

WOMEN IN TECH SURVEY 2021

An exploration of career progression
among Women in Tech

February 2022



FOREWORD

Six years ago, WeAreTheCity created WeAreTechWomen as a platform to help women in the tech industry thrive in their careers. Since then, we have built an amazing community of over 50,000 women through that platform, and we have hosted over 50 tech events, forums and workshops to connect, engage and upskill that community.

In 2017, the British Computing Society reported that there were about 17% of women working in technology. In 2021, global recruiters Harvey Nash Group stated that only 15% of those working in tech were women, according to their Technology and Talent Study 2021. It is clear there is work to be done in terms of attracting women to the sector, retaining the talent we have alongside developing programmes and initiatives that offer support to those who wish to rise to the top.

In 2021, WeAreTechWomen and the Tech Talent Charter commissioned Ipsos to conduct new research. Participants were recruited using the WeAreTechWomen network and other associated networks. Key objectives were to explore the perceived barriers for the women surveyed in terms of progressing their careers, as well as to identify what was important to them when seeking new roles. This report highlights the key issues they raised and provides recommendations to organisations that are committed to addressing the imbalance of women in tech and supporting the careers of their female tech talent.

The research data shows mixed results. There is good news that those tech women surveyed are attracted to organisations by higher salaries and supportive managers. And while one in five are considering leaving their current roles, this is broadly in line with other current data across sectors around the “Great Resignation” – and 80% actually intend to remain in a tech role or in the tech sector. That’s positive for organisations which are being proactive about their gender balance efforts, but it still has the potential to cause significant damage to the overall sector representation which is starting from such a low base. The report highlights that the tech women surveyed are flagging issues about a lack of clarity and transparency around career paths in their organisations. While mentoring appears to be of some benefit, it’s not enough - and only 49% are aware of what sponsorship relationships are. Depressingly in this day and age, more than half of respondents (52%) still feel that their gender limits them in their careers.

Looking across the results, it’s obvious that efforts by organisations around pay gap reporting, reward transparency, and good people management skills must continue. Meanwhile, there’s a real opportunity for organisations to step up with more of what tech women are asking for, around clear, unbiased processes across the employee lifecycle, more skills development opportunities, and useful communications around how to get ahead. This should be further supported by building out

sponsor and sponsee capabilities with leaders and tech talent from diverse backgrounds as standard practice, empowering organisations to make more informed talent decisions and accelerate progress on gender balance all the way through the pipeline.

Our work to enable tech women to navigate to better opportunities and fully realise their career potential in inclusive organisations carries on. I hope that the findings in this report provoke more specific thought, dialogue, action and measurable outcomes that move the needle dramatically forward from that 15% female representation figure for the tech sector once and for all.

Vanessa Vallely OBE
CEO, WeAreTechWomen

BCS report - [Click here >](#)
Harvey Nash Report - [Click here >](#)

While it is deeply frustrating to see the numbers of women in tech at a plateau, there is much in this report to be optimistic about, IF you are an employer who is willing to act on it. We can see that women can be attracted to tech, can love tech, can be very successful and will want to stay in tech IF we as employers get it right. It is great to see that salary is being called out as a key factor, emphasising the positive impact and ongoing need for gender pay reporting. It is also positive to see other things that employers with smaller budgets can do to get it right in terms

of transparent promotion structures, mentoring and sponsorship as well as good management and culture. The talent gap continues to grow, and women are key to filling it. There are great actionable insights here, but it requires leadership, commitment and action. Every company willing to do this will reap the benefits.

Debbie Forster MBE
CEO, Tech Talent Charter

Few disagree that a better gender balance is better for the technology industry and those working in the myriad of tech functions within every business. As with all companies addressing similar challenges, there is no silver bullet which will bring overnight change. However, this research highlights the potential cost of doing nothing (1 in 5 women working in tech are thinking of leaving their current role). This is not about fixing women. This is more about fixing the environment and culture in which they work. Transparency of promotion opportunities, increased awareness of bias (conscious and unconscious) and policies that acknowledge the distinctive needs of working women could all have material impact on women’s likelihood to remain within an organisation. Ipsos has been proud to partner with WeAreTheCity to give leaders in tech some clear actions that will improve the gender balance in their organisations.

