

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO DIVERSITY IN TECHNOLOGY



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Boosting diversity



If you work in the technology sector, you'll have noticed one topic has loomed large over the past year: diversity, or more specifically, the lack of it within the tech industry.

The statistics make for stark reading. The share of female computing degree graduates has plummeted from over 35 percent in 1984 to under 20 percent today. The proportion of black and Hispanic employees in big tech companies rarely reaches over 5 percent. And that is before you get into less visible issues of ability, sexuality or economic background.

This isn't just a moral issue. It's also a financial one. There is a plethora of evidence that diverse companies

return higher profits. And imagine all the innovations we may be missing out on due to the de facto exclusion of the majority of the population. While it's healthy for tech companies do a bit of soul-searching about this issue, it'd be even better to see them take action.

The good news is, there is plenty they can do. This guide is packed with advice on concrete steps companies can take to open themselves up to a wider group. From hiring to promotion to retention, we suggest the policies you need to ensure you're hiring and retaining the best people. We also have tips on how to ensure you run more inclusive events and some perspectives from female founders on their biggest challenges. Finally, we talk to Maxine Williams, Facebook's Chief Diversity Officer, who reveals how the company is boosting representation. [Charlotte Jee](#)

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What women really want from their employer

If you are serious about your commitment to diversity in tech, here is how you need to start changing your processes and approaches

You are a company hiring for technical roles. You understand that diverse teams build better products and that's better for your bottom line. You have actively instructed your recruitment company to seek out senior women in tech. But you are getting nowhere.

You assume it's because there are not enough women working in tech but how hard are you looking at what you are offering? Do you understand what women

in tech look for when choosing their next role? Do you know that women in tech move less than men because the risks are higher? They have to make sure that it's the right next step in their career, so they need to know what you offer them, and if it's being 'the diversity hire'... well that's just not attractive.

We've spoken to over 50 women in tech and they've told us exactly what good looks like to them. If you are serious about your commitment to diversity in tech you need to start changing your processes and approaches to make yourself competitive. Here's how:

- Take a look at what your current senior leadership team looks like. Do you have a female CTO or CEO? Is your leadership team all white? What about your Board? Most senior women will want to look beyond just the leadership team. They see diversity in the round and look for organizations that are diverse in class, race, LGBT people, ability/disability as well as gender So it's not enough to add a token middle class, straight, white woman to your management team. Generally if people of colour are able to progress in an organization it's a good indication that the processes are fairer and unbiased. Details of how often people are promoted are readily available to potential employees on LinkedIn and company review websites.
- How many senior technical women currently work on your development teams? Many women don't want to be the first female technical architect or first female senior developer. If the answer is none then you are going to have to work hard to develop processes and policies to convince your first hire that

you are committed to changing the ratio and have a methodology in place to do so.

- Pay careful attention to the wording of your job advertisements. A study published in 2013 in *The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (*Evidence That Gendered Wording in Job Advertisements Exists and Sustains Gender Inequality*) found “that masculine wording in job advertisements leads to less anticipated belongingness and job interest among women”. The study suggested that this perpetuates gender inequality maintaining the status quo. Based on this Kat Matfield has built a wonderful gender decoder (see fave.co/2OD2Jgr) to help you test whether your job advert has the kind of subtle linguistic gender-coding that has such a discouraging effect.
- Do you talk about unconscious bias in your organization and as part of your recruitment process? If not why not? No one is intentionally biased against a certain person or profile, but it’s an inherent part of everyone’s learnt decision-making process. We associate certain jobs with certain types of people. When looking at job applicants, we’re more likely to use biases to analyse people that are the same sex, race, religious conviction and nationality. When we lack information our unconscious bias fills in the gaps. Companies need to address these behaviours at all levels within their organization, facilitating and training people to become self-aware enough to avoid it. Women in technology continually face these biases so you will improve your success rate in recruiting women in tech roles if they know your organization addresses it in formal and

structured ways. And the research shows that men are often promoted for their potential; women are promoted for their experience. If you've got two equally-qualified people, don't assume the woman can't do it because she's never done it before. You need to put women in the same kind of stretch roles that companies historically – and continue to – offer to men.

