



A PATH TO TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Diplôme d'Études Supérieures en Leadership Study

Preliminary Findings Report

INTRODUCTION

This longitudinal study is a multiyear research project designed to assess the impact of the Diplôme d'Études Supérieures en Leadership Humanitaire (DESLH)¹ course on graduates, their organisation and in the longer term, the humanitarian system. This research covers the first two cohorts of the course: DESLH1 (2017–18) and DESLSH2 (2019). It is academic research, approved by the Faculty of Arts and Education Human Ethics Advisory Group (HEAG) at Deakin University under project # HAE-19-219. This report provides highlights of the initial findings from the first phase of the research.

This report was produced to share initial findings of the longitudinal study with the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership, Action Contre la Faim and USAID, and other partners. The research is funded by USAID and this report is part of a more substantial piece of academic research that will be published in 2021.

« J'avais fait beaucoup de lecture sur le développement personnel mais ça ne peut pas se comparer avec ce que moi j'ai vécu dans le DESLH... Ce n'est pas que j'ai grandi, mais j'ai pu renaître avec ce DESLH. »

("I'd done a lot of reading on personal development, but it cannot compare with what I experienced in the DESLH. It's not that I grew up, but I was reborn with this DESLH.")

¹ The Diplôme d'Études Supérieures en Leadership Humanitaire (DESLH) was previously called the Graduate Certificate of Humanitarian Leadership Francophone (GCHLF) or Programme de Leadership Humanitaire (PLH). The course name was changed at the end of 2020 to increase applicability with the French-speaking demographic. Any reference to the GCHLF or PLH in quoted material and interviews has been changed to DESLH for consistency and clarity.

THE RESEARCH

Course outline and history

The DESLH is an accredited tertiary postgraduate course delivered by Deakin University through the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership and in partnership with Action Contre La Faim/Action Against Hunger². The course is funded by USAID as the main donor, with some contributions from the IKEA Foundation and Deakin University Faculty of Arts and Education.

The DESLH is a fully scaffolded, work-integrated course, consisting of four units (two Cloud-based distance-learning units and two residential units) delivered over two academic trimesters, over a period of approximately eight months. Comprising lectures, webinars, facilitated peer learning sessions, academic research and writing, coaching, self-reflection, and scenario-based learning, the DESLH provides experienced humanitarian and development actors the skills and confidence to be able to demonstrate highly effective leadership in complex environments. With a combination of academic rigor, experiential and work-integrated learning, students have the opportunity to develop their leadership competencies and refine their academic skills in a very innovative and supported environment.

Students are humanitarian and development practitioners with a minimum of five years in the humanitarian and development sector and three years in a leadership or management role. The diversity of the

cohorts is an important component of the course design to ensure greater peer learning and representation of the current humanitarian system (international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), non-government organisations (NGOs), the United Nations (UN), or government bodies). Nonetheless, the aim of the course is to develop leadership competencies of humanitarian and development workers at national level and with a focus on West and Central Africa. In terms of demographics, over 80% of students are from West and Central Africa, with a ratio of 70% men and 30% women. The average age of both cohorts is 40 years old.

The DESLH was developed and contextualised to Francophone Africa over a period of two years (2015–17) and was officially launched in September 2017 with an initial cohort of 33 students, out of which 25 successfully completed and were awarded a Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures en Leadership Humanitaire (Master 1) (Graduate Certificate of Humanitarian Leadership Francophone) in 2018. The second cohort started the course in March 2019 with 43 students enrolled and 30 successfully completing the course. All of the 55 graduates from the first two cohorts were offered the opportunity to contribute to the research.

² IRIS (Institut des Relations Internationales Stratégiques) was part of the tripartite consortium for the first iteration of the DESLH in 2017–18 but withdrew in 2018.

LONGITUDINAL STUDY

Purpose and aims

The purpose of this study is to better understand the impact of the DESLH on graduates. In particular, it aims to assess the extent to which the DESLH has impacted graduates' career pathways and the extent to which graduates have been able to apply the knowledge and skills from the course in their workplaces. Over time, the research will aim at measuring the impact on the sector.

The key objectives for this study are:

- to review, analyse, and document how graduates have applied the learning from the DESLH course
- to assess the impact of the DESLH course on their career pathways, and
- to assess the impact of the DESLH course on the graduates' organisations.

