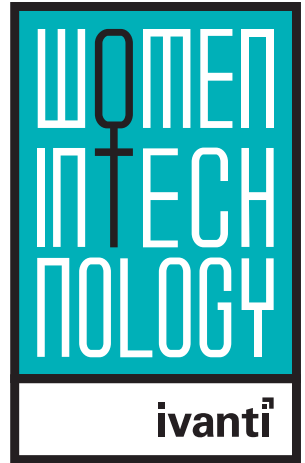# GENDER EQUALITY IN ITSM

On 21 st June 2018, SDI and Ivanti hosted a forum for service desk professionals (both male and female) to discuss their thoughts, concerns, and ideas surrounding Gender Equality in ITSM. This report will explore the conversations professionals had throughout the day.

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FOREWORD

As someone who is passionate about supporting the enhancement and empowerment of women in the tech sector, it has been both a pleasure and a privilege to have been asked to contribute to this report on gender equality in ITSM.

Women have been responsible for some of the greatest technological inventions in the modern age and yet they continue to be massively under represented within the industry – currently, women hold less than 20% of technical roles in software companies, and make up only 18% of computer science graduates, with only 16% of tech companies founded by women. Given the importance of technology and software and how central it is to modern life, this is certainly worrying. Not only have we got a leaking pipeline, but we also have a very limited pipeline! When females make up 60% of our graduates in the UK this is a shocking waste of talent. What is even more shocking than is the fact that we are facing a digital skills shortage. Currently, 72% of large companies and 49% of small and medium enterprises are suffering a technical skills gap. There is a clear mismatch between the skills we need and those the workforce is currently offering, and this is holding back the growth of many organisations. We

need more people with the digital skills, but supply is simply not keeping up with demand.

The tech industry has an image problem – there is a lack of awareness of the career opportunities available within the tech industry, we are struggling with gender stereotypes and much work needs to be done to demonstrate that this is an exciting and interesting sector to work in. This is not just a gender issue, we need to focus in on diversity in general. Recognising the value of a much wider pool of people from all backgrounds, ethnicities, religions, gender and age could go some way in addressing the challenges of the digital skills shortage. Studies have shown time and time again that the organisations that focus on diversity are far more likely to be successful. Creating a diverse workforce will increase creativity and innovation, encourage personal growth, enable you to develop your talent pool and is likely to increase employer performance.

Whilst ITSM does have a slightly better gender balance than other areas of the tech sector, such as infrastructure management, much work still needs to be done. We need to focus on the skills and competencies required to be a successful IT and ITSM

professional – that magical mix of technical understanding, business and market awareness, leadership and influence and of course communications. If we really want to attract more diversity into tech we need a different approach to recruitment, we should stop recruiting against job descriptions, essential skills and experience, instead we should look at how we can create great jobs for talented people.

The Gender Equality in ITSM event provided a valuable insight into some of the challenges faced by our sector, including some of the more negative behaviours and biases that the attendees had experienced. Despite this, the day was very positive and motivational, with lots of inspirational stories from people who are making a difference to gender equality within their own organisations and wider sector and I hope that this report will encourage each of you to adopt different approaches to recruiting and retaining a more diverse ITSM workforce.

Sally Bogg, Head or End User Service,
Leeds Beckett University.

SDI VIEW

Gender Equality is an incredibly important issue and it is crucial that, as an industry, we continue to work to improve our diversity and gender balances. This report amalgamates the thoughts and views of industry professionals who attended the Gender Equality in ITSM event, and their ideas on what organisations can do to support gender equality in their workplace.* SDI is privileged to work with service desks globally, who are dedicated to providing equal opportunities to all its employees, and are serving as excellent examples to our community.

While the event was attended by ITSM professionals, attendees also referenced STEM and Tech industries throughout the day; therefore, this report reflects these discussions. Furthermore, the event was held in the UK, therefore the discussions focused mainly on experiences, issues, and barriers facing people in the UK. However, some data referenced by speakers originated from the US, therefore there was some discussion and similarities made between UK and US Gender Equality. Discussions did not consider global Gender Equality or issues and barriers facing men and women in other countries.

Some data used by speakers and in this report came from as yet unpublished surveys which were run specifically for the event.

*These are the independent views of the people who attended the event.

