

## **Women in Technology (WIT) Subnet Paper for WEPAN 2007**

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**Abstract—** For many years there has been a concerted focus to attract, retain and incent women into technology positions. Many programs such as mentoring, women's networking groups and organizations such as WEPAN, WIT, SWE and others provide services to help women succeed in our increasing technical world. However, most of these programs are either individual to individual (such as mentoring) or large groups. Within IBM we have initiated a new type of initiative, called Woman In Technology Subnets to provide more personalized networking and support in an intimate group setting. This paper will explain how these small groups of woman networks are fulfilling these needs. We will share some of what worked and what did not work, and recommendations for others who might like to start a similar set of networks. Our experience has shown that information exchange and learning in small groups provides mentoring and networking at a more personalized level.

A WIT Subnet for Technical Women is a group of ten to twenty women who meet on a periodic (usually monthly) basis to discuss topics of interest that will assist them in their career development as technical professionals. WIT Subnets were launched at IBM in March 2006. Seventy subnets were launched in forty global locations. Our subnet was launched in East Fishkill one year ago, and we would like to share in this paper what we have achieved and where we are continuing to improve.

The goals of the subnet are to foster the growth of women in technical career paths, assist in personal development, provide peer support to each other, and establish networks within our very large and diverse corporation.

We have found many benefits from the subnet approach. First of all, it bridges the gap between one on one mentoring and large network groups and societies. It has enabled our technical women to establish closer networks with people beyond their existing sphere of coworkers. They have the opportunity to gain multiple perspectives and since the group is small, everyone is comfortable participating. The network also provides employees who work at home or remotely, the opportunity to connect with others.

The networks include seasoned and new employees and have facilitated finding the right individual mentor for members, as well as making new employees feel more welcome.

The number of WIT subnet chapters has grown to seventy across the global IBM with fifty in the USA, two in Canada, ten in Europe, seven in Asia Pacific and one in Latin America.

To start a Woman in Technology subnet, there are several key roles. Each team has an executive sponsor, who is a Director or higher level committed to advancement of technical woman. A team leader, who can be at any level, must have the desire to organize and co-ordinate the meetings. These are both key roles to promote the enthusiasm, schedule meaningful meetings, and handle the logistics involved. A Human Resource partner or advocate helps the team with any personnel related questions. Last but not least, the group must have committed members, who want to participate actively.

The WIT Subnet provides a penalty-free environment where employees can learn about the broader workings of the company as well as engage in developing personal leadership. It provides a more informal setting for mentoring, or building community.

Here is some of the research analysis done by <http://www.management-mentors.com/default.aspx> to show how this mentoring helps:

- A well-designed mentoring program succeeds 95% of the time
- Matching mentors and mentorees rather than having mentorees select their own mentors succeeds 90% of the time in a well-designed mentoring program
- You can identify specific knowledge/skills learned in mentoring and confirm that this has occurred by comparing mentor and mentoree responses
- A mentoree who is “on the fence” about continuing his/her employment with the company can, as a result of a mentor, be transformed into a committed employee who advocates for the company to others
- Mentors and mentorees are transformed in a successful mentoring relationship:
  - They gain a real understanding of the challenges faced by diverse individuals and thus are changed in how they relate to this issue
  - The sharing that takes place in mentoring alters one’s career path, helps to create work-life balance more effectively, etc.
  - Silo mentalities within companies are reduced by the bridge-building that takes place between mentors and mentorees
- By implementing formal mentoring over a long period of time a company begins to create a mentoring culture

According to Eve Tahmincioglu from Workforce.com, some companies are finding that group mentoring can be a cost-effective alternative to the old one-on-one style. For the group setting to work there must be a commitment among leadership, clear expectations on the part of mentors and mentees, and clear objectives.

Per mentoring.com, the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), rates five unique leadership practices according to frequency of the leadership behaviors performed by

the person; challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way and encouraging the heart.

Mentoring.com also stated that productivity and commitment to the business unit increased after participating in a mentoring circle.

The group of women in a successful subnet should be varied in experience, job level, job type, and technical expertise. The broader the organizational participation, the more effective the networking and cross pollination of ideas will be. It should be noted that while we have focussed our subnet on technical women, a subnet could be created for any group wanting to share mentoring activity.

