

STUDY:

Women in tech careers yearn for female role models and flexibility in the workplace.



Summary

Pluralsight and Women Who Code teamed up to survey women in technology careers in an effort to better understand why women tend to be underrepresented in technology fields and what challenges they face in the workplace.

Responses indicated that women in technology careers would benefit from more female role models, and that they are running into a number of obstacles in climbing the corporate ladder, which may be impacting their salary and long-term career trajectory.

Additionally, the report surfaced themes such as experiencing a pervasive lack of confidence in navigating a male-dominated workplace and having difficulty balancing work and personal life. Responses suggested that women in tech would prefer working at any other type of organization over a startup and are craving flexibility in their work environment.

The study, which polled more than 1,500 women in technology fields, also identified some positive trends across the technology industry as a whole, including a more positive outlook on career advancement among the younger generations and sexual harassment ranking low on the list of career challenges facing women in tech. The study's key findings are outlined in this report.

Major career hurdles

The study asked women in technology fields to rank the biggest challenges in their careers. Overall, the results suggest that barriers to advancement and a dearth of mentors are the most daunting obstacles women encounter.

Certain challenges seem to be more pronounced for leaders. Women in leadership roles (from senior manager to C-level) were more likely to report a hurdle (70 percent) than those in mid-level positions or below (55 percent).

Additionally, women in leadership roles reported being held back by male-dominated work environments at more than twice the rate of individual contributors (19 percent vs. 8 percent).

Women in leadership positions also echoed the need for more female role models, indicating that they believe their teams would be more successful with the addition of more women. *More than 60 percent of female leaders strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that having more women on their teams would be beneficial.*

One caveat to note, younger women who participated in the study were more optimistic about advancement opportunities based on their current position.

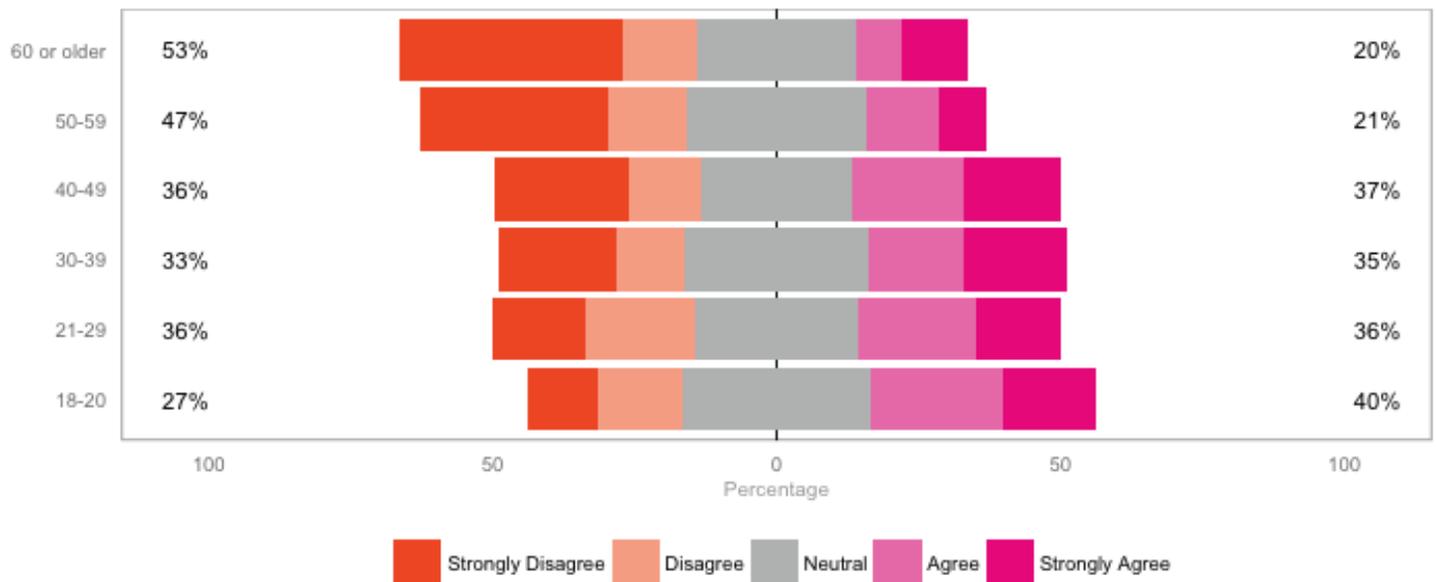
Between the ages of 18-39, more than 50 percent of women strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that their current position provides good opportunities to advance in their careers, signaling that over time we may see this concern drop among women in technology careers.