The study includes consideration of:

- how relevant graduates feel the course content was for them
- how graduates share the knowledge and skills they gained through the DESLH with their colleagues
- how the knowledge gained through the DESLH has influenced the way graduates perform their work
- the enablers and barriers to applying learning
- how graduates perceive completion of the DESLH has impacted on their career, and
- the impact of the relationships established through the course.

Limitations

It should be noted that the responses reflect those of graduates who agreed to participate in the survey and interviews. As such the results may reflect some bias towards those whom most felt the benefits of the course. However, the course involves building the capacity to give and receive constructive feedback and the surveys and interviews provided an additional opportunity for this.

Methodology and Scope

Data has been collected via online surveys and key informant interviews completed between the 22 December 2019 and 16 February 2021, with a data collection gap between February 2020 and October 2020 as a consequence of COVID-19.

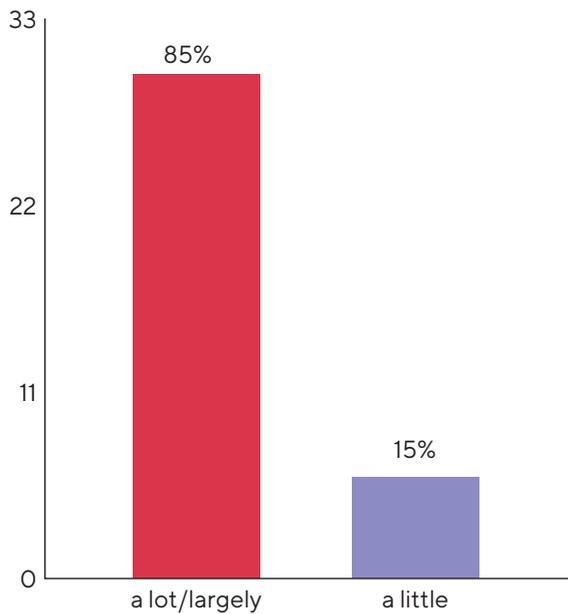
| | DESLH 1 | DESLH 2 | DESLH 1 & 2 | Overall Response Rate |
|------------------------------|---------|---------|-------------|-----------------------|
| No. Online Surveys* | | | 33* | 60% |
| No. Key Informant Interviews | 10 | 15 | | |
| · Male interviewees | 7 | 9 | | |
| · Female interviewees | 3 | 6 | | |

*Of the total 55 graduates, 35 provided signed consent forms to be included in research with 33 graduates completing the survey. The response rate refers to the numbers of respondents out of the total number of graduates invited to participate. The online survey is anonymous, and does not allow for cohort identification of respondents.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Leadership transformation of graduates

How much have you applied DESHL learnings?



% is the percentage of survey respondents.

Application and impact of the six leadership behaviours

Six Leadership Behaviours

Communicating vision and strategic purpose

Strategic thinking

Managerial courage

Deliver results

Building high-performing teams

Change and transformation

DESLH Course Values:

Integrity, Honesty, Fairness, Trustworthiness

From the initial findings of the research, the six leadership behaviours instilled in the course are very clearly being applied and are having a tangible, positive impact on graduates. Through the application of these behaviours, graduates report and demonstrate a strong, newfound sense of confidence and capacity to make decisions in difficult and complex circumstances. They provide evidence of improved decision-making by applying strategic analysis and reflection, a clearer and stronger ethical basis and a new grounded sense of confidence in demonstrating managerial courage. Graduates also give examples of presenting a more