- Do you have data and robust processes about diversity, fairness, salary, promotions, and appraisals? Think about your bonus structure. Many women work differently than men and often this is recognized differently. Are you prepared to publish what percentage of females got the top level bonus in a given area? If it is only men, people are left with the impression your culture may only award men bonuses. And as for advertising here is a good example: “Lyst is hiring an Engineering Manager/Director”. The advertisement clearly states: “Additionally, we have robust process in place to scrutinise promotion and salary decisions to ensure we treat staff equally regardless of background.” Most of the women who have contributed to this post have had long careers in tech. They were all of the view that they always felt there was a question mark over the difference between men and women's salaries in the industry. It's well known that, on balance, women are far less likely to negotiate a fair salary and shouldn't be at a disadvantage because of this. Explicitly state what the salary range is in the job advert. Not declaring the salary just makes it more likely that it's unfair.
- Even better if you can actually demonstrate there is no gender pay gap. There are products developing in the

market where you can actually dashboard this for your employees. Consider using a product like sliips.com, which takes actual (anonymized) payslips to provide absolute transparency around pay. Of course this is even more important in the UK now since it's the law for companies with staff in excess of 250.

- Work on deepening understanding around diversity at a senior level. This has to be a company-wide understanding, not just superficial, so you can increase your 'diversity hires'. Women in tech see through this very easily. It's what you do, not what you say, that counts. For example, are your diversity and inclusion panels only made up of 'diverse' people, in other words where is the participation from senior leaders in the organization? And show, don't tell, as Monzo has done (see fave.co/2MNW96s) visibly demonstrating the progress that it is making over time. Likewise, Slack is open about its diversity and inclusion approaches publishing the data on its blog (see fave.co/2vM9sxQ).
- Provide clarity around things such as flexible working, maternity leave, and so on. If you offer enhanced maternity pay, then say so. Women don't want to have to ask. If your people work part-time, or can work from home, then say so. It's even better if you can demonstrate that your senior people, both men and women, use flexible working hours. Getting your senior people to write about this on your company blog is a good place to start. What about Shared Parental Leave?
- These are the kinds of things that women don't want to have to ask about for fear of appearing uncommitted,

so if as a company you offer these things, and they are offered without affecting people's careers, then say so. Here's a good example of US firms in the creative industry leading on the Pledge for Parental Leave (see fave.co/2MOW1U4) and here's a great blog from one of the founders of Ustwo doing just that in the UK Family Before Fampany (see fave.co/2MM483H).

- Provide clarity and talk about your working practices and culture. Do your people routinely remain at their desks until 7 or later, or do they work hard during the day and then go home on time? Either can work, but it's much better to make the culture clear and explicit, so that you are offering the opportunity for women to make a clear and informed choice.
- Pay particular attention to your interview panels. Many senior women will get immediately turned off if they never see a woman in the interview process. People generally have a bias towards hiring people like themselves. So it's critical that the interview panel and decision makers are as diverse as the talent that you want to hire. And don't forget to seek out your candidates by attending conferences and events. Sign up to the pledge (fave.co/2MquBqM) and only appear on panels that have women on them. Seek out women to speak at your conferences and to your staff.
- And finally don't forget. Many of the conditions we are highlighting here as being attractive for women are increasingly attractive for men and completely taken for granted by millennials. One outlier in Silicon Valley is VC firm Andreessen Horowitz where women make up

55 percent of the workforce. According to its founder Marc Andreessen, its diversity is key to its success. “If you don’t have access to the best talent, if you confine yourself to a certain part of the talent landscape...then you’re just not getting the best people, and you’re not going to build a high-quality company.” So working to make your company more attractive for women will ultimately give you a major talent uplift across the board. [Charlotte Jee](#) and [Emer Coleman](#)



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Diversity in tech: The steps companies can take

How hiring, mentoring, role models, development and retention all play a role in making tech more inclusive

It's an irrefutable fact that the tech sector is not representative of the population as a whole. Men outnumber women by four to one, according to the 2018 Tech Nation report released in May. And that's before we get into issues around ethnicity, class, neurodiversity or sexuality.

It's an issue that is increasingly coming under the spotlight, not just for ethical reasons, but because if we're ever going to meet the demand for digital skills,

appealing to a wider section of society is surely one of the fastest ways to broaden the talent pool. This is a complex, emotive issue, and there are no quick fixes. But there are some practical steps companies can take.

“The best way to implement a diversity scheme is to make purposeful and genuine efforts to address the problem and take a top-down approach. Management must not dismiss diversity as simply a HR issue; it should run through your business so it naturally filters into the work and company culture,” argues Jas Panesar, founder of web development agency Aspiring Panda.

