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WOMEN IN TECH
A NEW ERA

Summary of the experiences and discussions at Grey Matter and ESET's Women in Tech Roundtable event at Wembley in June 2024.

Report Curated by Grey Matter | August 2024

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Women in Tech Roundtable

Grey Matter was very fortunate to host our first Women in Tech Roundtable with ESET at their corporate box at Wembley on 21 June 2024, the first London date of Taylor Swift's Eras Tour. This document summarises the discussions we had at the event and the virtual follow-up session hosted to round off the wide range of topics the group covered.

The background and aims of the discussion

According to the **JetBrains Developer Ecosystem Survey**, only 5% of respondents were women, highlighting the gender disparity in the tech industry. To delve deeper into the experiences of women in tech and understand why there is this disparity, Grey Matter and **ESET** invited six customers and prospects from diverse backgrounds to share their insights.

It's fair to say the event was a success, with feedback from attendees finding the event fun and insightful, especially for those with less experience in the industry – they valued hearing the advice and experiences of other attendees.

As a token of appreciation for sharing their insights and experiences, attendees were treated to the spectacular Taylor Swift Eras concert.

The event aimed to:

> Understand their experiences as women in the tech industry.

> Share ideas on how the industry, as well as Grey Matter and ESET, could improve workplace equality.

> Discuss the attendees' technical and security challenges.

> Facilitate networking and learning from each other.

What Did We Discuss?

How they got into the tech industry

We discussed the different ways women have built their careers in the tech industry.

> 1/3 of the attendees fell into the industry through changes of job.

> 1/6 had a maths background, applied for various jobs, got into coding and loved it.

> 1/6 were interested in how things work, for instance, how games were developed.

> 1/3 found out by accident that they were good at tech.

Advice for their younger self and the next generation

Hindsight is a gift, we discussed key advice built from years of experience in tech and the general world of work.

> It's okay to say no/don't be afraid to be assertive.

> Balance your work and personal life.

> Find the right mentor.

Mentorship

Our attendees universally sited mentorship as being a major positive influence in supporting their career development, and many have gone on to be mentors themselves.

> Some already are mentors and support women and/or men with advice.

> Some have had mentors and have found them very useful and supportive.

> One noted how it is important to have both a male and a female mentor – to learn different approaches and perspectives.

In addition to or instead of finding a mentor within your own organisation, there are many external mentorship schemes available where you can gain valuable support and experience, including:

> **Women in Tech UK mentorships**
> **Women in Tech mentoring program**
> **TechHer**

Imposter syndrome

All genders experience imposter syndrome throughout the workplace. However, it is more likely to be experienced by women. For instance, a report by The Executive Development Network (EDN) found that 54% of those who suffer from it are women, and only 38% percentage of men admitted to experiencing imposter syndrome.

> There was a general feeling among the attendees that as a minority gender working in technology roles, they must prove themselves more.

> When pitching a project to a manager, it was noted that women were more likely to vocalise their ideas once they have a thorough thought-out plan compared to their male peers.

> One attendee said she does not experience imposter syndrome as she has the confidence to know she works hard and deserves to be where she is. She also grew up with brothers, which may have influenced this.

Maternity leave and return to work

Maternity leave is one of the single biggest issues that can impact women in the workplace, regardless of the industry they work in. For instance, a 2023 report by the charity **Pregnant Then Screwed** found that 52% of mothers said they faced some form of discrimination when pregnant, on maternity leave or when they returned.

Collectively our group found they were faced with the following issues:

> Stigma to keep it a secret as long as possible.

> Concern over job security when they return for those in male-dominated workplaces – feeling like they must prove themselves more.

> Assumptions that women will stay at home/sacrifice career to look after their children and the home are still prevalent among peers.

> Concerns over managing childcare and finances.

Flexible working

The **Pregnant Then Screwed** report also found that 7% of women lost their job through redundancy, dismissal, or feeling forced to leave due to a flexible working request being declined or due to health and safety issues.

The women in our group reported the positive impacts of their employers' flexible working policies and how the nature of the IT industry supports it.

> Flexible and hybrid working has brought an opportunity for shared childcare responsibilities between genders, and for women coming back to work from maternity leave.

> This makes managing a healthy work/life balance much easier, improving their mental and physical wellbeing.

> You can write code at any time of the day from home.

52% of mothers said they faced some form of discrimination when pregnant, on maternity leave or when they returned.

Inspirational women and leaders

We discussed where attendees have found inspirational women and leaders and how they have become inspirational leaders themselves.

> One has a female CEO at their company.

> 50% of the attendees are in leadership roles themselves.

> Another has a female Tech VP at her place of work – the only woman on the board. She makes herself visible in the workplace and will carve out time to sit with employees to have a chat or check in with them.

