

Title:

How can mindfulness help female leaders with self-promotion in the workplace?

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I declare that this dissertation has been composed by myself, that it has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree, that the work of which it is a record has been done by myself, and that all quotations have been distinguished appropriately and the source of information specifically acknowledged.

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Signed....Samantha Bedford.....

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Abstract:

As a female leader in the private sector for over 20 years and seeing little movement in the leadership gender gap I wanted to understand what role mindfulness could play in helping women to self-promote at work and thereby positive influence their chances of career progression. Over an eight-week period I conducted a study of 10 female leaders who practiced mindfulness on their own for at least 15 minutes per day collect to ask a series of sub-questions. I conducted a thematic analysis of the interviews to understand the impact the mindfulness practice had on the participants and identified five main themes: enhanced self-awareness, improved self-confidence, an increase in empathy and compassion for others, greater inner calm and clarity and the emergence of self-care. I learned that self-promotion was not something that the leaders were even conscious of or cared about. What mattered to them was doing a good job, which intrinsically meant their teams were able to perform well. Mindfulness gave the leaders the ability to look inside themselves to recognise their competencies and the importance of looking after themselves.

Keywords

Mindfulness leadership self-promotion gender-gap female-leadership

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List of Contents

Title Page	page 1
Abstract	page 2
Acknowledgements	page 3
List of Contents	page 4
Chapter 1 Introduction and Background	page 5
The Gender Gap in the Workplace.....	page 7
Aims of the Study.....	page 8
Mindful Leadership Model.....	page 8
Chapter 2 Literature Review	page 11
The Role of Self-promotion.....	page 12
Gendered Behaviour Norms.....	page 14
Fear of Backlash.....	page 16
The Role of Confidence.....	page 17
Imposter Phenomenon.....	page 19
The Role of Mindfulness & Leadership.....	page 20
Research Questions.....	page 25
Research Approach and Methodology	page 26
Research Methods.....	page 26
Ethical Considerations.....	page 29
Chapter 4 Findings	page 30
Identification of Inhibitors to Self-promotion.....	page 31
Chapter 5 Discussion	page 35
The Impact of Mindfulness on Leadership & Self-Promotion.....	page 41
Exploring the Themes.....	page 43
Chapter 6 Implications and Recommendations	page 56
Chapter 7 Reflections & Conclusions	page 58
References	page 62

List of Tables

1. Ehrlich's Mindful Leadership Model (2017).....	page 9
2. Inhibiting Factors to Self-promotion.....	page 31
3. Themes & Participant Quotes.....	page 33

Appendices

1. Consent Form
2. Interview Questions
3. Sample Transcript
4. Thematic Long List
5. 27 Themes
6. Colour Coded Transcript

Chapter 1

Introduction

In the third decade of the 21st Century it is astounding that there is still such a gender gap in senior leadership and boardrooms in companies around the world. Women make up 16% of board members in global multinational companies with 1 in 20 of the top 500 companies having females at above 30% (OECD, March, 2020). As a female senior leader myself and one who has spent the last five years working in corporates I find this both frustrating and curious.

According to the World Economic Forum (WEF) at the current rates of progress it could take 202 years before we close the global gender pay gap. In the UK we are showing few signs of this being eradicated in the near term (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-47754005>). It is too complex an issue to simply focus on flexible working and maternity policies, there is so much more to its resolution than this. I believe from what I see and experience that many companies recognise the value of achieving gender balance and certainly there is a financial case for this (Noland et al, 2016) but there is, in my experience no silver bullet, no one single thing that will shift the scales. Whether it is more focused recruitment policies, additional learning and development, coaching and mentoring, it is clear that it calls for a number of interventions.

I find myself, a now 51year-old executive female, who, over the period of studying a self-funded MSc in mindfulness and compassion has noticed more about how her thoughts have been positively and negatively impacting her behaviour and actions at work. In addition, in recent times I have found myself becoming more conscious of my age, particularly in the workplace and how I may have been behaving and responding as a result. I have observed for example that when opportunities have occurred to enable positive recognition for excellent work, I had either been reluctant or actually gone out of my way to ensure my activities were not widely known. I am not alone, this discomfort with self-promotion is well researched (Heilman 2001, Moss-Racusin, 2010). This may well be compounded by the triple jeopardy of gendered ageism (Krekula et al, 2018), i.e., appearance, age and gender

discrimination having a detrimental effect on the female leader's ability to progress her career.

The Gender Gap in the Workplace

The make-up of the FTSE 100 in terms of female executives is only 10.9% whilst non-executives are at 38.9% (Vinnicombe et al, 2019), is there any difference in the mindset and behaviours that are impacting this gulf? Vinnicombe et al (2019) also highlight the age difference between the genders with women directors on average being two years younger than men. This is surprising given that many females take career breaks to have children.

The key area of concern in this is the gender gap at a senior level in business and whilst recognising that companies with over 250 employees have to report it and that this is driving company policies in the right way, giving the issue focus and motivation; there may also be something women could be doing for themselves. Something(s) to help them to recognise how they might be limiting themselves from creating, taking and exploiting career opportunities and moreover by becoming more comfortable with self-promotion.

This leads me to consider the role that mindfulness and compassion-based practices can play on the female leaders, to help them to have a greater impact in the workplace. In turn this has inspired me to consider not only how mindfulness might help women in leadership to progress their careers but if it could go a step further and help female executives who may be feeling they are struggling, because of the contemporary challenges of being a senior female in business. Can it provide relief? Could it help their leadership?

Gender balance in the workplace is critical. A McKinsey study (2016) identified that bridging the UK gender gap in the workplace has the potential to create an extra £150 billion on top of business-as-usual GDP forecasts in 2025 and could translate into 840,000 additional female employees in the workforce. Thus, I feel it is important to gain an understanding of ways in which companies and female leaders themselves can help to address the balance.

Whilst there has been previous research on mindfulness and leadership none has focused specifically on female leaders and the impact it could have. Furthermore, as the gender gap has been and continues to be a high-profile topic it is an opportunity to build on previous work and expand knowledge of this contemporary phenomenon.

Aims of the Study

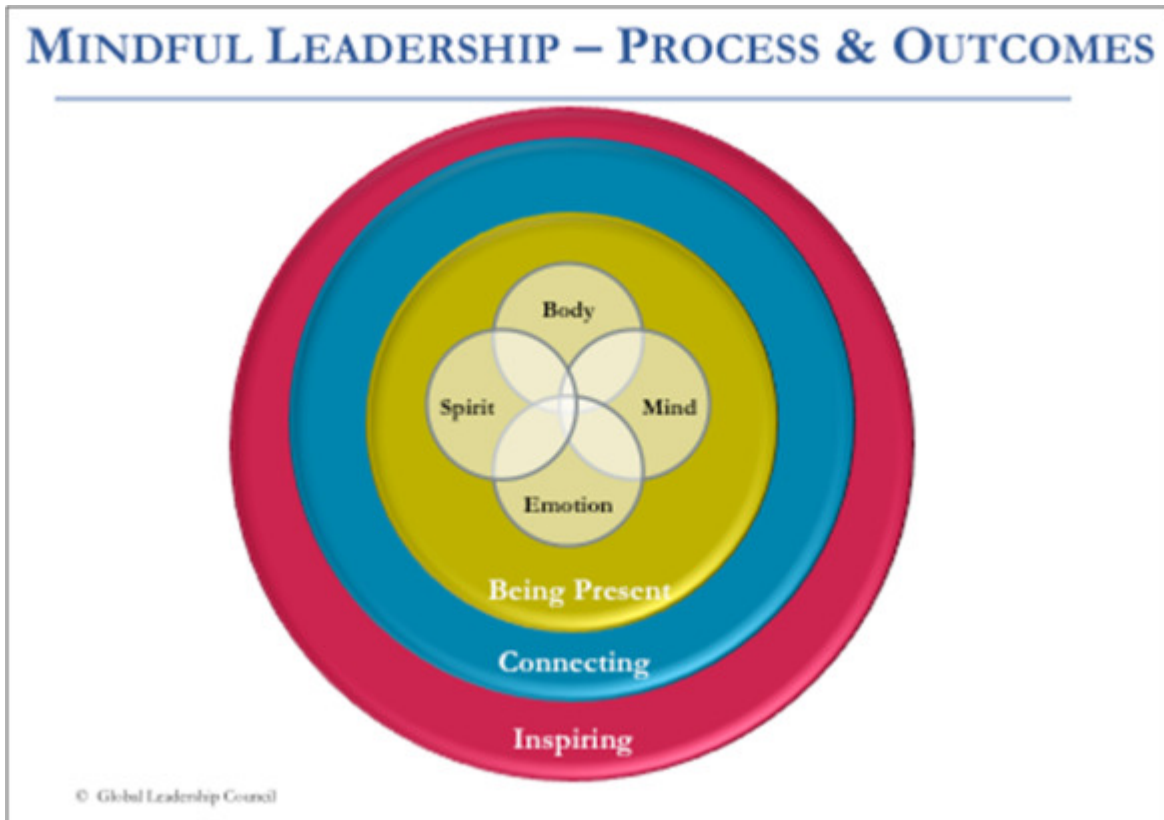
The study aimed to understand the lived experience of the participants and will draw from phenomenological approaches to enquiry. Through qualitative enquiry my intention has been to have an extended conversation (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998) about behaviour and actions at work and if and how mindfulness may be impacting them. To understand the gaps around female leaders and self-promotion phenomenological research can increase insight and awareness but does not necessarily provide clear reasons for the phenomena (Prashant, Astalin, 2013). Hudson proposes that “research is one of many different ways of knowing or understanding. It is different from other ways of knowing, such as insight, divine inspiration, and acceptance of authoritative dictates, in that it is a process of systematic inquiry that is designed to collect, analyse, interpret, and use data.” (Hudson, 1954, p2).

As mindfulness has been associated with increased levels of emotional intelligence (Hyland et al, 2015, Lippincott, 2018) and self-awareness (Kaoun, 2019) I wanted to understand if this is the experience of the leaders and then to consider how it can shift their leadership and career progression.

Mindful Leadership Model

I have used Ehrlich’s Mindful Leadership Model (2017) as a framework to seek to understand what the participants have been experiencing and noticing i.e. was there recognition of this with the participants through their practice. Furthermore, it was used to probe a number of themes such as awareness of one’s physical body and non-verbal messaging she may be aware of, how she is feeling situationally. Moving on from self-awareness, developing awareness of those around her, creating the ability to “read the room”. Through the Mind component of the model examining internal chatter and the role of the inner critic (David and Congleton, 2013). Exploring the potential benefits of less formal mindfulness practices such as mindful

walking and movement, spending more time in nature to understand the impact on self-efficacy and if this would help the practitioner to become more at ease with self-promotion?



Joshua Ehrlich, 2017 (p236).

In the following chapter I have reviewed the literature around self-promotion and females in the workplace and explored mindfulness and leadership. Through the literature I have identified inhibitors to self-promotion and explored the role of mindfulness and leadership. In chapter 3 I have outlined my methodological approach to the study which used in-depth interviews to understand the impact of mindfulness. I adopted a thematic analysis to understand and present the findings in the discussion chapter (page XX). Concluding the dissertation by synthesising the major themes and making recommendations for further research and the implications of the study for private sector organisations and their senior leaders.

A full discussion of gender inequality in the workplace is beyond the scope of this study. The reader should bear in mind that this was a snapshot in time in what is arguably one of the most difficult periods many leaders would ever have had to experience, this was due to the global pandemic. It is with this in mind that this was a self-regulated mindfulness intervention with the objective of understanding how providing accessible mindfulness 'tools' could support the participants as they navigated the new way of working, leading and living.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In reviewing the literature related to self-promotion my approach has been two-fold. Firstly, to focus on research related to self-promotion drivers in the workplace, that is, the role self-promotion plays in career progression and career success, with a particular focus on women. Secondly, I have identified a number of barriers to women and self-promotion and finally, I have explored research on mindfulness and leadership including how it might influence self-promotion for female leaders.

Women are ambitious and are wanting of leadership positions, however, often they don't believe they have equal opportunity (Sanders et al 2011), this creates the risk of developing a defeatist mindset and barriers to performance. When they do receive recognition, they are often placed in leadership roles where there is less support and opportunities for growth and less authority in decision making and the phenomenon of the "glass cliff", whereby females are awarded roles in companies which are challenged or struggling with performance (Sarbahwal 2013, Beddow, 2018) and this may well have contributed to holding women back.

In 2019, the UK ranked 15th in the world for most equal nation, falling six places in one year (Neate, 2019). A McKinsey study (2016) identified that bridging the UK gender gap in the workplace has the potential to create an extra £150 billion on top of business-as-usual GDP forecasts in 2025 and could translate into 840,000 additional female employees. The business case for gender balance is clear.