It’s important that business leaders understand this is not only about the ideal of ‘inclusion’, but also an opportunity to solve problems they may never have experienced personally, says Jill Hodges, founder and CEO of tech education provider Fire Tech Camp.

A good start could be regular diversity training for management and junior employees, Panesar suggests.

Hiring

Hiring seems another obvious place to start. The methods you use to recruit new people, where you look for them and how you try to appeal to them can all have a big impact.

“We pay particular attention to recruitment. The pipeline is smaller, so it takes longer. But we’re taking steps like ensuring diverse interview panels,” reveals Yvonne Agyei, chief people officer at Booking.com.

It’s worth implementing a ‘blind’ application process to remove biases during recruitment, Panesar argues. For example this could entail removing candidates’ names or photos from application forms or using software built for this specific purpose.

Of course, there is no getting away from the fact that there simply are not enough women entering the tech industry in the first place, Gunita Bhasin, CEO and founder of social app Showcased, says.

Schools and universities should hold more information sessions, taster sessions and workshops to provide advice for people considering a STEM degree.

Employers who are really committed to improving diversity in tech, and who have sufficient budgets, should consider setting up programmes to target women, girls and under-represented groups far earlier on in their careers. Amazon and Booking.com have started running scholarship programmes for university students, for example. It's also worth considering ways to help women switch careers into tech further down the line.

Open up

Tech companies can learn from new rules requiring UK companies to publish the difference in average pay between all men and women across the entire company.

Most of the tech giants already publish diversity statistics. It's not the whole answer, but it can be a useful addition to a firm's arsenal. Tracking progress and providing evidence of what works and what doesn't is never a bad idea.

"Since we've been focused on recruitment we've seen diversity numbers really increasing, especially in product and tech roles," Agyei reveals. Booking.com collects data on attrition and pay equity, "and happily we don't see a difference between men and women", she says. Men have a 3.3 percent advantage in average pay at the company, but this is largely explained by the fact there are fewer men in entry-level roles, Agyei adds.

It can be tough to encourage companies to be open with their status, especially as it can feel embarrassing or intrusive, but at least by measuring these types of metrics they can start to track progress.

Role models and mentors

While attracting women into the tech industry in the first place is a crucial first step, another less-discussed but equally vital aspect is retention. One important part of keeping women in the sector is ensuring they see role models in leadership positions, says Agyei.

“We’ve set up mentoring programmes and find that having one-on-one interaction with another woman, especially in a senior role, can have a huge impact,” she explains.

“We’re lucky because we have slightly more women than men and our CEO is a woman, but if you look at leadership roles, representation does decrease.”

Booking.com has also run mentoring schemes externally, for example at Web Summit in Lisbon and via sponsoring women to attend other conferences.

A growing number of companies are setting up ‘returner’ programmes for people who have had a career break – be it caring for elderly parents, bringing up children, illness, or just wishing to have some time off. FDM Group and techUK have been big advocates for these schemes within the tech sector.

Rather than focusing on diversity as a problem to be solved, surely a crucial part of encouraging more women into the tech is banging the drum for the industry as a fun, exciting and rewarding sector to work in.

“One of the things I like about tech is it’s less focused on seniority and more on what you can do. It tends to

be a more flat, dynamic environment where people are more willing to take a chance on you,” Agyei says.

Despite the challenges, women in the industry are increasingly optimistic that the issue of diversity is finally starting to break through into the wider tech sector’s consciousness. “In time, we can all make a difference... Conversations are happening that haven’t before and there’s more chance for progression than ever,” says Gemma Young, cofounder and CEO of digital property platform Settled. [Charlotte Jee](#)



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How to ensure a diverse, inclusive tech team

Too few women or ethnic minorities work in tech. Here are some practical steps you can take to change this where you work

It is a commonly acknowledged fact that technology companies have a diversity problem. There are far too few women or ethnic minorities working in tech teams or companies. However, identifying diversity gaps in your organization is only half the battle. Rebuilding and restructuring to ensure diversity is adopted (and encouraged) is a challenge in itself. So, what can you

do to ensure you're creating and maintaining a truly diverse workplace?

Mentoring programmes

Match mentors with mentees from different backgrounds and experiences to help stamp out prejudices and build real relationships. These relationships will force people to evaluate any perceptions or judgements they may have had about a particular group of people.

