# Mentorship in IT Project Management: Supporting and Empowering Women

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**Abstract**

**Mentorship is not just a professional tool — it's a lifeline, especially for women working in IT project management where the road to leadership can seem like an uphill battle. Despite advances, there are still gaps in gender-based leadership roles, and sometimes it helps to have a champion by your side. This article explores the soul of mentorship — why it matters, how to find the right mentor and what it requires to be a great one ourselves. And whether you're a woman striving to rise through the ranks of IT project management or just someone who wants to help others to, you'll find both advice and wisdom in this column. Through addressing the criticisms and uplifting the potential of mentoring experiences, we hope to motivate and encourage women who share our dream of a more diverse and supportive IT ecosystem and community.**

**Keywords: Mentorship, Professional Development, Women in IT, IT Project Management, Leadership, Skill Development, Empowerment, Guidance, Career Advancement, Support System, Coaching**

## I.    INTRODUCTION

As  IT becomes more essential in business, IT project management is a dynamic and demanding field that requires a unique blend of technical expertise, leadership skills, and strategic thinking. The situation in the IT  industry, wherein the number of women increases steadily, but the percentage of women at top positions is still relatively lower. As per a report  by McKinsey & Company in 2021, women constitute just 25% of technical roles and only 16% of senior leadership roles [1]. These make the case for the necessity of mentorship as a support system for women in IT project management, given their underrepresentation, to help them break through the barriers they may face in this domain and advance in their careers.

Mentorship is one of the tools that can help fill that gap by providing guidance, support, and opportunities for professional development. In this article I'll discuss why mentorship is  important for women in IT project management and provide actionable tips on how to find a mentor and how to be one. It breaks down the conversation into three distinct sections: the benefits of mentorship, how to find a mentor, and how to be a good mentor.

## II.  THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORSHIP FOR WOMEN IN IT PROJECT MANAGEMENT

*1) Career Advancement:* Mentorship as a career advancement tool is  very impactful, even more so among women in IT project management who works in a male dominated environment. Mentorship is

also positively correlated with career satisfaction and advancement, particularly for women, according to research conducted by Ghosh and Reio (2013)[2]. A mentor can help a mentee to understand how the organization works, how to navigate the workplace and can advocate the mentee's progress. A mentor might directly recommend a mentee for a high-visibility
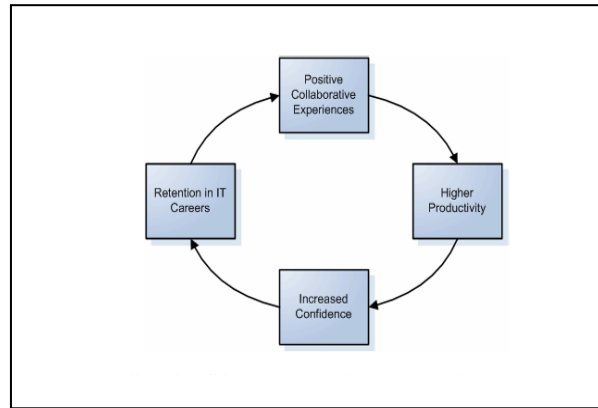


**Fig. 1. Effects of a Collaborative Apprenticeship on Female Students' Interests in IT Careers [8]**

project or leadership position, increasing the mentee's chances of promotion, for example. Also, through mentorship women can break the so-called "glass ceiling" that can deny them the promotions that lead to more senior leadership positions. This gap can be overcome by mentors who guide women on leadership development and strategic career decisions.

*2) Skill Development:* Validating the technical needs within any project is crucial. Mentors can support the development of these skills in their mentees by sharing their wisdom, providing feedback, and offering opportunities for experiential learning. For example, a mentor can help their mentee navigate the challenges of managing an IT project through a multi-step process.

Mentors can also guide their mentees to build soft skills that are essential for effective leadership, helping them to develop emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills. In a study by Goleman in 1998 showed that emotional intelligence is one of the most important criteria to determine a leader's success even more so in IT project management because of how stressful the environments of these activities are [3]. Mentoring these skills can help mentors speed up mentees' career success.

*3) Networking Opportunities:* Networking plays a key role in career development, especially in the IT sector where connections could provide leads for projects, partnerships, or advancement opportunities. Mentors often tend to introduce their mentees to their significant professional networks which help them in accessing various resources and connections. For instance, a mentor might bring a mentee to industry conferences, introduce them to key stakeholders, or recommend them for job openings.

Mentors can help mentees build diverse professional networks and create equitable networks for career advancement by connecting them with professionals from all walks and backgrounds. By helping mentees to create a more equitable environment for themselves, a (more) inclusive environment for future generations can be fostered.

*4) Confidence Building:* Although confidence is pivotal to moving up the corporate ladder, women in male-dominated sectors including IT project management tend to battle self-doubt and impostor syndrome. A mentor can assist the mentee in reframing negative self-talk by highlighting their unique contributions and encouraging them to recognize their achievements. This not only fosters personal growth but also equips mentees with the confidence needed to navigate their professional paths more effectively.