Sue Phillips,
President, Ipsos Gender Balance Network

CONTENTS

06

Highlights

08

Background

10

Why women choose Tech/satisfaction with current role

12

Female representation and male allyship

13

Key barriers to career progression and personal fulfilment

15

Mentoring, sponsorship and networks

18

A systemic issue

20

Case studies



HIGHLIGHTS

Approach

This research project was conducted by Ipsos and Tech Talent Charter on behalf of WeAreTechWomen. Between May and September 2021, a total of 363 women who work in tech shared their views on their careers and motivations in an online survey. An additional six women took part in qualitative depth interviews in October 2021. Participants were recruited via the WeAreTechWomen network and associated networks, and as such, the findings represent the views of those taking part in the research and cannot be taken as representative for all women working in tech.

Ipsos' MAPPS framework was used to explore barriers to behavioural change and inform a set of recommendations to help organisations with their support and development policies aimed at the female workforce.

Key Findings

Technology is an appealing sector for the women surveyed thanks to its innovation

potential and the myriad of opportunities it offers, which is visible in the variety of roles and functions occupied by the survey participants. However, only half of those surveyed are happy in their current role and a fifth are considering leaving¹. Two thirds feel frustrated and anxious about their career advancements and close to six in ten report a workplace environment that is not supportive of women, nor empowering them to succeed.

75% of women surveyed say that at least some men within their organisation are NOT allies.

Only a fifth see the majority of their male colleagues as allies. Giving credit to female colleagues for their contributions and achievements is seen as the most effective way of demonstrating support. Behaviours that hinder allyship include talking over – or not listening to – women in meetings as well as failing to acknowledge inappropriate behaviours towards women.

52% of the women surveyed feel their gender limited their career in tech.

1. Results in line with the 'great resignation' report of almost a quarter of workers actively planning to change employers – source: Randstad UK, Nov 2021

More than half (56%) of participants consider that women are not well represented at senior levels. The most noticeable barrier to career progression or continuation is the lack of promotion opportunities for nearly four in ten (38%). The promotion process is often perceived as confusing, with 81% of women saying they lack a clear promotion process. Over a third (35%) report a lack of confidence as hampering their progress and some of those who took part in the depth interviews are uncomfortable talking about their accomplishments. In addition, progress can be hindered by a lack of relatable senior role models and sponsorship² programmes.

In this context, support initiatives are critical. Mentoring³ schemes are both recognised and valued for their benefits, including an increase in confidence in abilities. On the other hand, sponsorship initiatives are not well known – only half of the women surveyed (49%) are aware of them – and only a minority (18%) reap their benefits. However, 55% of those who used sponsorship initiatives say they have seen a huge impact from taking part.

2. Sponsorship defined as 'a program where a senior employee helps a more junior employee get noticed, and creates opportunities for them to progress'

3. Mentoring defined as 'where a senior / more experienced individual (the mentor) is assigned to act as an advisor or guide to someone less experienced'

WHAT IS HOLDING BACK WOMEN IN TECH?

Results based on Ipsos data from an online survey (n=363) and depth interviews (n=6) among women in tech recruited via We Are Tech Women network and associated networks - conducted between May and Oct 2021

When I was pregnant, I put myself forward for a high-profile project and was refused the role because of scepticism about my ability to perform, given the change in my circumstances

MENTORING AND SPONSORSHIP

- 49%** of those surveyed are aware of sponsorship and of those who used it, 55% say it had a huge impact on their career development
- 52%** of the women who participated in the study feel their gender limited their career in tech
- 1 in 5** women surveyed are thinking of leaving their current role
- 67%** think that access to mentoring and/or sponsorship is important in attracting them to an organisation

EXIT

MEN AS ALLIES

- 75%** of women surveyed say that at least some men within their organisation are NOT allies. Talking over/not listening to women is the main reason for 2/3 of them
- 19%** of participants see all or most men as allies, 85% of whom say giving credit for achievements is the best way to demonstrate ally-ship

Only around a third of those surveyed say that support is in place to ensure they develop the right skills for promotion, and only a fifth of those surveyed say there is a clear promotion process in place

Six in ten women surveyed have used mentoring and/or networking but only **one in five** have ever had access to sponsorship

KEY REASONS TO JOIN A TECH ORGANISATION

- 84%** salary
- 83%** supportive manager
- 76%** inclusive culture

Biggest barriers to tech career progression / continuation

- 38%** Lack of promotion opportunities
- 35%** Lack of confidence
- 33%** Lack of senior support/role models
- 31%** Difficulty balancing work & other responsibilities
- 29%** Sexism/gender bias