The review of the self-promotion literature in the workplace amongst female leaders has revealed that there are four key, interrelated factors that can impede or prevent self-promotion. The first is gendered behaviour norms. Many women believe or have been socially conditioned to conform to their gender behaviour expectations (Smith and Huntoon, 2013), in particular demonstrating modesty in order to be accepted as a leader and good colleague. These gendered behaviour norms examples of which also include selflessness and not displaying anger have contributed to the gender gap in self-promotion (Mancuso et al, 2019). Secondly,

self-confidence is a factor followed thirdly by avoidance of backlash effects from others if the female leader self-promotes. Backlash effects are defined as receiving social and economic penalties for behaviours which run counter to gendered norms (Moss-Racusin and Rudman, 2010). Finally, the fourth factor is the presence of Imposter Phenomenon (Clance and Imes, 1978); a belief that she is simply not good enough or believing herself to be a fraudster and thinking that drawing attention to herself would risk revealing this self-perceived reality.

The Role of Self-Promotion

The notion that if one works hard then achievements will come is held by many successful leaders including women, despite some executive women having experienced unfair treatment and limited access to opportunities in their careers (Baker, Kelan, 2019). Research by Mancuso et al (2019) has highlighted that self-promotion can play a critical role in becoming a leader as well as being identified for further promotion in the workplace (Mancuso et al, 2019). In this section I will explore and discuss the role of self-promotion on career progression for women.

Self-promotion helps to position the would-be leader for success as there is an understanding of the value proposition of the individual (Marcus, 2015). In addition, it helps the would-be leader to be seen, to be noticed by others and their value to be understood (Hernez-Broome et al., 2007). A number of researchers (Mancuso et al, 2019, Exley and Kessler, 2019, Scharff, 2015), have argued that self-promotion may not come naturally or easily to many women however the evidence supporting the need to make achievements visible and speaking up to take credit, which are just some self-promotion activities; is clear and a strategy that many male leaders have deployed for some time. Research shows men to be four times more likely to self-promote (Mancuso et al., 2019). Self-promotion is not the only facilitator to career progression and does not guarantee it however its role in a successful executive career can be critical in being seen especially in larger organisations.

Exley and Kesler (2019) highlight how self-promotion is inextricably linked with career progression. It plays an important role in the diversity of the labour market and this may well contribute to gender pay disparities in the labour market. In their study of 3,345 high potentials, both male and female, on a traditional career track

post MBA, Carter and Silver (2011) discovered that women who were proactive in ensuring their achievements were seen and understood had greater salary growth than their peers who had not focused on shining the spotlight onto their work. Of all the career advancement strategies, including access to formal training, on the job training and access to power such as high-profile projects and senior influencers, making their achievements known was the only one which influenced pay increases (Carter & Silver, 2011).

Female self-promotion can however come with challenges which have been ingrained over many generations. Even in 2020, cultural expectations of behaviours of male and female colleagues such as modesty in women can create cognitive dissonance. This can cause women to experience discomfort, when they engage in self-promotion related activities (Lindeman et al., 2019). In their study of 115 participants, which explored women and self-promotion Lindeman et al., (2019) discovered that when the women used a pseudonym to submit an essay, they found it easier to promote themselves thereby avoiding the experiencing of negative consequences or even negative repercussions from peers and other colleagues.

Gendered Behaviour Norms

As discussed, one of the challenges preventing self-promotion for women is the expected and gendered female behaviour norms (Mancuso et al, 2019). Firstly, women are often expected not to put themselves first but rather to look after others; self-promotion could be perceived as counter to this. Bierema (2016) notes that women are expected to be selfless, and that self-promotion is counter to this as it can be seen as pushy and selfish (Scharff,2015). Women's career progression can be hampered by gender stereotypes with negative experiences occurring when exhibiting styles of behaviour typically expected from their male counterparts (Heilman 2001). Sarbharwal (2013) has argued that women may face an identity crisis in their leadership roles. They can either be perceived by their leaders to lack leadership skills if they display communal behaviours i.e., nurturing and empathy (Bierema, 2016), conversely, if they use agentic attitudes - commonly defined as tough and achievement oriented, they can be shunned for being aggressive or bossy (Sabharwal 2013). Heilman (2001) has argued that, unlike competent men, who tend to be seen merely as non-communal and agentic, competent, forthright women

are seen as counter communal and therefore can be negatively perceived. There are still many gender stereotypes at play in the workplace, for example the female behaviours of waiting to make a decision rather than acting immediately may seem passive coming from a woman but prudent coming from a man (Heilman 2001). Rather than them being embraced for a different style of thinking which can be slower, and a more analytical mode where reason dominates such as System 2 Thinking (Kahneman 2012) they can be thought of as unsuitable for promotion as they are indecisive. System 2 Thinking is slower, it is not impulsive or automatic but rather more intentional and more detailed and requires continuous monitoring of one's own behaviour.

Self-promotion can make some feel very uncomfortable. In their study of 78 women students from a US university, Smith and Huntoon (2014) recognising the gender norms that women are expected to be modest and that boasting about one's achievements creates discomfort which can result in lower performance on a self-promotion related task. Their study identified when a self-promotion opportunity is presented some women experience negative situational arousal but that those feelings could be negated when creating an external source of situational arousal, which was a (fake) subliminal noise generator. When women were able to be relieved of the discomfort of ignoring the modesty norm their willingness to self-promote improved. A different motivation can suppress the impact of the gendered modesty norm or rather activate self-promotion. In their study of 342 men and women, Mancuso, et al., (2019) provided a pro-social justification for self-promotion. This required participants to publicly promote on Facebook that they had donated research participation fees to charity and revealed that in this situation it increased the number of women self-promoting thereby decreasing the gender gap by two thirds.

Women have to be seen to play down their success in a public setting (Smith and Huntoon, 2014). In many work and non-work contexts competent people can be expected to be understated, to not boast about their successes (Pitman, 2011), thus in this context I contend that understated could be used as a synonym for modesty. Society has imposed different expectations upon how women should behave with regard to their achievements. They are expected to demonstrate feminine traits

such as modesty and will be more favourably received if their achievements are downplayed (Budworth and Mann, 2010). The downside risk of this could be invisibility or being overlooked, which contributes to the female leadership gap as successes are simply not seen. Harvey (2001) notes the “self-promoters” paradox which highlights the need for women to moderate the way in which they state their abilities and achievement as perceived overstatement of these can lead to doubt from others. Kawakami et al., (2000) characterise this as the double bind, in which women have to decide between self-promotion and risk of being called out for behaving like a man or being seen as aggressive or adhere to female traits of nurturing etc with the outcome of being liked but not respected or finally, wait, in the hope of being noticed but with the risk of fading into obscurity (Bierema, 2016). In this situation mindfulness could mitigate the perception risks, as discovered in a study of male Rotary Club members by Kawakami et al., (2000). Their research showed that when asked to rate which type of female speaker (leader) they found most effective the results showed that both cool (i.e., not engaging) mindful speakers and warm mindful were viewed as equally effective versus a mindless, (in this instance defined as simply reading the script), cool female speaker. The mindful behaviours such as authenticity increased a perception of genuineness. Women do know the technicalities of how to promote and are comfortable advocating for others for promotion or salary increases (Moss-Racusin and Rudman, 2010) but conform to gender modesty norms in situations when promotion of self or requesting salary increases for oneself is required (Smith and Huntoon, 2014).

Fear of Backlash

Backlash has been identified as another blocker to self-promotion. In this context the term backlash is defined as women experiencing social and economic penalties when they behave in ways which are against the expected gendered norms (Moss-Macusin and Rudman, 2010). In their two studies of undergraduates testing the backlash avoidance model, designed to account for disruptions in women’s self-promotion. They identified that women’s fear of backlash for being too demanding accounted for gender differences in negotiation success. Furthermore, the need to avoid backlash can undermine the women’s motivation to self-promote and this in turn limits their career progression opportunities (Budworth and Mann, 2010). The body of research exploring barriers to self-promotion for some female leaders, for

example Smith and Huntoon's 2014 study of violating modesty norms has indicated that the ability to self-promote is necessary for women to overcome negative stereotypes about their competence and leadership skills relative to men. There is however a double standard with female self-promotion whereby it is more acceptable for men (Moss-Racusin and Rudman, 2010, Budworth and Mann, 2010).

Women can hold back from openly sharing their achievements as they may be concerned with likeability which could be negatively impacted in doing so (Sanders et al., 2011). Going against the gendered norms by demonstrating more agentic behaviour can risk economic and social penalties (Budworth and Mann, 2010) and there could be a reluctance to make others feel insecure, less confident and intelligent (Daubman et al., 1997). Whilst both men and women can be liked less when they present themselves immodestly this is more polarised with females (Daubman, et al., 1997), as previously noted, women can be more concerned about the feelings of others.

O'Reilly & O'Neill's study (2011) of 132 MBA undergraduates and graduates exploring the impact of self-monitoring on promotion rates demonstrated that women who were more 'masculine' and practised self-monitoring i.e. modulating how and when to display and utilise agentic, behaviours often seen as masculine received more promotions and, the modulation reduced the likelihood of the backlash. It is not simply a case of not self-promoting alone but also women can undersell or play down their capabilities for fear of backlash (Sanders et al., 2011) this could contribute further to the leadership gender gap.

Although feminine styles of leadership may be more acceptable in some contemporary organisations, their more transformational, collaborative and democratic approaches identified by Bierema, 2016 and their less aggressive and competitive (Kawatra & Krishnan, 2004), however, while feminine styles of leadership may be more accepted in some more contemporary organizations, women can still struggle to be seen and heard, in other organisations. Many companies are still patriarchal institutions and have the expectation of male default leadership behaviours such as agentic and assertive (Bierema, 2016). A 2019 KPMG report found that many women identified with an authentic leadership style,

yet they had a hard time negotiating how to be authentic in the workplace, based on gendered stereotypes and expectations (KPMG, 2019). Authentic leaders put others before themselves, have greater self-awareness and self-regulation and also communicate actions to followers more transparently (Woolley & Levy, 2011, Baron, 2016). Women in the study reported that they had to change their leadership styles more than men to adapt to these expectations of the gendered stereotype. Further compounding this, there was a high tendency to focus on task orientated behaviours, taking up time and energy on this rather than self-promotion.

Research by Vinnicombe and Singh (2010) considering the importance of women-only training for the next generation of female leaders suggests that women can experience the same organisation very differently to men. This may well contribute to a reluctance to put oneself out there with female leaders seeing and indeed experiencing barriers their male counterparts may not, examples include less access to high profile projects or senior individuals with decision making power (Carter & Silva, 201), both of which can help to locomote career performance. Combining these barriers with lowered confidence and the presence of imposter phenomenon could result in the reluctance to inspire others through self-promotion activities. In the following section I will explore these factors.

The Role of Confidence

Women are more likely than men to limit their ultimate career choices because of their lack of confidence in their abilities (Wilson et al., 2007). According to a study by the Institute of Leadership and Management (qted in Bierema, 2016) women can be more lacking in self-confidence than their male counterparts. The study of 3,000 UK male and female managers found that women reported feeling self-confident 50% of the time versus men 70% of the time. This lack of confidence can impact lower risk taking which can inhibit applying for more senior roles (Bierema, 2016). In addition, women have shown a lower willingness to compete than men when performing types of tasks such as maths and their preference for entering competitive tournaments is lower (Kamas and Preston 2012), this could be connected to confidence in abilities thus impacting the desire to put oneself forward. There may well be a difference across the role leaders have in their organisation, their subject matter expertise or choice of career. In the study of 310 males and female students at Santa Clara

University exploring confidence, career choice gender and willingness to compete Kamas and Preston (2012) discovered that there was no difference between the genders in the willingness to compete within those studying STEM subjects however when studying students within the business school men were significantly more likely to compete in a winner takes all scenario than their female counterparts. Carrying this over to the workplace, where leaders may be expected to demonstrate competitive traits in order to be successful, this lack of confidence could be impeding career progression. Confidence in one's abilities can help the leader to take on more ambitious goals and the ability to persist in the task when faced with adversity (Benabou & Tirole, 2003) which in turn can facilitate career advancement.

Self-efficacy is based on individuals' perceptions of their own skills and abilities which can impact motivation and outcomes (Zulkosky, 2009). It has been linked to career development (Betz & Hackett 2006) and career progression. Wilson et al (2007) suggest that self-efficacy is task specific rather than person specific thus thinking of self-promotion as a task in itself, could enhance self-belief. Furthermore, Kirkwood's study (2009) of 50 males and female entrepreneurs in New Zealand discovered that women could have a higher fear of failure, and this could be indirectly linked to self-confidence as they persistently undervalue or fail to acknowledge their own skills and knowledge.

