



FRANK
RECRUITMENT GROUP

**WOMEN
IN
TECH**

TECH'S LEADING WOMEN

Nine Lessons on Gender, Culture
and Building an Inclusive Workforce

INTRODUCTION

Frank Recruitment Group exists to bring our customers together with outstanding technology talent, no matter where they are in the world. We work with business of all sizes, across all verticals, and our consultants spend thousands of hours every month speaking to our customers about their greatest challenges. The question those customers put to us, time and again, is ‘how do we get more women into our workforce?’

As our customers know, the imperative is both ethical and economic. Organisations perform better when their leadership is representative. Employee engagement increases. According to independent polls and the results of our own salary surveys, over half of all job seekers consider culture and D&I an important determining factor when looking for a new role. But despite the best efforts of so many, we are still a long way from gender parity. The number of women in tech roles has hovered at approximately 20% for some years.

As a business, we have made a commitment to help move the dial on those numbers. Through our sponsorship of the global Women in IT awards and our work with organisations such as the Tech Talent Charter, Project F and Brown Girl Tech World, we are championing the brilliant individuals and teams who are leading by example. We have supported women and girls by helping them access careers in technology, from implementing returner for carers programmes to running coding clubs for children. In 2020, we launched our Women in Tech desk, dedicated to helping customers recruit more female technologists. And in 2021, we launched ‘[Mentor me](#)’ - our first mentoring network to help more women access the support they need to build their career.

We commissioned this report as part of our gender inclusion initiatives. Throughout 2020, our team conducted a series of interviews with senior female leaders in technology. Many of our interviewees were pioneers in their field, joining the industry at a time when the tech we know today was still in its infancy. They are leading teams at some of the UK’s best-known institutions—from banks to national retailers, publishing houses to Premier League clubs. They have experienced all the challenges of working in an environment where they are often the only woman in the room and they are champions for other women in technology, driving policy and launching organisations that help to redress the gender imbalance.

They were all generous enough to give their time for an in-depth, one-to-one interview and their experiences and recommendations form the basis of this report. All these interviews were conducted after the first UK lockdown took effect. As we all started to adapt to our new circumstances, our interviewees also reflected on how the future of work might look for women in technology and what organisations can do to make sure that we advance opportunities for all employees from underrepresented backgrounds.



Zoë Morris

ZOË MORRIS

President, Frank Recruitment Group



FOREWORD: DAME STEPHANIE SHIRLEY, CH



Dame Stephanie Shirley, CH is a workplace revolutionary and successful IT entrepreneur turned ardent philanthropist. In 1962, she founded what became Xansa PLC, an all-woman software company. It was ultimately valued at almost \$3 billion and made 70 of her staff millionaires. Copies of her books can be ordered via steveshirley.com - all profits go to autistica.org.uk, the UK's national autism research charity, founded by Dame Stephanie in memory of her son, Giles.

My experience of female IT professionals started in 1962 when I set up a software company as a company of women. A company for women. An early social business. People laughed at my crusade for women, but I wanted opportunity for me and for others. I recruited professionally qualified women who had left the industry to marry or have children, and structured them into a homeworking organisation. I, too, pursued a vigorous professional computing career working from home.

Lockdown 2020 has brought working from home into the mainstream by compressing five years of innovation into two months of adoption. Could this be an equalising moment? Women have been disproportionately affected by furloughs and redundancies and (by the end of 2020) are doing almost twice the unpaid childcare men do. But the pandemic has seen health and care jobs valued more highly—and these roles are predominantly carried out by women. So it's not all bad.

There weren't any women role models back in 1962. No-one expected much from women in work because all expectations were about home and family responsibilities. I couldn't accept that and so challenged the conventions of the time; even going to the extent of changing my name from Stephanie to Steve in my business development letters so as to get through the door before anyone realised that "he" was a "she".

In those days, women needed male authorisation for any significant financial dealings, and were disbarred from activities such as driving a bus, flying an aeroplane or working on the stock exchange. We, however, floated on the main stock exchange in 1996; 70 of the staff later became millionaires. When the company was acquired after 45 years, it was on the FTSE 250 and there were 8,500 staff—men and women. Which is as it should be.

My concept of a company of women was, though I say it myself, both timely and brilliant. But lots of people have ideas. It's energy and persistence that are responsible for success. And success comes from good leadership.

Frank Recruitment Group, global leader in the staffing of IT professionals, initiated and supported this 21st century survey of female IT talent. This report is full of case studies, research and commentary from female leaders in IT. I was particularly struck by the concept of T-shaped management: a wide range of skills at the top of the T (tech, leadership, stakeholder management) but also a deep expertise area—the vertical part of the T that gives team engagement.

In no way was mine a typical business. I try to lead differently, to act as an advocate and role model for women in the economy. There is still a need for such role models and to encourage women and girls in critical thinking.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report was commissioned by Frank Recruitment Group, global leaders in niche technology recruitment. It is based on in-depth interviews with 36 women in leadership roles in the UK tech industry. As current figures suggest that only 9% of senior leadership roles in tech are held by women, this report examines some of the most significant barriers to progression and identifies nine key areas where organisations can focus their efforts to remove those barriers.

- **CONSIDERING THE INFLUENCE OF THE CEO**
- **THE CATALYST, COMMITMENT AND CRAFT APPROACH**
- **RE-EVALUATING TYPICAL ROUTES INTO TECHNOLOGY**
- **SUCCESSION PLANNING**
- **THE ROLE OF THE EMPLOYEE IN FLEXIBLE WORK**
- **MENTORING**
- **ALLYSHIP**
- **VISIBILITY**
- **ENGAGEMENT AND TRUST**



A PROFILE OF OUR INTERVIEWEES



WHERE ARE WE NOW?