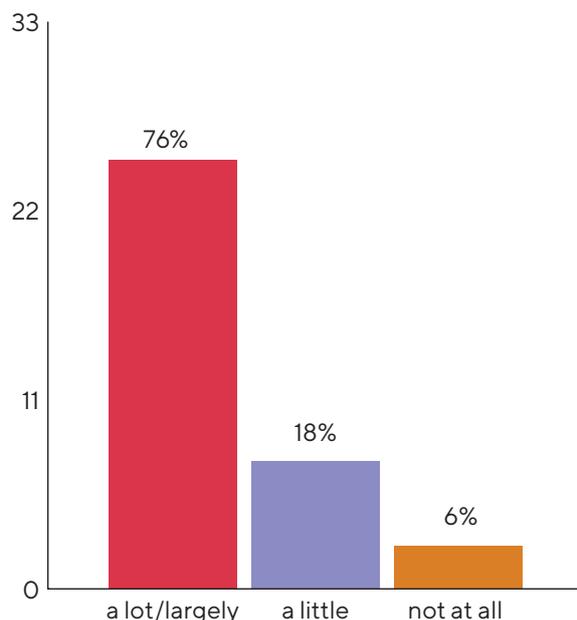
positive attitude, reflecting a greater self-awareness and of being more successful in their ability to influence others through more effective communication and listening skills. Their demonstration of the six leadership behaviours is also often reported to be changing how graduates are perceived by their managers and colleagues.

« Avant de prendre des décisions, j'analyse les opportunités et les risques en collaboration avec mon équipe, ensuite je prends les décisions qui s'alignent aux valeurs stratégiques et d'intégrité ; »
 ("Before making decisions, I analyse opportunities and risks in collaboration with my team, then I make decisions that align with strategic values and integrity.")

« Cette identification à l'autre dans mes prises de décisions et de management a suscité plus d'adhésion et une meilleure collaboration des autres dans les différents projets. Par ailleurs, j'ai développé mon courage managérial, en prenant les bonnes décisions, parfois difficiles, mais nécessaires pour la bonne suite des activités. »
 ("This identification with others in my decision-making process and management has elicited more support and better collaboration from others in the various projects. In addition, I have developed my managerial courage, by making right decisions, sometimes difficult ones, but necessary for the success of the activities.")

Application of new competencies and skills learned—the impact

How much has DESHL influenced how you work in your new role?



% refers to the percentage of survey respondents.

Self-knowledge and confidence

In addition to the in-depth focus on the six specific leadership behaviours, a key area of transformation identified among graduates is their awareness of the importance and impact of 'soft skills'. As such, graduates identified a significant change in their leadership ability through an increased level of self-knowledge regarding their strengths and limitations. They reported gaining this through the Hogan psychometric test, the coaching, and peer-to-peer feedback received during the intensive residential units. This new self-awareness and self-knowledge formed the basis for developing or strengthening key competencies and skills. In some cases, these have increased graduates' empathy towards themselves and others, also changing the way they communicate and work with colleagues and partners.

« Tout ce qui était lié à la connaissance de soi, Hogan test et exercices de simulation m'ont permis de mieux me comprendre et d'atténuer certains aspects de mon comportement. Je trouve que ce volet, notamment un changement de ma part a plu à mes collègues. »
("Everything that had to do with self-awareness, Hogan test and simulation exercises helped me better understand myself and mitigate certain aspects of my behaviour. I find that this aspect, in particular a change on my part, pleased my colleagues.")

Communication, listening and empathy

Vital skills described by the vast majority of graduates are a much-strengthened ability to communicate and listen effectively, better understand their audience, be open to different perspectives, and use self-awareness to understand how they, themselves, might be perceived. They cite numerous examples of the impact of this on others, including examples of managers and teams seeking them out for their input or advice.

Another significant new skill consistently identified as a key learning from the course by many graduates is the capacity to step back and reflect—to view the situation from 'the balcony', rather than continue to act and react in fast moving complex environments.

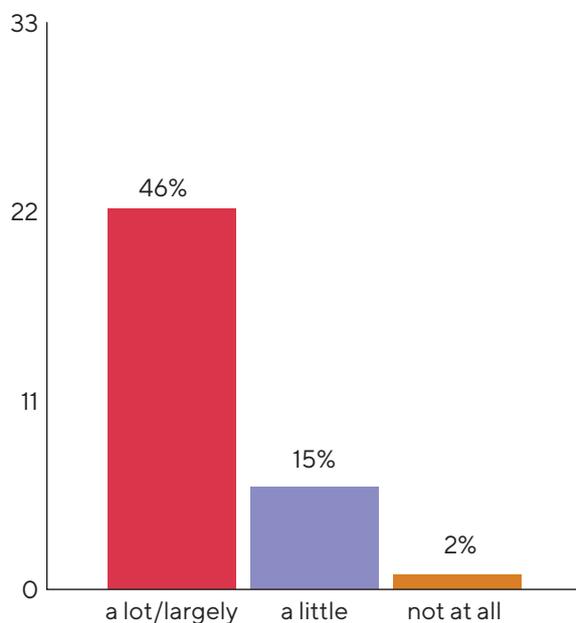
« La méthode du balcon m'inspire jusqu'ici et je m'en sers souvent. Je me retire de temps en temps des discussions lors de certaines réunions pour observer les participants. »
("The balcony view method has inspired me until today and I use it often. I withdraw from time to time from discussions at certain meetings to observe participants.")

