The Effectiveness of Negotiation Skills Training in Advancing the Status of Women in Science and Engineering

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ABSTRACT

Gender equality has been linked to several positive organizational outcomes, including improved overall organizational performance, and yet fields such as science and engineering remain male-dominated. This discrepancy may be, in part, because women are less likely to negotiate than men and that they negotiate differently than men do. To address this disparity, negotiation workshops were offered to women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) in Ontario. This paper presents a detailed account of the training program and then presents a mixed-method evaluation of the workshops. Results showed that the training produced positive results and was particularly effective at encouraging participants to transfer their new skills back to the workplace and change their negotiation behaviours. The key practical implication is that organizations should consider training such as this for women in STEM as a means to support learning but, more importantly, as a forum for informal learning, mutual support and network building for participants.

KEYWORDS

negotiation skills, women, science, engineering, training

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INTRODUCTION

While gender representation has improved in many Canadian industries, the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) remain male-dominated. In 2011, women represented only 22.7% of the workforce in STEM, an improvement of only 3% since 1987 (Dionne-Simard et al., 2016).

Gender equity leads to innovation and can help build strong, resilient organizations (Kelly & Dickson, 2012). Organizations characterized by gender equity have been found to be more growth oriented (Mateos de Cabo et al., 2012), to reflect more commitment to corporate social responsibility (Boulouta, 2013), and to exhibit better overall organizational performance (Dezsö & Ross, 2012). For these reasons, it is essential to improve the representation of women in male-dominated fields, particularly in management positions.

One theory about the cause of gender disparity in management-level positions is that women do not advance as quickly to these roles because they are less likely than men to negotiate (Reif, Kugler, & Brodbeck, 2020). In addition to avoiding negotiation altogether, once they are in negotiations, women tend to be less direct and focus more on achieving consensus than on getting what they want (Babcock & Laschever, 2003). While this has many positive applications, this negotiation style may exclude the self-promoting communication behaviours that facilitate advancement to management in the STEM fields.

Factors that Affect Likelihood of Initiating Negotiation

The literature supports the conclusion that there is a gender divide in the likelihood of initiating negotiation (Babcock et al., 2006; Fischer & Bajaj, 2017; McGregor et al., 2016; Reif et al., 2020; Volkema & Fleck, 2012) with women having a lower propensity than men to initiate this practice (Kugler et al., 2013). To further compound the problem, women are more likely to experience resistance when they attempt to negotiate, reducing their likelihood of engaging in this practice in future (Bowles et al., 2007).

Babcock and Laschever (2003) found that the differences between male and female negotiation rates are consistent across type of profession and level of education. However, they note that the tendency to avoid negotiations is more pronounced among early-career women. Similarly, O'Shea and Bush (2002) found that "number of prior jobs does have a relatively strong relationship with the propensity to negotiate" (p. 378), suggesting that prior experience is a strong predictor of willingness to negotiate. Indeed, there is evidence that the disparity between the willingness to negotiate of men and women may be even more drastic in early career; one estimate is that 57% of men negotiate their first salary out of college, while only 7% of women do the same (Sandberg, 2010).

Gendered Negotiation Styles
Studies focused on gendered negotiation styles typically find that women employ a more relational negotiation style, talking through issues (Babcock & Laschever, 2003), being more honest and thus trustworthy (Buchan et al., 2004), with a stronger "moral identity" (Kennedy et al., 2017), and being somewhat more compromising and more obliging (Nelson et al., 2015). In addition, women may be more attuned to the need to balance self-interest and other interests (Bronstein et al., 2012). Some researchers have proposed that it is adherence to gender roles that explains differences between men's and women's approaches, in particular expectations of women to behave less assertively in order to behave congruently with others' expectations (Reif et al., 2020) and to be perceived as nice and not too demanding (Bowles & Babcock, 2012).

Previous studies have shown that male participants are more confident in their abilities (Barron, 2003), set higher personal goals (Bowles et al., 2007), make more aggressive opening offers (Kray et al., 2001), are more dominating (Nelson et al., 2015) and exhibit a more competitive negotiation style overall (King et al., 1991) than women. These traits may be particularly pronounced – and valued -- in the culture of engineering, "which has been described as one in which the control of how things work, technology, and rationality often trump social skills, personal relationships and emotions" (Hatmaker, 2013, p. 384). In other words, relational negotiation approaches may not only be de-valued in engineering contexts, they may actually work against the success of women to fit into a "profession [that] has been depicted as valuing masculine interaction styles such as aggressive displays of technical ability, self-promotion and self-confidence" (Hatmaker, p. 384).

