



Microsoft T Party Initiative

In June 2011 Microsoft commissioned a report aimed at understanding the UK female talent landscape. We wanted to understand what women like and don't like about working in the IT industry, the roles they occupy, how many STEM degree qualified women are not currently working, the barriers to female progression and how qualified women can be encouraged back into the industry. 420 women currently working in technology roles took part in the research helping us document their careers and learn what is important to them.

The key themes from the interviews fuelled our gender diversity programme; for example their insights helped us drive our senior leaders to be career sponsors as well as mentors for our female talent. We stay in contact with this network through our regular T Party events and [LinkedIn](#) network where we continue conversations on driving gender diversity in IT and we use it as a test bed for new initiatives.

We started with two events designed to delight and challenge a few perceptions of our business; we also wanted to say a big thank you for the time they had spent with us on the research. One of the things we noticed about this group is that they are passionate about enabling more women in to IT, a passion we share, so our latest initiative with this group makes the most of that.

[It starts with a spark](#) invites T Party members to nominate a woman they know who doesn't currently work in IT to attend a course where she will learn to code an app in a day (delivered by our partner Decoded). 10 women win a place on the course each time we run it and we're now in our fourth cycle. Through the day the winners learn that women have been pivotal in IT since Ada Lovelace and after they have successfully coded and published an app they enjoy a networking event with the man or women who nominated them. Also at the T Party event are other successful women from the T Party group and our own Microsoft talent and hiring managers so they can understand different roles and what people love about working in IT. The nominator then becomes their career sponsor and is devoted to helping her carve out a career in IT.

From our research we know that confidence is key for women progressing so by bringing all of the components; role models, inspiration and sponsorship together we hope to create interest in these women to follow a career in IT that they might not previously have had the opportunity to follow and to tap in to the huge number of women who are qualified to work in IT but have never pursued it.

We are seeing very diverse women nominated for this initiative, for example one candidate had a PhD in Computer Science but had experienced trouble getting back in to work after extended maternity leave. We hope that with the help of her sponsor and her renewed confidence and the opportunities presented through T Party events and the free online training we provide through the [Microsoft Virtual Academy](#) that she will find herself back in work very soon.

It's important to know that our female and male employees were also invited to nominate for the initiative and through the integration with T Party members and our employees at the event we hope to broaden all our horizons and networks. We didn't want there to be a separation between the wonderful events our T Party group are treated to and the events open to our employees and so by combining the two we create a more engaging and productive environment for all and a sense of community that supports our existing women but we also hope proves attractive to women thinking of working for us.

Members stay connected between events via a closed LinkedIn Group. We use the Group to post announcements on the latest events and relevant news.

We hope that these women understand we are invested in a long term gender diversity programme. We want to continue to learn from them and we give them feedback on our research so that they in turn can champion other women in to the industry by giving them a forum and collective insight.

We have seen a marked increase in our female technical hiring to over 35% since the launch of the T Party, of course this campaign isn't the only reason for that increase but we think it has a large part to play. Following the report we now understand our strengths better and have actionable areas to improve and as we take action we can garner opinion from our own female talent as well as the group to keep us level headed.