In terms of diversity, consider using software which allows for 'blind hiring' to ensure you are eliminating any unconscious bias. For inclusion, use psychometric tests to determine personality types. This way you'll be better placed to understand a person's behaviour. Are they expressive or reserved? Do they focus more on the long or short term? Are they familiar in tone or formal?

Write inclusive job descriptions

Strive to write job specs and descriptions that don't favour one group of people over another. Use gender neutral language and list qualifications as preferred not required, unless they are absolutely crucial to carry out the role. You can even reference your company's commitment to an inclusive team to attract more diverse tech applicants.

Sensitivity training

Educate the team on how to act appropriately when faced with conflict or confusion. It's important for them to be aware of the differing backgrounds, beliefs, and opinions of their colleagues. Foster an environment that recognizes differences and is respectful of them. For example, tech managers should take a zero tolerance

approach to slang or derogatory language being used to describe a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Cast the net wider

There can be a tendency for hiring managers to return to the same universities or groups where they may have sourced tech talent previously. Expand your hiring horizons by recruiting from under-represented universities, colleges and community groups.

Open forum

Facilitate open discussion in the workplace by creating an environment where people feel comfortable discussing issues and sharing views, even if they go against popular opinion.

Education

Education partnerships and networking events allow companies to build relationships with talent in their formative years. This helps change perceptions of the industry and promote inclusiveness. Initiatives like SAGE (Science in Australia Gender Equity) aim to attract and retain more women and minorities to STEM industries.

Be accountable

Put procedures in place to assess your hiring after a new employee is on board. Investigate whether or not interviewers have stayed true to the initial requirements advertised and if not, why not?

Recognize difference

In an attempt to promote equality, we can sometimes ignore aspects of a person's make up – their ethnicity,

religion, sexuality, and so on because they simply don't make a difference to how we view them. While that's fine in theory, in reality it can be problematic. For one, these elements play a large role in a person's identity so failure to recognize them undervalues a large part of who they are as individuals. It can also trivialize any negative experiences or discrimination a person may have endured because of their race, gender or sexuality. To be truly inclusive means acknowledging and celebrating differences, not underplaying them.

A sense of belonging and inclusion doesn't come from fitting in but from being accepted. [Aoife Geary](#)



Credit: iStock

Tips to make your tech event more diverse

Sign up to the ‘Minimum Viable Diversity Pledge’ and commit to never actively supporting an event or panel that has zero diversity

It seems obvious that speakers at tech events and panels should represent the world we live in. However, too often we still see panels that feature only white, male speakers and conference line-ups that feature virtually no women. Thankfully, growing numbers of technology speakers and companies are saying ‘enough is enough’. One such company, Softwire, has launched a new initiative called the ‘Minimum Viable Diversity

Pledge’: a commitment to never actively support a paid event or panel that has zero diversity. You can sign the pledge at fave.co/2Mly9e3.

It’s a bare minimum, but the aim is to totally stop the worst offenders. Softwire’s MD Zoe Cunningham says “we’d encourage people to go further”.

“The world we’re aiming for is one where every event organiser gets at least two or three of their speakers accept the invite on the condition there’s at least some diversity in their line-up,” she says. “This won’t solve diversity overnight, but does make life far more difficult for those who totally ignore it, and provides steady pressure on every event to actively put in at least a little effort towards this issue,” Cunningham adds.

Here are her tips for event organisers to help them to make their events more diverse...

Analyse: Look back at your past events and evaluate the speaker diversity. How many of the experts didn’t fit the stereotype of the middle class white male speaker? This will give you a starting figure and a goal to aim for.

Set your goals: What mixture of people would be appropriate? Do you need to include 40 percent female speakers and what proportion from under-represented groups?

Expand your network: Look further than your own network for diverse speakers, this will take time.

Get online: If you don’t have the contacts there will be those out there that do so use social media to harness interest in upcoming events and speaker engagement.

Commit: As an organizer, commit yourself to improving your selection process. Reach out yourself, build a rapport with potential speakers and engage in a meaningful dialogue with those from under-represented groups.

Lead by example: As a panellist, commit yourself to sharing the stage with a diverse panel. If you notice the panel is homogenous, ask the organizers if they have considered including speakers from under-represented groups. Be prepared to offer suggestions on who they could approach to build a more diverse panel.