Studies suggest there are some areas of negotiation where women naturally excel (see Babcock & Laschever, 2003; Buchan et al., 2004; Kray and Kennedy, 2017). In integrative bargaining, where the main goal is achieving win-win situations, for instance, "women demonstrate greater concern for the other participants and a higher commitment to ensuring that all parties are treated fairly in a negotiation" (Kray & Kennedy, 2017, p. 73). Women also excel at understanding the other party's needs, demonstrating concern for the other party, and building trust with the other party (see Buchan et al., 2004). Yet, despite these strategic advantages, studies continue to find that women choose to negotiate less often than men, and when they do negotiate, they gain fewer advantages as a result of negotiations than men do (Gerhart & Rynes, 1991).

Training as an Intervention
According to O'Shea and Bush (2002), "it is possible that negotiation skills training could reduce pay disparities between men and women" (p. 367). To explore this possibility, this case study provides an overview and outcomes of a negotiation training programs designed for women in STEM.

OVERVIEW OF THE TRAINING PROGRAM
This case study presents an evaluation of a negotiation skills training workshop for early- to mid-career women in STEM administered by the NSERC / Pratt & Whitney

Canada Chair for Women in Science and Engineering for the province of Ontario (CWSE-ON).

The CWSE-ON negotiation skills training workshop is a half-day workshop offered to early- to mid-career women professionals in STEM. The workshop follows the negotiation process chronologically (see Figure 1 below).
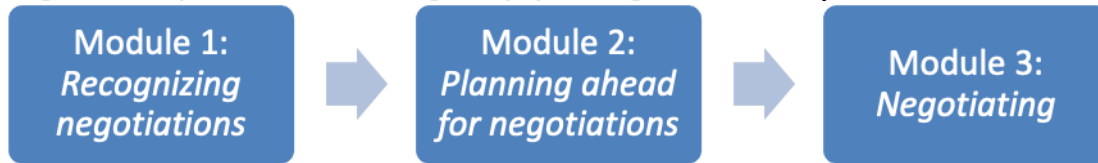

Figure 1: CWSE-ON negotiation skills training workshop Modules

In the first module – *Recognizing negotiations* – participants are taught that negotiations can be *any* scenario in which two or more parties agree to come together to share or divide a limited resource, create something new that neither party could create on their own, or resolve a conflict/dispute. Participants are asked to work in small groups to brainstorm possible examples of negotiation scenarios they encounter in their everyday lives (both at home and at work), using the above definition as a guide. This module was designed to encourage participants to see negotiation as a common, comfortable activity in which they engage regularly.

The second module – *Planning ahead for negotiations* – covers the important tasks that must be completed prior to engaging in a negotiation. First, participants are presented with research demonstrating that beginning a negotiation with a positive, inclusive goal statement leads to the most positive results. Participants then work on crafting negotiation goal statements, first working with a hypothetical example, and then using a negotiation situation that they identify. Participants are then taught the importance of having alternatives when engaging in negotiation, and are presented with several practical examples of how having a known BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement) increases one's bargaining power.

Participants are then taught the dual-concern model of negotiation strategy, as suggested by scholars such as Carnevale and Pruitt (1992). This strategic model asserts that, in negotiation, we are often balancing substantive concerns (concerns for what we get), with relational concerns (concerns for what the other gets). This broad framework creates four possible strategic approaches: a competitive style, an accommodating style, a collaborative style, and an avoidance style. Examples of when each strategy might be most appropriate, and some potential tactics are offered. The key takeaway is that a variety of strategies is an important part of a negotiator's toolkit, and it is appropriate and useful to be able to select the strategy (and associated tactics) that best fits the situation.

During the presentation of negotiation strategies, participants are invited to share stories of times when they used various negotiation strategies. These stories often revolved around challenges the participants had faced in the past – for example they recounted failed negotiations, times they were *too* accommodating, times they avoided negotiations they should have engaged in. These very personal stories

often elicited supportive and helpful dialogue from fellow participants. The goal of this discussion is to reassure participants that they are not alone in the challenges they have faced with negotiation.

The module ends with a discussion about creating value, and interest-based negotiation. First, the concept of interests and positions is presented. In pairs, participants are then asked to role-play a classic workplace negotiation twice. For the first role play, the negotiators are only given position statements and asked to role-play the negotiation to its conclusion. Then, the trainer leads the group in a discussion about the experience – participants invariably talk about the frustration of position-based negotiations. For the second role-play, the negotiators are given interest statements (in addition to their position statements) and are asked to role-play the negotiation to its conclusion. Again, a discussion ensues. This time, participants noted how interest-based negotiations opened up many more options, and how they were able to achieve a mutually beneficial result.

This leads naturally to a discussion about creating value in which the trainer presents a variety of ways in which negotiators can 'create value' (in other words, add resources to the negotiation table) to maximize the possibility of a mutually beneficial result. Again, this is presented using practical examples from the STEM field. After this module, participants are given quiet time to reflect and write notes on how the concepts might apply to their own negotiation.

