The Remote Project

Understanding the Impact of Remote Work

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WIT ops

Changing the Paradigm for Women in Tech

Companies are redesigning the future of work

What can we learn from remote work during the Pandemic?
And if it matters for women?

The Remote Project Research

Data from 51 people world-wide organized by affinity diagraming

Survey: Open ended questions in Valuing & Jerk Survey end of June 2020

- 35 world-wide respondents, mainly US and Europe
- Including multiple ages, genders and ethnicities

Field Research, a deeper dive into understanding the experiences

- 16 Field interviews – Nov 2020 to April 2021
  - 14 Women and 2 men primarily in the US,
- Population: 25-55 of diverse race, ethnicity, marital and family status
- Developers, UX researchers, designers, product managers, technical managers, content manager and other technical roles

Revealing consistent themes across data sets

Driving insight into teamwork and individual experience

Literature: Key issues in remote work

Remote work impacts team collaboration

- Less cohesion and connection – less dynamic collaboration
  - But identifying strongly with the team increases cohesion & quality of work & reduces stereotyping.
- Remote teams with clear goals, roles, structured processes, and leadership are more productive

All remote technology reduces interpersonal cues

- Increasing miscommunication and stereotyping
  - More likely to fall back on identity characteristics instead of the unique person
- Self-perception on video increases self-awareness
  - May reduce stereotyping because we want to be our best selves

Findings before the Pandemic

Thanks to our remote team!

Professional volunteers

- Nina Schloss – Project manager
- Emily Carlson
- Bradlee Sutherland
- Solace Francine Arevalo - Sabado
- Aditi Shankar

UMD student volunteers

- Kelly Hoffman
- Kinny (Yuanqi) Chen
- Ruiqi Li

All work at WITops is performed by volunteers – Join us!

Findings and Implications

**Connection and Work Quality
Running Ourselves
Interpersonal Dynamics**

Connection and Work Quality

We need to connect socially

Before when we sat together, we created a sense of community
- Sharing life, taking a walk, coffee, team socializing was easy and built-in

Now interactions are highly structured and planned
- Chat before meetings isn't the same as individuals talking before and after meetings
- Social only meet-ups (lunch, coffee hour, etc) or individual outreach peter out
- Large social events don't help individuals get to know each other

Chit-chat in meetings can help us feel connected
- I learn your culture, about your home life, interests, pets…
- But chat can overtake the meeting

But only 1-1 interactions help me get to know you for real
- So that I'm comfortable reaching out to you for work
- But setting up meetings just to chat doesn't feel like real work

Especially hard for new hires at any level to build connection

Work suffers without talk outside of meetings

Lost informal interaction = Lost collaboration & info exchange

We didn't know that spontaneous informal interaction was critical to work

- Sitting together led to helping each other with the work
- Dropping-in might start with chit-chat but leads into work collaboration
- We gave light touch nags, learned what related groups are doing, realign projects...

Slack/chat tries to replace it

- I can ask a quick question, see who is busy, set up a 1-1...
- If I know the people and everyone is on it, we can do some "discussion"

But doesn't really – productivity, quality, cohesion is lost

- Setting up a meeting to chat or just be in touch is awkward
- So, we can over-structure getting an answer (ticket system)
- And fail to ask for help and go it alone

The result: We can be isolated, angry, and out of the loop

I need to know your style to work effectively

Face-to-face interaction helps me learn who you really are
- If I knew you before I can collaborate remotely
- If I'm new to the team, or you are a new leader, I need to connect personally

Face-to-face interactions used to help remote teams get to know each other
- Global teams met face to face
  - Learning each other's culture, face, and issues – now we can't
- Remote group meetings give a feel for the team, but don't help me connect to individuals

Working 1-1 helps me learn your style and get the work done
- It's easier to ask and get answers to questions
- I'm hesitant to ask in a group setting or "office hours"
- We can mix the personal and the work – we develop real relationships

