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Tech Experience: Women's Stepping Stone to the Corporate Boardroom?

It is well known that there are not enough women in corporate boardrooms. For example, only one in five board members at S&P companies are women.* But new Accenture research suggests an opportunity: Many women who have succeeded in getting on boards have professional technology experience to propel them.

Take a look at the rosters of corporate boards of leading companies—from Disney to General Motors to Walmart—and you'll find the names of dozens of women with tech experience. In fact, our research found that female members of corporate boards are nearly twice as likely as their male colleagues to have professional technology experience.

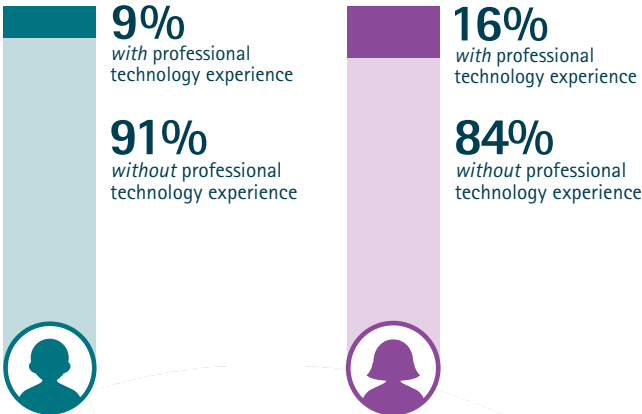
While there is a general lack of tech experience—among women and men alike—in boardrooms around the world in this digital era, the findings point to the opportunity that women with professional technology experience have to join corporate boards.

More Women than Men with Tech Experience on Corporate Boards

To understand the gender composition of corporate boards and the role technology plays in the careers of female board members, Accenture examined women's representation on the boards of 518 *Forbes* Global 2000 companies in 39 countries. The research found that while only 10 percent of board members overall have professional technology experience, the percentage of female board members with tech experience—at 16 percent—greatly exceeds that of male board members with tech experience, at 9 percent.

And this phenomenon isn't isolated in one or two countries. Of the 10 most represented countries in our study—the United States, Japan, Germany, China, France, the United Kingdom, Spain, Canada, the Netherlands and Australia—seven exhibited similar results; only Spain, Canada and China had higher percentages of male directors with technology backgrounds.

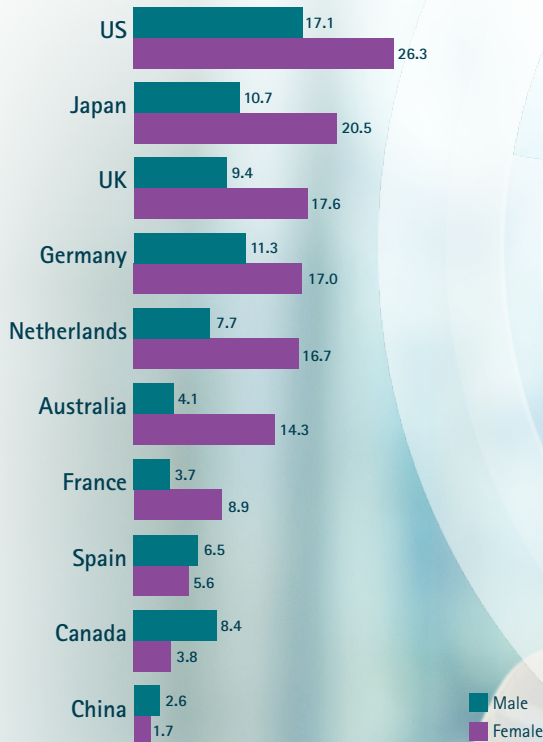
Male and Female Board Members with Professional Tech Experience



Source: Accenture Research based on S&P Capital IQ data and company websites



Board Members with Professional Tech Experience - by Country (%)