48% say that visible allies within a tech organisation would attract them when looking for a new role

For further information, please contact **Karen Fraser**, Ipsos, karen.fraser@ipsos.com or **We Are The City**, info@wearethecity.com

Note: no quota controls or weighting are applied to the data, which reflects only the profile of those who responded to the survey

Logos: WeAreTechWomen, Tech Talent Charter, Ipsos MORI, Ipsos

BACKGROUND

This report is based on the findings from a research study conducted by Ipsos and Tech Talent Charter between May and October 2021, on behalf of WeAreTechWomen (WATW).

The key objectives for the research were to:

- Provide a snapshot of women in tech today, as represented by the study sample
- Understand women's perceptions of their roles and their careers
- Explore the barriers they face in terms of career progression
- Identify the support systems already in place and gauge their impact on retention
- Design a set of recommendations for tech organisations to improve female representation and address barriers to career progression and continuation

A mixed qual/quant methodology with a behavioural science lens

A total of 363 women aged 18-64 completed an online survey between May and September 2021. The invitation to take part was posted on the WATW LinkedIn page as well as shared with distribution lists of the WeAreTechWomen network and associated networks.

In addition, six in-depth interviews were conducted in October 2021 with women working in tech. The participants were recruited by Ipsos from a list provided by WeAreTechWomen.

Therefore, the results should be interpreted as a snapshot of women in the profession rather than representative of all women working in tech.

Additional analysis based on the Ipsos MAPPS framework was used to inform the study recommendations, including the design of intervention strategies to bring down barriers to career progression among the female workforce.

Participant profile

In terms of their demographics, two thirds of the women who took part in the research are aged between 30 and 49, whilst a fifth are under 30. Over two thirds are from White ethnic backgrounds and a vast majority (80%) originate from the UK. Just under half (47%) have children (under ten years of age for about half of those). Nearly one in five (19%) has caring responsibilities.

Just under a third (30%) have a particular physical or mental condition: 14% have a mental health condition, 10% a disability and 8% are neurologically diverse.

From an employment perspective, most of the participants work full-time in mid-level or senior managerial positions across a mix of industries including the IT/Telecoms and Finance sectors. Nearly half have worked in tech for over ten years and a third work for large organisations of 10,000+ employees. 79% work for a UK-based business.

Whilst four in ten hold a role of a technical nature in a tech organisation, the remaining six in ten are split between tech roles in non-tech businesses and non-tech roles in tech.



WHY WOMEN CHOOSE TECH/ SATISFACTION WITH CURRENT ROLE

The power of technology, including its innovation potential and what it enables, was identified as a key attraction by women we spoke to qualitatively. They are inspired by the multiple opportunities it offers. The wide array of industry sectors where technology is a driving force is another factor of appeal. As with other functions like HR and Finance, tech roles are found in banks, manufacturing companies or consulting firms – everyone needs tech.



Tech is sometimes perceived as a means to an end. It is a great way of solving issues that exist within companies or for end-users.

For some, tech is not the first career step. They evolve into tech as their role becomes more influenced by technology and their passion for it develops.

With regard to the key reasons to join a particular organisation within the tech sector, the vast majority of women we surveyed (84%) see a competitive salary as a main driver, with a quarter of participants choosing it as their primary reason. Beyond a good compensation, a supportive environment is also critical to many, including a line manager mindful of career development opportunities (83%) and a work culture that is inclusive, respectful, and welcoming to people who are different to the majority of the group (76%).

Flexible / part-time working is the fourth most important factor, with 68% choosing it as one of the reasons and a fifth (22%) as their main driver of choice. Mentoring and sponsorship initiatives are important for two thirds of women (67%) and is the main driver of choice for 10%. Whilst only the primary reason for a small minority of 3%, having allies visible in the workplace is another influencing factor for 48%.

EXIT

1 in 5 WOMEN SURVEYED ARE THINKING OF LEAVING THEIR CURRENT ROLE

When it comes to their current role however, just under half (49%) of those surveyed report feeling happy, whilst another 30% are not entirely happy but enough to stay in their current role for the foreseeable future. A fifth (20%) are considering leaving; however, most of them (80%) intend to remain in a tech role or in the tech sector.

