

Institution: Queen Mary University of London (QMUL)
Unit of Assessment: Business and Management (C19)
Title of case study: Women and union leadership
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This case study is underpinned by research carried out within a Leverhulme Trust International Network award on Women and Union Leadership. The case demonstrates three sets of impact: (1) engagement of Professor Kirton to advise the probation service union Napo on changing policy and practices to improve women's representation in the union's leadership and decision-making structures; (2) career development, activist development and new networking opportunities for women union leaders/activists in the UK and USA; and (3) increased action on improving women's representation in unions and raising greater awareness (including lobbying through Motion 26, TUC 2011) of the pressing importance for union renewal of correcting women's under-representation in union leadership in UK and USA unions.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Trade unions suffer from a pronounced gender democracy deficit. Women are currently seriously under-represented in union leadership roles, yet they form over half of UK and almost half of US union membership. This striking discrepancy, and how to tackle it, has become a pressing issue within the union movement in both countries – not least because unions must recruit and retain women members to survive and grow in the increasingly feminised labour markets characteristic of industrialized countries. Kirton and Healy identified this discrepancy as a major opportunity to build on their past research and achieve wide-reaching impact. Their project, Women and Union Leadership in a Comparative Context, was supported by the Leverhulme Trust (£111,500 over two years 2008-10). The project is highly significant as the first cross-national UK-US study on the topic, and its design from the first incorporated an ambitious engagement and change strategy. Cross-national secondary research identified the scale of women's under-representation in union leadership together with the history, causes and implications of women's under-representation in union decision-making. The research focus was on the contemporary politics and dynamics of women's leadership given the changing labour force demographics. The research design has involved close engagement with users and stakeholders within the UK and USA union movements.</p> <p>The primary research comprised: (i) an educational exchange programme of 20 American and British women union leaders co-organised with the UK/US peak union bodies; (ii) one-to-one qualitative interviews with 130 American and British women union leaders; (iii) roundtable discussions with small groups of American and British women union leaders; (iv) case studies of a selection of the most senior union women in the UK and USA; (v) a survey of a New Jersey women's union leadership conference; and (vi) exploratory and evaluative discussion workshops involving scholarly subject experts in the UK, Europe and USA.</p> <p>This research gives a robust account of women's under-representation in union leadership in both the UK and USA. The research was the first of its kind and culminated in the project report (see s.3 point 5. below), peer-reviewed articles and the Routledge monograph (see s.3, point 4. below) which defined, mapped and theorised the scale of the problem. The empirical data clearly demonstrates that many of the challenges of union leadership, especially for women, transcend national boundaries and specific contexts. Both American and British women carry out multiple leadership roles at a variety of hierarchical levels but many continue to experience being excluded, undervalued, undermined and marginalised. On the individual level role models and mentors, typically other more-senior women, emerged as crucial in supporting and developing women in leadership roles. Women unionists also strongly valued events targeted at women such as education and training courses. On the collective level encouraging unions to adopt equality strategies and raise awareness of the issue promised to embed union reform in this area. As this case study demonstrates, the data gathered has encouraged a wide range of unions in both countries to engage much more effectively with this pressing issue.</p>
<p>3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p>** submitted to REF2014</p> <p>1. ** Healy, G and G. Kirton (2013) 'The early mobilisation of women trade union leaders – a</p>

- comparative perspective.' *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 51(4), 709-732, DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-8543.2012.00902.x
2. **Kirton, G. and G. Healy (2013) 'Commitment and collective identity of long-term union participation: the case of women union leaders in the UK and USA'. *Work, Employment and Society*, vol. 27, 2: pp. 195-212, doi: 10.1177/0950017012460304
 3. ** Kirton, G. and G. Healy (2012) 'Lift as you rise': Union women's leadership talk. *Human Relations*, 65(8): 979-1000, doi: 10.1177/0018726712448202
 4. Kirton, G. and G. Healy (2012) *Gender and Leadership in Unions* London: Routledge [eligible for REF 2014]
 5. Kirton, G.; G. Healy; S. Alvarez; M. Gatta; R. Lieberwitz and H. McKay (2012) 'Developing and globalizing women's union leadership via a cross-national exchange programme' in S. Ledwith and L.L. Hansen (eds) *International perspectives on gender, identity and union leadership*, London: Routledge.
 6. Kirton, G. and G. Healy (2013) Stratégies en faveur de la démocratie de genre dans les syndicats, *Travail, Genre et Société*, 30(2) doi: [10.3917/tgs.030.0073](https://doi.org/10.3917/tgs.030.0073)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

This case focuses on impacts in terms of changes to union strategies and actions to promote the position of women in leadership both at the individual and organisational/collective levels. The aim is that these changes will lead to major, future shifts in the gender composition of union leaderships.