Self-promotion can be inhibited by a range of limiting beliefs (Hernez-Broome et al., 2007) and considered reframing this could help the individual overcome their barriers to doing it. To overcome the reluctance to self-promote, Hernez-Broome et al., (2007) argue that shifting to thinking of their range of skillsets being in the spotlight rather than themselves as individuals being in the spotlight (Scharff, 2015) could alleviate some of the challenges experienced by female leaders. In her study of freelance female musicians, Scharff (2015) noted that many of them found self-promotion to be repulsive, they felt extremely negative about doing it but shifting the focus away from self to recognising they were actually businesses of one facilitated the willingness to doing it (Scharff. 2015). As discussed, there exists the expected gendered female behaviour expectation norm of looking after others and not being selfish, whilst recognising that confidence is key such behaviour can be deemed aggressive and again counter to what is *right* from a female.

Conversely, Exley and Kessler (2019) in their study of individuals rating their own performance found that gendered self-promotion was not driven by confidence in performance even when participants were informed of their perfect performance. The gender difference related to the differing standards created by the individual regarding what good work is as opposed to a lack of self-confidence. They reported that women consistently and systematically provide less favourable assessments of their own past performance and potential future performance than men. Note that the study looked at confidence in performance influencing self-promotion rather than the other factors outlined in this review.

Imposter Phenomenon

Imposter phenomenon is defined as an individual who does not believe they deserve credit for their achievements (Clance and Imes, 1978). They believe they are not intelligent and have an internal story that they are frauds and fooling other people (Clance and Imes 1978). This phenomenon disproportionately impacts women (Mullangi and Jagsi 2019, Clance and Imes, 1978) and can contribute negatively to self-promotion. Women hold back believing their competence and achievements are an illusion or attribute temporary accomplishment to them such as effort (Clance and Imes 1978). Achievements are attributed to luck or serendipity rather than competence and achievement. There can be shifting of the credit to others and a refusal to acknowledge recognition (Dahlvig, 2013) and there's a self-perception of inability (Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016) which can prevent them from applying for roles let alone building their internal profile. Imposter phenomenon can manifest in inauthentic behaviours as some women avoid voicing their ideas and views believing that it could harm their success if they are discovered to be of an inferior intelligence (Clance and Imes 1978). This can create a compelling reason not to self-promote for fear of being 'found out' which is unlike many male counterparts who can be more likely to see their success as something attributable to their inherent intellect (Clance and Imes 1978), that said, more recently it has been evidenced that men do indeed experience the imposter phenomenon but are less likely to openly acknowledge its existence (Clance and O'Toole, 1987).

Imposter phenomenon sufferers can experience anxiety and turn down opportunities to advance within their careers (Clance and O'Toole, 1987). They can underperform as their perceived self-view causes them to procrastinate, to delay decision making

and, at the other end of the spectrum, demand perfection from self and others rather than prioritisation of work. This can become a downward spiral as at its extreme it results in underperformance of the leader and activates self-fulfilling prophecy. Self-compassion may help to unlock this and provide the locomotion that could drive it (Moss-Racusin and Rudman 2010), it can reduce suffering and help people to thrive (Neff and Dahm, 2015). There may well be challenges to this, firstly within a corporate setting, “many people dismiss self-compassion because they think it conflicts with their ambition or hard driving attitude, but self-compassion can be about how you care for yourself to better succeed” (Hougaard & Carter, 2018 p 80), secondly, self-compassion can be difficult to enact for those who may be high in self-criticism (Gilbert et al, 2011).

The Role of Mindfulness & Leadership

Whilst to date the research evidence relating to the direct application of mindfulness and leadership is still relatively limited, there are a number of studies which evidence the beneficial impact a mindfulness intervention can have on leadership. Mindfulness has been shown to have a positive impact when practised alongside transformative leadership (Kroon et al, 2017). Their study of 382 adults investigating the extent mindfulness can function as a substitute for transformational leadership showed that where there were low levels of transformative leadership mindfulness can compensate by fostering better work performance from the subordinates. It inspired higher levels of intrinsic motivation and self-leadership from the employees themselves thereby filling the transformative leadership gap. Mindfulness can help leaders to become more adaptable and more accepting of change (Verdorfer et al., 2019) critical for leading during Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity (VUCA) times. Leadership flexibility has been shown to be another benefit of mindfulness (Baron et al., 2018). In their study of 100 leaders and 62 MBA students to better understand the relationship between mindfulness and behavioural flexibility Baron, et al., (2018) identified that leaders with a more mindful quotient demonstrated a more flexible leadership style, comfortably changing course and not reacting impulsively.

Mindfulness and Self-Promotion

The following recognition of what mindfulness can manifest is pertinent to transformational leadership: “the power of mindfulness arises from systematically developing a person’s attention so that he or she can recognize in the moment how he or she identifies with his or her implicit, habitual, and automated patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting and the results they bring about. By recognizing these patterns, he or she can elect to change course” (Hunter and Chaskalson, 2013, p 198). This could therefore help the mindfulness practitioner to recognise when she may be holding herself back for example in a salary negotiation scenario as she is uncomfortable with highlighting her achievements, as identified, a critical component of professional success. (Moss-Racusin and Rudman 2010).

Mindfulness may also be beneficial within this context as it improves general functioning and thereby positive leadership styles and, furthermore can enable the leader to perform in an exceptional way (Decuyper et al., 2018). With the gender gap that exists today, in the short term exceptional may be what’s required but that may demand more active self-promotion in order to succeed. Kinsler, (2014) has argued that mindfulness can help to remove blind spots, creating an openness to positive and negative information about the self, which in turn can lead to greater understanding of the self. Connecting with all aspects of oneself can create the potential to transform how we lead (Ehrlich, 2017). Ehrlich’s Mindful Leadership model (2017) proposes that awareness of one’s complete self is critical to leading effectively. The model posits that mind, body, spirit and emotion, define what it means to be present and from there the leader can connect and then inspire.

As metacognitive knowledge and insight (Teasdale, 1999) can be developed through mindfulness practice (Mindfulness Institute, 2016, Duffy et al., 2016) the leader can develop the ability to not only become more aware of thoughts, feelings and impulses and to see them as internal events rather than reality but also to consciously choose to respond rather than automatically reacting i.e. going into reactive mode (Hanson and Hanson, 2018). The reactive mode can come from a place of fear or hurt and is deep rooted in survival mode as mammalian beings (Hanson and Hanson, 2018). This mode can increase the stressors experienced physiologically and negatively impact well-being. Using mindfulness to inspire

oneself, not using negative self-talk to paralyse positive behaviours and noticing self-destructive thought patterns as just thoughts rather than reality could positively impact self-promotion. Through the development of the cognitive understanding of thoughts not being reality I contend that it's possible that the female leader can develop a greater recognition and understanding of her strengths, of her self-efficacy.

In facilitating greater self-awareness, a way of getting to know oneself and what one is doing, through insight and inquiry, the mindfulness practitioner is able to notice their habitual way of operating and observe their interaction with others (Baron, 2014). Taking time out to sit can help to develop clarity of thought and “a more accepting self-awareness” (Webster-Wright, 2013) which, I propose could contribute to increasing self-confidence as through the reflection and development of self-acceptance there's a shift towards inner-calm enabling confidence to grow. The lens of the “beginner's mind”, seeing the self differently, more objectively (Decuyper et al., 2018) can help to overcome automatic, habitual reactions. By opening up to seeing the actual, lived experience destructive emotions can be transformed (Gilbert and Choden, 2013). Mindfulness can increase the monitoring or awareness of the environment, helping to reduce inattention blindness (Schofield et al., 2015) thus creating the opportunity to see what may not have been seen before. Furthermore, the development of self-confidence can be connected to awareness of self-efficacy (Owens, 1993). Through becoming more mindful and thereby having a greater awareness and understanding of one's abilities there could be an increase in self-efficacy for the leader (Gartner, 2013).

Negative self-talk could reinforce imposter phenomenon. Mindfulness can help to increase awareness of the inner or self-critic. Through a regular meditation practice the practitioner can learn to observe the role their critic plays, to stop fuelling it and focusing instead on strengthening and reinforcing the “inner nurturer” (Hanson, 2018). Similarly, experiential processing, allowing the individual to notice the stimulus as it is without judgement, going back to the core definition of mindfulness – viewing thoughts just as they are, not interpreting them (Duffy et al., 2016) and thus removing personal bias.

Mindfulness has been linked to authenticity, a key trait of transformational leadership and high self-esteem (Heppner and Kernis, 2007) it can also be a buffer to the emergence of low self-esteem. Through mindfulness individuals are able to detach themselves from potentially negative thoughts and self-talk (Pepping et al., 2013). Defined as an individual's evaluation of their own self-worth or a positive self-evaluation (Neff, 2011), self-esteem can be an important pre-cursor to transformational leadership (Matzler et al., 2015) and indeed cultivated through mindfulness (Emavardhana and Tori, 1997).

Individuals can be less likely to be consumed by negative thoughts and be less judgemental of flaws. Through mindfulness we can shift to observing rather than evaluating and engaging with thoughts which can lead to the negativity (Nairn et al 2019). How aware are individuals of their beliefs, the behaviours they drive and the impact of the results which ensue in their work? Self-compassion *and* mindfulness could be helpful tools to increase awareness, increase security of losing the known, old, comfortable ways and potentially provide a buffer to anxiety. In their study Klimecki et al., (2013) found that a cultivation of compassion can create new coping strategies and have a positive impact in adverse situations, this I argue could help with anxieties associated with the fear of backlash. As mindfulness can help to reduce burnout and perceived stress in the workplace (Tamdjidi et al., 2018) and increase psychological well-being I contend that this could also positively impact the desire to self-promote as the individual feels more positive about their work and performance they are delivering within a more positive organisational climate.

Different people however can react differently to mindfulness, and it is important to recognise this may not always be positive (Farias and Wikholm, 2016). Some may notice nothing at all and others in developing a clearer view of what's happening, observing the Nairn (2001) definition of mindfulness "noticing what's happening whilst it's happening" could experience a negative response. Dane (2011) notes that mindfulness in the workplace can be a hindrance to performance when conducting static (repetitive) tasks, it's more suited to a dynamic environment.

As discussed, there are still structural issues at play which negatively impact women's progression in the workplace. Leaving mindfulness at an individual level

does not address the negative cultural issues (Kristensen, 2018) which still pervade in a number of workplaces; however, it may be a helpful aid in the portfolio of learning and development training programmes. The commoditisation of mindfulness known as McMindfulness (Purser 2018) creates the risk of a corporate mindfulness programme being seen as a panacea to solve problems associated with gender imbalance rather than developing a clear understanding of the drivers contributing to systemic issues. The impact of organisation wide mindfulness training is dependent upon the leadership culture and organisational culture of the business (Rupprecht et al., 2019) proposing that further research is conducted in understanding its limits and potential in the workplace.

Summary

Whilst the literature on women and self-promotion is not abundant there is as noted, a common understanding of what contributes to this, gender stereotypical norms, imposter syndrome, backlash avoidance and confidence. There is however little research on strategies in the field of mindfulness to overcome these specific blockers to self-promotion. A mindfulness study can add to the field of mindfulness and leadership in the workplace and indeed to provide some insight into how to remediate the gender gap in leadership. It could also provide inspiration for more innovative learning and development interventions focusing specifically on female leadership. Through an exploration of an experiential study of informal mindfulness practice in female leaders there is an opportunity to understand what participants can learn about themselves and their behaviours in the workplace. This in turn could contribute to an increase in the desire to practice self-promotion and consequently shift the senior leadership gender disparity.

Research Questions

My area of inquiry was:

How can mindfulness help female leaders with self-promotion in the workplace?

It addressed the following questions:

1. What did their mindfulness practice help them to learn about their leadership behaviours?
2. Can a regular mindfulness practice positively impact recognition of past good performance and future potential of good performance in the workplace?
3. To what extent does mindfulness have the ability to break /relieve gender modesty norms? (How they may communicate their achievements).
4. Could mindfulness mitigate or reduce the need to avoid the potential backlash related to female self-promotion in the workplace.

Chapter 3

Research Approach and Methodology

The main focus of my enquiry was to understand how a self-imposed daily mindfulness practice could help female leaders with self-promotion in the workplace.

