

# GENDER GAPPED

The tech sector has made strides attracting more women and inching closer to equal pay. But a glaring disconnect remains in how men and women view gender diversity progress in IT.

BY BETH STACKPOLE

**T**he way **Melissa Di Donato** sees it, there are three types of women in tech: those vying to improve gender diversity in the workplace, those who opt out because the journey is hard and they don't feel they have sufficient voice, and those who don't realize they're the only woman in the room.

For decades, Di Donato considered herself the latter, steadily climbing her way up the male-



dominated corporate ladder to become the first woman CEO of SUSE, an open source Linux provider. Di Donato, who says she's always embraced her femininity with her signature big hair and stiletto shoes, rarely contemplated the idea of gender as a barrier until she attended a women in tech luncheon eight years ago, reluctantly, at the urging of a male mentor.

"I told him I don't do women lunches — I'm getting along just fine and I'm happy being me," says Di Donato, who admits to doing a complete reversal after listening to women recount their hard-fought battles for success amid a rampant and glaring gender divide. "I started hearing the stories and thought, we do have a problem, we do have a pay gap, we do have visibility issues. My head was so down in the weeds, I didn't realize."

Di Donato, then an executive at Salesforce, applauded CEO Marc Benioff's public commitment in 2015 to close the gender pay gap and elevate diversity. Years into that initiative and despite the strides Salesforce and other tech companies have made, Di Donato

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contends there's still a long way to go to achieve gender parity beyond hitting milestone goals for equal pay. Specifically, there is significant work to be done to address distortions in how women and men view gender equality and the progress made to date. "Men see a steady increase in the number of women leaders and think the problem is solved, but it's not proportional enough to be at 30 percent, which is where they say

a minority's voice is heard," she explains. "The minute we stop talking about it, men think the problem is solved, yet women still feel disadvantaged."

participation in the general workforce jumping from 38 percent in 1970 to nearly half (47%) by 2014, the percentage of women in tech-related occupations peaked in the



## Measuring the perception gap

Increasing the number and profile of women in tech has been a persistent struggle. For decades, the number of women fielding technology and IT-related occupations has paled in comparison to other high-profile fields such as medicine, law, and the physical sciences. While the U.S. Census Bureau and other government reports show women's

early 1990s to settle in at around 25 percent in 2014. A June 2019 IDC Women in Technology survey found women comprised 21 percent of employees at technology companies with a larger (34%) share in specific technology roles.

Perhaps even more distressing than the still-lackluster female

presence in tech is the glaring disconnect in how men and women view progress made on gender equality. Male respondents to the IDC Women in Technology survey gave their firms high marks for diversity and inclusion across the board, with 45 percent specifically commending their firm's gender diversity efforts. In contrast, only 29 percent of female respondents felt their organizations were doing enough to tackle gender diversity issues.

### Divergent views

When it comes to equal pay and title equity, the delta between genders is even more acute. Three quarters of male survey respondents believe employers are paying both sexes equally compared to only 42 percent of women. At the same time, 67 percent of men believe the current status of federal, state and local laws are suf-

ficient to ensure men and women are paid equally for similar work while about one-fifth (21%) of women respondents said the same, the IDC survey found.

Lack of transparency is the biggest hinderance to achieving pay parity, yet even there, men and women diverged. Only about a third of women respondents said human resources or top management shared pay ranges with employees, compared to 62 percent of men. Less than a third of women said they are in a position to see other employees' pay, versus 63 percent of men, and only 17

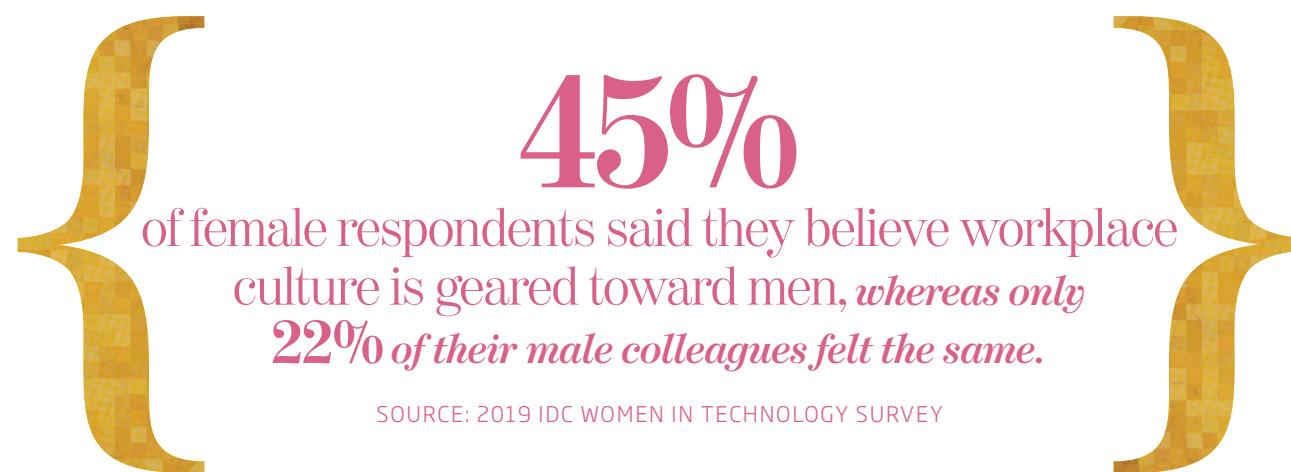
percent of women felt comfortable sharing their compensation details with coworkers compared to 44 percent of their male counterparts.