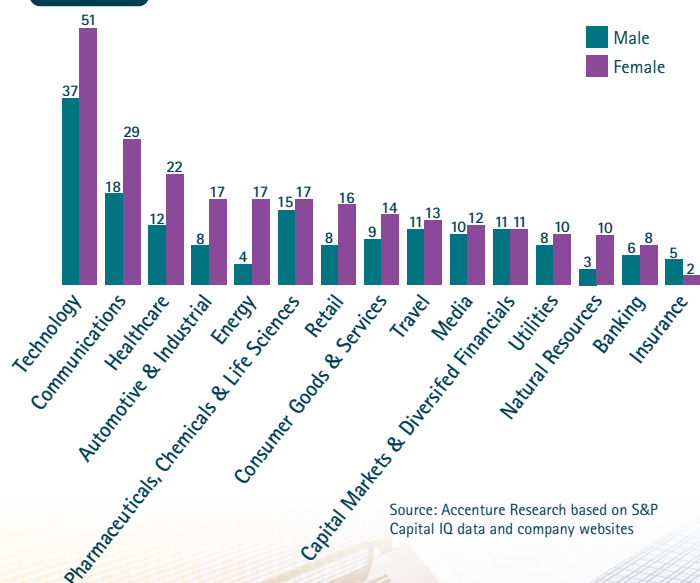
Source: Accenture Research based on S&P Capital IQ data and company websites



The research also found notable differences among industries. Of the 15 industries included in our research, the percentage of women with technology experience on corporate boards is, not surprisingly, highest in the technology industry, at 51 percent. Communications ranks second, at 29 percent, followed by healthcare, at 22 percent. Automotive and industrial; energy; and pharmaceuticals, chemicals & life sciences follow at 17 percent each. At the bottom of the list are banking and insurance, at 8 percent and 2 percent, respectively. In all but two industry sectors—capital markets & diversified financials, and insurance (both part of the financial services sector)—the percentage of women with technology experience exceeds the number of men with technology experience.



Board Members with Professional Tech Experience – by Industry (%)



Women's Opportunity

These findings suggest that at least at the highest levels, companies put a premium on female executives with technology experience. Why is that?

One reason might be that companies increasingly recognize that, without greater technology knowledge guiding strategy and operations, they're going to have trouble anticipating the forces shaping their industries. Today, digital is transforming everything, rendering every business—regardless of industry—a digital business. Because many of the biggest challenges now confronting business are interconnected with technology, directors need a robust understanding of technology. As companies seek to achieve gender balance on their boards, professional technology experience is a differentiator for women.

These findings complement those of a recent Accenture study about women in the workplace and digital fluency—the extent to which people embrace and use digital technologies to become more knowledgeable, connected and effective. That research, entitled [Getting to Equal: How Digital is Helping Close the Gender Gap at Work](#), found that digital fluency is helping to close the gender gap and level the playing field for women in the workplace.

Specifically, the research found that digital fluency acts as an accelerant in every stage of a woman's career. Within the workplace, men and women alike are gaining from digital, but women seem to be getting more value from it. One reason is that flexibility, imparted by technology, appears to go a long way in helping women break down barriers to finding work and staying employed. The study found that if governments and businesses can double the speed at which women become frequent users of technology, we could reach gender equality in the workplace 25 years sooner in developed nations and 40 years sooner in developing nations. That's a whole generation, or more, of young women who would no longer be shut out of an equal workplace.

Value In Professional Tech Experience

With technology disrupting virtually every industry in every country around the world, it's clear that more and more jobs—up to and including the board level—will require technology skills. This should offer extraordinary opportunities for people, regardless of gender, who have technology and related skills. Yet the number of women

pursuing careers in science, technology, engineering and math is on the decline. For example, in 1985, 37 percent of computer science degrees went to women. Today that number has dropped to 18 percent, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

The non-profit Girls Who Code is a great example of an organization that is working to show high school girls how exciting, compelling and engaging coding and technology can be. This group aims to provide computer science education and exposure to 1 million young women by 2020. Private-sector engagement with organizations like Girls Who Code, and with colleges and universities, is essential for showing women what skills the market needs.

As the importance of technology in nearly every area and level of business continues to skyrocket, a solid background in technology can be an important stepping stone for women looking to get ahead in the corporate world. As corporate boards look to close two gaps—gender and technology—women with professional tech experience will prove to be attractive candidates.

Methodology

Accenture examined women's representation on the boards of 518 *Forbes* Global 2000 companies in 39 countries across Europe, Asia, North America, South America and Australia. In total, 7,188 board of director profiles, including those of 1,166 female directors, were screened. The research covered 15 industry sectors: automotive & industrial; banking; insurance; capital markets & diversified financials; communications; consumer goods & services; energy; healthcare; media; natural resources; pharmaceuticals, chemicals & life sciences; retail; technology; travel; and utilities. For the purpose of the research, professional technology experience was defined as holding a key technology position—such as serving as a chief technology officer, chief information officer or chief digital officer—at their current company or at a previous company, or having senior responsibility at a technology firm. The research was conducted between February and April 2016.

About Accenture

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