

Report: Tech's Gender Gap Widened by Uninviting Workplace

May 15 2007

New research may shift the view of the gender gap in the tech workplace away from a lack of interest among females to the work environment itself, which women rated as unfavorable.

For years, word has circulated of a significant gender gap in the technology workplace, where women are greatly outnumbered by men.

The blame is typically placed on low interest on the part of women to pursue computers and engineering, but the actual experience of women working in technology is rarely addressed. A report released May 14 stands to shift this perception by drawing attention to the fact that tech workplaces may not be the most favorable environments for women to work in.

The vast majority of women working in the field of technology enjoy their jobs, finds the "Women in Technology 2007" report published by WITI (Women in Technology International), a trade association, and Compel, a management consulting and research firm. Of the survey's nearly 2,000 female respondents, 75 percent said that they would encourage other women to pursue similar interests.

Yet, female tech workers have mixed feelings about their companies' climates, with only 52 percent believing that their organizations offer a favorable one for women.

"There is a kind of conventional wisdom that goes around that maybe

women don't like technology. So, for us to learn through this research that they do like it and do find it to be a place where they can make a difference and would go as far as to recommend it to others is very telling," Patricia Schaefer, president of Compel and co-author of the report, told eWEEK.

"What was very intriguing was that such a large percentage of women said that they didn't find their organizational climates to be very inviting to women. They're saying that they don't feel that their voices are heard and it causes them to question whether this is an environment that they wish to stay in," said Shaefer.

Difficulties getting ahead

The report found that women in technology-related fields desired more influence in this typically male-dominated arena, and drew attention to the difficulties they faced. Many expressed that their input and presence was less in demand than that of their male co-workers, with half (48 percent) feeling that their views are not as acknowledged or welcomed as that of their male counterparts. Nearly half (44 percent) also expressed that that women in their company received fewer invitations to participate in and lead large projects.

Though female tech workers largely (73 percent) felt confident that they could influence their bosses, significantly fewer (53 percent) described themselves as broadly influential in the organization. A little over half of the respondents felt that they were in control of their careers.

Shaefer said that the data that emerged from this research represents and good news/bad news scenario.

"The good news, despite conventional wisdom, is that women are highly energized by technology as an arena where they can be creative and find

meaning. The bad news is they don't necessarily perceive technology organizations as inviting places to pursue their futures."

Women at the top feel differently

Female CIOs had notably different impressions of the technology work environment, based on individual in-depth interviews. For instance, the women CIOs consistently described careers replete with taking on risky projects, crafting an inspiring vision, aligning teams and forging ahead in the face of adversity.

Yet, despite these female CIOs citing role models, coaching and support networks as being essential to their success, 46 percent said they do not have a mentor in their current company. Just 27 percent said their companies had formal women's mentoring and networking programs in place.

Suggested directions

The report found that most technology organizations have not developed disciplined programs to support women employees.

"If there is a single message to technology companies and functions, it's the need to get serious about committing resources to women's career development initiatives," said Dr. Barbara Trautlein, an associate at Compel and co-author of the report.

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Citation: Report: Tech's Gender Gap Widened by Uninviting Workplace (2007, May 15)
retrieved 26 April 2024 from
<https://phys.org/news/2007-05-tech-gender-gap-widened-uninviting.html>

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