

Flagstone Group: How to support and promote individual contributors' development in tech.

A guide by TTC Signatory, Flagstone's
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Overview

Individual contributors (ICs) are the backbone of any tech company. They are the ones who write code, design products, and build the features that customers love. However, ICs often struggle to get the support and development opportunities they need to reach their full potential.

This resource provides guidance on how to support and promote individual contributors' development in tech. It is based on the learnings from the Tech Talent Charter's Signatory, Nicole Hardiman of Flagstone Group. Hardiman has an extensive career as an IC with a background in Software Engineering, having worked in both large FTSE 100 organisations and smaller organisations. Hardiman's extensive background offers a unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities facing ICs in tech.



As a Signatory of the TTC, Hardiman has contributed to the TTC's annual report, which highlights a number of factors that are contributing to the high rate of attrition among women in tech, including dissatisfaction with career development, work-life balance, and pay. These factors are all closely linked to IC development.

By supporting IC development, companies can help to create a more inclusive and equitable workplace and reduce the high rate of attrition among employees in tech.

Why Investing in ICs is Essential for Business

IC development drives company success.

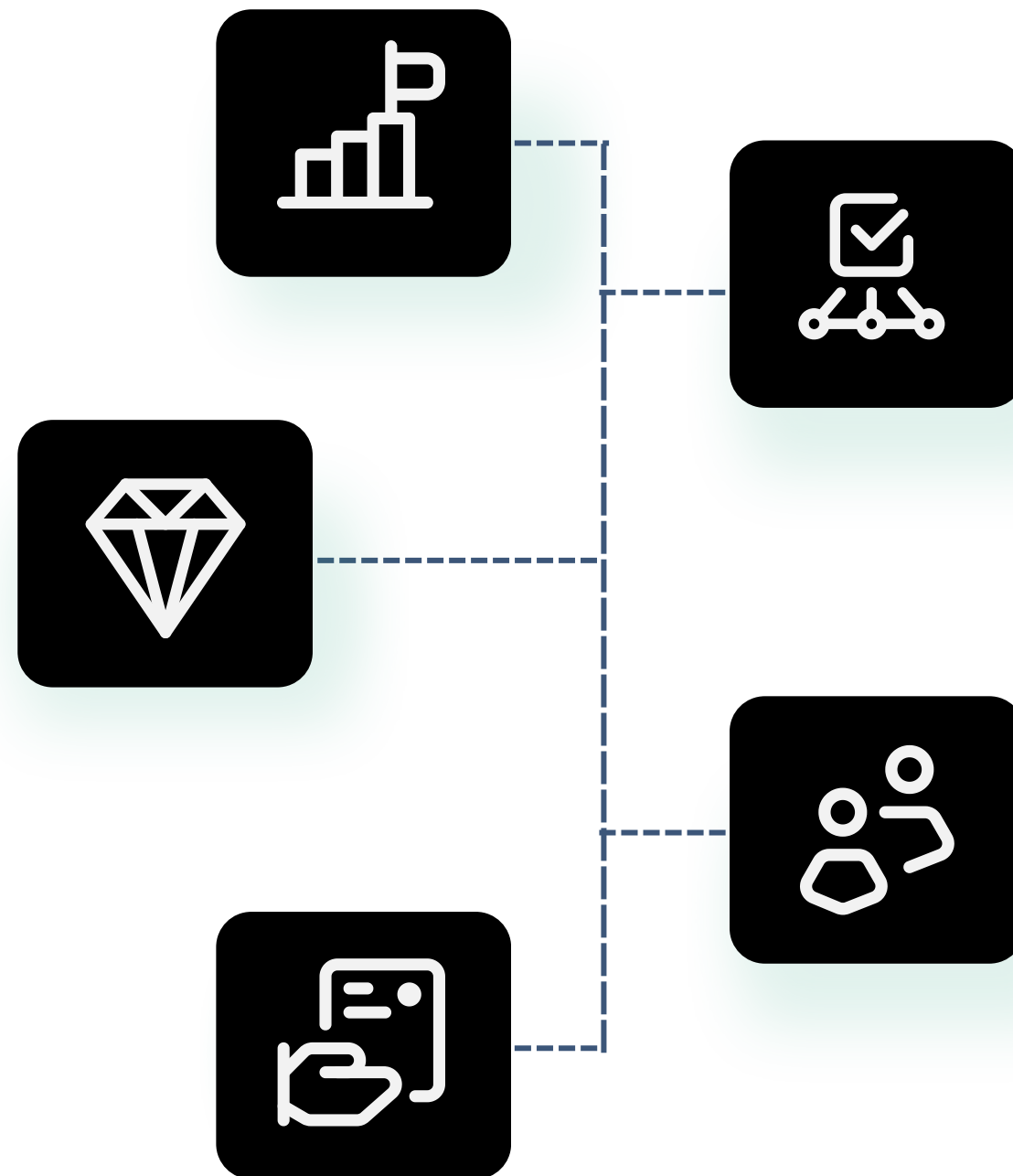
Contributors are the ones who do the work that drives the company forward. When ICs are well-trained and supported, they are more productive and effective. This can lead to increased innovation, better products and services, and improved customer satisfaction.