FEMALE REPRESENTATION AND MALE ALLYSHIP

More than half of women surveyed (56%) consider that women are not well represented at senior levels in their organisation; over one in ten (12%) feel that they are not represented at all.

This perceived lack of representation is even more pronounced for women from minority groups or diverse backgrounds: 73% of the participants feel that women from ethnic minorities are not well represented.

19%

of participants see all or most men as allies, 85% of whom say giving credit for achievements is the best way to demonstrate ally-ship.

Only a fifth (19%) of the women surveyed see all or most of the men they work with as allies, whilst half report that only some of the men are.

In this context, a male ally is defined as a 'man who actively supports gender equality e.g. through their behaviour towards women, their support of (and on behalf of) women, and their hiring / training / promotion decision making etc'.

Offering similar training opportunities, general opportunities and responsibilities, providing flexibility to those with caring duties and fostering a positive environment where women can thrive are the other most commonly reported behaviours that foster ally-ship (for 59%, 56%, 52% and 50% of participants respectively).

75%

of women surveyed say that at least some men within their organisation are NOT allies.

For 63% of them, this manifests itself in men talking over or not listening to women in meetings. 54% of them also report men not calling out on inappropriate behaviour towards women or acting inappropriately themselves.

Some men can also fail to foster a positive workplace environment where women can thrive. 40% of women surveyed feel that they take credit for contributions and/or achievements of female colleagues.

KEY BARRIERS TO CAREER PROGRESSION AND PERSONAL FULFILMENT

52% of the women who participated in the study feel their gender limits their career in tech.

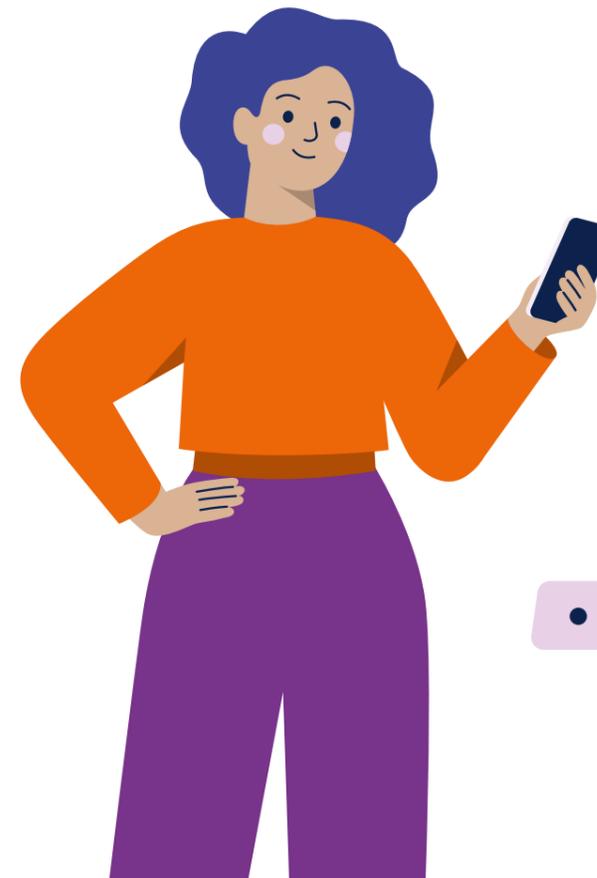
It's something that women are brought up with their whole lives. Women are told not to take risks

In addition, 42% of women identifying as being from an ethnic minority group agreed that they felt their ethnicity was a limitation in their career progression. 32% of those whose nationality was different from the country in which they worked felt it was a limitation.

About two thirds (63%) feel frustrated and anxious about their career advancements, and close to six in ten (57%) have issues with their workplace environment and culture that they don't perceive as supportive of women and empowering them to succeed. Those we spoke to qualitatively feel that the organisational system they evolve in has been designed by men for the benefit of men. This is evident in the established social and cultural norms at play in the workplace.

A typical meeting is eight males, two females. It is hard to have the confidence needed in these situations

It's still the case that men's potential is very much more part of the mix than it is for women



There are many perceived barriers to career progression. The most mentioned is the lack of promotion opportunities for nearly four in ten women surveyed (38%). Only 19% find the current promotion process clear and only 27% deem the support in place to develop the right skills or experiences for promotion sufficient. A few women who took part in the depth interviews feel that they have to earn a promotion, whereas men are more likely to be judged based on potential and capability.

