

Actions and solutions to facilitate women's careers in technology-driven work environments

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Summary of text:

Research analysing why the gender gap in technology persists indicates a male-dominated culture of technology, which makes it more difficult for young women to envisage themselves in technology contexts. The 'ecosystem' which surrounds girls and women, including parents, school and employers, are also affected by these gender stereotypes. A Danish study found that while 70% of parents assumed that boys were more interested in information and technology (IT) than girls, only 1% of the parents imagined girls to be more interested in technology than boys. These attitudes affect the degree to which parents, and recruiters, actively encourage girls to participate in technology training and education.

A survey of young women which explored what had motivated them to study technology showed that exciting job opportunities were important, closely followed by a good salary and the importance of technology knowledge in solving societal challenges. Many of the positive drivers are similar between men and women; however, women place a greater emphasis on societal factors. A qualitative study found that few women receive adequate information about technology-related careers at school and that a minority of women who decide to study technology had been motivated through the school system.

A recruitment initiative in Norway was found to be effective in recruiting girls who had an existing interest in technology, since it provided the opportunity for girls to interact and be encouraged by women professionals in technology-related fields. This supported the girls' ability to envisage themselves in technology work. The recruitment initiative was similarly found to encourage girls who had not experienced support for developing an interest in technology, since it compensated for a lack of such support at home or school. However, the study showed a tendency for schools to send only girls they already considered to be interested in technology, thus limiting the effect of such recruitment initiatives.

Key recommendations:

- The widespread assumption that girls and women are not interested in technology must be overturned. This assumption creates a self-perpetuating cycle, in which girls lack knowledge about technology, therefore do not express interest in the field, therefore are not encouraged to enter tech-arenas and continue to lack knowledge.
- In some countries, a strong public discourse exists which suggests that gender equality has already been realized, which implies that the continuous gender imbalance in STEM fields is a result of women's free choice. This post-feminist assumption is based on misunderstanding and ignorance of the continuous gender stereotypes which underpin gender inequality throughout the STEM field and must be overturned.
- Many women identify non-technological fields of interest as motivational for studying technology. The diversity of these interests should be recognized in educational institutions but also to support the future of work in fields such as the green transition, e-health, and artificial intelligence, which are in need of specialists with cross-disciplinary knowledge.