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INTRODUCTION

The day was led by group discussions and feedback inspired by talks from four industry professionals. We wanted to not only inspire attendees and empower them to support gender equality in their workplace, but also to create a space to allow people to share their challenges and experiences and discuss ideas on what we can do to improve gender balance within the ITSM community.

The discussions throughout the day revolved around what issues and barriers attendees are experiencing in the workplaces regarding gender disparity, what we can do within our organisations and industry to try to improve the outlook for gender equality, and how we can encourage girls to consider a tech career by breaking the stereotype that girls are not suited to study STEM subjects.

Gender biases are not unique to the ITSM industry; the tech industry is one of the most underrepresented industries for women, alongside finance, scientific, insurance, and energy. If we work to improve this issue and empower women to help themselves in our industry, we can begin to chip away at the barriers that women face and the significant gender imbalance we are seeing.
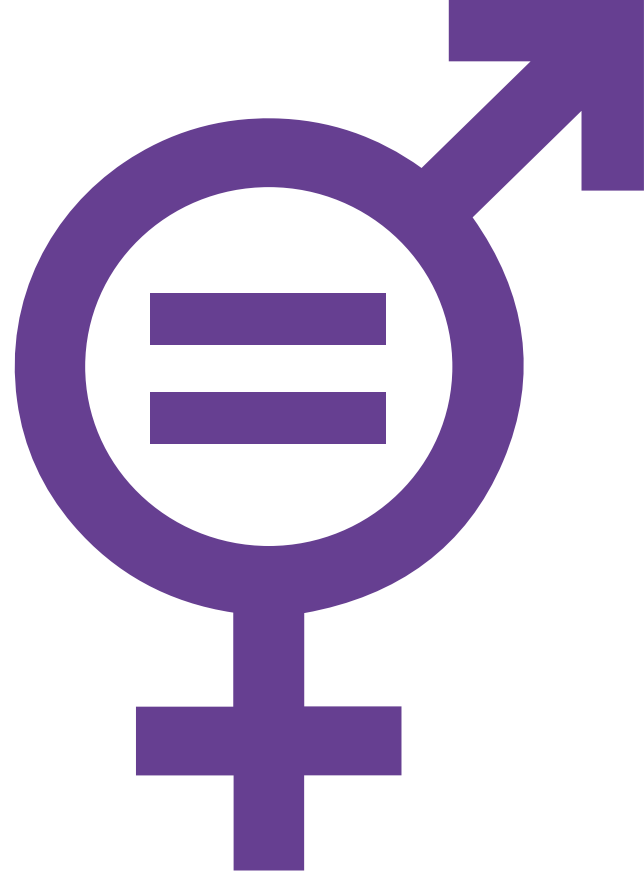
If we do not strive towards breaking the stereotypes that prevent gender equality and tap into the pool of talented women, the industry will continue to suffer a lack of a gender diverse workforce, which in turn impacts on the ability of an organisation to create solutions through a more diverse talent pool. Encouraging women to follow a tech career to benefit from the intrinsic and varied skill set a gender-balanced and diverse workforce carries with it.

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KEY BARRIERS

Attendees discussed a multitude of challenges faced by women in tech careers, many of which stem from deeply entrenched societal stereotypes and gender roles. It was pointed out that the enforcement of gender roles starts from a very young age, with toys and clothes being starkly different for girls and boys; for example, toys for girls centring around housework, beauty, or childcare, and boys' toys being themed around construction, sports, and warfare. Some attendees pointed out that even as children go through school, girls are encouraged to do more creative subjects, such as English, Art, or Home Economics, whereas boys are driven more towards Maths, Sciences, or ICT. As a result, less women are inspired from a young age to study STEM degrees or have a career in tech.