Over a third (35%) report a lack of confidence as an obstacle. It is often an internal barrier – some women we spoke to qualitatively see it as a function of how women are raised and triggered by gender imbalance in office environments. This can lead women to limit themselves mentally.

Moreover, some of those we spoke to qualitatively said that they are often uncomfortable talking about their accomplishments. This means they are often played down, which then exacerbates

the existing inequality and can also slow down promotions.

Progress can also be hindered by a lack of relatable senior role models and senior sponsorship, which is a common issue for a third of the women in tech for the women we surveyed.

31% of participants say that finding the right work/life balance can also be challenging. Qualitative feedback supports this: help from family members e.g. husbands/partners etc. is essential to enable many women to multitask working in tech with having a family, and progress is not always easy as pregnancy and/or managing household responsibilities after marriage can impede progression.

On the other hand, in their qualitative interviews, participants also highlighted opportunities for women to leverage the traits that can set them apart from their male colleagues. This includes the ability to collaborate more effectively or to be a good listener.

Biggest barriers to tech career progression/continuation



MENTORING, SPONSORSHIP AND NETWORKS



of the women surveyed think that access to mentoring and/or sponsorship is important in attracting them to an organisation.

Having the right support systems are key to women's tech career progression.

Among the participants, mentoring has both higher awareness and usage levels than sponsorship: 84% of those surveyed are aware of mentoring, but only 49% of sponsorship. Among those aware, 55% have ever used mentoring and 34% of them currently take part in a mentoring programme.

On the other hand, only 18% of those aware of sponsorship have used it and only 8% of them are currently involved in a sponsorship initiative.

The bank has a sponsorship program. It's been amazing for me. But women maybe (sic) not looking for that sponsorship or waiting for that connection

Alongside networks⁴, mentoring and sponsorship initiatives are perceived as somewhat or very useful by 90% and 89% respectively of those who have used them. Sponsorship is considered slightly more impactful than mentoring and networks, with 85% reporting some or a huge impact from sponsorship, vs. 75% and 78% from mentoring and networks respectively. However, all three initiatives have a similarly high likelihood of being recommended to other women working in tech: 77% for sponsorship, 70% for mentoring and 73% for networks extremely likely to recommend them to others.

Among those who are aware of these support options but are yet to use them, over eight in ten would be interested in joining a mentoring programme, whilst over seven in ten would be interested in sponsorship and/or networks.

Key benefits of mentoring and suggestions for improvements

58% of those surveyed who have used mentoring felt that it helped increase confidence in their own abilities, 57% reported that it provided support for difficult work situations and 54% that it inspired them to achieve more in their career.

4. Networks defined as 'a network of people in similar industries / roles or focused on a particular issue (e.g. diversity) that provides opportunities for making contacts, sharing information and support etc.'

Those not currently involved in mentoring provision suggest the following improvements:

- Make mentoring more available – 42% say it has never been available to them
- Brief potential participants and demonstrate key benefits – 21% claim not knowing enough about it
- Reassure about the process and its outcome – 17% say they'd be nervous about having too much attention on them

Qualitative participants feel that the following initiative would also help:

- Make the list of the mentors available more visible (so that mentees can choose)

I think I could have gotten more from the experience if I knew more about how to be an effective mentee. In the past I've not always known what to ask or even how often to set meetings

- Carefully match the mentee and the mentor
- Ensure the mentor isn't someone in the company who works directly (on projects) with the mentee
- Train mentors so sessions are planned effectively, with clear objectives set from both sides

Sponsorship: low awareness and suggestions for improvements

49%

of those surveyed are aware of sponsorship, but only 18% of them have ever taken part in a sponsorship initiative. However, 55% of those who have report a huge impact on their career.

We're not saying that you need sponsors because you are women. We're saying everyone needs sponsors. Men already have sponsors. How do we get you sponsors?

Overall, over nine survey participants in ten have never benefitted from sponsorship opportunities, of which six in ten hadn't even considered this initiative. Of the third who had considered obtaining a sponsor, less than half has actually tried.

Many fail to consider it due to a lack of knowledge about the process (44%), alongside a lack of sponsorship opportunities within their organisation (39%).

