

Gender and ICT Professions Career Management for Women

Gender and ICT Professions Workshop
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What motivates organisations to tackle gender inequality?

- The need to attract women - small pool of applicants for jobs
- The desire to promote women - bottlenecks of talent
- Difficulties in retaining women - the flight from organisations

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Attracting women

There is a continuing lack of women applicants because:

- there is a small pool of qualified women,
- they are unaware of the job possibilities,
- many are put off by the image of computing,
- others are discouraged by the image (and sometimes the reality) of the working conditions

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“[Girls] don’t get a chance to get interested in what is going on, so that when they come to do A levels and degrees it is just not on their radar as a potential career. You don’t see a lot of women with a technical background.

Once people understand what is involved, then they get interested. But when you are looking at CVs, you are not getting a massive pool.”

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Enduring stereotypes of nerds

The black-boxing of IT professions

“When you talk to women, going out to universities or whatever, and say ‘How do you envisage the work? What might my job be about?’, they say ‘You sit in front of a computer all day. You probably wouldn’t talk to anyone.’ They have this beard and sandals and men image. They don’t actually think about what we do.”

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What HR managers do

“Developing the pipeline”:

- Awareness programmes (Daughters to Work)
- Access programmes (IBM’s EXCITE camp)
- Innovative advertising
- Relax selection criteria where possible

“I have said off the record to [the recruitment agencies], ‘If you have got any women there who are not dead on our spec, let me see what sort of CVs they have.’ But they really have very few women. Very few women apply for this kind of work.”

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Progressing within organisations

- what do women say?

- Progression = move into management.
- Some want to stay in 'hands-on IT' work, but others like the mixture of technical & management tasks
- 'Boy's clubs' still make men (or women without children) more visible for promotion
- Long working hours can be a problem

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Progressing within organisations

- what do HR managers say?

- Women select themselves out
- Companies with gender equality programmes provide support systems to help them progress. Examples: mentoring, networking
- Companies offer various incentives to attract and retain women in senior technical jobs (examples: flexible working, career breaks). Some complain that small pool makes this difficult

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Working outside organisations

- Problem of senior women leaving organisations
- Redundancies and the downturn in the market - is this the right time to attract women into IT?

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Maximising Opportunities ...

- Catching girls young - are information and role models enough?
- Drawing in non-IT workers
- Drawing in workers of all ages
- Making girls and women visible but not vulnerable - noticed because they are women
- Advantages for women of being part of a large organisation

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... and Minimising the Obstacles

- Changing working conditions
- Flexible recruitment and promotion criteria
- The employee development contract - will it work better for younger women?
- “Boys’ clubs” - is women’s networking the answer?

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