New hires especially need to know and be known by the team

Remote Work is Undermining

Quality Work
Group Cohesion
Sense of Belonging
Work Critical Communication
New Hire Integration

Running Ourselves

We run the same meetings we always did

Status, review, brainstorm, agile, training

Managers have the same responsibilities & challenges

Career growth, onboarding, support, interpersonal interventions

But now we do it all remote

Structured meetings increase success

We use collaborative tools to make the meetings work

We spend our days "zooming" from meeting to meeting
- Time zones dictate when we start and end
- No time is "scheduled" to chat before or after – it's back-to-back

But meetings can feel time-wasting and long
- Irrelevant to me, tech glitches, listening for hours

We need to keep the meeting focused
- Without an agenda and a clear process, the meeting can devolve
- We prioritize what we will talk about to fit the time

We share a document that guides the discussion
- We all see the same thing at the same time – if not we get confused
- We can capture our decisions and commitments – Gdocs, agile tools

More structure is good for women & meeting interactions

We monitor participation in groups

We take turns to know who speaks next – or it's chaos
- Round Robin – a randomizer to stop people from talking over each other
- Or the manager or meeting owner calls on people

We have to manage chattiness and keep the talk focused
- But can worry about being polite

We monitor if you are paying attention when I talk
- If you ask questions, you are – if I hear key clicks with camera off, you're multi-tasking

We change how we talk in meetings – our participation is public
- We talk more to show we are contributing
- Or to work out ideas that we would have figured out before the meeting
- Or we don't speak up and lose needed clarification

Remote requires increased structure to ensure smooth interaction

We collaborate to get the work done

Simultaneous input keeps us more engaged

We work in pairs or small groups over a collaborative artifact
- We co-design an organization, a design, a slideshow...
- We each listen and come to a shared solution
  - If I'm senior I need to give you space to share your perspective
- The collaborative tool ensures we document our choices

We run large collaborative group meetings
- Training, brainstorming, design critique
- Works when people are either all remote or all in-person
- And I can't see the whole audience when I'm presenting

Collaborative whiteboards make the work work – but it's an adjustment
- We mimic paper processes
- Content can be hard to follow if not visually

Remote collaborative tools will continue to be used

We Onboard New Hires

It's the same challenge but now it's a remote challenge

New hires working remote need support
- Quick access to people who can help
- With questions about the work
- To understand the culture
- To coach and encourage
- To advocate for career and for needed information

They may not reach out – especially when remote
- They worry about bothering people
- They feel self-conscious

They can feel isolated and like an outsider
- They need the manager & team to reach out 1-1 frequently

Translate the Team Onboarding Checklist to remote

Remote needs more structure
Clear goals, roles, procedures, interaction rules

Remote needs a focusing artifact
With clear input & collaboration process

It's just good meeting process
and good for diverse teams

Next, if all go remote when any are remote
it will equalize power and ensure being heard

Interpersonal Dynamics

Remote or F2F I react to how I'm treated

Overall valuing & jerk behavior is the same when remote

Survey Stats do not indicate major changes
- "I observed more valuing (or jerk) behaviors since remote…"
- Valuing: 31% disagree and 46% partly agree, partly disagree
- Jerk: 65% disagree, 26% partly agree, partly disagree

People look for valuing– just like F2F
- Manager support, coach, and champion me, my work, my career
- Co-workers follow my lead and ask questions when I present
- You listen to me and know me personally – you take time with me

We can increase valuing when remote – with emoji's and notes
- It's about the team culture

See **Valuing & Jerk Project** results for key behaviors

How I'm treated can devalue & alienate

Jerks before are still jerks when remote

Jerk behavior is perceived the same – F2F or remote
- Don't talk in a harsh tone or belittle other's skills
- Don't devalue my capability, my job, or what I ask you to do
- If you don't listen to my ideas, I feel diminished