Research Methods

I chose a qualitative research methodology in order to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' phenomenological experience of their self-led, guided mindfulness practice in the context of their workplace and interactions with teams, leaders and peers. A qualitative research approach provides a rich insight into the lived experience of the participants and allows insights to emerge organically rather than being constrained by prescribed questionnaires from a quantitative study (Prashant and Astalin, 2013). Saldana (2018) has noted that a qualitative approach can show how life works and deliver answers and this felt very exciting and motivating to me. I also recognised that I would enjoy the opportunity to interview participants about their mindfulness experience. I genuinely wanted to know and understand what had happened to the individuals as they progressed through the eight weeks. In essence I wanted to be able to talk to them (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009).

Recruitment & Sample

I recruited participants using the professional social network LinkedIn and I also contacted participants who had recently attended an Executive Women in Leadership Programme with me. I recruited 10 participants, all female, aged 30-55 and all leaders with varying degrees of seniority. Nine of them were employed, one was recently self-employed. Four of them had some experience of mindfulness but none had a regular practice or had been on either a personal or company led mindfulness programme and for all participants their understanding of it was limited. The study was in the field for eight weeks.

I conducted in depth interviews with the 10 female leaders for approximately 50-60 minutes on their mindfulness practice and how they found their experience. The interviews were conducted remotely using Microsoft Teams and all were recorded

Participant Brief

The participants were given the Mindfulness Association mobile application and asked to practice for at least 15 minutes per day. I did not prescribe the practices they should do preferring them to self-select based on how they may have been feeling. I wanted them to have the latitude to explore different practices so that they did not get bored. I also asked the participants to record their reflections into a journal after their mindfulness practice. The purpose of this was so that they had a record to refer to when I conducted the interviews at the end of the eight weeks. I communicated in advance that their journals would be private and that they would not be showing them to me. Whilst the research was in the field, I had two coaching check-ins with all participants, to ensure they were comfortable and managing to maintain a regular practice as well as to answer any questions or concerns they had. The check-ins helped me to develop a rapport with the participants. In addition, a degree of trust emerged through the process and a number of them informed me of their mindfulness rhythm i.e., not always practicing every day and some asking for input on how to write their reflexive journals.

Interview Process

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, for clarity the reflexive journals did not form part of the data corpus. As the research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic the interviews were conducted virtually using Microsoft Teams to record them. I gave the participants a choice to have the camera on or off and two of the ten opted to turn it off, just using audio. The interviews lasted for one hour maximum. I was conscious of putting the participants at ease and building trust and rapport. With this in mind I began by getting an understanding of their practice, frequency and the types of practices they had used. The interview questions were open and the style conversational to allow the information to flow. The questions can be found in Appendix 2.

Transcription Approach

My initial plan had been to use a transcription service to create the transcripts however I took the decision to transcribe them as I felt it would give me a better insight into the participants experience. I was concerned it could threaten the quality or accuracy of the data (Poland, 1995) and as remarked by Braun and Clarke

(2006) it is an excellent way to become familiar with the data and transcription itself can be seen as an interpretive act. I became aware that they were not mere transcripts but living conversations (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009) and came attached with an opportunity to extend my knowledge.

Thematic Analysis

I elected to use a thematic analysis as I felt it would give me the flexibility to give a detailed and robust account of the participants experience (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Taking an inductive approach, the analysis was iterative and reflexive. Recognising I am a novice researcher I was acutely aware of my responsibility to be a faithful witness to the data and to develop an awareness of any pre-existing thoughts and beliefs I had (Starks and Trinidad, 2007).

In addition, as a new researcher taking a thematic analysis approach to the study made it more accessible to me (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I decided to construct the insight on the basis of the data which stems from the participants' view of their lived experience. I took an inductive approach to coding the data without trying to fit it into my preconceived ideas as a female leader, a coding framework or concur with previous research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Recognising that the data represented must present the whole picture (Mutepa, 2016) I was aware that that as much as I am being driven by the data in the transcripts, I could not completely remove my own bias. With this in mind I allowed the themes to emerge as they were articulated by the participants, recognising that they were already embedded in the transcribed conversations. Hence in reading the transcripts several times over a period of a month or so alongside my own journaling and mindfulness practice I attempted to find their truth and deepen my intention for the study to be trustworthy (Nowell et al., 2017). It was this that drove me to take the systematic approach over a two-month period as I will now outline.

My coding journey began with creating a long thematic list from each interview (Appendix 3). I approached this by reading and rereading each interview individually and then coding on separate documents in order to avoid repetition in my thinking. From there I identified 27 themes (Appendix 4) which I then refined and reduced into 10 themes going back through the transcript and colour coding, Appendix 5 shows

one example. I was conscious of remaining flexible around the themes and kept revisiting them over a period of weeks. I finally settled on eight themes with a focus on five which appeared the most within the transcripts (Figure 3, page 32).

Through the thematic analysis I have identified new theories about self-promotion, leadership and mindfulness with the proposition of a new self-named concept – we-promotion.

Ethical Considerations

This study has been of deep personal interest to me, and I have therefore entered the process with the foresight of being extremely aware of my bias. I will use my personal mindfulness practice pre, post interviews and during the writing of the dissertation to ensure I pay close attention to this. I recognised that there was a risk of closely identifying with my participants and that this could impact the maintenance of a professional distance to ensure that I did not go ‘native’ and step into the participant’s shoes (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009).

As the study was taking place during the first lockdown of the pandemic, I wanted to ensure that it was not adding any stress to their lives, and I was also conscious of poor participation (Hayman et al., 2012) hence the addition of the check-ins. I was aware of ethical considerations and made it clear to the participants that they could stop the study at any time. There was a risk that participants would not feel comfortable being completely open about their experience and this could create two issues; firstly, a concern about confidentiality and their employer discovering insights from the research and secondly that they may not want to be open about how their mindfulness practice is making them feel, it could surface discomfort or anxiety. The first was mitigated through the clarity of the consent forms which include confidentiality (Appendix 1) and in addition no names have been mentioned. The second was aided by contacting the participants every 10-14 days to simply check-in. As I also recruited some participants from my workplace it is acknowledged that the confidentiality issue may be compounded due to my seniority, this was openly discussed during recruitment.

Chapter 4

Findings

Through my research into how mindfulness could help female leaders with self-promotion in the workplace, I have been looking more specifically to understand how a regular self-managed mindfulness practise could bring awareness and understanding of their individual leadership behaviours with a focus on self and follower leadership. I have explored if it could aid recognition of past good performance and future potential good performance in the workplace. If the participants were able to recognise their achievements at work and confidently share and communicate them with colleagues. Finally, could mindfulness help to alleviate the fear of backlash when self-promoting.

As noted in the Methodology chapter, there are no standard ways of presenting the results of an interview study (Brinkman and Kvale, 2015) and as outlined in the methodology chapter I read the transcripts a number of times to develop familiarity and understanding.

No negative outcomes were identified through the study, however not all of the leaders rigidly followed the practice as requested at the outset with one having a sporadic engagement with a formal mindfulness practice.

I asked a number of questions (see Appendix 2) to discover answers to the study sub-questions below:

- What did their mindfulness practice help them to learn about their leadership behaviours?
- Can a regular mindfulness practice positively impact recognition of past good performance and future potential of good performance in the workplace and thereby engender self-confidence?
- To what extent does mindfulness have the ability to break /relieve gender modesty norms? (How they may communicate their achievements.).

- Could mindfulness mitigate or reduce the need to avoid the potential backlash related to female self-promotion in the workplace.

I began by understanding their practice, how long they sat for, the frequency of their practice, types of mindfulness practice and journaling. I then progressed to gaining insight into how they perceived their leadership and their sphere of influence at work. I then moved to exploring their understanding of the concept of self-promotion, its role in career success, how they felt about it, if they practiced it, if they noticed others doing it and their response to this. I then explored the leaders' knowledge and experience of the inhibitors to self-promotion in Figure 2.

As the research was carried out during the first UK lockdown of the global pandemic there were a number of first time challenges the leaders faced which increased their stress levels and forced them to adapt some of their leadership behaviours, for example to accommodate remote working and reduced team size. I was unable to control for this in the study.

Identification of Inhibitors to Self-promotion

As referenced in chapter 2 four key factors emerged as inhibitors to women self-promoting in the workplace (Fig 2). Every participant referenced these factors throughout the interviews without being explicitly asked. The most frequently mentioned factors were self-confidence and imposter syndrome.

Sub Questions	Inhibiting Factor	Illustrative Quote
What did their mindfulness practice help them to learn about their leadership behaviours?	Imposter Syndrome	"I think there is something there about a bit of modesty I'm much better at promoting my team and my team efforts than I am promoting myself"
Can a regular mindfulness practice positively impact recognition of past	Self-confidence	"I do have times when I probably wouldn't be as confident as people think I am."

<p>good performance and future potential of good performance in the workplace and thereby engender self-confidence?</p>		<p>“I’m proud of what I do, and I definitely think I’m good at what I do so how do I show that? I don’t know how I let people know that.”</p>
<p>To what extent does mindfulness have the ability to break/relieve gender modesty norms?</p>	<p>Gendered Behaviour Norms</p>	<p>“I just don't want people to think that maybe I'm overly confident or too full of myself”</p> <p>“I think I could get better at where I’ve done it and I should be promoting myself.”</p>
<p>Could mindfulness mitigate or reduce the need to avoid the potential backlash related to female self-promotion in the workplace.</p>	<p>Imposter Syndrome</p>	<p>“I would say I had a bit of Imposter syndrome and I was a bit like I would never applied for this it would never have been my choice”</p> <p>“I remember coming home to my husband I was married at the time and saying I think they think I'm a lot better than I am because they've just offered me this huge big chunk of money and I'm thinking oh my god what are they expecting.”</p>

Figure 2 Identifying Inhibitors to Self-promotion

Whilst the inhibitors were all evidenced through the interviews these did not emerge as the overriding barriers to the leaders engaging in self-promotion. I will discuss this in the following chapter.

Thematic Identification

The below table outlines the themes I identified following the analysis of the transcripts. I will structure the discussion chapter focusing on the first five themes in Figure 3 and address them as they pertain to the research questions.

I will examine the outcomes of the mindfulness practice for the leaders and explore if these could minimise barriers to self-promotion or offer alternative opportunities to facilitate career progression.

Figure 3: Themes & Participant Quotes

Theme	Illustrative Quote	No Participant References of Themes
Enhanced self-awareness	It was clearly making me quite physically stressed thinking about it and not getting angry I noticed that I didn't really need to feel like that so why did I put myself through it?	10/10
Improved self-confidence	I've probably been quite surprised how comfortable I'm becoming more and more comfortableand I do think some of the practices that I'm doing are helping me just feel like "yes I can do this"	10/10
Increased empathy and compassion for others	"One of them I noticed was having similar struggles I had earlier on in my career so I shared some observations they were being quite defensive if I	9/10

	shared feedback even in the most kind way I could”	
Greater inner calm and clarity	“Where situations may have made me quite stressed. I felt calmer and more able to deal with things. I definitely think I have more confidence in myself and my ability to deal with things. “	9/10
Emergence of self-care	“I didn’t make time, we didn’t make time for each other and I feel I’m making more time to people see people and go for walks and having a coffee”	9/10
More in control	“but if I do it with the right intent I feel that I have more clarity of thought I find it easier to prioritise”	8/10
Increased ability to let go	“it’s myself that’s noticed the ability to let go has been freer, not talking about work as much with anybody which has been good”	6/10
Simple joys	“I was going to get a Chanel handbag and I just kind of said to myself ... I don't need it and it's not going to make me feel any better...so I just said be grateful for what you have and you just don't need it”	6/10

Chapter 5

Discussion

In this chapter I will discuss the key findings and refer back to the literature review. I will also include new literature in this section to support the discussion around the research findings. I will structure the discussion focusing on the first five themes in Figure 3 and address them as they pertain to the research question and sub questions below:

1. What did their mindfulness practice help them to learn about their leadership behaviours?
2. Can a regular mindfulness practice positively impact recognition of past good performance and future potential of good performance in the workplace and thereby engender self-confidence?
3. To what extent does mindfulness have the ability to break /relieve gender modesty norms? (How they may communicate their achievements.).
4. Could mindfulness mitigate or reduce the need to avoid the potential backlash related to female self-promotion in the workplace.

I will examine the outcomes of the mindfulness practice for the leaders and explore if these could minimise barriers to self-promotion or offer alternative opportunities to facilitate career progression.

Firstly, I will set the context by sharing the leaders' understanding of self-promotion and how they perceive their leadership.