IC development benefits everyone

When employees have the opportunity to develop their skills and knowledge, they are more likely to be engaged and motivated in their work. This can lead to increased productivity, reduced turnover, and a more positive work environment.

IC development creates an inclusive workplace.

When employees have the opportunity to develop their skills and knowledge, they are more likely to be considered for promotions and leadership roles. This can help to create a more diverse and inclusive workplace, where everyone has the opportunity to succeed.



IC development attracts and retains top talent.

In today's competitive job market, employees are looking for companies that offer opportunities for growth and development. By supporting IC development, companies can show potential employees that they are committed to investing in their workforce.

IC development creates a positive and productive work environment.

When employees feel supported and valued, they are more likely to be happy and engaged in their work. This can lead to a more positive and productive work environment for everyone.

Supporting the Development of Employees in Tech

Organisations can use the following framework and real-life user examples to support the development of all employees in tech. By investing in IC development, organisations can create a more supportive and inclusive workplace for everyone, attract and retain top talent, and contribute to a more productive and successful workforce.



- ✓ **Recognise and reward ICs.** It is important to recognise and reward individual contributions. This will help ICs to feel valued, and appreciated and motivate them to continue to develop and grow.
- ✓ **Create a culture of inclusion and belonging.** This includes creating a workplace where women feel valued and respected and where they have the opportunity to thrive.
- ✓ **Provide opportunities for career development and progression.** This includes providing employees with access to training and development resources and helping them to identify and achieve their career goals.
- ✓ **Offer flexible work arrangements and support for working parents and caregivers.** This can help women to better manage their work-life balance.
- ✓ **Provide competitive salaries and benefits.** This can help ensure that women are paid fairly and have the resources they need to succeed.

Emily's Case Study: Investment from leadership

Emily [is] was a promising automation tester with a **passion for learning** more coding aspects and branching out into automated mobile tests - this meant learning about iOS and Android and their native apps. To help her, we gave her a **technical mentor** who already had the right skills and was happy to teach and direct her, meeting regularly to talk through anything that needed further clarity.

We paired her with a **business coach** to help understand the **direction of the business**. In this case, a senior engineering leader. This **empowered** her to speak up and make more **business-centric decisions**, and we made sure her business unit knew what the plan was and that we were **investing** not only in the team but in the business unit itself. This allowed us to have **open** and **honest conversations** with the business, her line manager, the scrum master in the team, and the product team.

With everyone on board, we made **time** and **space** for her to grow. Setting **strategic and technical goals**, we were able to **promote** her to a more **senior position** with a body of evidence that everyone involved in that decision had seen her develop. Not only did she **benefit** from the career growth, but the team had a more senior member who could help others and help set strategy.



Learnings:

- Identify and support promising talent.
- Provide access to mentors and coaches.
- Set clear goals and expectations.
- Create a supportive culture
- Celebrate individual successes.

Alice's Case Study: Training and support

Alice is a software engineer who joined the business as a junior through the **career changer programme**. She showed **ambition** and **promise** at an early stage. Conversations with her made it clear that she wanted to work in architecture.

We found her **appropriate courses** and used the **apprenticeship levy** to enrol her on a degree-level apprenticeship in software development; this included architecture as a module, which she did alongside her day job.

We made sure she was in a team that allowed her to work with **experts** in the field, and she **shadowed** and then **paired on architectural solutions**. This, alongside her learning, gave her great exposure to where she wanted to be career-wise.