It is also worth noting that numerous respondents describe feeling more "calm" and "serene", which positively impacts their teams, and is also a sign of personal empowerment resulting from clarity of purpose, greater confidence in self and their leadership, decision-making, and problem-solving abilities.

« J'avais une timidité qui se cachait en moi sous forme de manque de confiance. Surtout quand je suis avec mes superviseurs : j'avais rarement mes opinions de peur de les voir rejetées. À l'instant où je vous écris, je ne me reconnais plus sous cet angle. Je suis plus écouté et consulté par mes superviseurs. En plus, mes opinions comptent beaucoup pour mes collègues concernant la prise de décision managériale dans l'organisation. »
("I had a shyness that was hiding inside me in the form of a lack of confidence. Especially when I am with my supervisors. I rarely put forward my opinions for fear of seeing them rejected. As I write to you, I no longer recognise myself from that angle. I am more listened to and consulted by my supervisors. In addition, my opinions are very important to my colleagues regarding managerial decision-making in the organisation.")

Career Impact

Has the DESLH increased your career options in the

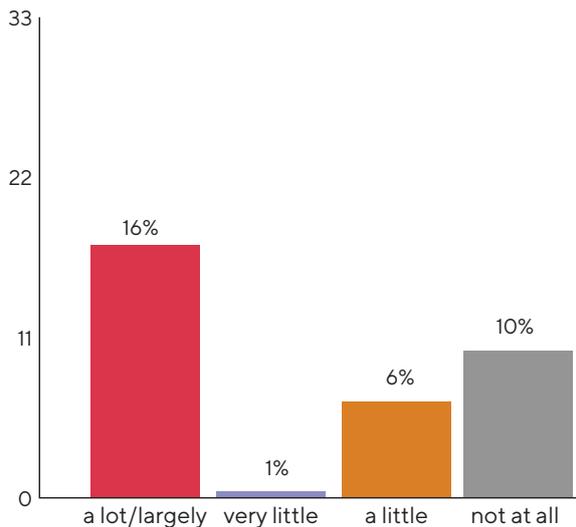


humanitarian sector?

Changing roles and responsibilities

At least 17 (52%) respondents have changed roles since they completed the course. This includes at least 9 (27%) respondents who have changed to roles in a different organisation. The majority of those who had changed roles said that obtaining the DESLH academic certification was a significant factor in securing this change.

How much did obtaining the DESLH diploma influence your role change?



*Actual numbers of graduates

In terms of increasing graduates' levels of responsibilities in their current or new roles, 20 graduates (60% of respondents) stated that they had more responsibilities since completing the DESLH course.

The preliminary findings of the study confirm that DESLH is having a tangible, positive impact on the career opportunities and decision-making ability of graduates. Graduate respondents overwhelmingly state that there is an increased confidence in their leadership, particularly in relation to strategic decision-making, their ability to empower and motivate teams to get results, their ability to influence others, and develop stronger relationships and credibility with partners. Some cite the importance of these 'soft skills' for taking them further in their work. Numerous graduates cite examples of their increased visibility in the organisation and greater confidence in them by the organisation's senior leadership.

The findings demonstrate that graduates have an ability to articulate their leadership skills and competencies, and to provide clear examples of how they have applied their skills, which is an important factor in career progression. In addition, after perceiving how much they have learnt during the course, graduates cite a motivation to find positions where they can apply their new skills and continue learning.

In terms of relationships and engagement with their fellow graduates, the study found that graduates have continued their relationships with their cohorts and shared opportunities and advice. Some used the strong graduate network to change jobs and advance their careers. Limited engagement was reported between the different cohorts and between graduates and faculty members.