“I have worked in different industries, and I think tech is more siloed. I know fewer people in my competitive set, there seems to be less collaboration and celebration of success as an industry. Compared to other sectors it can feel very inward-facing and company-centric. But we have to be able to face outward, discuss our industry as a collective and understand our consumer and employee wants.”

JO SKILTON, CCO, UNILY

“I think we don’t spend enough time talking about how much things have improved. When I started out, I was the only woman on the team and there weren’t even bathroom facilities for women. They created one for me but of course no one had thought to test it and on the first day the handle came off in my hand and I was stuck there until someone came looking for me. It wasn’t malicious—it happened because they’d never had a female employee before.”

CAROLINE CARRUTHERS, CEO, CARRUTHERS & JACKSON

As the renowned Dame Stephanie Shirley points out in her foreword to this report, the early adopters of programming were, as often as not, female. Employers in the private sector looked for people who were diligent, logical, good with instructions. Entrepreneurs such as Dame Stephanie realised the huge potential in recruiting a workforce who could do the job just as easily from home. Women with young children, able to work around the demands of family were, as tech historian Mar Hicks put it, ‘pioneers in a feminized field of endeavour’¹.

¹ Programmed Inequality: How Britain Discarded Women Technologists and Lost Its Edge in Computing’, Hicks, Marie



As the industry grew and the spectrum of skills required evolved along with it, one might have expected to see those early pioneers shaping a female-led workforce. But this did not happen. For more than a decade, women have occupied fewer than 20% of tech roles. The number of women in senior leadership roles is around 9%. 35% of women in tech feel their gender has negatively impacted their career progression². According to one report, by the time they reach 35, 50% of women in tech roles will leave the industry for good³ (the cross-industry average is around 20%).

Despite the positive momentum created by initiatives such as apprenticeships, returner programmes, and ambitious targets for quotas, the fact remains that the number of women entering the workforce is still low.

"It's great that companies have these targets for a 50% female workforce but how do we ever get to that number?" asks Sheridan Ash MBE, Tech Innovation and Women and Technology Leader, PWC.

*"Unless we fix the pipeline then frankly, we are all just fighting over the same women in the workplace. And if anything, we know the early pipeline is deteriorating. Female participation in the computer science GCSE for 2020 was 21%. This is down from 40% for the old ICT GCSE a few years ago."*⁴

THE MISSING MIDDLE

One key demographic that many of our interviewees felt deserved more attention was the 'Missing Middle'—the experienced tech professionals who drop out of the workforce at a certain age.

There is an obvious correlation between the age at which women start to have children and the age when so many choose an alternative career. But this is only scratching the surface. Look a little closer and there are a number of reasons why this group of women start to disengage.

Several of our interviewees spoke of their frustration that the time and resources spent on acquiring female talent was not matched by the same efforts to develop their careers. Non-inclusive culture plays a part (as one of our interviewees observed, *"the higher up the ladder I get, the more male and aggressive the atmosphere"*). Then there is the knock-on effect for those women who came to technology late, having been disenfranchised by school experiences of STEM; their career paths don't always fit the established pattern for promotions, so they struggle to progress. Others report feeling excluded from the networks of influential sponsors who tend to choose successors shaped in their own image.

"In the UK, the larger pool of available talent actually works against women. It's too easy for companies to simply hire a clone of whoever previously had the role and if that was a man, eight times out of ten, you end up with another man. In South Africa, we had a far smaller pool of available talent, so we got much better at looking at a candidate's potential and then nurturing those we hired. As a result, women in business are better supported than they are here."

ANNETTE KLIMCZAK, VP INSIGHTS & DATA, CAPGEMINI UK

The issue is not just the women who have left the industry altogether, it's also the number who go 'missing' from senior roles. Zahra Bahrololoumi, former Senior Managing Director at Accenture and now CEO of Salesforce UK & Ireland has spent years observing hierarchies in different organisations:

"Before, you would always have one woman nestled somewhere near the top, but never quite in the number one spot, then a cluster of women near the bottom and virtually no women in the middle space".

This issue of how to eradicate that middle gap is something that Bahrololoumi and others have been working to address. See page 13.

² <https://bima.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/BIMA-Tech-Inclusion-and-Diversity-Report-2019.pdf>

³ https://www.accenture.com/_acnmedia/PDF-134/Accenture-A4-GWC-Report-Final1.pdf

⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-54204833#:~:text=But%20in%202020%2C%20against%20a,participation%20rate%20was%20above%2040%25.>



CHANGE, CULTURE AND THE CEO

"Nowadays, culture is always my first question... I turned down one role at a major retailer several times because the culture was aggressive and hierarchical. I would say now, I feel even more strongly and it's my number one criterion when I'm thinking about who I want to work for." — Anonymous

How do we begin to create the kinds of culture change that will encourage gender parity? Surprisingly, a December 2020 report from the Behavioural Insights Team suggests that some of the most common interventions used by organisations have very little effect. Despite the prevalence of unconscious bias training, there is no significant evidence that shows this training changes behaviour or improves workplace equality. The same research shows diversity training has similarly little effect and may even backfire.

The experience of our interviewees was incredibly varied when it came to deliberate culture interventions. Some felt they had benefited from being the only woman in a very masculine environment. Others felt that the lip service paid to diversity initiatives did more harm than good.

"I have been in a large meeting where the number of women in the room was outnumbered by the men called Dave; we counted. Yes, being the only woman in the room can be intimidating, but it also means that you are memorable. I'm a blonde woman and when I open my mouth and say something technical, there are some people that behave as if that's more unusual than a talking dog... You can say that's a bad thing, or you can embrace the fact that it makes them sit up and take notice."

ALISON DAVIS, CIO, NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

However, where interventions were specific, and had visible support from leaders across the top of the organisation, they were far more positively received.