1. Impacts within one union

Work with the National Association of Probation Officers (NAPO) demonstrates how the team's research has had an impact on an individual union's strategy and decision making, what can be achieved in this area and the significant value unions place on the research. Kirton is leading this three-year strategy project in which her experience is both informing her work and being shaped by it.

NAPO asked Kirton to advise on an action plan to improve women's representation. She drew up a series of recommendations based on the earlier UK-US study, her analysis of NAPO gender monitoring data, and a survey of Napo women members in which she initiated roundtable discussions with three major Napo branches. The NAPO National Executive Committee accepted these recommendations in full in September 2012. Kirton's close involvement with the Union has deepened as she has further been asked to advise the Union on the implementation of her recommendations. NAPO appointed her as an ex-officio member of its new Women's Strategy Steering Group which is overseeing the three-year women's equality strategy (2011-14), largely based on Kirton's recommendations. She is working closely with key NAPO officials on developing the case for devoting greater resources to the promotion of women's equality. To date, the Union has: (i) initiated negotiations with the General Federation of Trade Unions to establish a bespoke women's leadership training course; (ii) improved its collection of data on women's representation within the Union; (iii) placed women's issues as a standing item on the Equal Rights Committee agenda; (iv) run two workshops on women and accessing power at its biennial Women's Conference in June 2013 facilitated by Kirton; (v) disseminated, via its conference, good branch practices which reflect Kirton's recommendations; and (vi) agreed to monitor by gender attendance and contribution at National Executive Committee meetings.

The General Secretary of NAPO stated: "*Professor Gill Kirton was engaged by Napo before the Women's strategy was put in place and was a vital part of the team. She offered advice and guidance on its format, its pace, and its aims, and the make-up of the steering group. She enabled a survey of its women members to take place, capturing information which then guided policy. She helped educate the Union about the issues facing women, and her collaborative work enabled a mature debate to take place*".

Importantly, and widening the reach and significance of the case study, Napo put a motion to Women's TUC 2011: 'Motion 26 was moved by Napo and seconded by Unison. Conference

welcomed the publication of the academic study by Gill Kirton and Geraldine Healy on women and trade union leadership. Conference called on the General Council to undertake research into identifying any barriers to the full participation by women in leadership roles’.

2. The core project impact on individual careers and strategies for change. The core project, funded by the Leverhulme Trust, tackled women’s leadership under-representation through a series of action-orientated activities. The key activity was a two-week residential leadership development course (one week in the US and one week in the UK) between March and June 2009, for 10 American and 10 British women union leaders. This unique path-breaking course was designed to create: (i) an educational and developmental experience for individual participants enabling them to identify and devise their strategies for responding to the gender democracy deficit, (ii) a new cross-national, self-organising, network of women union leaders to disseminate understanding of and collective action on gender issues, and (iii) to generate wider lessons for the union movement in both countries.

The development course had immediate benefits for participants in the form of shared experiences and learning, the formation of new networking links and (post-course) individual promotions. The benefits of sharing experiences, not only nationally but also internationally, were striking. Participants continued to complete learning logs, themselves organised follow-up meetings and created an e-network. Follow-up meetings have included further exchange visits between the two countries and various actions to support activities on promoting women as union leaders (corroborations detailed below). Not least several participants have now been promoted to higher-level leadership positions. For example, one UK participant has moved from being a lay Unison branch officer to being the National Association of Probation Officers (NAPO) National Official with responsibility for NAPO’s women’s equality strategy. One American participant similarly has become Vice President of her Communications Workers of America (CWA) local and established a local women’s committee. She said: *“Another benefit to my organization is that the enthusiasm that was shared ... spawned a move to establish a women’s committee here in CWA Local 1036. Even more exciting is the fact that the committee agreed that it wants to see a focus on international women’s rights and women’s issues. So for the very first time, we sponsored an event for International Women’s Day focusing on universal paid sick leave.”* Participants’ feedback was collated in the Southern and Eastern TUC (2009) *US Exchange Report*. One participant’s (Unison) comment is illustrative: *“The whole experience has prompted me to consider new and different ways to recruit, organise, politicise and educate women within Unison. I am grateful for the experience and knowledge gained so far.”* Another participant (National Air Traffic Services (NATS)) writes: *“Taking part in this exchange has enabled me to build on my knowledge and gain a wider understanding and appreciation of the role of women in trade unions in an international context. It has also helped me to formulate strategies that I can apply to my roles, particularly as PCS Assistant Secretary in NATS, and to actively promote the important part that women play in the trade union movement.”* The Regional Secretary SERTUC, said: *“The experiences [participants] had meeting their US counterparts cemented their understanding of both the collective nature of their work and the individual talent they brought to it. Outcomes were greater participation in their unions and within the Southern & Eastern Region of the TUC.”*