Some examples of the relationships and their impact include:

« Quand je finissais avec le DESLH je n'occupais pas un poste managérial. Mais avec l'utilisation du courage managérial en prenant des décisions dans la conception des projets et ne pas hésiter à donner mon avis sur différents sujets, les managers des projets venaient chercher des conseils auprès de moi. Le 1er décembre je suis devenu Manager de la réponse humanitaire/chef de bureau avec une trentaine de staffs sous ma responsabilité. »
 ("When I was finishing the DESLH I did not hold a managerial position. But by applying managerial courage, by making decisions in the project design, and not hesitating to share my opinion on different subjects, project managers came to seek advice from me. I [soon] became Manager of the Humanitarian Response/Head of Office with around thirty staff under my responsibility.")

« Le fait d'être déployé sur la réponse au Mozambique et aussi sur la réponse à la crise des réfugiés Nigériens a fait ressortir la confiance que la direction m'accorde à travers ma participation à cette formation. Une formation qui est devenue presque un [nom d'une ONG] un passage obligé pour être déployé sur des crises. »
 ("Being deployed in the Mozambique response and also in the response to the Nigeriens refugee crisis has brought out the confidence that management has placed in me through my participation in this course. A course that has become almost a necessary step to be deployed to crises.")

The value of an academic qualification was another important factor for some respondents and many valued that it was from an Australian university. One impact of the course is the acknowledgment of importance of academic literature to the humanitarian sector and its ongoing evolution. Some graduates cited how it helped them understand new and current thinking and the bigger picture beyond their role and context. As such, it has instilled a new motivation in some for further study.

« L'autre aspect qui impressionne ... c'est le fait que Deakin University qui fait le cours, une université australienne. Merci pour cela. »
 ("The other aspect that impresses ... is the fact that Deakin University offers the course, an Australian university. Thank you for that.")

« ...le DESLH m'a donné envie de reprendre éventuellement un cursus académique dans un proche avenir. »
 ("...the DESLH made me want to possibly resume an academic course in the near future.")

« Avec ce diplôme je pourrai vite évoluer dans ma carrière. »
 ("With this diploma I will be able to quickly evolve in my career.")

LEADERSHIP TRANSFORMATION OF COLLEAGUES AND TEAMS

The preliminary findings indicate clearly and consistently an increased self-awareness and focus among almost all graduate respondents on how their teams, and others, perceive them; how to apply their new listening and communication skills and their strategic vision to build high-performing teams. Graduates regularly report that because of the course, particularly the simulations, they now focus significantly on empowering and motivating their teams rather than imposing a 'command and control' approach. This stems from showing more positivity, cultivating a culture of respect and acceptance of diverse views, and providing space for others to speak and be heard. They also focus on sharing a common strategic vision, generating more autonomy, participation, and delegation of more responsibilities to their teams. The study provides many examples of graduates stating their teams and colleagues demonstrate greater trust, confidence, motivation, and effectiveness. Furthermore, the graduates frequently reported that their new capacity to step back and reflect on 'the balcony' to better understand their colleagues and the situation, is something they now practice regularly. The 'balcony' technique from their perspective directly impacts colleagues because it prevents the graduates from simply reacting rather than responding carefully.

Significantly, graduates also frequently report an increased sense of confidence in their teams and that colleagues also feel a greater level of confidence in the graduate's leadership based on their ability to think before reacting, to make thoughtful strategic decisions and to take colleagues' views into account when making decisions.

The following quotes are indicative of the findings mentioned in this section.

« Ma nouvelle équipe, qui était étiquetée de nonchalante, démontre aujourd'hui une force de productivité que je n'ai jamais eu le plaisir de côtoyer auparavant avec mes supervisés. Car je sais aujourd'hui comment laisser la place aux autres. Et comment donner de la motivation en montrant l'exemple dans ma participation et concertation dans le travail. »
("My new team, which was labelled nonchalant, today demonstrates a force in productivity that I have never had the pleasure of working with before with my supervisees. Because now I know how to make room for others. And how to motivate by showing the example of my participation and consultation at work.")