"You need a top down approach to bring a genuine change. Firstly, leaders should look at fair representation of women at all levels across the organisation. And then it is about nurturing, growing internal talent and providing opportunities for growth so that women are not just seen as a tick in the box 'D&I initiative'."

NEETA MUNDRA, INDUSTRY TRANSFORMATION ADVISOR, SALESFORCE

LESSON 1: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CEO

One near-universally shared opinion was that the role of the CEO (whatever their gender) was crucial. *"There has to be a champion at the very centre of the board,"* says Dr Jacqui Taylor, co-founder and CEO of FlyingBinary, which works with organisations across the UK on diversity initiatives. *"We always find that it is the CEO who is the person who drives the change."*

Nadine Thomson, Global CTO for MediaCom agrees:

"Blind recruitment, good hiring practices, pictures that are representative: they're all good but without strong leadership at the top then it's all surface level. Without great leadership you don't have the desire and drive to change, and the battles take too long to fight."

Expediency is one key reason why the CEO's sponsorship is so important, but there are other benefits to the CEO leading from the front rather than siloing all D&I activity within a separate team. A CEO who speaks publicly about diversity naturally attracts a wider talent pool. But there is also the sense that a company's values are driven by the CEO's personal values—and this can have a negative impact as well as positive.

"I've observed in more than one business that the commitment to D&I-related issues can be a bit patchy, because it's related to what's important to the chief exec at the time. For example, they might be bright enough to know that issues like menopause should be on the agenda but it's not directly affecting them, so it gets raised, then disappears again. The intent might be there, but there isn't always the follow through."

ANNA BARSBY, FOUNDER, TESSIANT

LESSON 2: EMBRACE THE THREE CS

That commitment from leadership has become a theme in the work that Sheridan Ash has done in driving gender equality in UK tech—work that was recognised in The Queen's Birthday Honours list in 2020.

"When I talk about innovation, I talk about the three Cs; commitment, catalysts and craft," she explains. "The approach also happens to work very well if you're talking about how to address diversity."

"First, there has to be commitment. It has to be vocal, target-driven, and shared by leaders throughout the organisation. Then there's the catalyst, that's the initiatives that make the commitment real. Craft is the clever bit, and the most difficult. We have to recognise that there's no 'one size fits all' approach that works for tackling diversity, so how do you craft your initiatives in a way that make the people in your organisation want to do it?"

SHERIDAN ASH, MBE, TECH INNOVATION AND WOMEN AND TECHNOLOGY LEADER, PWC.

CHALLENGING ASSUMPTIONS

LESSON 3: WIDEN THE PLAYING FIELD

The rich and varied backgrounds of our interviewees demonstrate one thing very clearly—there is no such thing as a ‘typical’ route into technology.

Just under half of the CIOs and CTOs interviewed had no formal qualifications in any kind of STEM subject. And of those that did, only five had any kind of formal higher education qualification in computing or computer science—which, coincidentally, is the same as the number who dropped out of higher education altogether. Degrees held included History of Art, Theatre, Music, Psychology, and Law. For over half of the women we interviewed, technology was not their first career.

Yet despite the extraordinary range of experiences found in our cross-section, most organisations still insist on tech qualifications when advertising for roles. Partly, this may be because the number of applications has increased so dramatically. It may be because the industry is maturing, and ‘natural’ career paths are evolving. But there is a huge risk in ignoring the wider talent pool.

“When you receive overwhelming numbers of CVs for roles, you have to find a way to triage. Selecting applicants with a degree in an IT-related discipline becomes an easy way of doing that, particularly for early

career roles where the applicants haven’t accumulated much business experience. That creates risks, not only of losing people who could be successful, but also of losing the crucial opportunity to create diversity in our teams.”

ALISON DAVIS, CIO, NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

“When I was involved in some work around this, we found that of young people graduating with computer science degrees, only 35% were getting jobs. The courses were deeply technical, but they weren't teaching the skills like stakeholder management or business analysis, which are so vital. I was on an advisory group for the Tech Partnership who developed some more business-centric degree courses and around 95% of those students found employment.”

TIFFANY HALL, CIO, CANCER RESEARCH UK

If the industry is committed to becoming more inclusive then there must be a wider discussion about both of these issues—how to make the degrees on offer fit for the world of modern work, but also how to ensure that candidates with transferable skills, experiences and raw talent are able to get their foot in the door.



CASE STUDY: REVOLENT

Creating accessible routes into tech is imperative if we are to achieve better representation. This idea lies at the heart of Revolent's model. Founded by Frank Recruitment Group's parent company Tenth Revolution Group in 2018, Revolent offers accredited training and certifications in cloud technologies, and works with enterprise organisations across the UK, US and Australia. With a workforce that is 30% female and 63% from minority backgrounds, the team have built a business where diversity is part of the DNA. How have they done it?

- A training programme that is delivered by accredited trainers in a supportive environment.
- Acknowledgment that every journey is different—all 'Revolts' create a personal development plan with the training team, and have a mentor from the programme for additional guidance.
- A wide employee engagement platform, championing different voices every month.

"Every decision we make is examined through the lens of inclusion," says Revolent's President, Nabila Salem. "We're very proud to be able to support our clients and our sector in creating net new diverse tech talent and for our Revolts to have exciting careers in cloud technologies."

Revolent



HOW IMPORTANT IS THE TECH?

Respondents were really split on the importance of having formal training or qualifications. Some felt very strongly that it was an essential part of being an effective leader. For others, it was entirely irrelevant. What mattered more was understanding the business application.

"My personal perspective is that you cannot be a good leader in the tech space if you are not as strong as the expert. If you are lacking the knowledge of the tech that you are leading, then you cannot be effective."