The research has continued to engender interest within the union movement and beyond on women’s representation in union leadership positions. Kirton was invited to speak on the topic at Napo’s women’s conference in May 2011 and June 2013 (estimated attendance 80), and Healy was invited to speak at ‘Unions 21’ in May 2012 (estimated attendance 80-100) at the TUC. The study has been widely referred to in the UK, US and union media, for example, the research has influenced the following pieces: *The Observer* (three-page article on women and unions) 6 August 2012, Yvonne Roberts, *The Women changing Britain’s unions* www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2012/aug/05/women-changing-union-movement-tuc; BBC report on *Trade unions: Not dead yet*, (25 January 2012) www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-16609527; New Jersey Star Ledger (2009) article *Women changing Britain’s unions*, www.nj.com/business/index.ssf/2009/05/women_labor_leaders_from_uk_vi.html; a Rutgers University Newspaper (2009); Berger Marks Foundation (2010) www.bergermarks.org/news/2010/index3.php?art=148#148; TSSA (Union) Journal (2009); Napo

outputs (2011-12) www.napo.org.uk/about/news/news.cfm/newsid/191,
www.napo.org.uk/resources/win_blog.cfm

3. Sustaining the momentum and widening the reach

The central challenge in this case has been to sustain women unionists' motivation and work with union activists and leaders to embed the lessons of the core project within the union movement.

The challenge is particularly great as the aim of gender equality within union leaderships will take many years to achieve. The momentum was sustained through four further activities:

(i) Immediately after the development course, the research team convened a UK networking conference attended by 50 women trade unionists (June 2009). The team disseminated the lessons from the course and prominent union speakers stressed the benefits of an equitable gender balance plus the individual and collective strategies for achieving such a balance at the top of the union movement. (ii) The research team joined with Cornell University colleagues to organise a US women activists' conference at Cornell in May 2010. Again the Conference took forward the lessons of the core project. It focussed on change strategies such as increasing the effectiveness of working parties and task-and-finish groups on women's leadership in the two countries and voter mobilisation campaigns targeted at encouraging women to vote for women candidates. (iii) The team worked with the TUC on a second UK women activists' conference, held at TUC headquarters in September 2010. The team sought to maintain the prominence of the gender disparity issue and again work on effective strategies for change with union activists, many of whom supported a demand for more women's leadership development courses. (iv) Meanwhile, in the US the team joined with Cornell colleagues in two workshops, involving book launches, at Cornell and, notably, at the AFL-CIO headquarters in Washington in March 2013 (attended by 60 women union activists). These workshops reiterated the lessons of the UK/US research findings, but the team also used them to focus activists on the next steps for women in the labour movement. These next steps included the need for sustained collective action by women and their supporters as well as stressing the value of individual development through mentoring and women's networking.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

End-user organisations and individuals

1. Regional Secretary, SERTUC. (Can corroborate the impact on UK women leaders/activists under the Leverhulme Trust project)
2. Executive Vice President, Communication Workers of America Local 1036. (Can corroborate the impact of the exchange programme on her Union's action on women's representation as well as personal impact)
3. General Secretary, Napo. (Can corroborate the impact relating to the work with Napo)

Reports targeting end-users

4. SERTUC (2009) *US Exchange Report* A booklet by Southern and Eastern TUC details participants' self-reported experiences (referred to above). Trades Union Congress: <http://chwaratetg.com/downloads/QMU%20Women%20in%20Leadership%20report%20TUC.pdf>
5. Kirton, G.; G. Healy; S. Alvarez; R. Lieberwitz; M. Gatta (2010) *Women and Union Leadership in the UK and USA: first findings from a cross-national research project*. Centre for Research in Equality and Diversity, School of Business and Management, Queen Mary University of London
6. Kirton, G. (2012) *Women's representation in Napo leadership and decision-making: what progress on gender equality and democracy?* Napo

Media and other web-based reports covering the research:

7. New Jersey Star Ledger (2009): www.nj.com/business/index.ssf/2009/05/women_labor_leaders_from_uk_vi.html
8. Napo (2011-12): www.napo.org.uk/about/news/news.cfm/newsid/191
www.napo.org.uk/resources/win_blog.cfm
9. Roberts, Yvonne 'The Women changing Britain's unions' *The Observer*: www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2012/aug/05/women-changing-union-movement-tuc