The final module – *Negotiating* – covers concepts that are relevant during the negotiation itself. First, the trainer presents research on communication behaviours that result in the most successful negotiations. Specifically, participants are encouraged to find ways to convey both competence (through behaviours such as making eye contact and avoiding disfluency) and communality (through behaviours such as smiling and using self-disclosure). Participants are then asked to complete a short quiz to identify their communication strengths and weaknesses and to set communication goals.

Next, participants engage in an activity to illustrate active listening techniques (and, comparatively, poor listening habits). The importance of effective listening to successful negotiation is emphasized. Finally, the module ends with a practical section on agreements. The trainer covers what good agreements need to include and presents examples of negotiations that were not successful because the agreement was not detailed enough. Participants identified the details that would need to be included in two different agreements: first, the agreement of a hypothetical negotiation scenario; and second, the agreement of their own upcoming negotiation.

Purpose of the Evaluation
This study sought to identify the impacts of CWSE-ON's negotiation skills training program in terms of participants' reaction and application of new skills to the workplace.

METHODOLOGY
A mixed-method of surveys and interviews was used to evaluate the CWSE-ON training program, with surveys being administered directly after participation in the training program to assess reaction, and in-depth qualitative interviews being conducted 4 – 6 months later to measure behavioural changes resulting from the training.

Sample
Participants who attended one of five workshops in cities in Ontario, Canada consisted of early- to mid-career women in STEM. Following participation in the workshop, all 47 workshop participants were asked to complete a survey designed to measure reaction to the training. 37 participants completed and returned surveys. From these participants, a convenience sample was used to select eight participants to participate in an in-depth follow-up interview to explore the impact of the training on their behaviors.

Data Analysis
Quantitative data was analyzed using IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Responses to the questionnaire's open-ended question and interview transcripts were analysed using thematic coding, which facilitated the identification of patterns in participants' experiences and perceptions.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS
Reaction to the Training
Overall, the survey data suggests that participants reacted very favourably to the CWSE-ON training program. 100% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed the training session. In addition, over 90% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the training was useful on a personal and professional level, and that the trainer was credible. Finally, when asked 'overall, how satisfied were you with the training you received today', 54.1% said 'very satisfied', with the remaining 45.9% saying 'satisfied'.

A strong relationship (Pearson Correlation score of .628, significant at the 0.01 level) was found between the variables of overall satisfaction (overall, how satisfied were you with the training you received today) and personal usefulness (I found the training I received today to be useful on a personal level). This is consistent with the findings of various studies on training transfer (e.g. Baumgartel et al., 1984) which have found that the perceived usefulness or value of the skills being learned is a strong predictor of overall training program success. Interestingly, there was no such relationship between overall satisfaction and professional usefulness. This suggests that participants who felt the workshop was most useful in their personal lives—perhaps useful for learning how to get better prices on goods or to negotiate personal finances—were most satisfied with the workshop overall.

That participants were most satisfied with learning that could be applied to their personal lives might be explained with reference to Lawson's (2006) work on the design and implementation of training programs. According to Lawson (2006, "each of us brings to a learning situation a wealth of experiences that provide a base for

new learning as well as a resource to share with others [...] Because people base their learning on past experiences, the new information must be assimilated" (p. 29). In other words, when adults learn, they learn through reference to their past experiences. The literature suggests that many of the early-career participants in this study may have had minimal experience negotiating in professional contexts (Babcock & Laschever, 2003). However, each participant has experience engaging in informal *personal* negotiations, such as negotiations around personal finances or division of household labour. Given what Lawson (2006) suggests about adult learners, it is possible that participants who were able to see the connection between the new material and their past experiences with personal negotiations found the workshop more satisfying.

The usefulness of the workshop emerged as a theme in the interview data as well. Participants commented on the interactivity of the workshop, and the value of getting practical experience with negotiation. Participant 8 said, "It was very well done in the sense that it was very interactive and engaging... there were a lot of these mock situations ...before you leave the session, you basically leave with 'I've tried this', 'I've tried this once'". This statement supports the conclusion that the perceived *usefulness* of the workshop has a bearing on participants' overall satisfaction.

The second theme related to participants' reactions to the workshop was enjoying the opportunity to connect with other women in the organization. Participant 7 said, "I liked that it was a diverse group of women across the company, across the plant, so the idea that you were sharing ideas with other people who are in a similar situation was a bonus." Similarly, participant 4 said "it was really nice to actually be able to get together with all the other women in the company and talk and meet some new faces." In response to the open-ended survey question, one respondent reported that she "really enjoyed the session and the small group atmosphere," again suggesting the value of being able to connect with other participants. This finding is consistent with the literature that suggests that an important aspect of training for adults is the chance to network with other members of their organization and to build social capital (Terrion 2006). There is reason to believe that this communal environment may be particularly important for women learning and practicing negotiation skills (Babcock & Laschever 2003). As well, the finding is consistent with other research that has pointed to the importance of training programs as a forum for connecting with colleagues who understand one's organizational reality and the challenges specific to their work (Terrion, 2006).