SDI research found that respondents felt that the biggest barrier to women in tech is the perception that the field is male-dominated. Considering that women make up around 17% of the UK tech industry, meaning women are often a minority in a team or workplace, this seems like a fairly justified concern. But why does a male-dominated field act as a barrier to women?
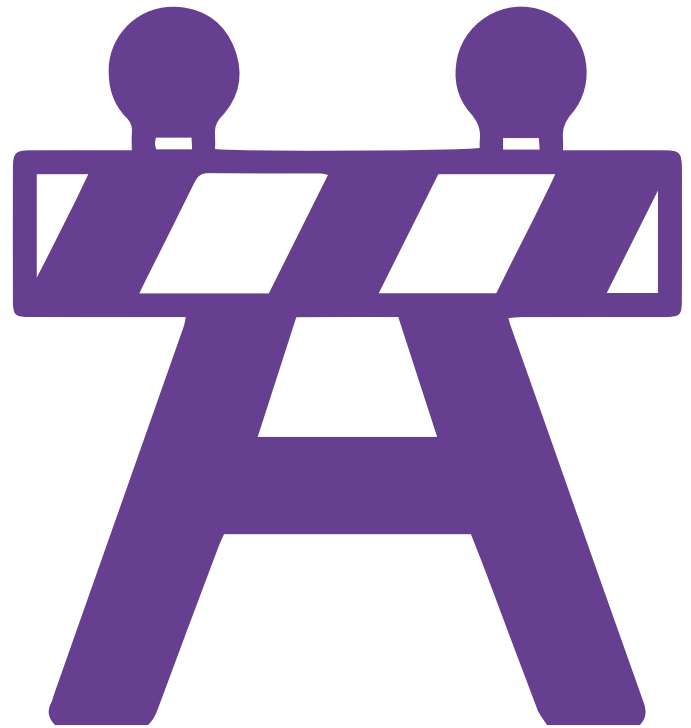
Some attendees also shared examples of how male managers and colleagues would delegate menial tasks and administration duties to the women in the office, often without realising their actions. Attendees theorised this may be due to the stereotype that admin staff are often women and are therefore better suited to the task regardless of their position within the team. This can create a divide within the team where women feel they are being treated unequally but may lack the confidence or feel uncomfortable confronting their managers about this.

Attendees also noted how challenges can stem in part from limiting self-perceptions and behavioural patterns of women themselves. For example, attendees discussed that women were less confident than men in many aspects, such as applying to jobs where they did not meet 100% of the job specification or asking for a pay rise or promotion. Some women care more than their male colleagues about how they are perceived which may prevent them from networking with colleagues in more senior roles, particularly if they are male.[1] Furthermore, 47% of women who are in a tech role did not plan a career in the tech industry. This can cause some women to suffer from "imposter syndrome", which creates the perception that they do not have the same abilities as their colleagues who studied to be in their career and may be more reserved as a result.
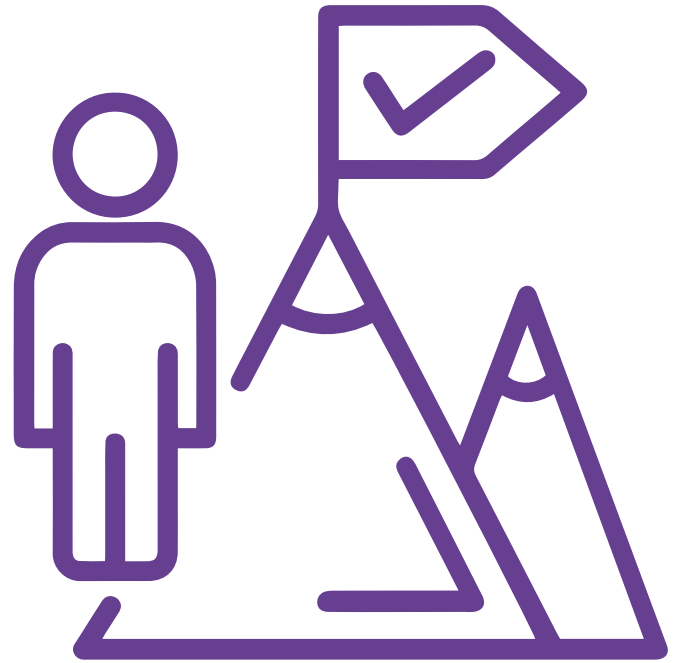
Attendees discussed some of the challenges around recruiting women into the tech sector, noting the common observation that women are simply not applying for jobs in tech. One of our speakers discussed the fact that the industry is currently facing a digital skills gap but focusing on gender equality and diversity in recruitment could be the key to closing this gap. There are several steps recruitment and hiring managers can do to improve the gender balance in their organisation.

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ENCOURAGING GIRLS TO DO STEM

One of our speakers spoke about the importance of providing guidance, support, and encouragement to girls in school to study STEM subjects and pursue a career in one of these sectors. She mentioned that most girls who will consider a STEM career have already developed an interest by 11 years old, but this interest is likely to falter at around 16 or 17; this can be for a multitude of reasons which were discussed by attendees.