The minority who have taken part in sponsorship initiatives enjoyed the opportunity it provided to

gain exposure to people at a senior level in the organisation; many also felt that it gave them a stronger voice internally.

Those who haven't tried to obtain a sponsor suggest the following ways to improve sponsorship initiatives:

- Raise awareness and understanding of sponsorship and how it works within a corporate structure – 44%
- Provide further clarity on how to obtain a sponsor (35% do not know how to approach a sponsor)
- Showcase examples of successful sponsorship relationships to drive further awareness; 28% say they don't know anyone who has done it previously
- Make sponsorship more widely available – 39% of those surveyed say that sponsorship isn't available in their organisation

In their depth interviews, participants also mention the following:

- Ensure clear objectives/outcomes are set and aligned with the sponsored employee's objectives
- Enable them to have a sponsor with evident common ground

I feel proud to be able to open doors or promote other women. It is one of the most meaningful things anyone can do, asking you to sponsor them

I use my network a lot. There is someone out there that I know that I'm sure would help if I was stuck - because I would do the same back

- Women in senior positions should also be encouraged to sponsor other women as this can be both effective and rewarding.

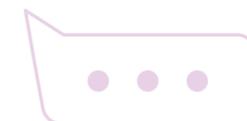
Networks

Over eight in ten (82%) are aware of networks. About half (56%) of the participants have previously used a network, with 42% currently using one.

Among those currently using networks, 71% belong to a tech industry network, whilst almost nine in ten (87%) belong to a network focused on women.

Note: research participants were recruited via the WATW network (and associated networks); usage of networks reported here is solely representative of this particular cohort and not of all women in tech.

Those who have never used networks mention lack of knowledge and the extra time requested as reasons for not using networks.



A SYSTEMIC ISSUE

Using Ipsos' MAPPS⁵ model for behaviour change, we are able to identify a negative cascade of consequences that stem from environmental factors as well as established social and cultural norms.

experienced within tech organisations, but its manifestation is more covert than overt.

Overall, the playing field is not seen as level for men and women – be that for conscious or unconscious reasons.

Qualitative findings show that sexism is still

01 Environment, Social and cultural norms

Women in tech believe that their workplace environment and culture does not support their career progression

- Lack of opportunities rated as the biggest career barrier (58%)
- No clear career path processes (37%)
- Male colleagues that aren't allies don't show support for a fair environment (75%) and non-discriminatory acts (79%)

02 Lack of Confidence

This arguably creates a lack of confidence in women in tech as they are unsure of how they can progress their career

- Lack of confidence is the second most highly rated barrier for women in tech (35%)

03 Intuitive and automatic thinking

This means that women in tech resort to intuitive and automatic thinking to navigate the uncertainties of their career progression – 'make it up as they go along'

04 Frustration and anxiety

Unsurprisingly, women in tech feel frustrated and anxious about how they can progress with their career

5. There are several stages to MAPPS, but fundamentally is a model that sets out the key dimensions that are important for behaviour change. For more information please visit www.ipsos.com

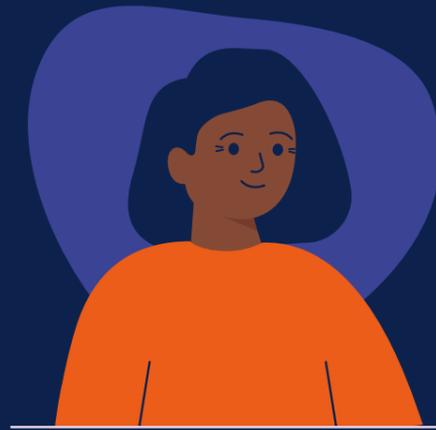
“I think that there is bias - conscious or unconscious - which is a really big thing we need to tackle. So if you're looking for 10 people to sit on a promotion committee and you are 80 percent male, it's easier to go find eight men and two women. But actually, what you need to do is to find five women and five men. So reducing that unconscious bias is really important and probably the first thing I would say needs to be done”

The men have lots of sponsors, and we see it because there are just so many more of them – and we don't see enough men sponsoring women

“There are men who claim to be great supporters and great champions, and then they'll say something which gives them away. And then you realise, actually, how much supporting are they really doing? Are they just saying the right thing in public and in private, they're doing something different? And so I think that sexism tends to be a little bit more subtle than it perhaps was, but it still absolutely exists.”