In Alice's case, she was **absorbed into the team as she grew**. She was doing less software development but becoming the go-to person in the section for architecture and eventually joining the architectural practice with a **promotion**.

Learnings:

- Identify and support promising talent.
- Provide access to training and development opportunities.
- Create a supportive culture.
- As an employer, be flexible and adaptive as your staff grow and develop.
- Create a supportive culture within the team and business.

Priya's Case Study: Support after promotion

Priya is a **keen engineer** who always ends up taking on the work others don't want to do. She's the one that makes sure the **sprint is finished**, everything's tested and that even the boring work is done. Because of this, she never had an opportunity to shine. She started to **show potential** when working on a **charity project** through **tech for good volunteering days**. When not pressured to pick up the items the rest of the team didn't want to do, she could show what she was **capable** of. Because of this, she was given **stretch goals** to get her out of this **enabling space**. The stretch goals became bigger pieces of work where she could **showcase her talent**.

She helped in one of the annual award submissions, which allowed her to **create** a small app that let staff during COVID know if someone wanted to chat to ensure we had a social connection. Because of this and the award, she had to do some **public speaking**, which **raised her profile** in the business, and **she gained more confidence**. She was **promoted** because of what *she could already do* - but was hidden due to her desire never to let the sprint fail.

Supporting the women who are promoted is key. A woman in a tech network or a space where they **can feel safe, ask for help, and let off steam is essential**. A **supportive line manager** and a **culture** that is **open to growth** will help **retain** your top female talent.

Learnings:

- It is important for employers to give employees opportunities to shine and showcase their skills and talents.
- Stretch goals can help employees to grow and develop new skills.
- Women in tech face unique challenges and providing valuable support can help retain top female talent.
- It's vital to provide promoted employees with the support they need to succeed in their new roles.

Flagstone's Framework for IC Growth

1. Support

Technical mentoring

Assign the person with a qualified technical mentor. Someone who they can learn from in their specialism

Business Coaching

Understanding the wider business and what it means to be a senior leader. How to be more visible, assert yourself and not be afraid to take up space.

Line management

A supportive line manager who will create a specific roadmap on how the person becomes promotion-ready.

Organisational support

This will impact velocity, so the business must be committed to this long-term investment and be willing to accommodate it.

Open discussion on blockers

How can we help them overcome any blockers? This could include looking at their working hours, excluding them from on-call duty, or ensuring that workshops are held close to their home.

The promotion must be possible.

There must be a clear and fair process for promotion, even if it takes time to complete. The goal of promotion must be achievable.

2. Training

Appropriate occupational courses

The person should be able to attend specialised courses for their technical area and follow up with internal specialists to ensure knowledge retention.

Utilising the apprenticeship levy

Degree- or master's-level apprenticeships can be used to increase learning in the business or technical area, such as security. Support will be needed for this option due to the business's reliance on apprenticeships.

Higher Education

People who want to add part-time learning to their plan should be supported with study days and technical support where needed.

Pairing, mobbing, and working with experts

Software development can be done in a group, and the promotion candidate should be given the opportunity to pair or mob with specialists in the area they are interested in. This should be done frequently, and the person should be given the opportunity to lead in these sessions.

3. Challenge

Appropriate work that enables growth

Without a challenge, growth is impossible. Give the person work that will challenge them and help them grow into a more senior techie.

Stretch goals

Set sensible stretch goals for the person. This will help you prove that they are ready for promotion.

Side of desk project

Encourage the person to work on side-of-desk projects. This is a great way for them to learn new technologies without impacting the critical path of the organisation.

Charity/volunteering work

Many organisations have volunteering days. Many organisations have volunteering days. Encourage the person to find and participate in this work. This is a great way for them to give back to the community and gain new skills.

Community

Encourage the person to participate in the specialist community, such as meetups, panel discussions, and conferences. This will help them stay up-to-date on the latest trends and technologies, and it will also give them the opportunity to network with other professionals in the field.

4. Promote

The diversity of thought in tech teams at a senior level is not as diverse at the pool at more junior levels.

It is imperative that female technologists support female technologists, so that teams are well-rounded, and represent the clients and customers businesses serve.

Continue support

Provide continuous support to senior female technologists by offering external coaching, access to the senior leadership team, and opportunities for further growth.