SDI research found the one of the main barriers for women in technology is the lack of female role models in the industry. One of our speakers pointed out that despite women's accomplishments in tech throughout history, such as Ada Lovelace, Grace Hopper, Hedy Lamar, and the pioneering women of NASA, we are often not taught about them.

Even today, while women's accomplishments in tech are celebrated more than in the past, they are rarely as commonly known as men within the industry. Therefore, attendees discussed how women's accomplishments in STEM need to be talked about more, especially in schools. Girls also benefit from having teachers that inspire them to pursue STEM subjects and careers, and seeing women teaching these subjects can have even more of an impact. Having more visible female role models in STEM can help to encourage girls to follow in their footsteps and study to work in these areas, including IT and ultimately IT service management.

Throughout the day, there were several references to programmes such as The IT Crowd, which provide negative and false representations of what the industry is like. Young girls see these stereotypes of minimal social skills, "nerdy" culture, underrepresentation of women, and poor image with the rest of the business, and see tech as an uninspiring career path. These stereotypes and stigmas must be tackled and broken down so that young people see the tech sector as an exciting and attractive career prospect.

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Attendees also discussed the importance of giving girls opportunities to gain practical, hands-on experience in STEM subjects, as well as learning about real-life applications that demonstrate what a career in tech can involve, helping them understand that there is a creative, experimental side of STEM which may pique their interests more than theoretical learning.[2] Some attendees shared their organisations' initiatives which involve visiting schools and teaching children about their jobs and making it seem much more attainable and attractive to children of all genders.

On the topic of creativity, as previously mentioned our speakers and attendees spoke about the fact that the tech industry is viewed as practical and highly-technical. As a result, often girls do not link creativity with technology, and may therefore be put off studying these subjects for fear they would not be engaging or may be less interesting than more creative subjects.[3] We need to consider a multitude of methods to advertise our industry rather than focusing on the practical, technical side. This is how we can begin to attract a more diverse range of young people with wider skill sets and get them excited about working in a Tech or even ITSM career.

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WHAT CAN WE DO?

Tech teams can greatly benefit from having an equal gender balance in their teams; one of our speakers shared that in a study of more than 100 teams at 21 companies, teams with equal numbers of women and men were more likely to experiment, be creative, share knowledge, and fulfil tasks than teams of any other composition. Furthermore, a series of studies demonstrated that diverse teams consistently outperform even the teams comprising only the highest-ability members. Therefore, it is worth investing time and resources in hiring diverse and gender balanced teams.

From recruitment to retention, attendees discussed several tips managers, teams, and individuals can use to support gender equality. Firstly, there may be an issue whereby hiring managers, regardless of gender, be it consciously or unconsciously, favour male applicants over female applicants.[4] In this instance, attendees suggested HR departments remove names and genders from application forms, as by the time an applicant is interviewed, the hiring manager already has a good idea as to whether they are right for the role.

RECRUITMENT

We have already noted that some attendees struggle with low rates of women applying for jobs. One group discussed an article which found that the wording of job adverts is crucial, as often the tone or words used in the advert can appeal to one gender while deterring another. One suggestion for how to tackle this was to consider whether the listed requirements of a role are absolutely necessary. Studies have shown that women will typically only apply to a job if they meet every required element listed on the specification, whereas men are more likely to apply if they meet 60%.

One attendee pointed out that they once saw a job advert which called for 15 years' experience in coding Ruby when the language had been developed a few years prior. Therefore, attendees stressed that hiring managers or HR should review job descriptions and requirements to consider whether every qualification listed is relevant and necessary.

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One of our speakers noted that the service desk is often perceived as a particularly technical role, which is no longer the case. In fact, attendees noted that some roles may benefit from a candidate with more creative or practical skills, as tech skills can be learned either on the job or over time with training or shadowing. Therefore, hiring managers should consider the other skills or attributes the right candidate should have, and in turn this may lead to more women applying for tech roles.

Furthermore, attendees expressed the importance of transparency of job adverts. For example, if a role requires travelling, the advert should specify how often the applicant would be excepted to travel or how many days a week they would be away from home. With specific answers to the questions women may already be asking themselves, they may be far more likely to apply to a role knowing they can make arrangements for, as an example, childcare. One of our speakers mentioned how in the past she had been uncertain whether to apply for a role for this reason, but later found out that the benefits included free childcare and flexible working. Advertising perks that could directly benefit women with young children, as they are still overwhelmingly more likely than men to be the primary carer for children below school age.[5] This could lead to a higher rate of women applying to tech roles.