« Simplement parce que j'étais plus en confiance, cela a rassuré les équipes. J'ai aussi compris que je ne pouvais pas porter tout le poids du monde et donc ai plus délégué et ai mieux soutenu les équipes. Je pense que cela allégé mon chargé de travail et le poids émotionnel de la mission sur moi et créer une équipe plus en cohésion entre les différents membres. »
("Simply because I was more confident, it reassured the teams. I also understood that I could not carry all the weight of the world and therefore I delegated more and better supported the teams. I think this alleviated my workload, the emotional weight of the mission and created a more cohesive team among the various members.")

« Sur la même compétence, la capacité à se mettre au balcon, je peux dire qu'elle m'a permis de diminuer les conflits avec certains collègues. »
("On the same skill, the ability to 'stand on the balcony', I can say that it allowed me to reduce conflicts with certain colleagues.")

Impact on the organisation

The transformation in graduates is showing some clear signs of impact on organisations, although this broader impact is difficult to capture in this research due to the high turnover of staff. Through their enhanced leadership skills and qualities, graduates say they are increasingly consulted by their senior leadership in strategic and important decisions, adding value to the organisation and its depth of talent to draw upon. Graduates regularly cite increased team performance and some cited influencing organisational policies. This translates into more timely and effective results, thus increasing the credibility of the organisation in relation to local NGOs and donors, for example.

Graduates also describe applying the principle of 'win-win' that they learned in the course, in order to create a 'third culture', and more trust. The increased trust from donors has boosted funding opportunities in some instances, including significantly more funding to local NGOs compared to INGOs. A clear impact of a graduate's leadership learning for their organisation is a pivot to localisation and empowerment of local and national NGOs. Graduates also cited examples of where a stronger understanding, grounding and belief in humanitarian principles has enabled them to take actions that have enhanced the integrity and credibility of the organisation. Some of these issues are highlighted in the quotes below:

« L'expression de mon leadership a été clef pour impulser un retour à un esprit de réponse d'urgence, en devenant un des acteurs majeurs de la réponse COVID au Liban. J'ai développé en externe de nombreux contacts et placé mon organisation sur le devant de la scène. En interne, j'ai montré à de nombreux collègues trop habitués au train train, que notre organisation peut être flexible et réactive. Que c'est même le coeur de notre métier. On a renoué avec notre esprit fondateur. »
("The expression of my leadership was key in driving a return to a spirit of emergency response, by becoming one of the major players in the COVID response in Lebanon. I developed numerous contacts externally and put my organisation in the spotlight. Internally, I have shown many colleagues too accustomed to the day-to-day work that our organisation can be flexible and responsive. That it is even the heart of our business. We have reconnected with our founding spirit.")

« J'ai beaucoup influencé le leadership de mon organisation concernant certaine politique qui mettaient frein à la performance de mon équipe. Qui prouve mon courage aussi. Avec mon leadership actuel, mon organisation commence avoir plus de confiance de la part des différents bailleurs. Ce qui prouve aussi la performance de l'équipe. »
("I have considerably influenced the leadership of my organisation regarding some policies which hampered the performance of my team. Which also proves my courage. With my current leadership, my organisation is starting to gain more confidence from the various donors. This also demonstrates the performance of the team.")

Gender and diversity

In early analysis of the data, there is evidence that gender plays a particular role in the leadership transformation of graduates. In particular, female graduates, highlight

different obstacles to applying their leadership skills, particularly in more hierarchical structures. These obstacles include cultural factors and patriarchal views of women which leads to less or no space and support for them to lead, specifically because of their gender. This has translated into barriers to promotion for some female graduates.

The findings indicate that DESLH has given female graduates solid examples of leadership experience, the ability to understand and value their own leadership style, and also the development of a close support group for sharing career opportunities, experiences, and challenges.

« J'ai essayé depuis deux ans et d'une certaine manière j'ai réussi à progresser, mais je me suis retrouvé dans une espèce de 'glass ceiling'. »
("I've been trying for two years and somehow managed to evolve, but I found myself hitting a kind of glass ceiling. ")

Diversity was raised as a challenge in terms of the disconnect between the organisation's global diversity and inclusion policies and the lived reality. More specifically, the 'cosmetic' inclusion of diverse ethnic and gender groups in leadership teams but with limited decision authority or power was discussed.