Here are the key difference between Team Mentoring and Subnet.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Team Mentoring</b>	<b>Subnet</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	More focused, specialized learning from one or two mentor(s)	Generalized learning, networking from a group of people
<b>Format</b>	Designated roles (mentor(s), protégés)	No designated roles (group is co-mentors to each other). Use of a subnet leader
<b>Size</b>	6-10	10-15
<b>Members</b>	Protégés have a common learning objective (i.e. JAVA skills)	Members have a common desire to build network and share experiences
<b>Duration</b>	Relationship for a defined period of time	Can keep evolving, longer life cycle
<b>Objectives</b>	Mentoring for a specific skill/purpose	Networking, generalized learning
<b>Types</b>	Career Development, Skill Development, Certification, New Employee, Diversity	Career Development, Skill Development, Diversity, New Employee

<b>Examples</b>	Certification - one certified IT Architect mentors a group of 8 protégés working on their certification package. Protégés rely on mentor for guidance for a specified period of time	Diversity (group of 12 females (various levels, roles and experiences) form a Subnet to share and learn from each other on a variety of different topics (e.g. women's health, presentation techniques, guest speakers, etc.)
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The subnet meetings must be meaningful and informative. At our kick-off meeting, we spent some time to getting to know each other and our job responsibilities. We then asked the members to complete a questionnaire to identify the types of the topics in which they were most interested. It is important to define and communicate meeting topics in advance and schedule them with plenty of time for members to clear their calendar. Meeting times for our group were generally lunch time.

The individual meetings provide a forum for sharing experiences and job/career challenges. We often have guest speakers from variety of disciplines. Some sessions are devoted to specific mentoring requests and open discussions. Our subnet maintains a confidential, yet relaxed setting. The meetings are interactive because we want to learn from one another via shared experiences. Neither the group leader nor the executive sponsor knows everything. Most meetings are informal. Since the meetings are held at noon, most people bring their lunch. Finally, every member feels confident that what is said in the group remains in the group.

Some sessions were combined with other subnets to leverage special presentations and company wide seminars. It is helpful to have the members in the same physical location, but when employees are remote, the subnets can meet via conference call.

A successful subnet group meets at least monthly. The group leader is assigned for a minimum for one full year. Whenever possible, members are encouraged to attend in person. We try to end the meetings with good news sharing.

A group can only be as successful as the energy the members are willing to devote to it. The executive sponsor must always be available/visible to the group (i.e. starting the group, assist in getting guest speakers, making herself available to the group members for questions and advice). The leader must be committed to handle all the details.

The topics we covered in our first year include a web seminar on work-life balance, a presentation on the technical vs. managerial career path in IBM, a roundtable on opportunity management, tips for getting promoted, Technical and Executive Resource programs, an Invention and Patent workshop, a special session on Emotional Intelligence, a session on Leading with Authenticity, and a web seminar on Woman Taking the Stage.

One of the difficulties with which we have struggled is finding the best meeting time because of the different schedules and urgent business demands (again lunch time seems to work best). Another issue was finding topics that appealed to every one (our kick-off questionnaire was beneficial in helping to define this).

It is important to use every resource at your disposal, to make your subnet vital. We called upon local/visiting IBM executives, local universities and faculty, the IBM Management Development Website, "Be Your Own Mentor" – from IBM Women's Advancement, e-Books from internal IBM and of course, the talent of our own subnet members.

Our subnet experience has promoted many positive results. By bringing a friend to the seminars and the educational meetings we have broadened our impact. We created a sister subnet, and sometimes shared successful speakers and topics. Future activities we are exploring include using the subnet to resolve a business problem for one of the subnet participants, adopting a school for tutoring, mentoring, technology visits, hosting a speed mentoring session, and partnering with a technical community to better understand specific technical areas within the corporation.

Having spent over a year in our subnet, we have reaped many clear rewards. All the members' network, network, network! (Something most of our members were uncomfortable doing prior to our subnet). In addition, the subnet has enabled personal interaction with Vice Presidents, Directors, and Technical Executives. We have built up the confidence to call on anyone in the group for help. We also established personal relationships with people outside of our normal sphere of work.

**Last but not least ...** And if it were not for the subnet, we would never have even thought about making this external presentation. So it opened our eyes to the greater technical female community.

#### **Reference Material:**

[http://w3.can.ibm.com/hr/yourcareer/en-us/mentoring\\_teams.html#subnet](http://w3.can.ibm.com/hr/yourcareer/en-us/mentoring_teams.html#subnet).

<http://mentoringcircles.com/>

<http://www.workforce.com/section/11/article/23/89/50.html>

<http://www.management-mentors.com/GroupMentoring.aspx>

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