In the UK, 42% of women in employment work part-time.[6] Therefore, it is no surprise that attendees noted that hiring managers could attract more women by advertising for two part-time roles instead of one full-time role. This also lends itself to the opportunity of a job share, where two people effectively do one person's job, but because it is more flexible than a full-time role, women may be able to be more accommodating with matters such as childcare.

During the interview stage, it was also noted that it is important that interview panel has both men and women on it; women are more likely to accept a job if they know there are already other women on the team, particularly in a typically male-dominated industry. Some attendees shared that their interview process includes 15 to 20 minutes where the candidate can go and sit with the team and talk to them; this can allow the candidate to see if the company is the right fit for them and potentially give them an insight into the team's gender balance and culture.

Two attendees from the same organisation mentioned how they have a secondment initiative, whereby they bring employees from other areas of the business to sit on the service desk and get to know what it is like to work there; in fact, one of these attendees was actually hired to the service desk this way. This is another avenue to getting women to consider a career in IT support or service management, and potentially provide a platform for them to progress within this sector.

SUPPORTING CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND RETENTION

Despite the proportion of women in tech careers already being significantly low (around 17% of the UK tech sector are women), 56% of these women leave at the mid-point in their career, which is twice the leave rate for men; from this 56%, around 80% stay in employment.[7] So what can we do to support women during their careers and encourage them to stay in the industry to support a gender balance?

Attendees discussed the idea of having mentorship and sponsorship programmes for women. For example, women in more senior positions could mentor new starters or younger women who want to progress in a tech career. Not only does this show that there is opportunity for women in senior roles, which may motivate early career women and empower them to develop their careers within the tech sector, it also puts younger women or women who are new to the tech sector in the minds of more senior employees. Therefore, when a career development or advancement opportunity presents itself, employees with influence may be able to recommend their sponsored colleague to help boost their career.

We have previously pointed out that men tend to be better at networking with more senior colleagues than women are. One attendee asked how they could begin to get better at this, and our speakers suggested using mutual connections to give you a platform to network further. Attendees also discussed the idea of setting up gender equality and diversity networks or groups to connect likeminded people and influence a conversation around gender equality within your organisation. There are also groups, such as Ivanti's TheTechieGirls and SheLeadsTech, which are dedicated to increasing the representation of women and gender equality in technology; working with these group could empower women within your team and motivate them to be more confident in their abilities and take new opportunities.

Many attendees noted that while their organisation offers flexible working, this is often not without its challenges. Several of our attendees and speakers mentioned that flexible working has a certain stigma attached to it, which is both caused by and can lead to other members of staff treating flexible workers differently and creating barriers for both women and men.

However, this stigma can begin to be broken down by managers and team leaders; offering flexible working as an equal opportunity across the team and treating it as a normality rather than an inconvenience can set an example for the rest of the team and foster an environment that empowers your staff. [8]

Attendees also addressed that this stigma can also be faced by men who opt to take extended or shared paternity leave. For some, this may be a difficult topic to approach, as some men may feel stigmatised by their colleagues or managers for going against the gender stereotype of the man being the "breadwinner" and focus on a career.[9] To reach true gender equality, men and women should be offered the same parental leave and flexibility without fear of being stigmatised by their peers or managers for it.

On a similar note, attendees noted how it was important to provide career development opportunities to both men and women. The SDI survey found that nearly 70% of respondents believed that their workplace provides equal opportunities for career development, which is a positive and significant proportion. However, stories shared by attendees showed how this has not always been the case in their careers. Therefore, there is still a long way to go to reach true gender equality in this sense.

It is important to note that career development can be led by individuals themselves; staff should be able to work with managers to formulate a career development plan or simply ask to go on courses or attend industry events. Managers can facilitate this by creating an environment which empowers staff to learn and progress.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

As previously mentioned, the tech industry is facing a skills gap crisis, which will only worsen over time if we do not take steps to inspire young people with a diverse range of skills and abilities, to pursue a career in tech. Young girls and women need a mixture of hands-on experience, mentors and role models, and guidance and encouragement to get them interested in STEM and technology, and not be discouraged by stereotypes and social stigma.