« On arrive à avoir de la diversité ethnique au niveau du leadership, mais la manière dont mes collègues femmes ou mes autres collègues de différents groupes ethniques sont intégrés dans les décisions ne sont pas les mêmes que les 'middle-age white european anglo-saxon men'. »
("We manage to have ethnic diversity at the leadership level, but the way in which my female colleagues or my other colleagues from different ethnic groups are integrated into the decisions is not the same as the middle-aged white European Anglo-Saxon men.")

VALUES—CHANGES, IMPACT, IMPORTANCE

It is clear in the early findings of the study that the strong focus on values and principles in the course has led graduates to question both personal and organisational ethos, decision-making, and ways of operating. There is evidence the strengthened awareness of values is giving graduates clarity, confidence and courage to speak up and address issues that contradict their values and ethics, providing a basis for decision-making and risk-taking that might not have been so consistent previously.

Graduates mention making a more explicit effort to ensure integrity in decisions and actions and successful efforts to influence others around them of the benefits of integrity, namely greater credibility and trust among partners.

Transparency, respect, and honesty towards themselves and to teams and partners are important values reflected in DESLH graduates, and they report subsequent positive changes in the relationships and work results.

Significantly, the preliminary findings indicate how graduates are using the humanitarian principles of humanitarianism and impartiality to influence the focus of their organisations' work, such as working in situations or with local partners that were previously seen as too risky. Thus, there appears a clear impact on decision-making and risk-taking and ultimately on the access and impact of the humanitarian assistance they are in the role of providing.

« Avant de participer au programme, je me disais que cela pourrait être mal perçu et deviendrait un problème de conscience pour moi le fait de savoir qu'un collègue a perdu son poste parce que j'ai signalé une fraude. Aujourd'hui j'ai compris que prendre ses responsabilités devant une situation et l'assumer c'est preuve de courage managérial. »

(“Before participating in the course, I thought to myself that it might be frowned upon and become a conscience issue for me to know that a colleague has lost their job because I reported a fraud. Today I understand that taking responsibility in a situation and assuming it is proof of managerial courage.”)

« Exemple de la mise en œuvre de projet d'urgence COVID-19 Mon organisation est une organisation humanitaire travaillant notamment dans le domaine de la santé. Il m'était inconcevable de ne pas avoir un rôle important dans la réponse à l'épidémie. (Se fonder sur les valeurs de l'organisation et les siennes). J'ai donc analysé les besoins et su saisir une opportunité en particulier : soutenir le HCR et un gouverneur local à mettre en place un centre d'isolement gratuit et ouvert à tous, réfugiés inclus. J'ai rapidement vu comment mon organisation pouvait avoir une valeur ajoutée : projets et équipes travaillant déjà sur du soutien qualité des soins, ONG avec expérience dans l'analyse des besoins et capacités organisationnelles. J'ai foncé même sans l'assurance de financement, tout en étant clair avec les partenaires et sans fausses promesses. Au moins nous offrons notre expertise. »

(“Example of implementation of a COVID-19 emergency project. My organisation is a humanitarian organisation working in the health sector. It was inconceivable for me not to have an important role in the response to the epidemic. (Based on the values of the organisation and my own). I therefore analysed the needs and seized an opportunity in particular: to support UNHCR and a local Governor to set up a free isolation centre open to all, refugees included. I quickly saw how my organisation could have added value: projects and teams already working on quality care support, NGOs with experience in analysing organisational needs and capacities. I went for it even without the assurance of funding, while being clear with the partners and without false promises. At least we were offering our expertise.”)

BARRIERS AND ENABLERS TO CHANGE

Overall, the study indicates significant changes in the graduates' leadership abilities and practices. However, there are clear challenges and the study aimed to understand some of the key barriers and enablers to graduates applying their leadership competencies and attributes.

Among the barriers cited by graduates are the hierarchical structures and top-down cultures of some organisations, a lack of support from management, and unresolved ethical challenges, such as corruption within organisations. At a personal level, graduates describe the challenge of not falling back into old patterns of behaviour, particularly a tendency to prioritise meeting the expectations of others. Other graduates cited that working in a new context was a barrier as it took time to understand it. However, one of the most commonly cited barriers was time pressure, meaning carving out time for change is difficult, but they recognised that their new leadership learning was the value of taking time to reflect. Gender was cited as another significant barrier, in particular, being a woman and a woman of colour from more patriarchal and hierarchical cultures meant being recognised, heard, and respected was particularly challenging.