Pay parity raises problems on many levels, but compensation is a much bigger deal for women, according to the survey. While conventional wisdom is that women care most about job benefits and flexibility, the IDC survey found both men and women ranking compensation/pay, work-life balance and a sense of purpose or mission as their top measures of a successful job or career — women more so than their male col-

leagues. Whereas women trained their focus on opportunities for career advancement, supportive management and flexibility in schedule (including the ability to work from home), men were more concerned with skills improvement and on-going learning, benefits and working with a diverse team, the research found.

### Why diversity efforts fail

At the root of many gender-related misconceptions, unconscious bias leads to workplace environments that are at best unwelcoming to women and at worst downright toxic. For example, 45 percent of female respondents to the IDC survey said they believe workplace culture is geared toward men, whereas only 22 percent of their male colleagues felt the same. Thirty-three percent of female respondents said there was a lack of professional support





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—MOLLY FORD, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF GLOBAL EQUALITY PROGRAMS, SALESFORCE

for women in STEM roles vs. 18 percent of men, and 35 percent of women worried that taking time off to care for children or other family members could potentially derail their career — a worry cited by only 23 percent of male respondents to the IDC survey. Women were also twice as likely to report that their workplace promoted a culture of sexism and bias, with 41 percent attributing these and other

gender-related issues to unconscious bias, compared to only 28 percent of their male colleagues.

If organizations don't commit to con-

fronting the unconscious biases baked into organizational DNA, all the pay raises, diversity groups and efforts to fill the pipeline with more women will achieve limited results, most of which won't be sustainable over time, according to Barbara Annis, CEO and founder of the Gender Intelligence Group, a consultancy specializing in gender diversity and leadership training.

Gender diversity efforts often hit

a wall, Annis contends, because companies leap into specific programs — for example, starting a women's networking group or introducing recruiting quotas — without understanding the inherent differences between the sexes and using those differing perspectives to shift culture and inform gender diversity strategies.

“With the best of intentions, they think, ‘Let's go out and recruit women and minorities,’ making the assumption that that will fix the problem,” she says. “But they are filling the pipeline versus questioning whether they have a culture that creates the highest level of moral engagement and

satisfaction for men and women. Companies that have done well with gender diversity have done the work to transform culture.”

### Creating a **culture of diversity**

Salesforce is one of the most-cited success stories of companies tackling the gender diversity problem head on. Currently, women comprise 31.6 percent of the company's workforce, up from 30.9 percent last year, and the tech giant says it grew women in leadership positions by 28.3 percent in the same time frame. In addition to its well-publicized effort to

ensure equal pay for equal work (Salesforce has conducted four global equal pay assessments and plunked down more than \$10 million to address unexplained differences in pay between men and women over the past four years), the company has a number of programs in place to promote gender diversity. That includes the Salesforce Women's Network, an enviable 26 weeks of paid parental leave, formal allyship and mentoring, and a focus on metrics, including making diversity data available to the executive team on a monthly basis so they can monitor results and keep diversity goals top of mind, according to Molly Ford, Salesforce's senior director of global equality programs.

Beyond the impressive lineup of diversity-focused programs, Ford emphasizes that milestone movements come with sweeping cultural change — in Salesforce's case, an emphasis on transparency, deep listening and top execu-



tive commitment. At Salesforce, employees can share feedback or report concerns on an anonymous third-party hotline, and there are 12 employee resource groups providing community for underrepresented groups and their allies, helping to create a culture of diversity and inclusion, she says.

“Equality cannot be an add-on or an afterthought — it must be baked into your DNA — and this commitment to equality sets the tone from the top down,” she says. “It’s critical that leaders are engaged in order to influence major organizational change.”