DOINA POPA, CEO/CIO, INNOTRUE

"There are so many roles you can do that are not very technical. We need good product owners, good business analysts. They are roles that we find actually have more appeal for a lot of women but only when they know those roles exist. You can have the best tech in the world but it's worth nothing if you're not joining the dots."

BARBARA GOTTARDI, CIO, VANGUARD EUROPE

"My job has taken me all round the world, and the tech has been the least of it. Those business problems exist in many different companies."

CLAUDIA WOOTTEN, CIO, TURNITIN

"I have talked in the past about developing a 'T-shaped' approach to leadership. It's about having breath of skills across a wide range—tech, leadership, stakeholder management [the top of the 'T'] but then also having a deep expertise area and you need that because it gives you the confidence. If you have that depth, you can engage with your teams and you aren't just there, managing them."

SARAH GREASLEY, CTO, DIRECT LINE GROUP

ARE QUOTAS A GOOD IDEA?

Should organisations be transparent about quotas for shortlists, or do they run the risk of alienating applicants by treating them as ‘the female candidate’? The subject of quotas was highly divisive among our interviewees.

“I think quotas are useful—they are polarising, but we have been trying to move the dial around women in tech for years. Targets or quotas and incentives to actually make organisations change are important.”

NADINE THOMSON, GLOBAL CTO, MEDIACOM

For others, the concept was offensive:

“I don't think I have ever been considered for a role simply because I am a woman. And if I thought I had been, I would never take the job.” — Anonymous

Some were pragmatic about the need for quotas and had learned to view them as a means to an end.

“I am aware that I have often been added to shortlists to add diversity. My perspective is that I view it as an opportunity. Always look at the silver lining in any situation. I

remember going for a big director role and I knew that the four other candidates were all male, all white. I really did my research; I knew what they were looking for and the kind of person they wanted. I will take the opportunity but if I am offered the job, I am certain it will be on merit.”

NORMA DOVE-EDWIN, CIO, NATIONAL GRID ESO

For as long as women in tech are outnumbered, there will be a need for positive action on shortlists, particularly when the issue of who feels qualified to apply is also a gendered issue.

“It is a cliché but it does still seem to hold true that women are less likely to put themselves forward for a role if they don't 100% match the criteria.”

PAULINA LAURIE, HEAD OF WOMEN IN TECH, FRANK RECRUITMENT GROUP

Frank Recruitment Group's Women in Tech desk was launched as a pro-active measure to encourage more women to apply for tech roles. “However, the women we speak to are incredibly well qualified,” explains Laurie. “We are very clear that they are not just female candidates they are exceptional candidates.”



LESSON 4: RE-EXAMINE SUCCESSION PLANNING

“We talk a lot about getting more women into tech, but we don’t always do a good job at looking at what women we already have. If we want to get more senior women then we have to look at how we’re promoting.”

CHERYL NEWTON, CIO, METROBANK

Succession planning was a critical area for many of our interviewees. There was a general feeling that many organisations had not invested enough time and resource into exploring whether their promotion pathways were inclusive.

“In my organisation there is a clear grade system and we see women coming in at grades that are too low,” says one anonymous contributor. “It might be because they’re less tenured or they’ve come from a different career path, but the knock-on effect is that there’s a huge backlog of promotions. The women are coming in and overachieving, because they were graded too low in the first place, but then the system doesn’t allow them to move up quickly enough.”

“I think it’s extremely important for organisations to think about how they should be working

specifically with women to build their career paths,” says Neeta Mundra, Head of Banking and Financial Services at Salesforce. “It’s not the same as for men. Women’s careers are far less likely to be linear. There should be more effort spent in helping women to understand their options and how they can evolve.”

Our interviewees also had examples of successful interventions they had made, which ranged from working directly with HR teams to create new promotion tracks, to recruiting aggressively from different departments for senior hires with transferable skills, to taking direct responsibility for encouraging women to apply.

“A lot of the leadership programmes I have seen have been aimed at younger people, starting out in their careers. There aren’t leadership programmes aimed at returners. But why shouldn’t there be?”

WENDY SPENCER, PARTNER ARCHITECT MANAGER, MICROSOFT

“It’s not enough just to say that you support women. When I worked for Credit Suisse we launched the Women’s IT Network. When roles came up, we identified people in that network and said to them

‘you need to apply.’ A lot of them felt that the roles we were putting them forward for were a stretch, they weren’t sure if they met the requirements, but we said ‘no, we think you are capable and we will support you to make the leap’. Within a year, four of those women had been promoted to an MD role.”

CHERYL NEWTON, CIO, METROBANK

“[In my previous role] we had a real laser-focus on equitable promotions, and a structured approach to things like succession planning. I could see in my own team that approach helps everyone to feel safe and included. When I took on my last role, we weren’t as advanced in the gender space. I put all the recruitment execs on notice and said, ‘you need to talk me through your gender-balanced approach.’ We grew to nearly 60% female intake and made some really big strides on putting women into leadership positions.”

ZAHRA BAHROLOLOUMI, CEO UK & IRELAND, SALESFORCE

WORK/LIFE BALANCE AND THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

"We always used to talk about the cost of childcare as being the elephant in the room. There was also the issue of people with children approaching primary school age moving out of London. You would see women with children disappearing until those children reached the age of 13/14. But by then it's harder to come back in."

SARAH GREASLEY, CTO, DIRECT LINE GROUP

Despite the apparent shift in domestic labour patterns seen in the early stages of the pandemic and the first lockdown (a subject we will return to), the issue of balancing work with caring responsibilities has always disproportionately affected the careers of women. Of course, domestic inequality is not solely a problem for the tech industry, but it does seem to be more of a problem within tech, where the drop-out rate is 50% compared to 20% across all sectors.

What is it about tech that makes work supposedly so incompatible with family life?