*5) Overcoming Gender Bias:* Studies have found that one of the challenges faced by women in IT project management is the fact that they are often subject to higher expectations than their male counterparts, given less credit for their contributions, and overlooked in the promotion of leadership positions [5].

Mentorship also addresses some of the unique challenges women face, offering guidance on how to work around bias, self-advocacy, and being resilient. For example, a mentor might help a mentee formulate responses to microaggressions or negotiate for fair pay. Mentors can serve to guide and assist a woman, which empowers a woman to overcome gender bias and achieve her professional goals.

## III. FINDING A MENTOR

*1) Identifying Goals:* Before looking for a mentor, it is important to define career aspirations and identify the areas where guidance is required or needed. This can help narrow down a mentor that resonates with the vision. For instance, if someone wants to move towards leadership, one can look for someone with experience in IT project management and leadership development.

*2) Leveraging Professional Networks:* Mentorship opportunities and networking events are also offered by professional organizations (e.g. Project Management Institute [PMI]). These forums are there to connect aspirants with an experienced professional who could help with the career.

*3) Seeking Diverse Perspectives:* Pairing with mentors from different backgrounds and experiences, can add to the mentorship mix. Having a mentor from other industries, cultural environments and discipline will provide different knowhow of thought and a new way to think how to solve problems, be it in career or even matters of life. An IT mentor could share insights about handling technical projects, certifications, best practices, or tools, while a mentor from a non-tech domain may find more creative strategies to deal with managing teams or maneuvering organizational life, or an international mentor may bring in cultural perspectives about global communication and collaboration.

*4) Formal Vs Informal Mentorship:* Formal mentorship arranged by organizations can provide structured guidance and support. Informal mentorship, in contrast, can take root organically through professional relationships. The legitimacy of both is beyond question; decision should come down to preference & need. For instance, an early-career professional may be better served by a formal mentor program, whereas a mid-career professional may benefit from a less formal mentor arrangement seeking guidance in a particular area.

*5) Evaluating Potential Mentors:* Mentorship is not a only a matter of credentials, it's about the bond that the mentee creates with the mentor. A sense of trust, mutual respect, and a real sense of understanding make mentorship more impactful. The most fulfilling mentor relationships extend beyond

career advice, it's about inspiration, similar experiences, and believing, and the same make the journey not just valuable but deeply meaningful.

## IV. BECOMING A MENTOR

*1) Readiness:* Identify the time and energy to support a mentee before mentoring. Almost all mentors in the real world were not born achievers but were groomed by the right experts. It is essential to know whether someone has the skills and experience to help guide a mentee throughout their career.

*2) Mentoship Skills:* Being a mentor is about more than passing on information it also means listening, providing feedback, and encouraging. One could also join mentorship training programs to become better at mentoring offerred by various instiues e.g. PMI, IEEE.

*3) Clear Expectations:* Setting clear expectations with the mentee on the goals, meeting frequency, and communication channels and evaluating this relationship to ensure both parties are aligned and committed. For instance, one may agree to meet monthly to discuss the mentee's progress and give feedback.

*4)* Leading by Example: Interaction and attitudes as a mentor will determine the dynamics of a mentorship. Be a role model in professionalism, ethical behavior, and lifelong learning to motivate the mentee.

*5) Providing Opportunities:* Providing mentee with opportunities to practice their skills through projects and introductions to professional network or recommend them for leadership positions. Mentee can be invited to work alongside mentor on a high-visibility project.

*6) Growth Mindset:* Inspire mentee to embrace a growth mindset for learning and developing. Giving feedback on what they did well and keeping them on track through encouragement. Celebrating their success and motivating to face new challenges.

*Evaluation and Reflection:* Continuously assessing how the mentorship relationship is working and discuss areas of improvement. Ask mentee for feedback and modify mentoring accordingly.

## V. CONCLUSION

Mentorship is a great way to empower women in IT project management by helping them navigate challenges, grow the skills they need, and take next steps in their careers with adequate guidance, support, and resources." In an industry which is rife with gender disparities, mentorship provides structured guidance for women as they contend with conflicts like bias, self-doubt, and a lack of access to leadership opportunities. Mentorship allows women to receive guidance, boost confidence, and extend their networks to enhance career opportunities.

The right mentor with experience, empathy, and alignment with the mentee's goals can be transformative. A mentor does more than giving insights, mentor can become an advocate by creating pathways to new opportunities and negotiating the schisms of workplace politics. Mentorship will

always be an important part of professional development, with the continued increase in demand for skilled IT project managers. Not only would it enable individuals to thrive but also make a positive impact towards a more inclusive and diverse IT landscape.

The future lies in having guidance available along the career tripod in the form of leadership or mentorship. This perspective on mentorship liberates the practice from the individualistic development frame and instead re-contextualizes it as a mechanism to drive sustainable, systemic change at a community, or organizational level; a path to a more sustainable, diverse and engaging future for IT as a whole.

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