Institutional culture and values, as well as management support were key factors cited as enablers, considered important as they can provide graduates with the space to influence and enact change. An increase in confidence from their teams and partners helped them increase their visibility and influence within their organisation. At a personal level, some graduates mentioned the qualities of determination, patience, and transparency as very important. For women facing sexism and cultural barriers, the support of other female leaders was key.

« De mon côté, je n'ai pas eu du tout de problème pour l'application des comportements et valeurs de leadership. J'ai un environnement de travail, ou la direction de l'organisation m'a donné de l'espace et me soutient énormément. » (“For my part, I had no problem applying the leadership behaviour and values at all. I have a work environment, where the management of the organisation has given me space and is very supportive.”)

« Le fait d'être une femme africaine au sein d'équipes principalement africaines n'a pas facilité des choses ; les équipes attendent un comportement de sœur qui couvre tout pour garder une image positive des équipes et de moi-même. Travailler pour une organisation qui hiérarchise la relation terrain et siège, ne m'a pas donné beaucoup de latitude pour impulser certains sujets. Mes propres réserves à soutenir mes convictions n'ont pas facilité l'application des comportements. » (“Being an African woman in predominantly African teams did not make things easier; the teams expect sisterly behaviour that covers everything to keep a positive image of the teams and of myself. Working for an organisation that prioritises the field and head office relationship did not give me a lot of leeway to promote certain subjects. My own reservations about supporting my convictions did not facilitate the application of the behaviours.”)

LOCALISATION

Graduates provided evidence that they have transformed opinions in relation to the strategic and ethical importance of localisation and the empowerment of local organisations, both their organisation's and, in some instances, their own. Graduates cite resistance and a negative perception of the capacity of local NGOs, but also some notable success in changing staff and management attitudes, resulting in tangible investment in and enhanced results from local NGOs.

One graduate's efforts to influence their organisation on the localisation agenda has resulted in a large shift in support to local NGOs. In 2020, they made 11 out of 13 agreements with local NGOs and only two agreements with international NGOs, in contrast with 2019 where the majority of agreements were signed with international NGOs.

One example of this, a graduate stated « pour eux [l'organisation], les partenaires n'ont pas exécuté ... » ("For them [the organisation], the partners did not execute ..."). However, the graduate was successful in changing perceptions and significantly improved the relationship with the local NGO who is now a lot more active and responsive.

« L'équipe donne plus de valeur aux partenaires, non pas juste pour que les projets marchent, mais aussi pour leur laisser leur place. »
("The team gives more value to partners, not just to make projects work, but also to make room for them...")

« ...quand il y a un blocage, moi, je réagis. ...Quand je réagis, c'est tout de suite. Donc, j'ai une réponse positive. L'action est vraiment immédiate et bien dynamique, bien déterminée. »
("... When there is a blockage, I react... When I react, it's right away. So, I have a positive response. The action is really immediate and very dynamic, determined.")

INITIAL CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the Longitudinal Study is to identify and understand the impact of the leadership course on graduates, their colleagues, teams and organisations and to a broader extent the humanitarian sector. The preliminary findings identify clear evidence of significant changes in the graduates who participated in the study, including evidence of a significant transformation in self-confidence, self-awareness, and specific leadership skills, competencies and behaviours. This transformation, which includes a focus on applying humanitarian values and principles, is directly contributing to better team performance and greater empowerment and confidence of teams, as well as career opportunities and choices for graduates. The changes are also impacting the strategic focus of organisations and their credibility, in particular

in shifting to a stronger focus to empowerment of local organisations. Respondents state and demonstrate clearly how the DESLH has contributed to these changes. As such, it can be concluded that DESLH content and delivery has been relevant, effective and is generating a sustainable and significant impact on graduates, their teams, organisations and relationships with donors and local organisations.

While there are clear challenges to applying new leadership skills and approaches such as barriers for women graduates, time constraints, challenging top-down cultures, the DESLH graduates are continuing to apply learnings by stepping back to reflect and think strategically.