In part, it seems to be the nature of the most lucrative and prestigious roles. In technology, so many of those roles are client-facing and therefore dictated by others' location (pre-pandemic), availability, and deadlines. This makes them seemingly impossible for women with families.

"You may have good [flexible working] policies on paper, but a lot of women find that if they want to have a good work/life balance, they have to take an internal role. And that tends to stop your career."

AMANDA GOSLING, VP, CAPGEMINI INVENT

This accidental side-lining went hand-in-hand with a kind of benevolent sexism for many of our interviewees:

"There are still too many people that assume a woman with other responsibilities is not committed to her job. You'll hear 'she's not going to want to have that conversation... she's part-time... she's not looking for a challenge'."

SHARON MOORE, DEPUTY CHAIR, BCS WOMEN

The problem is not a sudden lack of ambition, although, ironically, this assumption is often a barrier.

Another hallmark of the tech industry is the pace of change. Unfortunately, one of the unintended consequences of such pace is that anyone taking a career break for even a few months may return to work to find that the tech they excelled in is now obsolete.

"What a lot of people don't realise is that coming back from maternity leave, your world has changed and you feel like a new starter—but not one who can stay late to catch up. You have to be out of the door by 5.15pm for nursery pick up, so it's worse." — Anonymous

Of course, caring responsibilities are not just confined to women with young children. According to the ONS, 68% of 'sandwich carers' (i.e. those looking after more than one generation of dependants) are female⁵. The same report found that sandwich carers also experienced higher levels of stress and anxiety. Our interviewees were in near-universal agreement that confidence at work was a gendered issue. And although it is not solely linked to returning to work after time away, this was a time where a lack of confidence became compounded. From being shifted sideways into a less outwardly valued role, to countering assumptions about your commitment, to feeling that your skills aren't up to scratch, it's hardly a surprise that so many women feel the industry is no longer suited to them.

⁵ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/articles/morethanoneinfoursandwichcarersreportsymptomsofmentalillhealth/2019-01-14>

Despite all this, there are immediate, practical ways that organisations can begin to make positive changes:

LESSON 5: SHIFT THE BURDEN OF RESPONSIBILITY

“We cannot ignore the issue of flexible working and how we create more visible and better options. Right now, it’s almost always up to the women to figure out how to make it work. But is that how it should be?”

LORI SANGASTIANO, VP HEAD OF SAP, CAPGEMINI

Traditionally, what would happen when an employee made a request for flexible working? Official government guidelines suggest the onus is on that individual to outline the impact on the business and make recommendations for mitigation of that impact. For many women, returning from months of maternity leave with little idea of how internal politics might have shifted, or how many other staff work flexibly, the focus is likely on how to keep your job rather than how to thrive. How many have a clear idea of what their options really are?

Too often, the issue of what ‘flexible working’ meant was not clear enough.

“We need to understand what it really means to individuals. For some it’s about being able to start early. For others it’s about where they work. My role is global, and I see big differences in the culture in different locations. There’s still a lot we need to understand about what people need in order to do their best work.”

BARBARA GOTTARDI, CIO, VANGUARD EUROPE

Our interviewees cited examples of visible senior role models who had made four day weeks acceptable. Others spoke about line managers who had taken personal responsibility for making sure that early meetings or away days were possible for the people in their team with caring responsibilities. There was a clear feeling that where leaders or HR teams were proactive about providing options, employees felt supported.

“Clearly, the organisation is the one with the wider knowledge, not the woman coming back to work after her first baby. They should do more to make it clear how best to make it work.” — **Anonymous**

SUPPORTING THE TEAM

“I worked for one organisation that talked about its values, but the CEO would schedule 7am and 7pm meetings. For the people with children, if you were required at both, you were pretty screwed, and no one seemed to be pointing out to him that it was an issue, or they'd forgotten what it was like to have young kids. The marketing director had to leave at 5pm on some days and although seemingly the 'right things' were being said she felt awful every single time.” — **Anonymous**

It’s not only the HR team who can influence a successful returner’s experience. There is wider education needed to make sure that teams can work successfully—we may all have had a crash course in remote working recently, and plenty of leaders have rethought whether their team needs to be in the office five days a week, but we can still do more.

“We have to teach the people who run programmes how to manage people. If they're the ones creating the work streams, do they understand how to do that with people at the centre? It only takes a little bit of imagination to put the human first and not the spreadsheet.”

AMANDA GOSLING, VP, CAPGEMINI INVENT

Wendy Spencer, Partner Architect Manager at Microsoft, is an advocate for whole team coaching. *"I've seen a programme where not only was support offered to the woman coming back from maternity leave, but they also created tools for the team she was coming back in to."*

The idea that training and awareness should extend to the whole organisation, not just returning women and HR, was echoed by several participants. *"We have explored the idea of creating an internal memorandum of understanding—you would have a conversation with the project manager about the hours you work, where you can be flexible, what the team needs and what you need, and how you work together,"* explains Sharon Moore, Deputy Chair of BCS Women, and CTO for a large UK tech organisation.

What is clear is that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to helping organisations accommodate female returners.

Equally clear, however, is the need to broaden the conversations around work and family to include men. *"We tie ourselves up thinking about women in tech,"* says Tracey McDermott, CTO at McCarthy Stone. *"But we need to remember, what's good for women is good for all people, regardless of gender."* Although there is a clear imperative to retain women with caring responsibilities, the positive impact of progressive policies on flexible working benefit the whole organisation.

A poll conducted in September 2020 by the organisation Working Families showed that two thirds of UK employers have seen a growing interest in flexible working from their male employees⁶. As attitudes shift, organisations should be ready to meet the needs of both men and women.