Surprisingly, only 21 percent of respondents identified sexual harassment in the workplace as a challenge, ranking it last among all options.

Major career hurdles ranked from biggest to smallest challenges:

1. Lack of opportunities for advancement
2. Lack of female role models
3. Lack of mentorship at work
4. Lack of work-life balance
5. Pay gap compared to male colleagues
6. Lack of training resources
7. Lack of networking opportunities
8. Sexual harassment at work

I believe male colleagues are more likely to be promoted than females in my workplace



The confidence gap

The study asked women to rank common issues that might impede their careers. Thirty-six percent of respondents had no answer for what was holding them back, suggesting either they don't see any barriers or don't know how to label them. As for the remaining 64 percent, their responses reflect a pervasive lack of confidence and concern over navigating workplaces dominated by men.

This confidence gap seems to impact how women in the formative years of their careers (20s and 30s) negotiate workplace dynamics, such as asking for a raise or promotion. *While more than 20 percent of respondents in this age group aspire to a vice president or C-level position, more than 50 percent felt uncomfortable asking for a raise and nearly 50 percent felt uncomfortable asking for a promotion.* Across all age groups, only 25 percent were comfortable asking for a raise.

A path to inclusion

In addition to highlighting challenges women face once they enter technology careers, the study also looked at what women need to get into technology fields in the first place. Most notably, *1 in 4 respondents said flexible work hours is the most important factor in getting women into technology.* In fact, 50 percent of respondents agree that balancing career and their personal life is challenging. In addition, these findings follow the previous theme of the need for more female role models/mentors.

With the exception of women who identified as freelancers or consultants, half to two-thirds of respondents in every group surveyed reported that balancing personal and work life was an issue for them.

Also of note, these findings suggest that encouraging science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education for females is a relatively small barrier according to respondents, with less than 1 in 10 saying it was the most important factor in getting more women into tech careers. This runs contrary to the prevailing narrative around women and STEM education.

Issues holding them back in their career, in order from most to least concerning:

1. Lack of confidence
2. Male-dominated work environment
3. Inability to work the expected hours above the contracted hours
4. Lack of training
5. Pressure from yourself to perform
6. Circumstances outside the work environment
7. Pressure from your boss(es) to perform

Factors in getting more women into tech fields, ranked from most helpful to least helpful:

1. Flexible work schedules
2. More female role models
3. Better visibility into the range of careers available
4. Mentors
5. Financial incentives to train or re-train for a career in technology
6. More encouragement for female students to take STEM subjects in school
7. Quotas