Behavioural Changes
Overall, participants were optimistic about their ability to apply their new negotiation skills once they returned to the workplace. Almost every participant said she had been able to apply the skills, and several recalled specific example of using their new skills in the STEM workplace as a <u>direct</u> result of their participation in the workshop. Participant 5 recalled, "Shortly after the workshop I negotiated my hourly wage for a job that I have, and [....] I ended up getting a higher amount than what I would have gotten otherwise." When asked if she would have engaged in this negotiation prior to taking the workshop, she responded "I probably wouldn't

have even thought to negotiate it, to be honest." Participant 1 described an instance where she negotiated the parameters of a new project at work and stated that she would not have participated in such a negotiation prior to taking the workshop.

Two themes emerged from the interview data that were related to the mechanism by which the workshop led to behaviour change. Some participants said they were able to apply the skills due to increased confidence as a result of knowing new negotiation *techniques*. When one participant was asked about a negotiation she undertook following participation in the workshop, she said "I was definitely more confident in the whole process because I knew that [...] there's an algorithm, so I'm like 'okay, that's the algorithm, so it'll just apply it" (participant 2). These participants focused on the importance of knowing new negotiation techniques and applying them in the workplace.

The construct of self-efficacy helps make sense of this sub-theme. Self-efficacy refers to "judgements trainees make about their competency to perform tasks" (Burke & Hutchins, 2007, 266). Several studies have confirmed that self-efficacy has a significant bearing on participants' willingness and ability to transfer new skills to the workplace (see Gaudine & Saks, 2004). In other words, if participants leave a workshop feeling that they have increased competency to perform a task— high self-efficacy—they will be significantly more likely to transfer new skills to the workplace. This helps to explain why interviewees in this study said that increased confidence and feeling of mastery over negotiation techniques facilitated their application of skills in the workplace.

A second theme related to the observation of participants who said they were able to apply the skills due to increased confidence as a result of feeling they now had 'permission' to negotiate. Participant 5 said, "some people need to be told 'it's okay to negotiate, it's okay to ask for these things [...]' you need to be given permission to negotiate". Other participants noted that they now felt negotiation was "okay to do" (participant 7), and they now feel that it's "expected" (participant 6). These participants focused on the importance of having increased confidence as a result of knowing they would not be offending or surprising people by trying to engage in negotiation. This finding is supported by Small et al. (2007), who concluded in their study of gender and negotiation that framing a situation as an opportunity for *negotiation* is particularly intimidating to women because this language is inconsistent with norms for politeness among women. In contrast, framing the negotiation as an opportunity for *asking* is less intimidating to women because it is seen as more polite and role-consistent and thus is associated with a greater likelihood of negotiating.

IMPLICATIONS
Overall, participants reacted very positively to the CWSE-ON training program, citing the interactivity and opportunity to meet with other women in their organization as particularly enjoyable elements and ones in which they gained support and informal learning. As well, participants were optimistic about their

ability to transfer skills to the workplace, with many providing specific examples of negotiations that they engaged in after having participated in the workshop.

The opportunity to get together with other women, identified by all participants as a major impact of the program, speaks to the need experienced by women in STEM to take time from their busy schedules to reflect on the challenges they face and the goals and objectives they are trying to achieve. Respondents referred to the need to be removed from their daily tasks in order to interact with others – both colleagues and the trainer – who could help them understand challenges in their negotiations and identify possible solutions. The importance of both formal and informal learning opportunities seen in this study, where participants learned through interaction with their peers, cannot be understated. It is critical that organizations – both STEM and others – create the opportunity for women to connect, through mentoring, training, communities of practice and other learning opportunities because, as reported by Enos et al. (2003), the most powerful source of managerial informal learning is interaction with others.

In terms of transferring the skills to the workplace, the results show that, once exposed to the knowledge about negotiation and specific tools to engage in this process, participants were more confident and better prepared to negotiate at work. This alone demonstrates that closing the salary and power gaps between women and men in STEM can be aided by offering this learning opportunity to women, particularly early in their careers.

CONCLUSION
The CWSE-ON workshop was successful at increasing participants' confidence and thus willingness to engage in negotiations. If some of the discrepancy between men's and women's wages and organizational roles can be associated with their willingness to engage in negotiation this is certainly a promising finding. By giving women the skills they need to effectively communicate their position in negotiations, the CWSE-ON training program increased participants' confidence to ask for what they want in the workplace. On a larger scale, such a program could potentially help women advance in the STEM workplace more rapidly, resulting in benefits for both the individual and the organization.

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