With video off criticism can come out of nowhere
- Harsh, loud, and rejecting

We deal with negative interactions to minimize or stop them
- A better meeting process, facilitation, or a tool (Retrium) can minimize personal attacks
- Colleagues support me: commiserating, texts of support, & intervening
- I ask my manager to intervene – you may not like it, but you stop

Whether F2F or remote you have to deal with jerk behavior

Video on and off has an impact

Video's visual cues help interpret interactions more accurately

Video-on helps interpersonal dynamics
- Connect with our team and with new hires
- See reactions to proposed ideas and presentations
- Know when to intervene when interactions are getting too tense

Video-on may equalize power and help me speak up
- Body language isn't as powerful, everyone is seen equally, so I feel safer

But we turn video off
- Global teams know each other & are used to working that way if meetings are structured
- To respect privacy and reduce demand on appearance – sometimes it's policy
- We follow the lead of managers of when video off is OK

Video-on helps team cohesion & communication

Clear procedures
Rules of engagement
Culture of professionalism
Commitment to give value

Mitigate bad behavior

Personal Growth: Finding my voice

Remote emphasizes the need to speak up – women take it on

Learning to interrupt to control meetings – it's not rude
- I had to learn that as Product Owner I own the flow of the meeting

Standing up for work I'm asked to do
- I'm the top tier on the help desk – finally I'm saying no to work that isn't mine
- I got more confidence when remote

Speaking my ideas instead of going along
- After more experienced others shared their idea, I just agreed
- Now I'm learning I have to understand the whole problem and take a stand

Participating in the meeting – Speaking up
- You asked me to speak up but then the VP shut me down!

Coaching & challenging WIT with support is still the job!

Remote work changes interpersonal skill demands

Take the opportunity to become a more valuing professional culture

The Remote Project Conclusions

Remote work challenges work culture

The draw of being remote is strong
- No commute means more time for family or self-care
- Remote meetings that do not require participation encourage multitasking
  - Which gets home chores, dog walking, etc done while "listening"
- Remote work means people can live where they want

But remote work undermines the power of connection at work
- Social connection, networking, information exchange, and subtle influence
- Having to deliberately reach out for these things discourages it
  - Vs dropping in, before and after meeting chat, bumping in at coffee or even restroom

And losing team cohesion reduces work quality
- F2F is essential but it doesn't need to be everyday
- And back-to-back meetings of any type make talk and dropping in hard

We proved tech can be family friendly – Don't lose it

WITops interventions work for remote

Help diverse teams & builds confidence and success for all workers

Remote needs more structure in every meeting interaction
- Clear goals, agenda, procedures, with central focusing artifact, and ways to interact so all are heard
- Use a structured critique process – with cameras on

New Hires need the same things when remote but even more so
- Use the Team Onboarding Checklist guide managing new hires

Manage the interpersonal – An opportunity for change
- Consider more video during meetings – even for global teams
- Learn about the valuing and jerk behaviors – use the character posters and workshop
- Create a Team Manifesto and rules of engagement