### The **business impact**

**a** quorum representing diverse backgrounds, genders, and ethnic and cultural identities has been shown to discourage groupthink and spark innovation, help draw top-tier talent and make companies more productive. In contrast, lack of overall diversity is now widely recognized as being detrimental to business, creating a breeding ground for a host of issues, from missed business opportunities to future staffing gaps to being pigeonholed as a laggard or irrelevant in a period in which diversity is a

hot-button topic. According to the IDC research, 86 percent of respondents report some sort of business impact from lack of diversity. Yet there too, the survey revealed significant differences across genders. For example, 35 percent of women respondents said their firms missed out on business opportunities and new ideas because of lack of diversity — a sentiment shared by only a fifth of male respondents. Men were more likely to see diversity as a driver for future staffing gaps (17%) compared to 11 percent of women.

There are other systemic workplace problems associated with lack of diversity. For example, employees in organizations characterized by a high level of gender diversity are less likely to have experienced workplace discrimination (60%) than employees at firms ranked with low gender diversity ratios (75%). When there is workplace discrimination reported, the gender gap persists in terms of how the organization

is perceived to take action: Nearly half (48%) of males surveyed by IDC said they believe their company considers claims seriously and makes a quick and decisive response while only 32 percent of women felt the same.

Overall, the IDC survey revealed that senior management at tech companies needs to significantly ramp up diversity initiatives if they want to engage more women. While nearly half of the men surveyed gave their organizations high marks for a range of diversity benchmarks — for example, staffing diversity specialists, having diverse leadership, goal setting and measurement, ample funding and following through on promises — less than a third of women gave their organizations high marks on those same measures.

Companies that don't make the effort to address diversity as a systemic and endemic problem will have problems attracting and retaining female technologists, Annis

says. "It comes down to what causes women to quit and what encourages them to stay — pay and equality don't do that," she says. "Ultimately, the fundamental reason why women leave is because they don't feel valued in an organization and they don't see opportunity."

veyed put gender diversity goals on the corporate agenda this year compared to only 35 percent last year. Increasing the proportion of women as a percentage of the workforce was the No. 1 goal followed by increasing the proportion of new women hires and

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### Slow and steady progress

**W**hile the IDC survey sheds light on continuing challenges related to gender diversity, the good news is that progress is being made and company diversity goals and strategies are on the rise. More than half (51%) of companies sur-

achieving gender balance by a certain date. Men were far more bullish on the likelihood of the firms meeting gender diversity goals — 89 percent compared to only 65 percent of female respondents.

The number of women hired and moved into leadership positions is also on the rise. According to the IDC research, women now comprise 37 percent of all employees of



companies surveyed, up 3 percent from last year, with 34 percent of new hires now female. Women also comprise a bigger percentage of senior leadership — 24 percent this year compared to 21 percent in 2018. Once again, there were gender differences in the optimal targets: Women believe nearly half (49%) of mid-level and entry-level employees should be female with



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—KATIE SHAKUN,  
DIRECTOR OF IT, OPERATIONS, BROAD INSTITUTE

46% representation among board members, C-suite and senior management; for male respondents, the optimal number was 35 percent for women as mid-level and entry-level status and 32 percent representation in upper-level leadership and board positions.

The swells of women in senior leadership has a huge impact on engaging women, and companies with a strong bench of women

leaders are more likely to be considered trustworthy and offer equal pay. At companies with ample female leadership representation, women are also

inclined to stick around longer than a year and report higher levels of job satisfaction, the IDC survey found.

“If an organization doesn’t have women in technology leadership, it’s hard for some women — if they can’t see it, they can’t be it,” says Carol Donovan Juel, executive vice president and CIO at Synchrony. “If there aren’t enough role models, women don’t understand their career path or what they should do.”

In fact, Juel dropped off the consulting path early in her career because there were so few women partners; she wasn’t confident she could blaze a trail. That changed during her next chapter while at General Electric where three women CIOs led the technology organization during her tenure. When she stepped into the CIO role at Synchrony after it was spun off from GE, she took the reins from a woman. “I worked directly for a lot of amazing women over the last eight years of my career, and it matters,” she says. “I learned a ton about leadership, about the challenges women face, and how someone else managed and grew their career.”

## Mentoring is a must

In addition to exposure to strong female leaders, access to male mentors and champions is crucial for women to find their way. Katie Shakun, director of IT operations at Broad Institute, says she too was typically the only female in the room during her early days in IT. But a network of male colleagues made sure she was always an integral part of the group while encouraging her to take risks she might not have otherwise considered. “It was less about the gender divide and more about coming together as a team, having fun and doing our jobs well,” she says.

