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## Background

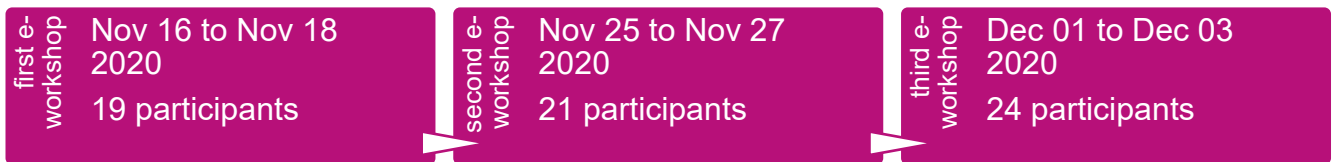
Over the past decade or two, increasing efforts have been directed to promote gender equality and empowerment of women in all sectors of society, including women's participation in leadership and decision-making positions. To contribute to this common objective, the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) and UNITAR organised a series of three e-workshops on gender, women's leadership and mentoring in November and December 2020. The series aimed to strengthen female leaders' confidence, resilience and leadership capacities, and targeted women and men in leadership positions, with special attention to those working in employers' and business organisations.

The training aimed at strengthening leadership and mentoring through building trust and confidence of participants while including gender and diversity considerations in their leadership functions. The e-workshops contained theoretical and practical knowledge on cultural and gender leadership and mentoring, mindfulness techniques, effective communication (including listening and questioning skills), public speaking and strategies for building resilience and confidence. The specific learning objectives are listed below in Box 1.

The half-day workshops were expert-facilitated and welcomed 64 participants from 33 countries, 89 per cent of them women (57 female participants). A follow-up survey for evaluations of event reactions showed that most of the participants had already some knowledge or experience in the topics addressed and only 61 per cent agreed that the information presented was new to them. However, respondents rated the workshops useful (95 per cent) and relevant to their jobs (94 per cent). Moreover, 97 per cent of respondents expressed willingness to apply the information from the course to their workplace. Participants taking part in the training evaluation also indicated increased awareness on the topics discussed.

In this Impact Story we collect participants' experiences on applying knowledge and skills and we look into potential changes that may have occurred in their professional or personal life after the e-workshop. We conducted a follow-up survey three months after the e-workshops' completion, and obtained a response rate of 25 per cent (16 responses). Additionally, we conducted two semistructured interviews to explore in more detail the changes experienced by the participants.

**Figure 1. Participants per e-workshop**



**Box 1. E-workshop Learning Objectives**

- i) Gain insights and build confidence about their own leadership and mentoring roles;
- ii) Understand the role of gender in having/gaining trust for successful leadership and mentoring;
- iii) Understand the nature, power and diversity of motivation and how this impacts leadership and mentorship;
- iv) Grasp international leadership in culturally diverse contexts; and
- v) Execute the Communicating-Mentoring-Conflict Resolution (CMC) of Leadership and Mentorship in order to optimise their unique leadership style.

## Application of knowledge and skills of the survey respondents

The survey received responses from female participants from the three e-workshops. The survey respondents hold management or senior positions mostly in private organizations or are owners of start-up companies. Most of them have previous experience and training on the topics with 75 per cent of respondents having previously participated in trainings on leadership or management skills. Being in management positions probably gave participants more independence and autonomy to apply the knowledge and skills from the e-workshops. All but one respondent indicated having applied any knowledge and skills to their respective workplaces (**94 per cent application rate**).

The application of knowledge and skills is diverse among participants and includes raising awareness of gender-sensitive conflict resolution, the application of active listening in their roles as leaders, the inclusion of techniques to handle stress and conflict at the workplace, public speaking skills, promotion of teamwork, and more active mentorship. Furthermore, the application of these skills has led to changes of behaviour at work for them and for their team. **Improved leadership and mentorship styles have resulted in the improvement of team communication and handling gender bias, the reduction of conflict and disputes at work, more responsive engagement from employees, closer relationships, and increased willingness from team members to ask for advice.** Some of these changes are highlighted in Box 2.

Factors that facilitated the application of knowledge and skills are the importance of applying the skills for job success, the support from colleagues at work, the confidence to apply knowledge and skills (all reported to feel very or fully confident to apply knowledge and skills), training design and methodologies and relevance of the information provided to their professional contexts. On the other hand, a factor that made the application of knowledge and skills more challenging was time, with some respondents referring to the workshop length as well as to the time available to apply skills.

Regarding the importance of skills for their job success, all respondents indicated that the information from the e-workshops was very or fully important to their job success. Specifically, from all diverse skills gained during the training, the respondents marked effective communication, building employee confidence at work, cultural diversity and awareness, mentorship strategies, and active listening techniques as the most important ones.

Overall, participants were satisfied and have been able to apply skills from the workshop to their work. A suggestion from participants to increase the likelihood of application is extending the duration of workshop to providing more time to assimilate the information conveyed during the e-workshops.

### Box 2. Changes occurred in participant's work/personal life after the e-workshops

"After the e-workshop I was more confident. I learned how to own my personal and cultural leadership style to my strengths."  
*Participant from Macedonia*

"I personally felt more motivated and confident."  
*Participant from Namibia*

"More awareness of incorporating diversity and listening skills into my work."  
*Participant from Switzerland*

"I became more aware of my knowledge, success, achieved results, but also the opportunities that are provided to me."  
*Participant from Montenegro*



## Ms. Malikhabiso Cicily Majara

Secretary General at Lesotho Textile Exporters Association

### Advising firms with a gender lens

**Maseru, Lesotho.** Malikhabiso, a graphic designer by education, is the Secretary General of the Lesotho Textile Exporters Association (LTEA), an organization formed by and representing textile and garment manufacturers. She participated in the first IOE-UNITAR e-workshop, after receiving an invitation to apply to the training through her organisation. The title of the e-workshop captured her interest due to its focus on women. Now, Malikhabiso says that after the training she is more aware of the importance of women in managerial and leadership positions and is applying the knowledge and skills from the e-workshop to her work.