⁶ [https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters.com/w-027-9243?transitionType=Default&contextData=\(sc.Default\)&firstPage=true](https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters.com/w-027-9243?transitionType=Default&contextData=(sc.Default)&firstPage=true)

LESSON 6: MAKE GOOD MENTORING AVAILABLE

"Provide mentoring with women tech leaders outside the organisation and encourage them to develop their own networks. We currently have a system where we are mentoring each other's direct reports. That independent third person can get you to think more openly."

JANE DEAL, CIO, THE LAW SOCIETY

The importance of a mentor or coaching relationship emerged as one of the strongest themes in our interviews. With a few notable exceptions, almost all our leaders felt that having a mentor had played a pivotal role in shaping their career.

"I had one mentor who was very helpful when I was going for promotion to Distinguished Engineer and it was her role to coach me. She was very, very good. She understood that it wasn't what I'd done that was important but that I wouldn't blow my own trumpet... it was a brilliant insight and that made a difference."

SARAH GREASLEY, CTO, DIRECT LINE GROUP

Having sponsors was another important development tool, and our interviewees were keen to make the distinction between the two, especially as this difference was not something they had all been aware of when they first started out.

"Find a sponsor who will expose you to the right opportunities. Develop an understanding of who your sponsors can be and who the influencers are within an organisation. There are very capable women out there but there are still too many job opportunities discussed in informal settings, down the pub, for example, that women are not exposed to. Who's in your boardroom? Don't compromise your integrity but make the effort to build a deep network with a good core of people."

NORMA DOVE-EDWIN, CIO, NATIONAL GRID ESO

BUILDING A NETWORK

"Your network is one of the main areas you need to work hard on," advises Pip White, Managing Director for a leading cloud technology company. "I have always kept a strong core of leaders who will challenge me and share some of their learnings. But it takes effort. One thing I do every week is take 30 minutes to think about who I have connected with recently and who I need to check in with. Some of those relationships only need a quick WhatsApp message. With others, it might be a more structured approach, asking for their point of view on a certain subject."

"Be very focused with your networking. There has to be mutual value," suggests Jane Deal, CIO of The Law Society.

"Don't dilute your networks by accepting everyone. And look for organisations that can connect you with mentors or give you access to network-building opportunities."

Claire Priestley, CIO at City University of London, founded CIO+1 to open up new opportunities for women in technology. As the title suggests, CIOs are encouraged to bring a guest along; someone who might be a junior member of their team or otherwise on the trajectory to leadership. "The aim was that diversity was the subtext rather than the focus," she says. "The events are always about a different topic, but they help us to bring a more diverse set of people together."

LESSON 7: ENCOURAGE ALLYSHIP

"I am incredibly grateful to the men who have sponsored or mentored me. Go back 20 years and it was almost all men who were in senior enough positions to be able to mentor or sponsor. Early on, there weren't a lot of female role models. Things are changing but they haven't shifted as much as we would have liked."

NADINE THOMSON, GLOBAL CTO, MEDIACOM

In an industry where approximately 80% of professionals are male, it would be imprudent to overlook the importance of allyship. Almost all our interviewees said that the most influential figures in their own careers had been men who had recognised their abilities and championed them.

"I started out working in retail banking at 16, when everything was still manual. Then they introduced this thing called a controller, and a floppy disk turned up every week and somebody had to do the updates, and I became the tech support

for the branch because I was fascinated by this thing where everybody else was scared. A job opportunity came up to go and work in support on the trade floor, but I was on holiday at the time. My manager, a man called Dave, photocopied that job opportunity and pushed it through my door because he believed in me. I got the job, and that was really the beginning of my career. Everybody should have a Dave."

CHERYL NEWTON, CIO, METROBANK

"We've seen a huge shift in this space over the past five years," says Tenth Revolution Group's CIO Mark Hill. "Even in the past 18 months, I've observed that the conversation around allyship has really moved to the top of the agenda."

Campaigners for movements such as HeforShe and Black Lives Matter have normalised the concept of allyship and argued for its importance in driving diversity. Despite these positive shifts there is still work to be done to make sure the conversation around gender parity isn't one-sided.

“Where I have got lucky is where my male managers believed in me and they pushed me... they are the ones that said ‘you are ready, you can do it’. It was individuals, and they were men, who got me to where I am today. I wonder if at the moment they feel alienated from the conversation.”

**AVRIL CHESTER, CTO, RIBA AND FOUNDER/
CEO, CANCER CENTRAL**

“I had an interesting exchange with a white, male manager recently who said he didn't know what to do as he felt like he was part of the problem. My response was there's a big difference between being part of the problem and part of the system. You don't have to feel guilty about having your seat at the table, but you do have to think about what you're going to do with the privilege of having that seat.”

AMANDA GOSLING, VP, CAPGEMINI INVENT

“The debate needs to include everyone,” agrees Hill. “Personally, I have got the most balance from running workshops with the female

members of my team and asking them about their experiences. The generational differences in attitudes—male and female—is striking. I would encourage anyone thinking about where to start with this to listen to the voices in their own organisation. There is likely a font of knowledge there that can help you think differently.”

“As someone who is often in the minority, I have experienced my opinions being squashed by ‘like-minded’ voices in the room. I am certain that the majority of the time this is done subconsciously, it’s human nature to agree with the people who sound like you. But I remember doing some management training where the trainer demonstrated how the ‘thinkers’ in the group were consistently ignored because they needed longer to consider the topic. This really stuck with me, and I changed my own behaviour to try and listen more, to encourage everyone to be heard.”

**GEORGINA OWENS, CHIEF PRODUCT AND
TECHNOLOGY OFFICER, LIFE'S BACK-UP**



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Over the past 12 months, we have all been part of a vast, unintentional experiment in the future of work. People who were told it would be impossible to do their jobs from home went months without seeing their colleagues face to face. While it is still too early to know what the long-term effects of this global upheaval will be, this is a critical moment for gender parity.