Daily Mindfulness practice, understanding leadership behaviours and self-promotion in the workplace

This study sought to understand how a self-imposed daily mindfulness practice could help female leaders with self-promotion in the workplace. By understanding the participants' knowledge of self-promotion at the outset helps to situate the insights. I felt it was important to gain insight into how the participants describe themselves as leaders; of themselves, their followers and how they influence internal and external stakeholders. My intention to explore these areas during the interviews was to create a baseline understanding of their leadership behaviours and attitude towards

self-promotion so that I could discern any shifts that may have come about through the experience of mindfulness.

Understanding the Role and Perceived Value of Self-Promotion

The leaders had a clear understanding of self-promotion. Whilst not being asked directly about this it emerged through discussion around the sharing of their achievements in the workplace and if they noticed colleagues talking about their success. Self-promotion was not practised by any of the participants. This, according to most of the leaders was something that should occur organically through the promotion of the team and the team's work rather than a focus on the leader herself and what she had achieved.

"I like to think that if I've done a good job it will get recognised without having to tell everybody about it"

Performing well, doing a good job, were perceived as the basics of the value exchange of what they are being paid to do and with this in mind they couldn't see any reason why this should be something they should shout about. In consideration of whether they recognised their own past performance and thereby future potential of good performance there was little acknowledgement of whether they had perceived themselves to be successful in their careers, it simply wasn't something they thought about.

"I would never openly say it but then January when I won the award for MD of the year and I was completely how did this happen and somebody nominated me but I didn't know who and I was like why would somebody nominate me and that's the first time I had to think about well actually I am a success you know I should maybe take more time to think about that other people see it and recognise it but I'm just you know doing my job and I get on with it in that way."

"Yes there is definitely a link between that self-promotion and success in their career but I think people need to be careful how intense they are in their own self promotion"

“you see them getting that visibility with the leadership team and they make it known that that's what they want to do, it's obvious to me so it must be obvious to other others but again there's nothing wrong with self-promotion it's like if you've got the balls to do it then just go for it”

In the literature review the theme of authenticity was discussed (Kawakami et al. 2000, KPMG, 2019). The participants in Kawakami's study generally found self-promotion to be a negative thing to do in the workplace. Whilst studies by Woolley & Levy, (2011) and Baron (2016) argue that self-promotion was not deemed to be an authentic leadership behaviour. Authentic leadership was implicitly defined as not putting themselves before others. Conversely the participants saw self-promotion as being closely associated with a number of negative behavioural descriptors such as boastful, arrogant and lacking credibility and was perceived to be a negative cost. It was something they felt both uncomfortable doing themselves and, for some participants, even seeing others practice. They believed good work was a team effort, this supports the findings of Hernez-Broome et al, (2007) as a limiting belief that leaders and team players don't take credit.

Throughout the interviews there was a broad acknowledgement of the need of others to self-promote upon delivering good work however when a number of the leaders had experienced their peers doing this it raised questions related to both its authenticity and credibility.

The leader below was unable to comprehend why her peers would want to draw others' attention to their work, finding it to be somewhat unacceptable behaviour.

“When I hear people say, “well that was me who did that, me who did this” and maybe not exactly that wording but I think why did you feel the need to have to do that? “

There was a feeling that openly talking about one's work was boasting (Smith and Huntoon, 2014). Moreover, it could be used as a method to hide work quality or claiming someone else's work for their own even if it was their team which delivered it.

“I think there's a time and a place when that's necessary but all the time talking about success again and again the more it happens the more people are boasting maybe they are trying to overcome the fact that it isn't as good as it is.”

“Sometimes when people were publicising a great project that they were working on or great cost saving or a great KPI you thought well did you really do that or was it your team?”

Participants acknowledged the benefits of self-promotion in contributing to successful career outcomes (Mancuso et al 2019) but saw it as a strategy to be used in what they deemed to be the right context and situation. For example, when it was appropriate to stand out as an individual, such as in an interview, or a performance review with a line manager. In a group situation it would be by sharing learnings with a peer group rather than pointing out achievements. The motivation for self-promoting had to be in the interest of helping others to learn as opposed to self-interest.

“I definitely see there is a connection [between self-promotion and success] and I do think again it depends on the company you're in and it depends on the situation you are in”

There was unanimity in feeling uncomfortable about self-promotion. The participants felt that it was more appropriate to talk about the achievements of the team rather than their own and this was something that they actively engaged in doing and believed was a core part of their company culture. What became clear was that the leaders saw shining a light on the work they deliver as achieving the benefits that self-promotion enables. There was no recognition of the positive impact of *their* individual role as leader of the team. Secondly there emerged a strong conviction of their achievements being a team effort which included themselves, not about themselves as individual achievers. This team promotion may obscure their visibility in the organisation and negatively impact their progression (Heilman, 2001).

“I think my take on self-promotion is what me and my team do as opposed to what I do”

There was low tolerance for a colleague simply promoting their great work, instead a number of pro-social behaviours, altruistically motivated were evidenced such as buying ice-creams, organising social events. It was felt that these contributed to helping their progression through their organisations (Mancuso et al, 2019) as this was them being a good leader. I will explore this further under increased empathy and compassion for others.

“if they’re doing it because they want to share learnings and involve others in that and presenting it as an opportunity to join in with success i think that’s great if they’re doing it because they want to talk about themselves, I tend to think of it as arrogant so that might be a limiting factor as well.”

One of the leaders was more comfortable with her colleagues self-promoting. She understood how much it could contribute to visibility and in doing so possibly enabling progression through her organisation. She did not however do this herself instead identifying it as a behaviour of other more ambitious colleagues, regardless of their gender.

“if they deserve it then good luck to them if they don't then I'm a bit right yeah ok ok you're blowing your own trumpet a wee bit but generally if they've done a good job and they deserve it then they're just a bit better at verbalising it and making themselves visible and you can see the people in the team that are obviously looking for that next step up and moving on.’

No examples were shared where any of the leaders had intentionally self-promoted amongst their peers or senior leaders despite often witnessing others doing it.

Leadership and Enhanced Self-Awareness

The participants were asked about their leadership style, to describe how they influence others such as peers and those more senior to them as well as any workplace challenges they had experienced during the eight weeks of the study which may have impacted how they lead.

Feminine leadership traits (Bierema, 2016) were self-described and unprompted. A number of the participants talked about how collaborative they were and how important they felt it was to give people a voice. They saw their leadership role required them to get the best out of their teams. The majority of the participants referenced collaboration being a core part of how they lead further supporting feminine traits and transformational leadership (Kawatra and Krishnan, 2004). These leadership traits did not mean that they did not challenge or expect great work through hard work but there was an intention to be both firm and fair. There was a clear achievement orientation but as a team rather than individuals.

“You work collaboratively you push hard and then in brackets: but fairly”

This leader’s summary of her leadership style; including traits and behaviours such as supportive, learning through failing and non-blaming was representative of the participants as a whole.

Always being there to support so we learn from our mistakes it's not about blame it's about how did we get here how do we stop it happening again if we do it in the future so that would be the way that I describe my leadership

In summary, despite having a good understanding of self-promotion and its associated benefits this is not a behaviour that is consciously demonstrated as part of their ways of working nor is it seen as being integral to their leadership.

In the next section I will shift the focus to sharing an understanding of if and how the mindfulness practice impacted their leadership and a willingness to self-promote.

The Impact of Mindfulness on Leadership & Self-Promotion

All participants evidenced that their mindfulness practice had contributed to positive changes in their inner thoughts and emotions and their outward behaviours, their self-awareness as well as their 'other' orientation, that is, their followers, peers and stakeholders, albeit to a lesser extent.

I will structure this section around the first five findings below and how they provide connect and provide insights into the sub questions:

- Enhanced self-awareness
- Improved self-confidence
- Increased empathy and compassion for others
- Greater inner calm and clarity
- Self-care mechanisms

The field of mindfulness research has demonstrated that the impact of mindfulness training of leaders can be beneficial. It can influence transformational leadership (Decuyper et al., 2018), support leaders in adapting to change (Rupprecht et al., 2019, Gartner, 2015) and facilitate task focus (Ehrlich, 2017), these are just a few examples. This study supports the benefits of mindfulness for leaders.

The findings show that over time a regular mindfulness practice could have a positive impact on the ability to self-promote in the workplace but indirectly through enhanced self-efficacy and increased self-confidence. This aligns with Sampl et al., (2017) whose study discovered that during a stressful examination period students practising mindfulness showed higher self-efficacy. Thus, rather than this having a direct influence on the motivation of leaders to proactively practice self-promotion what resulted was an emergence of positive emotions and behaviours which could enhance their leadership performance. This created greater clarity and feelings of control which contributed to an increase in their self-belief. Conversely there was an

easing of negative thoughts and behaviours which may have previously reinforced the self-promotion inhibitors.

At the end of the 8-week self-delivered mindfulness practise the participants discovered a better understanding of themselves and their self-leadership as well as a recognition of their habits and behaviours. On their journey a range of previously untapped soft skills surfaced into their awareness, making them more self-aware. The development of self-awareness facilitated a clear recognition of their abilities, surfacing knowledge that they had performed well in their careers to date and saw their potential for the future. This concurs with King and Haar's (2017) identification of higher self-awareness through mindfulness and enhanced leadership self-mastery. The leaders noticed that they were calmer and developed greater empathy for their team and personal connections. They realised the importance of taking care of themselves, recognising that self-care was not self-indulgent but critical for their general well-being and for their professional performance. This has the potential of aiding both their leadership of others and could facilitate the development a foundation of compassion at work (Dutton et al., 2014) and self-leadership capabilities (Sampl et al.,2017). These changes were subtle however their potential impact could be significant in terms of performance outcomes as discovered by King and Haar (2017) whose research findings showed that mindfulness positively impacted leadership behaviours in self-mastery and organisational transformation whilst in this study the leaders self-reported subtle changes the findings show the potential of the practice.

How much the mindfulness practice could directly impact the willingness of the leaders to self-promote is not immediately clear and I will address this in the implications section.

I will now discuss each finding in more detail connecting to the sub-questions to surface any direct or indirect impact of the mindfulness intervention.

Exploring the Five Themes

Theme 1: Enhanced Self-awareness

In consideration of sub-question 2: Can a regular mindfulness practice positively impact recognition of past good performance and future potential of good performance in the workplace and thereby engender self-confidence?

A participant shared how a few months prior to this study she had applied for an internal role and how upset she was at not making the interview stage. However, through her mindfulness practice there emerged a greater recognition of her good performance within herself and an awareness of her future potential which had come about through a self-reflective process during her practice. Waddock (2010) refers to this as the eventual emergence of wisdom. Her self-belief grew through an increase in self-awareness, identified as inseparable from mindfulness (Vich, 2015) with authentic leadership providing a path to mindful leadership. This in turn presents the possibility to create a gateway to wisdom (Robinson, Sinclair, Tobias et al, 2017) an unforeseen outcome in this research.

A few weeks later the leader decided not to be discouraged and applied for an internal promotion. Referencing her mindfulness practice, she shared how she was determined to get the role, paying her own money to attend a CV writing course and even staying up until 3am to perfect her application.

“The next day I said to my partner “I am so chuffed with that, I’ve written it, the structure’s good, and I think someone’s gonna pick that up and say oh yeah, let’s interview her.”

She concluded that she was proud of herself, was good at her job and as a result felt less afraid of thrusting herself forward into new, unknown situations. She understood herself better and shifted her behaviour to be more trusting of her abilities and in doing so relieving her gender modesty norm. In addition, in relation to the question of how her mindfulness practice had helped her to learn about her leadership behaviours. There was a conscious development of new behaviours which could make her more a more effective leader. She had an intrinsic motivation related to the task that enabled her to overcome the gender modesty norm (Smith

and Huntoon, 2014). This also supports the findings of Lippincott (2018), identifying that through mindfulness practice positive changes to awareness can endure and whilst this study cannot claim endurance of awareness, new behaviours generating positive outcomes create the conditions for this to occur.

“while yes it does change you you can't go through all of this and then come out the other end and say it's not different it would be really sad if I came out the other end and said no no I'm exactly the same thank you.”

As identified by Lippincott (2018), the influence of mindfulness on leadership effectiveness whilst not linear, has also been linked to the development of behaviours associated with an increase in emotional intelligence. A major component of emotional intelligence is self-awareness (Goleman, 1996) which can enhance performance. Mindfulness can help the development of emotional intelligence (Kaoun, 2019). The leaders' fixed assumptions about themselves had become limitations of their understood potential and negatively impacted their actions. Through their practice their awareness and understand of their limiting behaviours grew alongside a shift in actions, moving away from the automatic behaviours and reliance on previously held beliefs observed by Kaoun (2019)

“I started to realise that there are more skills that I have that I just needed to do rather than having somebody else do it”

Thus, the leaders reported a better understanding of their own minds. Through this increase in understanding of themselves there was a weakening of a number of behavioural habits and thought patterns which were intentionally replaced by more constructive ways of working (Frizzell et al., 2016). One participant shared that she put so much preparation into meetings that she was attending that she arrived with very high stress levels. By learning to calm her mind in her meditation she had realised that her preparation techniques were not helpful and contributed to her stress levels rather than alleviated them, she was now able to see that her modus operandi was counterproductive.