Malikhabiso also advises the work committees of the associated factories in their functioning. These committees help monitoring employee's wellbeing and potential risks at work (e.g., some committees were dealing with HIV awareness, prevention and treatment). Since 2016, many of these committees have collapsed but, fortunately, Malikhabiso is leading a process of restoring them despite difficulties being met during the pandemic. For this process, she has applied leadership and mentoring skills acquired during the e-workshop. She has recently **strengthened the relationship with the Ministry of Health** to help them monitor the COVID-19 situation in the factories. She has also applied her leadership skills to provide guidance in conflict resolution at the workplace. The association also assists the human resources offices of the firms and it has **developed a guideline to address conflict resolution**. Malikhabiso recently reviewed these guidelines incorporating concepts of conflict resolution and she supported their application to diminish conflict at the workplace.

Moreover, the e-workshop has **changed Malikhabiso's perspective on women's leadership**. Before the training she did not keep track of women's participation in managerial positions within the organization. Now she is aware of its importance and more women have been included in management positions. Before the training, Malikhabiso believed that men had better leadership qualities than women and usually they first considered men when filling a vacancy in a leadership position. Now, she and her team do not only look at male employees when a management position is open but equally consider female colleagues who possess the required qualifications.

Another important change in Malikhabiso's work resulting from the training is the **incorporation of sex disaggregated data in LTEA's reports**. Malikhabiso says that commonly figures about gender balance are left out in the legal documents and official reports of the organization. However, she is trying to change that and has herself included the information disaggregated by gender when drafting a report.

Malikhabiso highlights how the e-workshop contributed to developing her **confidence**, which has in turn helped her to carry out changes in her work. She has also been able to participate in external events to her organization as a panellist. Beyond work, Malikhabiso also reports that while 10 years

ago she was not very confident delivering a speech, even at her own wedding, today, after the training, she has full confidence in delivering speeches.



## Ms. Clara Thokozile Theu - Silubonde

Head of the Human Resources and Administrative Office at Nkhwazi Primary School

### Improving work environment and employees' wellbeing

**Lusaka, Zambia.** Clara is a professional in the field of administration and human resources. She holds a bachelor's degree in public administration, a diploma in journalism and is currently pursuing an MBA with a focus on human resources. She leads the human resources office of a private school in Lusaka. Clara describes herself as an advocate for gender mainstreaming at her workplace but she also participates in reducing discrimination against women in other environments. This interest motivated her to apply to the UNITAR online training. The e-workshop has not only strengthened her efforts in incorporating gender issues into her work, but also helped her apply skills on leadership and mentorship at her workplace.

Clara found the information from the e-workshop to be useful to handle conflicts and manage stress at the workplace. Clara monitors these two issues in her work, including the application of internal guidelines and policies on conflict management. Occasionally, her school organizes sessions to raise awareness of the guidelines in which she has incorporated some of the leadership and communication skills from the workshop. Clara has also acknowledged the importance of being inclusive with all of her personnel and she **organized additional awareness sessions with the school's maintenance team**. These employees usually have lower literacy levels which sometimes make their understanding about the guidelines and procedures more challenging. In fact, Clara has delivered some sessions in their local language and with simpler methodologies to ensure that everybody is familiar with conflict resolution procedures.

After the e-workshop Clara became **more aware of the importance of a healthy work-life balance for interpersonal relations and job performance**, especially while working in a school in the COVID-19 pandemic context. As in many schools around the world, Clara recognises that the pandemic has introduced an extra pressure on teachers and facilitators at her school. Therefore, she has introduced changes learned during the training to reduce the pressure over personnel and has guaranteed an adequate work-life balance. For example, they are **encouraging the employees to take short leaves and enjoy breaks**, which represents a simple measure but it was something rarely done. Before the training, she thought that breaks were not appropriate when there is a lot of work, but now she has even recognised positive effects after applying this policy. Clara acknowledges that the employees are more motivated when returning from breaks and they have experienced a reduction of absenteeism.

Although Clara has a strong background and experience in managing personnel and has participated in other trainings related to leadership and entrepreneurship, she considers that the e-workshop brought useful and practical elements that participants could easily apply to their work and that have proven to be effective in her case.



## Conclusion

Changes in behaviour derived from training on soft skills such as leadership are often more challenging to identify, however, the e-workshop participants have demonstrated a diverse application of knowledge and skills in a short time. Participants from the e-workshops have adapted their leadership and mentorship styles and incorporated elements to improve their work environment. This has led to changes not only of their own behaviour but of the overall team environment. As evidenced with the interviews, the learnings from the e-workshop have helped participants to incorporate additional elements into their work or increase awareness in areas that they were not familiar with before the training. Many factors enabled a high application rate, including the opportunity for e-workshops participants to apply the knowledge and the importance of the skills to ensure their job success.

An additional element from the training that has changed the respondents' behaviour is incorporating gender and diversity factors into their personal leadership styles, as some participants reported increased awareness when managing multicultural teams and when assuring gender balance at the workplace. Experiences gathered in this Impact Story demonstrate how short events, such as half-day e-workshops, can bring about noteworthy changes in behaviour.

Some of the participants' recommendations to boost their leadership and mentorship skills include extending the duration of the training or delivering a follow-up session.