When a former boss announced his departure, Shakun approached

him to say she was interested in applying for his post and he was all in, she recalls. That executive became her biggest champion, prepping her for success and coaching the negotiations. “He told me, ‘Don’t let them underpay you — you have the exact same experience I had for the role, and here’s the range you should go for.’” “The information he was willing to give me and the confidence he instilled — he told me I could do the job and be successful at it, and that gave me all the confidence in the world that I wasn’t overshooting.” Shakun landed the job and ultimately continued to move up the ladder at Broad Institute, to her current position.

### Building diverse teams

At TIAA, male colleagues are encouraged to be allies and show it. This doesn’t just mean mentoring female colleagues, but also being account-

able for building diverse teams, according to Ned Carroll, senior managing director and chief data officer for the financial services company. Male managers are advised to be deliberate about how they build teams, including creat-

**35%** of women respondents said their firms missed out on business opportunities and new ideas because of lack of diversity — a sentiment shared by only a fifth of male respondents.

SOURCE: 2019 IDC WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY SURVEY

ing diverse candidate slates for hiring that are reflective of diversity in multiple facets, including gender, skill sets and even seniority. “Today, most tech leaders are male and may let familiarity influence hiring and promotion decisions,” Carroll explains. “It’s important to acknowledge that

everyone has unconscious biases and part of managing them is understanding that individuals have a predisposition to choose people who are like them or have previously been successful completing a big project.”

In fact, the IDC research confirms that professional mentoring is strongly associated with higher salaries. Both male (66%) and female (59%) respondents made ample use of mentors throughout their careers, but women are much more reliant on men for mentorship, which makes sense given

their greater numbers. In addition, men maximize their time with mentors more so than women — the IDC research found 70 percent of men meet with their mentors daily or weekly compared to only 29 percent of women who do so. But male mentors are more apt to advocate for women when there are few female senior leaders in their organization.

### Support for risk-taking

Andrea Leszek, who has been with Salesforce since its first year, says having both female and male mentors has been instrumental to her career trajectory. “Each time my career has taken a leap forward, it’s been a big risk and something I wasn’t sure I could do because I hadn’t done it before,” says Leszek, now Salesforce’s COO of technology. “Having the support of mentors and managers to encourage me to take those leaps really has been

key to my growth.”

For example, when Leszek put her hat in the ring for an enablement function for the technology team, she pitched herself as the best person for most of the job but told the hiring executive she wasn't sure about a particular function. Her mentor made her see that she underestimated her abilities and encouraged her to make the case she was fully ready for the promotion. Similarly, a different mentor was instrumental in Leszek going for her current role.

While Leszek had the drive and organizational support to climb the Salesforce corporate ladder, the IDC survey found women significantly less convinced about their senior leadership prospects, whether it's because they don't have the desire to be an executive or they feel they're not part of the boys' club. Only a quarter of women see potential to be promoted to executive management while more than half (54%) of

male respondents feel confident in their senior leadership prospects, the IDC research found. In addition, women are more likely to aspire to a board seat or a C-suite role and less likely to want to be CEO or president compared to their male counterparts (43% vs. 22%). To get there, men believe they need to develop skills in areas such as management, communications, leader-

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— JEANINE CHARLTON, SVP AND CTO, MERCHANTS FLEET

ship, decision making, delegation and presentation skills, whereas women are more likely to focus on political acumen and senior management support.

## Embracing strengths

For Jeanine Charlton, now senior vice president and CTO at Merchants Fleet, years in IT at EDS, catering to the automotive sector, taught her how to hold her own with an old boys' network. At the same time, however, she learned to recognize and embrace her inherent strengths, even if some

rate groups, thus she played up those traits and worked them to her advantage. “I was able to connect the dots that men didn't see and bring conversations together



that resulted in better outcomes,” she says. “A lot of times women in technology focus on the technical aspects of the job. For me, bringing those other skills into the work-

place helped me.”

As women such as Charlton ascend to the top leadership ranks, they are committed to nurturing up-and-coming female technologists in ways that perhaps weren't

programming in grade-school girls and teens. SUSE's Di Donato orchestrated her firm's first formal mentoring program and feels it's her responsibility to do whatever it takes to pay it forward.

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SOURCE: 2019 IDC WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY SURVEY

possible during their early career. Synchrony's Juel is a sponsor of the company's Women's Network, is actively involved in the firm's mentoring programs, and was a key orchestrator of a Synchrony partnership and summer immersion program with Girls Who Code, a nonprofit whose mission is to encourage love of STEM and

“I'm lucky to have a platform to stand on by being the first female CEO [at SUSE],” she says. “I don't owe my gratitude forward — I need to utilize my role to pave the way and encourage more women to follow.” ♦

Beth Stackpole is a frequent contributor to CIO.com.

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