There are many things tech teams can do to be more inclusive and promote gender diversity, including changing aspects of job descriptions and the recruitment process to encourage a more diverse range of applicants, and make accommodations for people who may need extra support in terms of flexibility. During employment, companies should strive to offer equal opportunities to both men and women and foster an environment that empowers women to develop themselves. There are numerous groups and programmes which are dedicated to increasing the representation of women in tech and working with these groups can help to support gender equality within the industry.
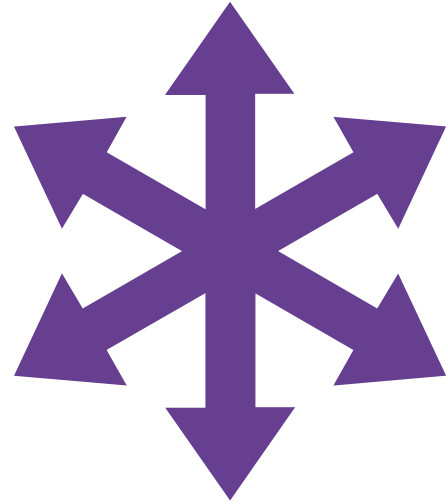
Despite the wonderful discussions that were had throughout the day, and the hope that attendees have for the future, there was a common understanding that this is not an overnight fix. Men and women alike need to work towards achieving gender equality. If gender equality is not embraced or addressed equitably by communities and organisations, we run the risk of women continuing to face barriers in their careers, including fighting against both unconscious and conscious bias and the issue not being taken seriously.

Breaking down the barriers that are hindering women's representation in the industry needs to start at a young age. It is crucial to the innovation and development of the tech industry to encourage girls and women to join and remain in a STEM career and continue to develop themselves and the industry around them.

It is crucial to the innovation and development of the ITSM industry to encourage girls to study STEM subjects and support women to thrive in tech careers. It is clear from just one day of idea-gathering that there are things we can do. We have the opportunity - as a community, as businesses, as individuals - to take action to help clear the debris left by decades of bias, misinformation and stigmatism that still obscures the road to gender equality in ITSM, and to begin to realise the rewards of that journey.

1 Studies have shown differences in the way men and women network; the basis of which tends to be that women strive to form meaningful relationships in smaller networks, whereas men are more transactional in networking. One article mentioned how men are typically more linear and are not afraid to ask for what they want, whereas women are not as comfortable being so direct.

2 This is not to suggest that girls only want creative careers, however, research and articles have expressed that a significant proportion of girls place more importance on the creative aspect of a career.

3 Research by Accenture has shown that 52% of girls stating their leading career aspiration is to be creative, and only 32% associating science and technology with being creative.

4 A study from 2014 found that when asked to hire a candidate to complete a mathematical task based on appearance alone, both male and female hiring managers chose to hire men twice as often as women.

5 The number of stay-at-home dads was increasing for years, but last year the number fell to a three-year low, with 232,000 men being out of the workplace to look after children. Of the 5.38m women out of the workforce, 1 in 3 are stay-at-home mums, totaling 1.86m.

6 Women are more likely than men to be working part-time. 42% of women in employment were working part-time in 2017, although this is down from 44-45% during the 1990s as female full-time employment has grown more quickly than part-time employment.

7 The number of working women in technology is significantly lower than most other UK work sectors, totaling just 17%. One study found that while 80% of women in the industry reported to "love their job", 56% of women leave their career 10 to 20 years in.

8 It is important to note that although stigma around flexible working was expressed as concern by several attendees, UK legislation denotes that all employees have the right to request flexible working.

9 A 2013 study found that 70% of men felt working part-time would damage their career prospects and finances.

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ABOUT SDI

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The SDI company mission is to inspire service desks to be brilliant. To achieve this mission SDI has developed a set of goals by which it aims to inspire service desks to:

Embrace: To raise the quality of service delivery by valuing best practice

Engage: To create an inspiring and engaging customer experience

Invest: To empower their teams to be inspired, take action and be better

Shine: To demonstrate and deliver exceptional business value

SDI sets the globally recognised best practice service desk standards that provide clear and measurable benchmarks for service desk operations and professionals. The standards are designed to encourage service desks to embrace and value best practice in order to raise the quality of service delivery.

For more information about SDI please visit
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