leadership culture suggestion offered by Roth (2016).

The benefits of networking resonated markedly in three ways; increased validation due to external networking with peers; an increase in confidence when invited to network alongside senior trust members; and an internal professional network offering support in the face of adversity.

The nurturing element of networking cited by Elias (2018) was evident in the narrative with continued contributions noted in terms of understanding roles and easier conversations to enable successful work outcomes. There were many examples of internal and external networking, the latter serving personal professional validation and providing a valuable point of reference for good practice. In this context, the benefit of networking opportunities for the trust, both internal and external may augment a leadership programme in agreement with recommendations (Bolden et al, 2017 and McKinsey, 2022).

Interdependence

Interdependence defines as being mutually reliant on each other. (Dictionary.com). Key factors were often discussed together or in relation to each other and can be viewed as influential when considered in unison. Using the cited literature and the research data in its broadest sense, the interdependence of certain aspects can be inferred with successful development dependent on the orchestration of intertwined elements as they appear tightly woven in aspects of influence and impact for both individual and organisational contexts (McKinsey, 2022).

Two theme triads have emerged from the data where interdependence appears most prominent:

- Talent Management, Training and 'Self ': recognition of the potential for growth, goal setting and targeted training and experience for individuals will undoubtedly have positive bearing on self-confidence and open doors to leadership opportunity.
- Mentorship, Networking and Role modelling: A robust structure of mentorship alongside a platform for internal networking would create the opportunity and exposure to role models that usually fall outside an individual's sphere of influence.

Both triads may gain from external networking or showcasing both from an organisational perspective where good practice and innovation may invite an increase in credibility and attract human resource, with individuals benefitting by increasing their network, ergo, opportunity, and promoting themselves, thus potentially feeding self-confidence. The synergistic effect of all aspects may yield a profound impact. Even with a grandiose ideal, the benefits are potentially resplendent in this respect. Dedicated time and effort are the predominant limiting factors.

2.6 LIMITATIONS

Although powerful in its qualitative content, this research is limited in two distinct aspects; it looks at a single point in time, i.e., a snapshot, and the potential for bias is high.

CIT as a method providing only a snapshot of prima facie experience with no counter perspective. The trade for completeness of narrative is a deep dive of narrow, often emotive breadth. There may be other elements contrasting, augmenting or separate from the narrative, particularly from the 70% who did not provide a response.

Contributions from those who did respond may have been strongly motivated to do so for a variety of reasons. This may be experiential, personality or time dependant. This may be a source of confirmation bias, having been asked an emotive question, the opportunity was taken to provide an emotive answer. Also, only one site out of a possible three within this trust was looked at. There may be other positive or negative forces at work beyond the scope of this research affecting female leadership development already in existence at the trust.

Part 3

3.1 CONCLUSION

Critical Incident Methodology has provided a valuable method of collecting real-life, qualitative, experiential data in this context and has provided a vehicle to successfully achieve the aims and objectives with knowledge rooted in experience. The knowledge gained is robustly geared around the experiences of females on a leadership trajectory within the NHS trust. Using a framework for thematic analysis, the information has provided valuable local intelligence into positive and negative aspects of leadership development which was previously non-existent. This has brought prominence to several elements of focus aligned to current literature and national recommendation, to inform a new, women orientated leadership development programme within the trust with relevant and contemporary data, maximising the opportunity for success.

Individual elements prominent to success in this regard are a careful consideration of the fragility of self-confidence and self-critique. Clear, regular sessional time with appropriately mentors or managers may help in this regard. Role modelling similarly has been recognised as an important factor for development.

An awareness of coercive behaviour is a worrying factor unearthed from the narrative that the trust needs to understand in greater detail. Understanding the impact organisational decisions may have on stakeholders, even those in lead positions where understanding and knowledge may be more progressed. Alongside this, an organisational awareness and provision of training needs associated with softer skills such as equity, mentoring and talent management as well as job related skills would go a long way to enhancing the desired culture of inclusivity.

The data yielded a richness of insight into developmental aspects of leadership progression with observations regarding the need for effective talent management and succession planning, a mentoring framework to benefit mentees and mentors and the provision of an internal networking opportunity which may evolve externally.

The importance of the positive impact personal affirmation has on an individual has been suggested. This simple action may prove a powerful and valuable addition to a programme that showcases individuals and the work they do, also to aid a cultural proliferation of positivity. This may inform or augment trust initiatives beyond that of the women leader's development programme.

The incorporation of a mentoring and networking programme within the project has the potential to help foster stronger relationships and further the bonds of understanding in a wealth of ways across the trust by promoting an understanding of the roles and challenges of others.

An observation throughout the narrative is the interdependence between the multiple facets of the issues surrounding female leadership development. Triads of prominent

interdependence have been identified woven through the narrative which may be better considered and planned in relation to each other; talent management, training and 'self' progression and mentoring, networking and role modelling appear to have interlaced threads of constituent parts that may prove synergistic when given due consideration as a triad for the women leader's programme.

The limitations of this exclusive, contracted yet profound sample research project have been acknowledged along with the potential for bias. There are no claims of a complete understanding of all of the issues related to female leadership progression at this trust but the snapshot taken has provided the desired information sufficiently to have a positive impact to start with. Further, broad based work across three sites with a longer time frame would yield a more robust picture of this complex issue. In addition, a piece of work around male experiences, particularly of women leaders, may inform another aspect of female leadership development, male allyship. Critical Incident Methodology would lend itself to this context also.

All work Authors Own
No Conflict of interests

Part 4 ANNEX

Annex 4.1: Critical Incident technique Questions

Q1:

Think of a significant event or interaction pertaining to your own personal leadership trajectory that has had a positive, empowering or enabling impact on you.

Use the space below to describe the event and express the feeling(s) evoked, the impression you took away and the resulting behaviour change (if any).

Q2:

Think of a significant event or interaction pertaining to your leadership trajectory that had a negative, disempowering or disabling impact on you.

Use the space below to describe the event and express the feeling(s) evoked, the impression you took away and the resulting behaviour change (if any).

Part 5

5.1 REFERENCES

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