CASE STUDIES



JENNY CONSULTANT IN TECH AND FINANCIAL SERVICES, CO-LEAD FOR THE UK AND IRELAND

She was always interested in tech and data, which led her to start as a Graduate in Consulting.

Mentoring and sponsorship played a critical part in propelling her career.

She set up a 'Women in Tech' network to help her company consciously do more in supporting women in the tech business.

A lack of senior support has occasionally held her back, although this has improved in time, with a few senior leaders really understanding her and her goals.

I have less visibility on the broader scale, I didn't know how to market myself, so I tried to learn how to be more visible

She has also observed sexism in the workplace, but "not in your face sexism, I've seen it in micro-aggressive performance reviews. In very small groups of senior people, often men dominated, people value different skills and styles, and often interpret it wrong (sic)."

She's keen to continue with mentoring and networking; she sees mentoring in terms of having a sounding board.

Mentoring relationships who make me feel good about myself are the most rewarding

Networking is something she still finds quite challenging, as she is not always confident in big groups.

She believes that showcasing the variety of jobs in technology will help women progress careers in tech.

High schools think it's just coding, but there are so many jobs around design/customer journeys/research. We don't tell people about all the jobs you can have



CAROLINE

HEAD OF OPERATIONS FOR A GLOBAL BANK

With no higher education qualifications, Caroline started at the service desk of a publishing company in the 90s and has worked her way up gradually.

The prospect of a higher salary as well as the desire to work with inspiring managers motivated her to keep progressing.

Sponsorship was a key factor in her success:

The bank has a sponsorship program. It's been amazing for me... wherever I've gone I've always had that person that would allow me to be my authentic self

Mindfulness has also helped her with her confidence, as has a lot of practice in her work:

I don't show up unless I'm prepared. Someone once asked me "Why don't you worry? And I said 'cause (sic) I plan not to worry, right?"

She believes women can bring particular and valuable skills to the tech industry, and need to be more proactive when seeking sponsors:

We are able to cross boundaries that men sometimes aren't. Women don't carry the same level of ego sometimes. I look for where we can all succeed together. It's not an 'I' problem, it's a 'we' problem

I've always been someone that would reach out to someone and say, can you help me or can I meet you?

She feels women need to find ways to better manage their 'negative voices' and boost their confidence by being louder and prouder of their achievements:

There have been times where I'm anxious or nervous and have that negative voice - which I know is stronger for women

I interviewed so many roles and a man will stand up and tell you everything he can do and women will go on and say all the things that we cannot do!

She's witnessed bias in many companies - albeit mainly unconscious - that needs to be challenged. Strong role models and allies - male or female - need to support women as they progress. The tech industry needs to take decisive actions to improve the gender gap, including implementing working policies that support all employees, including women at different stages of their journeys.

Why do they always assume it's a man because men are more likely to be in those roles. So there is something around language that we just accept and maybe we need to challenge

We need to have role models like myself who are confident enough to speak out and share our own experiences and offer to help support those ladies. And we need our men to be allies to us

From a business perspective we need to highlight more that you can do with flexible working support etc. Respecting that career breaks don't mean that we've lost our minds

The why has been spoken about for so long. It needs to be about action now. It's no longer about the 'why' - it's the 'why not'?



ANNA CONSULTANT FOR LARGE TECH COMPANIES

She's worked in Consulting for tech giants in disruptive technologies for over 20 years.

Anna comes from a family of engineers and has always seen how powerful tech is and has been drawn to its limitless offering from a very young age.

She has changed roles and organisations because she loves a new challenge; at times issues around diversity and inclusion have also encouraged her to move on.

I get bored easily, and always hungry to learn, so once a task is on track, I want to move onto the next problem or opportunity

Her current company supports her well in terms of being a confident woman in the workplace. In terms of senior support, she feels it starts with both men and women.

We need to be opportunistic to make the most of the resources available. I have all the senior support I want, but it took me a while to get this

Childcare and domestic duties support is needed to support women in tech. She would like employers to be compassionate and tangibly help women to juggle priorities. Both men and women are pretty much at the same level in their careers until they become parents, then their paths diverge. Everyone needs to join forces to change this inequality.

This is the best and worst thing about being a woman, it is the reality and is so difficult

In terms of sponsorship, she sees this as more scarce but even more important than mentoring. For her, sponsorships have been accidental or coincidental, and she has not always had them. They are much harder to find, and attention should be paid to this.