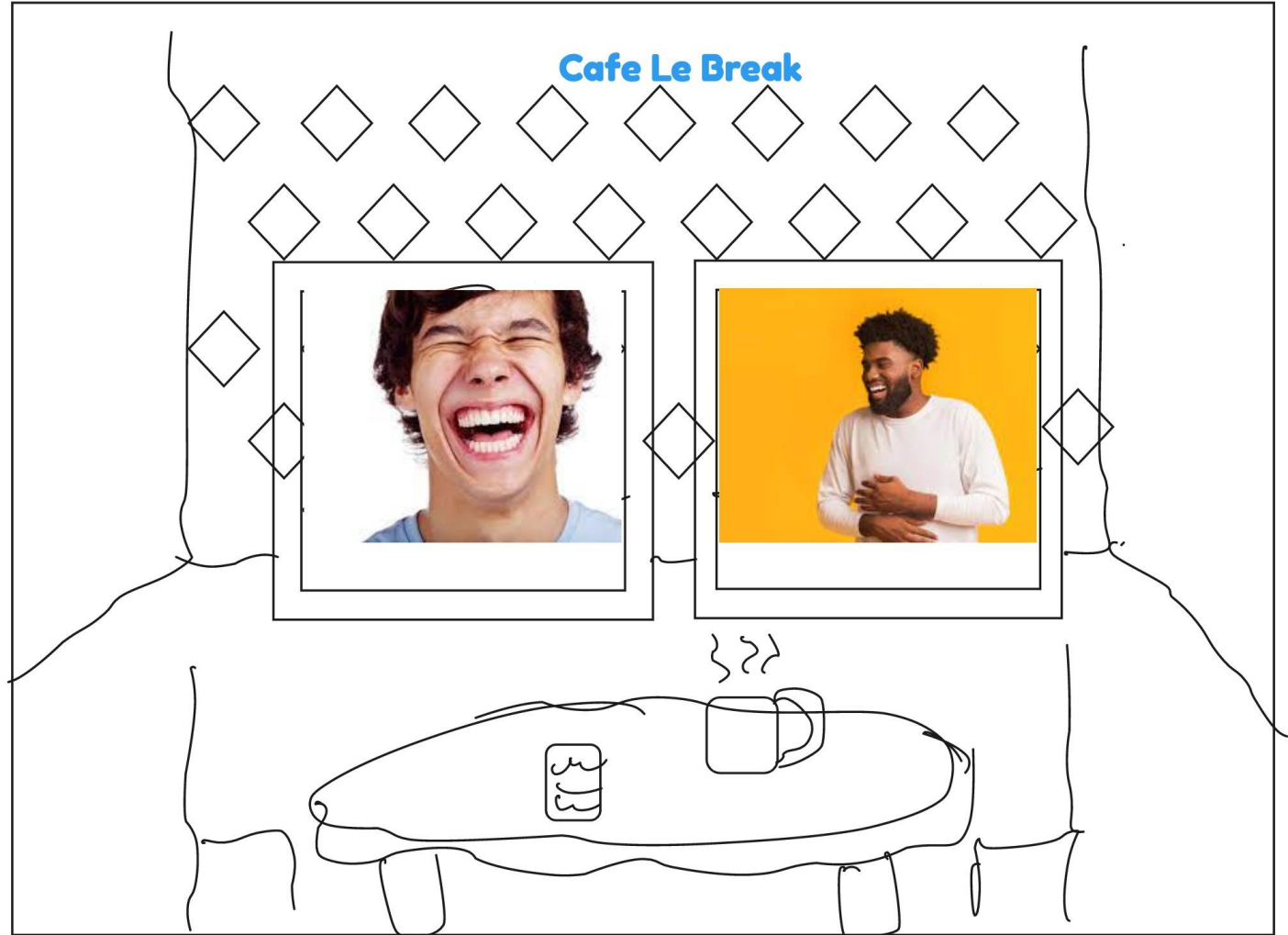Help people find their voice but support them when they try
- Camera-on helps everyone gage reactions to what they say and their work

Examine your camera on vs off policy

It's a remote imperative

Bring back 1-1 and drop in experiences

Mitigate loss of communication, information, connection, and quality

Cafe Le Break

Can opt for using Cafe Le Break's wallpaper as a background for privacy (the diamonds) or use their own home background

miro

It's a living experiment!

Do your own research
with these issues in mind!

Join Us!

