



Researcher:
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– Postdoctoral
Researcher in Education

Business:
Goldman Sachs

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The project idea

Dr. Niall Winters and Dr. Anne Geniets from the Learning and New Technologies Research Group at the Department of Education developed the go_girl code+create (go_girl) project in 2015. go_girl is a community outreach programme which seeks to empower young NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) women in Oxfordshire by helping them to clarify and broaden their aspirations, and by developing their capabilities in the use of digital tools, media production and coding. The goal is to help these young women to transition into careers in tech-related fields or to follow other pathways to independence, for example, by pursuing additional training, education or employment. Tracey began working as the lead postdoctoral researcher on the go_girl programme in 2017 and, together with Dr. Winters and Dr. Geniets, she realised that there was an untapped opportunity to map out how the go_girl programme could have industry impact and be scaled up.

The programme was initially funded for one year by the University of Oxford IT Innovation Challenges Seed Fund, with two years of follow-on funding from donors including Goldman Sachs Gives, the philanthropic branch of the investment bank Goldman Sachs. This funding was arranged and managed by Emily Winstanley from the Social Sciences Business Development team. Since Goldman Sachs was supporting a series of initiatives focused on increasing the number of women in computing, Tracey and the go_girl founders felt that establishing links and sharing information about the go_girl approach with Goldman Sachs Gives had the potential to strengthen and extend the reach of some of their related initiatives while also providing an opportunity to further develop the go_girl programme. A key means by which to do this was to use Economic and Social Research Council Impact Accelerator National Productivity Investment Fund (which is provided to encourage industry secondments for academics with innovative purposes), to fund Tracey to do a secondment at Goldman Sachs. While Tracey, Dr. Winters and Dr. Geniets took it upon themselves to develop the grant application, their main contact at Goldman Sachs was immediately involved and contributed to the process by writing a letter in support of Tracey's secondment. Thanks to this application, in 2018 Tracey was awarded a three-month ►

knowledge exchange secondment with Goldman Sachs. This funding enabled her to further develop the go_girl programme, by mapping out the potential for industry impact and collaborations.

Tracey had extensive experience working in related industries as well as academic knowledge on the role that technology can play in education and in bridging the gender gap in the tech industry. This made her an excellent candidate to drive the knowledge exchange between the Department of Education and Goldman Sachs. Her secondment there had three key objectives: to provide opportunities for highly disadvantaged young women to move into tech careers; to engage in knowledge exchange with partners at Goldman Sachs so they could benefit from the research outcomes of the go_girl programme, and to develop a sustainable relationship between Goldman Sachs Gives and the Department of Education, with an eye to engaging in future collaborations. To achieve these objectives, Tracey worked to identify potential synergies between the go_girl programme and Goldman Sachs' philanthropic initiatives.

Tracey conducted online research to learn about the company's other women-in-tech projects and she entered into conversations with employees of Goldman Sachs, who were involved in facilitating these initiatives, to gain a more in-depth understanding of the programmes the company was supporting. She then wrote up a short report in newsletter format which outlined the potential synergies that she and her supervisors discovered. Tracey explained that: "Goldman Sachs funds a number of programmes, some of which can benefit from the go_girl programme. For example, Code First Girls is a more advanced coding initiative funded by Goldman Sachs Gives. go_girl could potentially expand the reach of Code First Girls by preparing a cohort of young women to

transition into their programme. These are women who would otherwise not be prepared to take advantage of the training offered by Code First Girls. One other example is Imperial College Codelab which works with young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Sharing the go_girl approach, which combines the development of social skills (e.g. building confidence, communication and presentation skills, providing resources for support) with the development of technological skills, may potentially increase the effectiveness of Imperial's programme."

The narrative above illustrates how Tracey's three-month secondment helped her to develop an understanding of how to map out the ways in which the go_girl programme could have industry impact. Partners at Goldman Sachs were provided with knowledge that could potentially extend their reach in their efforts to involve more women in IT-related opportunities and training. Meanwhile, the group of academics involved in the project gained a better understanding of how their research findings, programme approach, and narratives of participants can benefit industry partners and cement partnerships. Finally, the knowledge exchange became an opportunity to improve the methodology and approach underlying the go_girl programme and, in line with its initial objective, it produced knowledge that will be helpful in further developing opportunities to scale and increase the project's impact.