I feel proud to be able to open doors or promote other women. It is one of the most meaningful things anyone can do, sponsoring others or asking for sponsorship yourself



ASHA FROM PROJECT MANAGEMENT TO SOCIAL INCLUSION

She has worked across many countries and organisations during her career in tech.

She has held roles in project management, innovation, change management and is now working in the social impact and inclusion space.

Asha was always excited by computers and fascinated by the world of IT.

When she became a mum, she faced some challenges in her wider team but was able to progress nonetheless thanks to a supportive manager.

My progression has not always been that easy. When I was pregnant, I vividly remember putting myself forward for a long-term, high-profile project, and initially I was refused the role because of scepticism about my ability to perform on this high-pressure job, given the change in my circumstances. So, I raised this with my line manager who luckily fully supported me and got me onto the project. He backed my ability. This has been a big reason as to why I've been able to progress

Her biggest ally in the tech world has been her husband.

If he hadn't supported me to move from India to the UK alone, and to do the executive MBA I'm doing now, alongside my career, I wouldn't have been able to do any of it

She sees sponsorship as the biggest thing needed to support women in the tech industry. Organisations need to play a very active role here.

Helping the next generation to understand careers in tech is also important, including developing outreach programmes in schools to ensure children know there is more to tech than just coding.



ELIZABETH

A TECH CAREER IN CONSULTING

The range of opportunities to work in a wide variety of environments is what primarily attracted her to tech.

She also acknowledges the importance and value of sponsorship and feels that it is a lot more powerful than coaching to progress women's careers.

I say to young people who are talking to me about which industry they should target to work in – ‘Why would you want to pigeon hole yourself into a certain environment?’ Technology is needed in every industry. I have done tech for banking, recruitment accountancy and advisory services. They are quite different and have quite different requirements

We're not saying that you need sponsors because you are women. We're saying everyone needs sponsors. Men already have sponsors. How do we get our women to have sponsors too?

We tend to see women being told they need coaches ... what an organisation is actually saying is the men are equipped to progress in this organisation without any extra help. They are operating in a world that was designed by men for men

She has progressed her career by taking new opportunities rather than awaiting promotion.

It takes years to get promoted in the environments I've been in, so find the opportunities that will help you get the next level

Potential is a key part of the promotion process, alongside platform and performance; this is where she sees the situation differing between men and women.

It's still the case that men's potential is very much more part of the mix than it is for women. My feeling is women are expected to be hitting the mark whereas with men there's a little bit more potential applied to the mix for them

Elizabeth states that in an 80% male environment, bias will clearly be a factor and that sexism exists, although in a more subtle form than 10 years ago.

I think that there is bias – conscious or unconscious – which is a really big thing we need to tackle... Reducing that unconscious bias is really important and probably the first thing I would say needs to be done

There are men who claim to be great supporters and great champions, and then they'll say something which gives them away... And so I think that sexism tends to be a little bit more subtle than it perhaps was, but it still absolutely exists

She admits that women don't always help themselves so may need support and encouragement to go for promotion.

Improving the promotion process for women can also be tackled with focus on proactive Talent Management.

I know that when I was at a firm, I took myself off the list for promotion a few times because I didn't think I would make it. I would never do that now! If I could go back to my younger self, I would be saying, don't be mad, go for it

The disparity between genders may become worse in our post pandemic return to the office “You're going to see women opting for the flexibility of working from home and falling behind because it's going to be the four o'clock school run, or the orthodontist appointment that they have to juggle whereas you'll see the men going into the office with access to all the networks that will bring them the after work drinks and so on and so forth.”

She believes the biggest opportunity to increase female representation in tech is to retrain, i.e. retrain many capable women who have lost their jobs during Covid, and train them in tech.

There are so many different technology jobs, and there's absolutely no reason why we shouldn't be retraining and giving people a whole new lease of life. This should be another big area of focus, if we want to make the best of the talent in our society

WeAreTechWomen would like to thank all the participants to the survey and in-person interviews for sparing their time and sharing their valuable perspectives. We would also like to thank Ipsos and Tech Talent Charter for their involvement and contribution to this important piece of research.

If you would like to find out more how WeAreTechWomen or The Tech Talent Charter can help you to attract, retain and develop your female tech talent, please contact info@wearethecity.com or hello@techtalentcharter.co.uk

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