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Videos & Livestreams
- https://www.witops.org/videos/

Use our resources
- Free book chapter
- Team Onboarding Checklist
- Valuing & Jerk Characters Posters
- Batman Jar
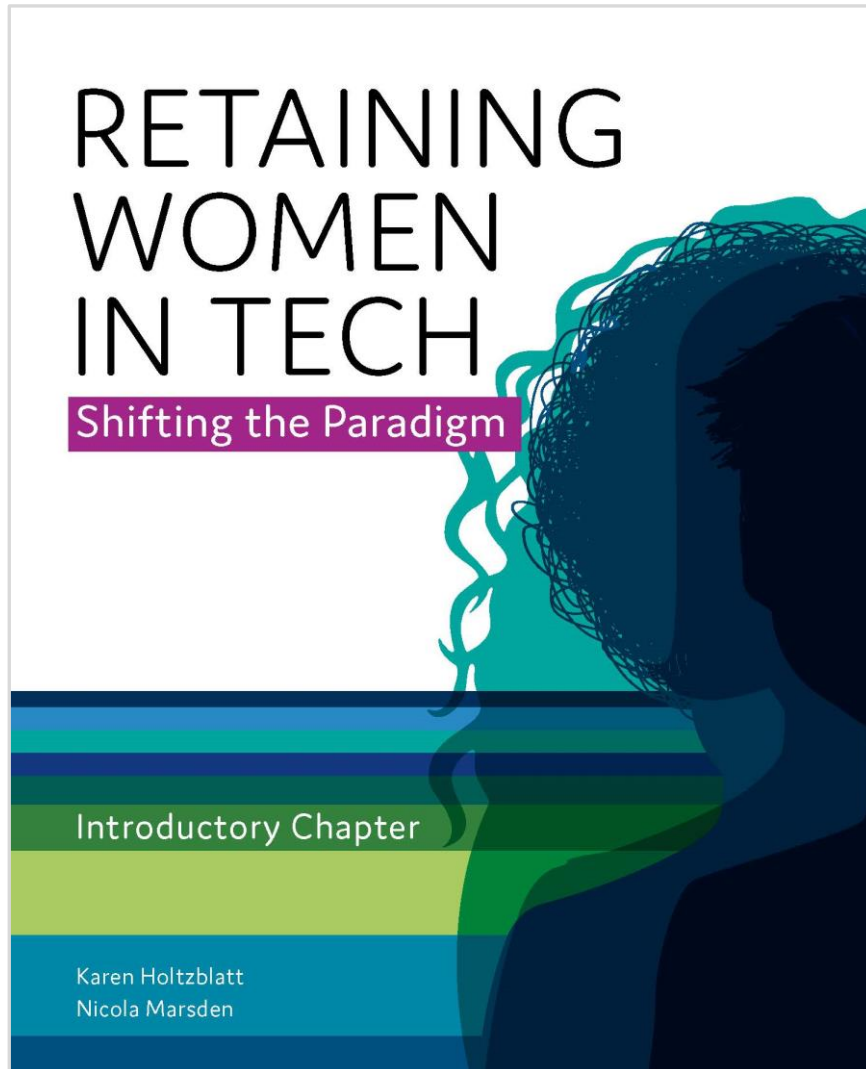- Career Power board game

Services to help you
- Talks, workshops, consulting

Volunteer!
- Sign-up to help

**Changing the Paradigm
for Women in Tech**

Get a sneak peek! Free!

RETAINING WOMEN IN TECH
Shifting the Paradigm

Introductory Chapter

Karen Holtzblatt
Nicola Marsden

Karen Holtzblatt and Nicola Marsden

Why can't tech companies retain women?

How can companies transform their work culture?

Women in tech leave the field twice as often as men Women report more stereotyping, hostility, and feelings of not belonging – even after 40 years of awareness.

Learn

Understand our perspective and findings gleaned from our deep dive research into the work lives of WIT & the literature.

Try

Try our tested interventions, practical techniques for onboarding new hires, work practices, interpersonal dynamics, & nudging change.

Manage

Shift how you manage diverse teams. Get the benefits of diversity to produce innovative results while women thrive.

Introductory Chapter: http://www.morganclaypoolpublishers.com/womenintech/