

Once named one of the 100 most powerful women in Canada and later working in software development in Silicon Valley, Jane Polak Scowcroft brought her international technology career back to Australia in 2013.

And while some would say Townsville, where Polak Scowcroft works with James Cook University, is an unlikely location for the 27-year-old to end up, she's more than happy to bring a bit of "positive disruption" to her new home.

"One of the areas I enjoy the most in my work is bringing my scrappy startup mentality to the university space. It creates some nice 'positive disruption'," she says.

Polak Scowcroft spent more than a decade working in Canada and the United States, including on Canada's national board of Engineers Without Borders and in a development capacity with start-up, Meltwater.

Now, as manager of Web and Social Media at James Cook University, she's leading a team on the development of the university's digital marketing strategy, including new mobile applications and its internal and external websites. The team's completely overhauling the social media strategy of the university and getting comfortable with the 'startup mentality' of using trial and error to get ahead.

"I tell my staff that if they're going to fail, to fail quickly," the finalist in the NAB Women's Agenda Leadership Awards tells Women's Agenda. "I'd prefer you fail quickly and learn rather than sit on a project and never progress it. And if you come to work bored, then I'm failing as a leader!"

Polak Scowcroft finds working with a team that's 80% female a big change from the environments she's previously been in. "I went from an all female high school into computer engineering, and then into an all-male environment in Silicon Valley where the ratio is totally out of whack," she says.

"There are still a lot of challenges around the perception of women in technology. I was the only female who graduated from computer engineering in my year."

As such, Polak Scowcroft's also keen to see a little more 'positive disruption' regarding the role of women in IT and business. Pointing to Facebook's COO Sheryl Sandberg's courage on writing Lean In despite receiving plenty of criticism for her ideas on what women can do to better promote themselves at work, Polak Scowcroft believes we shouldn't be afraid to openly challenge current gender norms and stereotypes regarding what men and women can do with a career.

And when it comes to success, Polak Scowcroft's comfortable knowing that in the technology space at least, what matters today could be obsolete tomorrow. "I think part of success is being ok with it being a moving target. At the end of the day today, what I've accomplished will be different to what I accomplish tomorrow. Success is being ok with uncertainty."