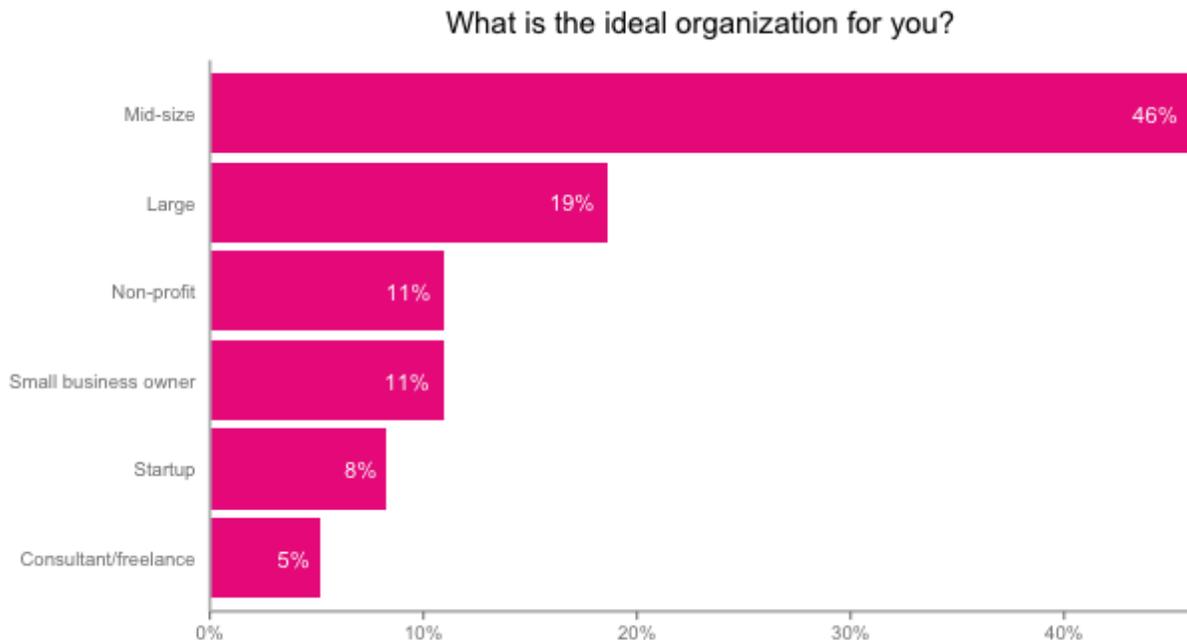
The ideal workplace environment

Women in technology professions tend to favor almost any organization over startups as a place to work. Only 8 percent said a startup was the “ideal organization” for them, barely outranking consulting/freelance (5 percent). In fact, women in technology fields would rather work for a non-profit or start their own business than work for a startup. Nearly 50 percent of respondents indicated that their ideal job would be in a mid-sized organization.

Women’s preference against working for startups is also reflected in the kinds of perks they prefer. In ranking 10 common workplace benefits, women rated free lunch, stock options, and onsite child care (all common startup incentives) as least important of all. Instead, responses indicated that flexible scheduling is key; In fact, nearly 80 percent of respondents listed flexible work hours as important to them. Stability and the organization’s willingness to invest in the employee also appear to top the list of desired benefits in the workplace.

Important perks for women in tech listed in order of most important to least:

1. Paid vacation/holiday leave
2. Flexible work hours
3. Training
4. 401(k) or equivalent
5. Working remotely
6. Paid maternity leave
7. Paid paternity leave
8. Free lunch
9. Stock options
10. Onsite child care





Age and workplace perceptions

The younger generations tend to report experiencing gender discrimination more than older generations. *Nearly half the respondents ages 21-49 feel that male colleagues are more likely to get promoted than female colleagues* compared to only 36 percent of respondents over the age of 50. Additionally, 36 percent of women in the 21-49 age group feel the pay gap between male colleagues is challenging, while only 20 percent of women 50 and older find it challenging.

Importance of Workplace Incentives



Children affect women’s expectations of workplace incentives

While nearly half the women who responded to the survey do not have children, 48 percent of all women surveyed did express a desire to raise children. This plays a part in the preferences of respondents in regard to the incentives offered by their employer (e.g. onsite childcare, maternity leave, etc.) – especially among women under 40 years old.



About the research

The study collected responses via online survey from more than 1,500 women working in technology fields in select industrialized, English-speaking countries with mature technology industries. Respondents were all adults (18 and older) and completed the survey without compensation. The research was generated by Pluralsight and Women Who Code.