LESSON 8: CONSIDER VISIBILITY

As we have already discussed, domestic labour responsibilities have traditionally impacted women's careers more than men's. In the early stages of the first lockdown, there was much discussion about whether this would be an equalising moment. But research published in December 2020 by the ONS suggests that the much-discussed shift in unpaid labour (largely made up of childcare and housework) was only temporary⁷. With women doing a staggering 99% more unpaid childcare than men by the end of 2020, is it inevitable that we will see even greater numbers of women disappearing from work over the next few years?

"I think one of the consequences of this pandemic has been losing those important 'wrap around' moments where we actually do a lot of our best networking or collaboration: those things that get decided before the official meeting starts. As someone who is based in Edinburgh with many clients in London, I have had that visibility problem for quite a while but there's an added challenge when you translate it to virtual." — Anonymous

"As a team, we have acknowledged that five minutes that frame meetings have a social significance—it's important to keep the 'chat' time as part of the conversation. Then there's the additional challenge of women being more negatively impacted because of caring responsibilities. When things get settled again,

I think there will be a worry for many women—have we been invisible too long?"

SHARON MOORE, DEPUTY CHAIR, BCS WOMEN

Managers need to recognise that there will still be a disproportionate burden on the people in their team with caring responsibilities and sure that they are not excluded from those shared social moments, which often have more value than we realise. By the same token, employees need to recognise that their contribution may not be seen or felt in the same way as when they are in the office. Are they doing enough to make communicate everything they are doing and achieving when they're not in the same physical space?

"The first thing I would say is scan around you and identify the area where you think you can have most impact. So many women say they aren't being seen, but my observation is that women are often less tuned in to identifying the most impactful need and making that their focus. Ask yourself, what is the 'so what' of the thing you are doing? If you can't conclude an outcome of what you are doing that is linked to the most important thing in your environment, whether that's sales or delivery quality or something else, then is it the right thing to do?"

ZAHRA BAHROLOLOUMI, CEO UK & IRELAND, SALESFORCE

⁷ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/satelliteaccounts/bulletins/coronavirusandhowpeoplespenttheirtimeunderestrictions/28marchto26april2020#main-points>

LESSON 9: THINK ABOUT ENGAGEMENT AND TRUST

“There has been a real paradigm shift, and I don't think that will change because, crucially, big business has had to change.”

JO SKILTON, CCO, UNILY

While we must consider the added unpaid labour burden on women, we should also recognise this as a moment of opportunity. We can challenge outmoded structures and find new ways to both measure and recognise achievement.

“This pandemic has been an exercise in trust,” says Jo Skilton, CCO of employee engagement software brand Unily. “Suddenly, it's not so much about who's in the office at 6pm on Friday, but about whether you trust people to do what they're employed to do. Companies want to engage with people, but it has to feel natural and engaging to them.”

Similarly, businesses that can make their staff feel included in shaping what their work looked like will see higher levels of engagement. Dr Jacqui Taylor of FlyingBinary has worked with organisations across the UK, and believes that creating ‘intrapreneurs’ is one of the most effective tools any business can use to encourage participation and a sense of meaning.

“Look at your organisation's whole structure,” she says. Are the same voices heard over and over or are there channels for anyone, at any level, to contribute? Are you hearing ideas from people who might bring a fresh perspective? Are varied points of view or suggestions for a new approach valued? “If you can create intrapreneurs you will get engagement and a more holistic organisation.”

“[We launched this company in the middle of the pandemic]. One of the driving forces for me was that the work had to mean more, so one of the central questions was 'how do you create a company that is all about giving back'. And that's not just about the work we do externally, but also how we are structured internally.”

“What opportunities are we creating for marginalised groups? What should our D&I policy look like? Are we creating a culture that promotes respectful engagement? It's not just about 'how to make the world a better place' but 'how to make our place better'. We've taken our hiring criteria a step further.”

“We're looking beyond hard skills to score on 'do we think this person brings a different perspective', 'how do they round out the team', 'will they elevate it, or pull it in a different direction'. I think that it will probably slow down our hiring, but I would rather that be the barrier than a lack of trying to find the right balance.”

VERA LOFTIS, MD, SOLUTION JUNKIES

Conversations around gender and racial inclusion that began long before 2020 have taken on new significance. There is a greater awareness and a greater need for organisations to embrace change, not just for women but for all those who have traditionally been marginalised in the tech community. There is work still to do, but for the organisations prepared to invest time—and real money—into addressing those issues that disproportionately affect some of their workforce, there are rewards to be had.



LESSONS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

What advice would this cohort of leaders give to the next generation of women coming up through the ranks?

STRETCH YOURSELF

"A pivotal moment for me was when I was thinking about going for my first CIO role and I really wasn't sure if I wanted it. Someone said to me 'it's not about whether you want it. Can you do it, and should you do it? And how will you feel if someone else comes in and does it instead of you?' That was the incentive."

TRACEY MCDERMOTT, CTO, MCCARTHY STONE

"Let go of the 'imagined' career. Are you doing now what you imagined you'd be doing 15 years ago? Be curious. Every role you have, look for what you can take away from it."

JULIE SCREECH, CHIEF DATA OFFICER

"Think about how you're going to get to the next rung. If it's about getting into line management then think about how you're going to get the skills, maybe volunteer to run a project so you're at least leading a team, or to be a staff rep so you get involved in HR issues. Volunteer for the things that are a bit beyond your normal job."

TIFFANY HALL, CIO, CANCER RESEARCH

THINK STRATEGICALLY

"Doing a good job is not enough. Think about it from the company perspective, challenge the norm and contribute strategically. Women often feel less comfortable self-promoting but it's also about promoting the team you work with."