We also touched on the subject of startups where one attendee also noted how she has found that female-led tech startups tend to be more successful than male-led startups. There is a lot of research that supports this statement in the **Flat6Labs** blog that highlights that while female-led companies generate 35% more ROI, they find themselves underfunded.

Signs of a good leader

We wanted to understand the criteria of what makes a good leader, regardless of gender, and what inspires teams to achieve. Here are some of the use cases they gave:

> Leading by example.

> Knowing your team.

> Giving people a hand up and not a handout.

> Recognising people's talent and abilities.

We plan to use this advice ourselves and recommend others to do so. It's important to gain feedback from your teams on how you can improve the leadership and enhance the team.

Experiences of gender gaps and discrimination

One of the areas of the female experience in the tech industry and the general workplace that sometimes hits the headlines is the unfairness and discrimination experienced. The **Women in Tech organisation** found that "Technology remains one of the sectors with the biggest gender pay gap, currently standing at 16% compared to the national average of 11.6%".

Unfortunately, every group member could share negative personal or observed experiences of inequalities in pay or discrimination by peers. For instance:

> One found out that a male in a lower position to her was paid more than her. After discussions with managers, this was changed.

> "Lad culture" is still experienced in some workplaces, leading to feelings of unease and exclusion. This goes beyond what would be classed as harmless "banter".

Tech challenges and trends they are concerned about or looking into

We took a break from focusing on gender-related topics and wanted to gain more general technological insights to understand the challenges and trends they are facing and aware of.

> Most of the attendees were concerned about cyber security:
>   - Working to comply with frameworks like Cyber Essentials.
>   - Protecting their businesses from the ever-growing complexity of cyber-attacks.
>   - The cost of securing a business.

> Some are interested in the use of digital twins, particularly in the healthcare sector.

> Some are interested in predictive analytics (AI) and using AI as a tool, not a replacement.

> Other trends they are seeing:
>   - Quantum computing
>   - Big data
>   - Self-driving cars

It's not surprising to see that cyber security is one of the main challenges. A report by the **UK Government** found that 50% of businesses have experienced a breach or an attack in the last 12 months, with the most common breach being phishing. Fortunately, companies like ESET and the other cyber security vendors that Grey Matter works with can offer multi-layered protection

Steps businesses can take to make the workplace more inclusive for women in tech

Whether you're in a leadership position or not, there are ways you can influence change in your business to create greater inclusivity for women.

Here are some of the ways we discussed how individuals and organisations can make a difference:

> Ensure men attend diversity events.

> Get more women on panel discussions to ensure a diverse range of viewpoints.

> Hire for potential not just past performance – however, we need to be careful of diversity vs skill hire (positive discrimination).

> Encourage women to go for roles they don't have the confidence to believe they will get.

> Better maternity and back to work policies. For instance, one of the attendee's workplaces offers 50% workload for the first three months back, with 100% pay.

> Set up or improve mentorship and apprenticeship programmes.

> Look at recruitment – make sure there is not a gender bias for certain roles.

> Look at the gender pay gap for similar roles – implement banded wages, objective criteria for wage discussions, transparency and parity.

> Build women's confidence, even with small wins.

> Point out when situations are not right and stop the bias/unfairness.

Have you experienced something similar to the topics mentioned in this report, or perhaps different?

Share your thoughts and experiences with us.
Email info@greymatter.com

Video Highlights

Watch the highlights from the event and see some staggering facts about women and the tech industry.

Final Comments

As you can see, we covered many topics; despite there being improvements in the industry with mentorship, flexible working, more women in leadership roles and successful female-led startups, there is still plenty more that needs to be done to make the tech industry a more inclusive and equal workplace. Especially in areas such as maternity leave and return to work, reducing the number of women who experience imposter syndrome, and gender pay gaps.

We advise speaking with your own team to get feedback about their own experiences. Implement new processes to stop inequality and explore ways that you can help encourage more women to get into and thrive in the tech industry.

We would like to extend a massive thank you again to **ESET** for letting us use their incredible space at Wembley to host this very insightful and inspiring session. We're proud to be an ESET Platinum Partner. ESET offers a range of IT security software and services including endpoint security, encryption, DNS and cloud security, authentication and sandbox technology.

As security was mentioned as one of the challenges faced by our attendees, note that Grey Matter has a team of cyber security experts to support you with all your security needs – including **Cyber Essentials** and getting the controls in place for other security **frameworks**; we can advise on the best **solutions** (like ESET) and offer great deals.

Contact us via the details below if you'd like to register your interest for our next ESET or Women in Tech event. View our other upcoming events **here**.

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