“...clearing my mind and has helped me to realise that I can still do it if I haven't got 4 thousand post it notes I need to remember back to the point of what I can do and what I'm capable of if I can get back to that I don't need to spend 4 hours sitting and scribbling and getting in a stress about something beforehand I can just be what I need to be.”

There was a shifting away from habitual, familiar behaviours and automated patterns towards a more conscious and intentional way of behaving. Hunter and Chaskalson, (2013) remark on the general thought that leaders are knowingly conscious but psychological research shows that conscious awareness of actions is quite limited and this aligns with this study. The shift to a more conscious way of behaving helped to relieve modesty as the leaders became more aware of their good performance and thereby a reduced fear of failure. There was an example of one leader feeling extremely proud of a piece of work and the next day she was motivated to share it, going to the ‘extreme’ of telling her team how good she thought it was.

“I didn't really shout about it much and then over the next day I kept looking back at it and I thought you know I'm going to send them a note and say you should read that because it's really bloody good and I did and everyone was like yes it was actually so I think yes there's that balance between are you being modest because you don't know how to communicate it or because it's kind of embedded within you if that makes sense.”

She had been able to break free of her modesty constraint and in doing so inspired her team. This provides an example of how mindfulness had given her the ability to relieve her modesty as explored via sub-question 3. This was not promoting for her own agenda but to grow the team productivity. There was no consideration of the potential backlash that could have occurred as a result as the quality of the work mitigated this. Higgs and Rowland (2010) identified that leaders focusing on their own needs or egos damage the success of change in organisations, whilst those with self-awareness have a higher success rate of change thus resulting in higher performance of leader and team, consistent with this finding. Conversely research by Bratton et al., (2011) highlighted that self-awareness does not always improve

leadership performance, however when coupled with mindfulness this study shows the potential for performance improvements.

Theme 2: Improved Self-confidence

The participants shared that they were outwardly confident as leaders in their workplace and acknowledged that others would see them as such however all but one confessed that inwardly they didn't see themselves as confident people. Contrary to the evidence surfaced by Wilson et al (2007) the leaders had not limited their career aspirations by not believing in their capabilities, but it may have held them back in some situations. It emerged that their self-confidence was something they enacted rather than felt.

"I'm not a confident person, people will smile and think this is hard to believe but I am not a confident person in myself, but I know I can portray confidence."

Through their mindfulness practice the leaders had developed a greater propensity to believe in themselves. Their cultivation of mindfulness had enabled them to regulate their emotions, in this case diminishing the thoughts and feelings which obscured their ability to acknowledge their professional capabilities. There was the emergence of meta-cognitive awareness (Teasdale, 1999) as they realised that much of what they told themselves was within their own thoughts rather than reality. This enabled them to access more of their future potential, this is supported by Ruderman and Clerkin (2015) who contend that mindfulness can facilitate the development of high potential individuals and reduce obstacles to thinking.

The leaders indicated that they experienced a growth in their confidence, their practice had engendered self-confidence. This manifested in number of ways. Firstly, as a willingness to be bolder; for example, speaking up in a group or company-wide situations as well as generally being more vocal.

"I would say challenging myself a bit more than I would have done before [being] a bit bolder and trying to put myself out there a wee bit more."

Secondly, there was an acknowledgement of a new willingness to push back against requests from their managers for increasing their volume of work. This was enacted in a firm but empathetic way.

“I think I've become a lot better at not feeling incredibly under pressure trying to spin 20 plates when the reality is I can only do 12, so I think I'm getting a wee bit better at pushing back and saying I'll do what you want me to do but I can't do miracles.”

Thirdly, through the development of self-awareness a new understanding of their own leadership emerged. One leader shared that her reflections through the practise of sitting and journaling had led to her concluding that leadership was not about her status or title but rather that people wanted to follow her. She discovered that people were happy to be led by her regardless of whether they reported to her or not, realising that it was her leadership behaviours and in particular her role modelling which contributed to this. This seems to have contributed to greater self-confidence.

The leaders' improvements in self-confidence were evidenced in a range of different scenarios and contexts. One leader had been tasked with organising and leading a new, company-wide, extremely high-profile event and how she had now decided she was more than capable of delivering it. She shared how previously she would have tried two tactics; firstly, she would have tried to find a way to remove herself from the opportunity and secondly, if she did work on the initiative, her stress levels would become so high that she would be convincing herself that she was either incapable of delivering the project or that it would fail. The net result being that she would not previously have taken on the ownership of the initiative. Confidence in their abilities can help their locomotion as they are able to take on more ambitious goals (Blanchard et al., 1979) and this was evidenced in the findings.

“I have that self-belief now whereas before I would have been stressed or in a panic fearing that people would say see you couldn't do that whereas this time I think, just - I'll prove it to them.”

Leaders described how they had previously felt undeserving of their position in the company. They believed their leaders and other executives thought them to be much better performers than they saw themselves. They saw themselves as imposters.

“I’ve often felt, and I know a lot of people suffer from this too, imposter syndrome, that I wasn’t 100% sure I should be where I am, but I don’t deserve to be there even though I’ve achieved a lot.”

Developing a clearer understanding of their value to their organisation and playing to their strengths contributed to reinforcing their self-belief, mitigating and changing some of the associated self-talk which in the past had reinforced their experience of imposter phenomenon (Clance and O’Toole, 1987).

“Realising that I do have a voice and that my they value my opinion and.... I don’t have to be an imposter, I am a professional with over 20 years of experience and I convinced myself over the last 10 years that I never wanted to do this job but actually I can and I’m ok, I’m good enough.”

“So I decided to grab the opportunity with both hands because I’d already been reflecting on the mindfulness and journaling about focusing on playing to my strengths and believing in myself.”

“I’ve probably been quite surprised how comfortable I’m becoming more and more comfortableand I do think some of the practices that I’m doing are helping me just feel like “yes I can do this”.”

The above quotes highlighting how the leaders’ mindfulness practice helped them to learn about their leadership, behaviours, engender self-confidence and potentially mitigate the need to avoid backlash related to self-promotion.

Theme 3- Increased Empathy & Compassion for Others

As their own self-awareness grew a greater awareness of the needs of the individuals in their teams emerged. They noticed what they may previously have

sometimes missed in terms of the work and effort exerted by individuals within the team. In doing so they were able to empower the team more and create space for themselves. Their leadership evolving as some blind spots were removed (Kinsler,2014).

“I’m also noticing I think it’s raising my awareness amongst others so when I noticed that someone has gone the extra mile for me, I will always call that out and I’ll leave them feedback, so I think I am a bit more thoughtful about highlighting that to others too.”

“I’ve been learning to give them the space to lead things but giving them clarity and them then knowing that I’m there to support and that they have ownership of things.”

This awareness facilitated a shift towards simple and practical ways to support their followers. They became more proactive in looking out for their wellbeing for example by taking actions to insure against burnout. There was an emergence of a recognition of their interconnectedness, understanding that most people are trying to do their best job and simply acknowledging that (Baron, 2016).

I’m conscious of the team and making sure they’re not too overworked

“I’m worried about my team getting a good work life balance at the moment, you know, I’m feeling a bit of a better leader I feel like I’m supporting my team better”

“You know these people are all doing the best that they can.”

“I have the confidence to say to them that I’m human I’m one of the team as well.”

In one example a leader noticed that one of her team was having similar struggles to the ones she had experienced in her early career. She observed low self-confidence and defensive behaviour. Her solution was to take the individual to one side and share her personal experience with an ‘honest chat’ which included helping them to see feedback as constructive rather than criticism. She had identified that this behaviour could hold the individual and the team back and when she became aware

of the behaviours resolved to tackle the problem head on. The leaders also indicated that they were more aware of putting themselves in their follower's shoes and saw this as a different way of thinking or approaching their leadership.

“[I’m learning] to think differently as you’re talking to people through the day as well and come at it from their side rather than just your side as well.”

“I think it’s making me more want to understand other people’s situations rather than make judgements about it.”

The increase in empathy and compassion led to an improvement in interpersonal relationships. This laid the foundation for a more effective leadership, aligning with the research of Duffy et al., (2016), Boyatzis and McKee, (2006) whose research highlighted that mindfulness could have a ‘downstream’ impact on cognition, emotion and behaviour and thereby positively influence relationships and well-being in the workplace. The development of compassion influencing these positive changes to their leadership behaviours. Whilst there was little evidence of a new awareness of their leadership style the intervention contributed to this shift in how they interacted with their teams.

Theme 4: Greater Inner Calm and Clarity

Through increased self-awareness, noticing high levels of self-criticism and a detachment of negative emotions the leaders identified how their decision making had evolved to become more considered. There was an emergence of moments of calmness even when they were required to act at speed. This aligns with the research of Frizzell et al., (2016) and Webster-Wright (2013) identifying that from the calmness induced through mindfulness comes increased clarity and energy to focus.

“I’m more rational in my thinking so I feel I always had to make decisions quite quickly, but I feel I’m much more considered in my decision making”

The self-reflection induced through the mindfulness practice enabled the leaders to discern what they were able to control and what they weren't. In doing so creating space and energy through which calmness emerged (Webster-Wright 2013). There

was a greater acknowledgement of feeling in control and a realisation that success and happiness do not have to be based upon what others think but rather how one feels about themselves.

“I just try and pride myself on what I can control and where I can influence or want to want to excel.”

Self-criticism was a familiar behaviour amongst the leaders, particularly when it came to improving their work, doing more or performing in new ways. What emerged was a recognition that they had instead learned to focus their time on *what* was needed and *when* it was needed; to be comfortable that they were self-empowered to do this, thus an increase in self-efficacy emerged. Sampl et al., (2017) found that a mindfulness intervention can promote self-efficacy as it reduces stress and anxiety.

One leader shared how punctuating her day with three 15-minute mindfulness practices, beginning and ending her workday with meditation had enabled her to finish her day feeling calm. In addition, she was now able to stop her working day without having completed everything feeling confident it would be acceptable to pick up where she left off the following morning. She saw this as an intentional creation of boundaries between work and home which in turn increased her emotional well-being and enhanced her quality of sleep.

There was recognition that their default way of working was not optimal for their emotional well-being. As they saw themselves and their working habits more clearly, through the development of their ability to let things go and relax rather than cling on to control there was an emerging sense of calmness.

The leaders shared how they felt better equipped to handle themselves. One leader commented on how liberated she felt as she began to realise that a number of situations were beyond her control. Interestingly this led to a greater feeling of control and freedom. Whilst Kucia and Gravett (2014) contend that 21st century leadership is about leadership in balance not leadership in control; control in this context is about knowing what to control, which emerged through the practice.

“I’ve tried to stop myself getting angry and annoyed about things that I can’t actually control so that’s been quite liberating.”

“I think when you’re calm you are more in control...one comes with the other so I think my feeling of not being a control freak but feeling in control of what needs to be done feels far greater.”

Clarity emerged for the leaders. For some this resulted in improved interpersonal relationships at work as well as at home and with friends.

“I could see that I was stressed that day and that’s allowed me to think I need to work out how I can work with that person better.”

Through the clarity there was evidence of acceptance arising in place of what would previously have been behaviours to try to fix problems or to force a change in the behaviour of others (Webster-Wright, 2013). As noted by Ehrlich (2015) this acceptance can help to build confidence from the inside out.

“It’s helped me see that there will always be some people who will take a disliking to you and that’s a shame but I’m now putting more energy into listen to the people who, I’m not trying to be biased in the feedback I listen to, but I listen to the people whose opinion I value.”

The occurrence of habitual, strong emotional reactions resulting in negative feelings such as unhappiness or anxiety were less prevalent. When they did arise, the leaders noticed that these behaviour patterns were not serving them well and they were developing the capacity to see situations differently, the ability to apply a more neutral evaluation of their emotions (Duffy et al., 2016). They were aware of their personal bias and the impact of their emotions on their judgement.

“That’s a huge lesson for me when you’re angry or you’re uptight or you are irritated you don’t see the good in others and what’s going on, so I think that’s allowed me to see that a bit more clearly.”

Leaders acknowledged that they had shifted their focus to thinking less about their negative experiences to realising that they are very good at what they do and in doing so to focus on their strengths. Some leaders observed that the praise they had recently received may well have been given in the past but only recently through the mindfulness had they really heard it. They had now developed an understanding of the potential damage created through that lack of awareness or distorted view of what was being communicated. This further contributed to their self-efficacy, in that actually hearing the feedback enhanced their understanding and confidence in their abilities (Blanchard et al., 1979, Zulkolsky, 2009).