NATASHA DAVYDOVA, VP/CTO FINANCIAL SERVICES, SALESFORCE

"Every career move I've made has been conscious. What am I doing to get me to that next step? It means I have made some moves where I have felt really stretched and, to be honest, spent the first few months thinking 'what on earth have I done' but it has helped me grow."

EMMA FELTHAM, IT DIRECTOR, NATIONAL TRUST

"Don't look at the company, look at your boss. That person is pivotal to you being able to advance."

NADINE THOMSON, GLOBAL CTO, MEDIACOM

GET COMFORTABLE WITH SELF-PROMOTION

“What do you think you should ask for? What do you think you’re worth? I make a point of telling organisations in the first conversation that I am expensive.”

CHERYL NEWTON, CIO, METROBANK

“Think about what you can do to make it easier for the next person. I remember being put forward for a Women in Tech award and at the time I didn’t want to be involved. I didn’t want to be put forward for something because of my gender. I still feel that strongly, however I now think about how that might be perceived by someone else lacking in confidence, support or the context in which to thrive. So it really isn’t just about me, it’s about paving the way and providing that incentive or encouragement for others.”

**TRACEY MCDERMOTT, CTO,
MCCARTHY STONE**

BUILD YOUR RESILIENCE

“I would really encourage women to find resilience. Not to give up, to challenge themselves. When I had a career break, I was the one who put the blockers on going back to work full time. I was making all kinds of assumptions about what would happen, and they were not true. I had to decide ‘I will do my best and if it doesn’t work out, I will do something else’. It kept me going and guess what, it worked.”

DOINA POPA, CEO, INNOTRUE

“There’s clearly quite a high proportion of imposter syndrome in technical environments. A lot of technical people hide behind technical language. One of my first questions is always ‘what does that mean?’ Even if I know the answer, I want to make sure everyone else in the room does too.”

CLAIRE PRIESTLEY, CIO, CITY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

“Don’t lose heart if you don’t have people above you that look like you. You can be that change.”

**ZAHRA BAHROLOLOUMI, CEO UK & IRELAND,
SALESFORCE**

Thanks to all our contributors for their time and support. This is only the beginning of the conversation. If you would like to discuss any of the topics raised in this report, or find out more about how we can support your teams to build better gender diversity, please don’t hesitate to get in touch with me or one of our ED&I contacts listed below.

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Zoë Morris

ZOË MORRIS
President, Frank Recruitment Group
z.morris@frankgroup.com

Nabila Salem

President
Revolent
n.salem@revolentgroup.com

Paulina Laurie

Head of Women in Tech
Frank Recruitment Group
p.laurie@frankgroup.com

Caroline Fox

Global ED&I Strategy Lead
Frank Recruitment Group
c.fox@frankgroup.com

WOMEN IN TECH

Our Women in Tech team is helping to shape a more inclusive workforce across the AWS ecosystem by connecting our customers with women working in every area of technology.

Find out more at www.frankgroup.com/women-in-tech

or contact **Paulina Laurie**, Head of Women in Tech at Frank Recruitment Group - p.laurie@frankgroup.com

“My consultant from the Women in Tech team really took the time to get to know me and understand my career goals, and quickly found an amazing role that perfectly matched my skills and experience. This personalised approach really stood out for me, as did the guidance and support at every stage of the recruitment process, which was more than I ever expected.”

NILOFAR BHURAWALA, SOLUTIONS ARCHITECT

OUR OFFICES

New York

10th Floor, 199 Water Street,
New York, NY 10038
+1 212-731-8242

Philadelphia

22nd Floor, Ten Penn Center
1801 Market Street,
Philadelphia, PA 19103
+1 267-233-6468

Dallas

Ross Tower, 500 North Akard Street
24th Floor, Dallas,
Texas, TX 75201
+1 972-546-4861

Tampa

Suite 1900, 501 E Kennedy Blvd,
Tampa, FL 33602
+1 813-437-6850

Denver

13th Floor, Tabor Center,
1200 17th St
Denver CO, 80202
+1 303-558-4400

Scottsdale

6360 E Thomas Rd, Scottsdale,
AZ 85251
+1 480-530-2050

Charlotte

Carillon Tower, Suite 620, 227
West Trade Street,
Charlotte, NC 28202
+1 980-498-8000

Irvine

12th Floor, Suite 12, 120 Park Tower
695 Town Center Dr, Costa Mesa,
CA 92626
+1 949-688-2222

Chicago

Suite 1500, 550 West Van
Buren Street
Chicago, IL 60607
+1 312-651-3100

London

Plantation Place South,
60 Great Tower Street,
London, UK, EC3R 5AZ
+44 (0)207 337 0814

Newcastle

St Nicholas Building, St Nicholas Street
Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK, NE1 1RF
+44 (0)191 338 7532

Berlin

Etage 1, Berlin Am Zoo, Budapester
Str, 35 10787 Berlin, Germany
+49 (0)30 3080 8800

Cologne

Etage 5 , Friesenplatz 4
Köln 50672, Deutschland
+49 (0)221 6508 9500

Amsterdam

5th Floor, Strawinskylaan 4117
1077 ZX, Amsterdam
+31 (0)20 241 8500

Geneva

14 Rue du Rhône, 1204
Geneva, Switzerland
+41-22-596-7010

Barcelona

Planta 1, Carrer de la Ciutat de Granada
123 Barcelona B 08018, España
+34 93 271 0300

Madrid

Paseo de la Castellana 77
Madrid 28046, España
+34-91-926-5060

Melbourne

222 Exhibition St, Melbourne
Victoria 3000
+61 3 9088 3700

Singapore

Suite 05-21, 109 North Bridge Road
Singapore, 179097
+65-3-163-0484

Tokyo

Floor 2, Nijubashi Building, Chiyoda
City Tokyo 100-0005, Japan
+81-34-563-8890