Tracey, along with another go_girl staff member, Ashmita Randhawa, have been awarded a place on the Oxford Foundry's L.E.V8 Women's pre-accelerator programme. They will leverage the knowledge Tracey has gained from her secondment, along with the intensive training they will receive from the Foundry, to further develop the reach and impact of the go_girl code+create programme, with the eventual goal to set it up as a social enterprise.

Key benefits & challenges

Tracey has always been excited about contributing to the go_girl programme because she was impressed by the difference it was making in the lives of highly disadvantaged young women by increasing their confidence, nurturing their interest and skills in computing and helping them to develop plans for the future. The collaboration with Goldman Sachs was an opportunity to look at the programme and the related research through a different lens. It expanded her thinking on the possibilities for broader impact and for ▶

leveraging research findings to further benefit the lives of marginalised women. Tracey explained that “a common goal shared by both go_girl and Goldman Sachs Gives is to prepare more women to pursue technology-related careers. Interacting with employees and conducting the mapping process was helpful in determining how go_girl fit within the overall agenda of Goldman Sachs Gives and also how the programme, and its associated research approach and outcomes, could fill a unique niche within that agenda”.

At the same time, being involved in a knowledge exchange project with a large corporation presented some challenges. The partners Tracey worked with at Goldman Sachs were extremely busy and travelled frequently. This created challenges when trying to meet with them in person to discuss the synergies discovered. Tracey overcame this challenge by being as flexible as possible in scheduling and re-arranging meetings and by thinking creatively about different means of communication that could compensate for cancelled meetings. For example, she created a newsletter and sent it via email to share progress when it was not possible to meet in person, by Skype, or by phone.

Moreover, being in a large organisation meant that there

was a specific hierarchical structure in place. If one partner was the lead for the collaboration, the others did not want to overstep and engage in communications when the lead was not available. This made Tracey appreciate the importance of understanding the decision-making hierarchy of an organization when designing plans and milestones for the project. Additionally, it often pushed her to proceed with a plan or idea on her own and inform Goldman Sachs partners of the outcome afterwards. In this way the delays to progressing the project were minimised. In most cases, Tracey discovered that the partners appreciated her efforts and updates and her willingness to push the project through even when they were too busy to meet. In retrospect, she felt that a longer time period for the collaboration would have been beneficial in order to have more flexibility to plan around the busy schedules of the parties involved.

Overall, Tracey believes that the project met its objectives and that it was very worthwhile. The skills she acquired and the insights she gained to sustain the go_girl programme were very valuable and she would encourage other researchers to embark on collaborative journeys with large businesses. They might be challenging but also very rewarding.

Advice for other researchers

There are three key tips deriving from her knowledge exchange experience that Tracey would like to share with other researchers. Firstly, in order for collaborative efforts to thrive, it is fundamental to understand the business goals of the partner organisation and how a research project relates to these goals. For example, one of the goals of Goldman Sachs Gives is to ensure that more women pursue technology-related careers. The go_girl project can assist in helping to broaden their reach by including highly disadvantaged women. Becoming aware of what the partner needs or is looking for and how a project might contribute to that will be fundamental to finding the story within your project that will resonate with the business partner and convince them that the collaboration will be beneficial.

Secondly, once the collaboration is in place, it will be important to network with as many employees as possible

within the organisation in order to build good relationships and develop business allies early in the process. Very likely, the knowledge exchange will require dealing with stakeholders beyond the core partners. Therefore, communication skills and the ability to work with a wide range of people will help you in pushing the collaboration forward.

Thirdly, it is important to be ready to face time-related challenges. Project partners will have other commitments and priorities while engaging in knowledge exchange. This may cause delays as rescheduling and changes to original plans may happen frequently. To deal with time pressures, conflicting schedules and uncertainties, you will need patience, flexibility and determination for those times when things do not go as planned. Developing these traits will help not only the project and the delivery of a successful outcome but will also be helpful in your future endeavours.