“I’m noticing the really positive way people respond to me when I do things that I really want to 100% - I notice praise more and that’s really helping to eliminate the negative self-talk.”

Through their regular practice and journaling they were able to see their abilities and their strengths more clearly and to frame them constructively rather than critically. This aligns with the findings of McEwan and Gilbert (2016), who discovered a significant increase in self-compassion and reduction in self-criticism when participants practised compassionate imagery tasks. The participants developed a clearer recognition of their self-talk and its potency.

“The change has been more about how I deal with things internally and how much better I feel focusing on the more positive stuff and trying to damp down the negative and not second guess when somebody sends me something.”

Theme 5: Motivated to Practice Self-care

I have included this finding as it could have the potential to address all the inhibiting factors I have identified to self-promotion. The leaders shift in perspective to thinking about themselves has the potential to build resilience which in turn could relieve gender modesty norms, mitigate backlash avoidance and reduce imposter syndrome. It could be argued that self-care is an impactful tool for effective self-leadership (Chesley and Wylson, 2016, Rupprecht et al., 2019).

The leaders shifted from seeing some behaviours as selfish to redefining them as self-care and in addition recognising it as important for themselves and others around them, they became mindfully aware of the need to look after themselves, this supports research by Chesley and Wylson (2016) whose research although specifically focused on change leaders, found that mindful leaders practiced self-care as a way to cope with the changing work environment and business challenges. One leader referenced that after a 20 plus years career she had concluded that she wasn't good at making time for herself and doing beneficial activities that would contribute positively to her leadership. This insight helped her and other participants to understand how this influenced their leadership performance.

"I feel much calmer, I feel people have said to me I'm much more patient at work more patient and calmer at work and I've noticed myself just being a little calmer with my parents."

There was an increase in self-care activities such as exercise, spending time outdoors during the working week and sleep. The leaders used their mindfulness practise as a gateway to other self-care opportunities which can enhance focus and increase energy (Ehrlich, 2017).

"The more I do it the more pay off there is so it's actually it's not a selfish thing to do it's usually important for other people as well. I feel like I owe it to people, and I need to spend time on myself as well."

Summary

By the end of the 8-week practice the leaders had greater insight into themselves as leaders, they demonstrated how mindfulness had helped to increase their confidence and implicitly how they had felt comfortable approaching situations differently, related to their (gendered) modesty norms. The study did not show that mindfulness could reduce the need to avoid the potential backlash associated with self-promotion and I will remark on this shortly.

These findings will undoubtedly be scrutinised but there are some immediately dependable conclusions for the positive impacts of mindfulness on female leaders as

whole people, that is not just their professional persona but their other personas as friends, partners et al.

Chapter 6

Implications and Recommendations

In this chapter I will outline the implications for mindfulness practice in relation to leadership and self-promotion amongst female leaders in the workplace. I will also share recommendations on how this research could be expanded upon by other researchers and its limitations.

Returning to the research question:

How can mindfulness help female leaders with self-promotion in the workplace?

Implications of the Research

To better understand the implications of these results it is important to note that where credit is not given or recognised consistently within organisations there may well be more engrained, systemic issues blocking women's progression and a lack of female self-promotional activities could be masking this (Kristensen, 2018).

This study adds to the body of leadership, female self-promotion and mindfulness literature (Mancuso et al, 2019, Hernez-Broome, et al., 2007, Ehrlich, 2017, Kroon et al., 2017) by identifying that self-promotion as it is currently defined may not be the right approach for some female leaders when considering how to help them to progress in their careers. It has shown that enabling them to create the space and time to develop a mindfulness practice can enhance their leadership abilities and unlock the inner confidence which is already within. This could negate the need for self-promotion as an expected career progression behaviour and in doing so alleviate the discomfort. The study has illustrated that mindfulness practice comes with a range of benefits which I would summarise as the awareness of one's complete self and I refer to the Socrates quote "know thyself" to capture the essence and importance of this to effective leadership.

Recommendations

The three main recommendations from this research:

1. The differences between the male and females and what good leadership looks like in the 21st century needs to be better understood and celebrated by senior executives in the workplace.
2. Further research is needed to understand what may be contributing to the gap between male and female leadership positions and then mindfulness could be explored as a component of a programme rather than simply the complete answer.
3. The study could be enhanced by implementing a robust 8-week mindfulness programme such as the Mindfulness Based Living Course (MBLC) with a both male and female leaders and running a control group.

Chapter 7

Reflections & Conclusions

The research aimed to understand how a self-imposed mindfulness practice could impact female leaders with self-promotion in the workplace. Based on the qualitative study undertaken the research findings suggest that a self-imposed daily mindfulness practice helped female leadership to develop their leadership capabilities directly in three ways. Firstly, it increased their confidence and self-belief, secondly it helped them to shift their attention to their followers and finally it created an understanding of the importance of self-care. The study shows that mindfulness has the potential to remove one of the barriers to self-promotion, namely confidence. In addition, and to an extent, it could weaken the emotions associated with imposter phenomenon, the suffering encountered through fear of backlash and relieve gender modesty norms. All of which have been shown to hinder self-promotion (Mancuso et al., 2019, Moss-Racusin and Rudman, 2010, Wilson et al., 2007). The eight-week daily mindfulness practice also gave the leaders insight into their self-leadership and leadership of other behaviours enabling them to identify where they were creating unnecessary stress for themselves for example through the prevalence of imposter syndrome and its counter-productive impacts.

Interestingly, whilst recognised, the inhibitors were not the reasons for the leaders' lack of self-promotion. The findings showed that the participants did not self-promote at work because they found it difficult or that it was against gendered behavioural norms (Mancuso et al., 2019, Exley and Kessler, 2019, Scharff, 2015) but rather because it wasn't an exercise they believed was critical to their success or even something they thought about. What emerged was something I've called 'we-promotion' as opposed to self-promotion.

We-promotion

The participants were steadfast in their beliefs that as senior leaders in their organisations it was important their teams received recognition and visibility for great work rather than themselves. There was great reluctance in the leaders putting themselves forward over and above the team which had in their eyes been the people who delivered the quality outputs. Ensuring the team received recognition amongst the leader's peers and line manager was deemed critical.

All of the participants said they were proud of their achievements but that they didn't tend to talk about them. There was an expectation that their work would be noticed and that it should be front and centre rather than themselves. They considered that if the work they delivered was of a high standard, then it would achieve the credit it deserved and in doing so they would receive recognition too. The analogy of the cream rising to the top was very much the expectation of all. In being proud of their work they saw themselves as hardworking, dedicated, diligent and committed. It was through these behaviours combined with their delivery outputs that they believed would get them recognition and facilitate their promotion.

Influencing Leadership Style

The study shows that whilst mindfulness did not completely or directly influence or motivate self-promotion it did engender and reinforce communal behaviours associated with transformational leadership (Hentschel et al., 2018) and enhance self-leadership abilities and self-awareness. Self-awareness has shown to have a positive impact on leadership performance (Bratton et al., 2011) engendering higher levels of follower trust and better performance. The findings also suggest that mindfulness can relieve gender modesty norms, however further research needs to be conducted to explore this hypothesis and the extent to which it can do so. Moreover, as modesty has been identified as a key trait for transformational leaders (Bratton, et al, 2011) it is important to consider that relieving it could have a detrimental impact. According to Sosik and Cameron (2010), leaders underestimating their leadership are found to elicit high levels of trust hence there's a risk of a negative shift in leadership traits. Mindfulness could play a moderating role in this (Decuyper et al., 2018).

Through the study I have learned that there is incongruity between leadership and the female gendered behaviours. Women do not fit the standard mould of a leader (Budworth and Mann, 2010) and ideal leadership or leadership as a construct is essentially male (Bierema, 2016). Transformational leadership, a style which has emerged in recent years has shown that when combined with feminine traits it can enhance orientation towards achievement and is more aligned with feminine styles (Kawatra and Krishnan, 2004). Thus, this study supports that whilst there is limited

desire in ambitious female leaders to practice self-promotion to progress their careers it is not a must-do practice for being successful. Rather the shift of focus away from the individual towards the team (including the leader) and the quality of the work produced further demonstrates transformational leadership behaviours i.e., working for the collective good (Matzler et al., 2015).

Corporate Mindfulness Training

The case for mindfulness leadership training in the workplace is not new (Vich, 2015, Kaoun, 2019, Baron, 2016) however as noted by Purser (2019) the dangers of corporate 'McMindfulness' programmes risk missing engrained, cultural behaviours. Moreover, leaving mindfulness at an individual level does not address the societal or structural issues (Kristensen, 2018). A humanistic not economic rationale needs to be taken with the approach to mindfulness in the workplace to indirectly connect it to business performance through simply recognising the value of well-being much as private health insurance or healthy food in the cafeteria.

Limitations of the research

As this is a qualitative study it is reliant upon self-reporting and self-reflection and whilst the participants did keep a journal during the eight weeks some participants were more diligent than others. The research was conducted during the height of the UK COVID-19 pandemic and the participants experienced unprecedented changes in their work and home life and this could not be controlled for in the study. As an example, some of the changes that emerged through self-awareness and self-care may also have been related to this as the participants were working from home and spent more time alone physically away from colleagues and their teams.

“The more senior you get in the company then if you take credit for everything you are the worst leader ever because you can't do it all by yourself, you can't pretend that you're going to do it all by yourself. I don't run away from it, but I don't go running towards it to get praise”

Female Leader, 2020.

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Appendix 1

Research Participation Consent: Form

Mindfulness, Gendered Ageism and Leadership - Participant Consent and Information Form

My name is Samantha Bedford and I am a postgraduate student at the University of Aberdeen where I am studying an MSc Mindfulness and Compassion.

For my Master's dissertation I am conducting a research study to understand the impact a mindfulness programme can have on senior female executives both in terms of what you may learn about yourself and also how it may influence your leadership style and behaviours.

The content from your interviews will be used to inform my dissertation which will be submitted for completion of my Master's degree. No real names will be used and the data will be collected in an anonymised form. The interview will be recorded for transcription and this will be stored in a password protected file on the University of Aberdeen One Drive. No real names will be associated in this study.

You are volunteering to participate and can withdraw at any time.

Research Consent

I have read and understood the information regarding the proposed research.

YES/NO (please circle)

I agree to be interviewed about my thoughts and experience of mindfulness as a senior leader.

YES/NO (please circle)

I give my consent for the interviews to be audio recorded.

YES/NO (please circle)

I give my consent to share information from my reflective journal as part of the interview process

YES/NO (please circle)

I give my consent for the researcher to use my anonymised contributions from the interview

as part of the data gathering process

YES/NO (please circle)

Name (Print):

Signature:

Date:

Contact details:

Samantha Bedford: 07827228943 samanthabedford@gmail.com /

s.bedford.17@aberdeen.ac.uk

Academic Supervisor: Elizabeth Curtis: elizabeth.curtis@abdn.ac.uk

Consent for Recording of Mindfulness Interview

I hereby consent to my interview with Samantha Bedford being recorded using Microsoft Teams and saved on the University of Aberdeen One Drive.

I acknowledge that no PII data will be shared or used in the writing of the dissertation to include drafts and final submission.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Appendix 2 - Research Questions

Start by asking for frequency of practise. When, how long and journaling.

Researcher Questions

Interviewer questions = bullets

Does their current work situation impact their experience?

- As a leader within your organisation, can you share some things about your current situation and any challenges and opportunities you may be facing
- How do you feel about yourself in the workplace?

Do they understand their role and influence as a leader?

- How would you describe your leadership style?
- How do you encourage people to deliver priorities?
- What about influencing those who may not report to you or peers?
- Has it always been like this? What impact has the pandemic had on you at work?

Does imposter syndrome influence behaviours?

- Do you feel proud of your abilities and your work?
- How does this manifest?
- May need to probe for imposter syndrome

Is self-promotion a known concept and what understanding do they have of it?

- Do you talk about your achievements in the workplace?
- How do you feel when others do it?
- Do you see any connection between self-promotion and success?
- When I say "self-promotion" what does that mean to you? Probe to establish if they do it, how it felt and what happened
- What about modesty? Is this something you recognise in yourself?

Does mindfulness help them to see and understand more about themselves

- How has your experience of mindfulness been?
- Have you noticed anything since you have been practising?
- What have you enjoyed / not enjoyed about the experience?
- What have you learned about yourself at work / home?

Does mindfulness influence their confidence?

- Would you describe yourself as a confident person?
- What does that mean to you?
- Are there things that you may have stopped doing since you starting the practice?
- Have other people around you noticed anything about your behaviour?

And finally. Will you continue with the practice?

Appendix 3 – Thematic Long List

Embarrassing to talk about yourself and your achievements

Cringe when others do it

Self promotion being untruthful

It's not about 'me' but 'we' in talking about success

There's a link between success and self promotion - they get it

Authenticity - letting the work speak for itself

It's what the team think of you

The team enables the achievement

Discomfort when pulled out for doing something well

Acceptance

Focus on the positive

Self-promotion - I don't want people to think I am one of those people - I, I, I

Trying to understand other's behaviour rather than judging it

Feeling calmer and more able to cope with things

Focus on what can be controlled

Focus on the positive - noticing the positive

More confidence in self and able to deal with things

Gratitude driver

More able to handle things

Facilitated more confidence

Change in language - from failure to learning

Stopped second guessing what people think

Recognition of imposter syndrome

Recognition of emotion as practicing

Feeling more bold (WFH or study?) ,putting myself out there

Recognition not good at blowing own trumpet but not enough to do it

Self promotion =visibility

Self-promotion isnegative and bragging

Confidence preventing self promotion

Self-promotion isOK 1:1 eg interview

Challenging oneself to be more visible

The calmness has enabled tosee experience and therefore contribute more in meetings (Elaine & also Isobelexample with ding new things)

Feeling confident to apply for other opportunities
Learning from not getting an interview – self-belief? Isobel
Noticing that I have been holding myself back
More selfish about my time
Become better at not feeling under pressure
Better at pushing back – suggesting priorities
The pandemic has evened the playing field
As a leader communicate about what the team is doing
Achievements shared and discussed at a team level
Self promotion ok as long as truthful (for others)
Self-promotion has to be authentic
Don't want people to think blowing own trumpet
Other's self promoting is annoying
Experience breeds confidence (Susanne)
Calmness has come through the practice
Patience has come through the practice
More considered in decision making
Better leader supporting team better
Become a nicer person
More time for reflection
Understanding of what's important
More relaxed
Increased feeling of control
The need to take time for oneself
Less frantic
Being better with team – noticing them
More gratitude for team
See the good in others (Susanne)
Calmness has bred openness and honest between the team
A shift in needed material things
Feeling happier and more content
Making times for things that matter
Don't talk about success
Modesty – I'm just doing my job

Talking about success has to be credible but not for me (Catherine)
It has to be fact based
Recognition of the role of visibility and success
Talking about success is boasting
Put my head down and get on with it
I don't like a big scene being made but no recognition for hard work then devastated on the inside
The leader is just the front of the team
Recognition that clearing the mind is helpful
Mindfulness help to notice why you are doing what you do
It helps to notice if you are thinking things through
Helped to build gratitude
Put yourself in other's shoes
Build empathy
People see confidence but I don't
Gratitude
Brought clarity
Sharing the vision
Encouraging dialogue
Open to challenge
Proud of abilities
Purpose
Values alignment
To be proud is to enjoy
It's not just about me but we
It's annoying when others talk about their achievements
Credit is OK when credit is due but has to be clear
Self promotion is about raising your profile
Don't automatically equate self-promotion with success
Raising your profile feels uncomfortable
Raising your profile is OK if it's about building a network to help others
Talking about achievements is not related to success, it's results that matter
It's about delivering on the work
Have someone else promote you

Shine a light on great work and that promotes yourself
It's about the success of the organisation not mine
Suffer with imposter syndrome
Inner critic – questioning my capability and ability
Imposter syndrome but not a blocker
I don't have the right – who do you think you are?
I'm clear about who I am
Manage my inner voice and it's quiet more often
Mindfulness has enabled letting go
No longer let things that don't go well get under my skin
Look at them more objectively
Liberating to do that
Outwardly I'm confident
I can handle things better
Influence is about relationships
It's my job to do a good job
Mindfulness enables small changes
Leadership – working together towards a common goal
Good leadership evidence that people choose to come and work with you
Modesty – I don't talk about being headhunted
After 20 plus years I only recently realised I'm good at what I do
Pretend to be a different person for the job
Proud is vocal and inclusive
Achievements are about team not just me
Letting go enables participation – not holding back
Confidence is portrayed but not real
Confidence is what you do how you show up
Inner critic
Alignment to values is comfortable
Curious about value and their influence
More disciplined about time at work to do other things
Time to reflect about what I want
Letting go of work is freeing
Journalling help to see the day

My value is misunderstood
Acceptance is helpful
Not sure if I get recognition
I'm underestimated
Mindfulness drives self-belief
I worry less and trust in myself
Not fearing feedback can be powerful
Self-belief is good
A leader is someone people want to follow
Influence is better than power because it gives breadth
Purpose led is powerful
Get things done through people and focus on outcomes
Negative self talk can be crippling
Recognition of 'weaknesses' / things that dislike about self
Proud of what strengths enable to do
No longer fixated / disappoint with "I wish I was.."
Being visible is important
In a hierarchical org it's easy for no-one to know that's your work
Used to hide strengths and good work – bullying
It's OK to talk about successes at the risk of threatening others
Talk about success is OK to share learnings
Talk about success to talk about self is arrogant
Servant leadership – achieve through and for the benefit of others
Giving recognition to others
Sitting doing nothing is difficult
Thought people should notice me but now know that's in my control
The calmer my thoughts easier to prioritise
Pausing helps to hear
Acceptance of limitations – self and others
Cope with more pressure – get less stressed
Increased resilience
Confidence – less self doubt
Hearing positive things about self
Awareness of strengths

Recognition of imposter syndrome
Is It luck or hard work?
Mindfulness allows a stepping away
Open leadership – hearing others' thoughts and ideas
Honest leadership
Leadership is about guiding
People are just human beings
I still recall what people used to think of me – I shouldn't be there
Not comfortable saying I'm good and deserve to be there
Personal brand
Trusted advisor
Hard to recognise your strengths when so busy doing
Talking about success can be perceived arrogance
Celebrate success in family but not work
Celebrate success hampered by imposter syndrome
In competitive environments talking about success is important but where they are more humbe
Sharing v communication overload
Talking about individual success creates skepticism – wasn't it your team?
Celebreting the entirety of the success rather than just the individual
Luck of who your leader is
If no one else sells you you need to do the self-promotion
Balance between self-promotion and modesty
Modesty because feel uncomfortable rather than design
Feedback is encouraging
I can get easily worked up
Clearing my mind helps me to see strengths, capabilities
Mindfulness helps focus
Mindfulness helps with sleep
Mindspace for clearer thinking
Helped to create boundaries between home and work
Fear of unknown people
Makes me more natural (the calmness) MORE AUTHENTIC?
More present

More active listening drives better ideas and engagement
Focus on the things that matter – to see them more clearly
Noticing more about how I am at work – the things I do
Some worries have gone away – FOMO
Noticing when / where the stress comes from
Most didn't 'succeed' with consistent daily practice
Jouurnalling can go hand in glove with the sitting practicing
Insight comes from the practice
Practice is vital
Recognition of the need for self care
Look after yourself makes you a better leader
Leader demands accountability and high performance
Empathetic leader
Leading by example
Let go of what you can't control
Let go of resentment
Passion is an indicator of pride
Achievements speak for themselves
I cringe but do talk about career
My achievements should speak for themselves
I have nothing to prove
I rather than we bothers me
It's a team effort
Self promotion and success not about others but how I feel
My self-worth can't be related to others like or dislike
In interview or end of year review talk about achievements – safe setting
Notice physical feelings and energy levels
Mindfulness helped to notice my thoughts in meetings
Shifted from achieving to self-love
Selfless and selfcare
Shifted from noticing when I'm being unkind to self
Leadership is inspiring people
Feel more relaxed physically
I succeeded without confidence

Outwardly confident
Less controlling at home
Stop trying to impress people – collect gold stars
Heightened awareness
The impact my behaviour has on others
Recognising what's bothering
Confidence is not caring about what others think
Unprompted imposter syndrome
The sense of Calm to notice abilities
Found my voice
I've held myself back (Susan)
Power in positive reinforcements
Self recognition of value
Leadership – take people with you
Credit the team for a job well done
Learning from mistakes
Proud yes but
Self critic
Can I do better?
I convinced myself I couldn't be more senior
Self care
Helped to slow down
I feel in control now not a imposter
Calm = confidence and relaxed
Not playing out the stories
Self-promotion is boasting
A good leader recognises your work
Others self-promotion is uncomfortable
The work will speak for itself
Success is about the collective performance
My partner now does it with me
Released anger over what cannot control
Liberating to let go
I'm outwardly confident

Great confidence e.g. sending an email without spending hours refining thinking what others will think / react

Leadership nurturing, firm but fair

Help people to be their best

Common goal is important

Give clear expectations

Directive not dictatorial

Recognition of position (career history) but not good influencing

Struggle with confidence

Confidence is portrayed

Imposter syndrome with age

Proud = arrogant

Just doing my job

Focus on where things can be improved – do better

Impressed by those talking about achievements

Being understated is admirable

Helps to be present (with back to back meetings)

Appendix 4 – 27 Themes

1	Self promotion has to be authentic
2.	The work should speak for itself
3.	It's about we, the team not I
4.	Feeling more calm
5.	More able to handle things
6.	Confidence driver
7.	Self promoters are show offs
8.	Able to be more bold
9.	Looking after self
10.	Imposter syndrome - prompted and unprompted
11.	Better decision making
12.	Improved leadership
13	Happier
14	Just doing my job
15	Empathy
16	Only outwardly confidence
17	Clarity of thought
18	The inner critic stops me
19	Able to let go
20	Professional persona helps
21	Enhanced self-belief
22	Visibility is for me to own
23	Become a better leader
24	New insights about self and ways of working
25	Self leadership
26	Modesty is a good thing
27	More in control

Appendix 5 – Sample colour coded transcript

...parents who God loves them mean well but they drive me a bit mad sometimes but I think this is the kindness thing kicking in for me 29:11 Where I'm less frustrated and less irritated in general I'm just feeling a bit more chilled there are times when I really could hit the roof at work and personally but but I am much karma than I have ever been feeling much more myself much more relaxed

and what's the so what of that calmness in the workplace?

I'm more rational in my thinking so I feel I always had to make decisions quite quickly but I feel I'm much more considered in my decision making and I think I'm also not afraid to say well let's not worry about that let's worry about that tomorrow where as in the past I think I would have been obsessed with getting things done properly today where as I'm a bit more manana now well that's ok it doesn't have to be done today DE3 can do it tomorrow let's not worry let's just leave it because I'm I'm worried about my team getting a good work life balance at the moment you know I'm feeling a bit of a better leader I feel like I'm supporting my team better

because you're calmer?

I'm a nicer person to be around it's not as if I was a complete ogre but I feel I'm a nicer person to be around consistently 2 time as opposed to not just when I've got time I'm I just feel in general I'm a bit nicer to be around

I just want to probe that a little when you were saying it doesn't always have to be done now tomorrow we can do things tomorrow Is there anything around confidence there? I just want to understand is there a greater confidence in your leadership, your abilities?

Nods head. I think there is and I think that being at home and being on my own at home is allowing me more reflection time and more thinking time whether I'm aware of it or not what and I think that's making me think about what's important and I think I'm confident in my abilities and my teams abilities to deliver in our business and yes I think there is something there in because I'm more chilled I'm a bit more confident

to say hey well we're not doing it I'm not asking somebody to work until 9 at night to do it because they don't need to and when they need to we will do it but we're not doing it today we'll do it tomorrow so I so yes there probably is something there where I do feel I have more confidence to say will do that tomorrow yes

is there also something there about feeling more in control? (32:25)

yes I definitely feel more organised I'm quite an organised kind of person anyway I feel much more organised much more in and I think I'm Getting my team I'm putting more and putting more work my team's way to allow them to be empowered and fell more accountable so yes I do feel, I think when you're calm you are more in control I think one comes with the other so I think my feeling of not being a control freak but feeling in control of what needs to be done feels far greater,

So what have you learned about yourself as you've gone through these 8 weeks?

I think I've learned that I need to invest in myself more. I need to find a good work life balance because it's working. My walking everyday is working. My face rolling is working. My mindfulness sessions are working. The biggest lesson for me is taking time for myself and it's not as if I've got kids that I need to run round after. I dont know what I was doing in my evenings but I do feel that the biggest lesson for me is taking time out for me to relax and do the simple things in life that I enjoy and I'm getting more pleasure out of, I htink that's been the biggest lesson for me because I honestly see the benefits in my work and in my personal life because as I say i think I'm just a calmer person to be around.