Mobilize resources and support: Speakers from under-represented groups may face the issue of underfunding. If you can, set aside some budget to ensure you are able to support their participation.

Practical support: Women and speakers from under-represented groups may not have as much experience participating on panels and may need support in preparing to effectively deliver.

Offer speaker training: You may want to consider providing guidance to help potential speakers perform at the level your attendees expect.

Make your events accessible to all: This includes live web feeds, using social media channels and consider accessibility for those less able, to ensure that your events reach a wider more diverse audience. [Charlotte Jee](#)



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Mind the gap

The unique challenges facing female founders in tech

From companies being forced to publish their gender pay gap figures to the government being lobbied over unequal parental leave, workplace inequality has dominated headlines for some time now.

UK tech is no exception when it comes to a lack of diversity and the need for better inclusion of women and minorities. What are the biggest barriers currently faced by female tech entrepreneurs and what can be done to overcome them? We spoke to six women who have founded their own companies to find out.

Julia Fowler: EDITED

A platform for fashion retailers, EDITED was founded by Julia Fowler and Geoff Watts in 2009. When asked about the biggest barriers she faced when starting out, Fowler describes one particular instance of casual sexism.

“When we were in due diligence during a fundraise, an investor asked me in a formal meeting if I ever planned to have children, the implication being that this was a significant point they were making their investment decision on. The question was extremely inappropriate and personal, and had nothing to do with the company. Interestingly enough, my male co-founder wasn’t asked the same question,” she reveals.

Anne-Marie Imafidon: Stemettes

Anne-Marie Imafidon co-founded Stemettes to try to get more women into STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths). She says a lot of the traditional barriers facing female founders still occur during investment, though as a social enterprise within the tech sector, she’s managed to escape a lot of them.

“I think when it comes to funding there can definitely be that element of investors looking to back people who remind them of themselves. Sometimes it’s not as blatant or malicious as that and it’s more to do with people not understanding the product because they’ve never had a need for childcare or experienced a period,” she tells us.

Áine Mulloy: GirlCrew

GirlCrew started as one woman looking to make friends and has grown into an online community of over 100,000 members across 46 different countries. Co-founder and CMO, Áine Mulloy, says that for her the biggest

challenge has been overcoming old gender biases. “Sexism and unconscious bias are still rife. From access to funding, to the perception of women as leaders, there is still a long way to go. In tech, there’s still a strong overall ‘boys club’ feeling. While conversations are coming to the fore, the more underlying issues often aren’t being addressed,” explains Mulloy.

Devika Wood: Vida

Devika Wood is a medtech founder on a mission to transform the home care industry. Her company, Vida, uses technology to provide a more holistic, personalized and sustainable healthcare model. She says that as a female founder she felt she had to adopt a stereotypically male attitude to business if she was to succeed and this was one of her biggest struggles.

“I thought I needed to be competitive, aggressive and sometimes harsh. I felt that if I was myself: soft, emotional and bubbly, I would fail or people wouldn’t take me seriously. I had to develop really tough skin when I founded Vida and I found that really difficult. I wasn’t being myself, and I found that I was always second guessing how people would perceive me. Remaining true to yourself and finding your own voice is the key to rising above preconceived expectations.”

Samantha Hepburn: Find a Tech Job

Originally from South Africa, Samantha Hepburn has been working in the London tech scene for a number of years. As well as starting her own company, she’s worked closely with a number of early-stage businesses and has seen first hand the challenges faced by women. For one, the uneasiness of attending

tech networking events and being in the minority. She recalls a number of occasions where she would refer to her accomplishments as a group effort even when this wasn't the case.

“Using the first person to discuss successes feels to me as if I’m bragging, and I cannot shake the idea that if someone knows it’s just me (a non technical, non developer female) in control, the value of what I do will go down. As I grow, I am making an effort to own what I’ve accomplished and not be so uneasy in a very technical, male-dominated environment,” she added.

Saasha Celestial-One: Olio

Olio is a food sharing app designed to help tackle food waste in the UK and beyond. Earlier this year, Saasha Celestial-One and her co-founder Tessa Cook raised \$2.2 million from a number of investors including Mustard Seed and Accel. Celestial-One believes that female founders need to recognize the obstacles that are unique to them and then disregard them completely.

“They (female founders) capture a disproportionately less share of investment dollars that are available. The challenge is to not let the evidence get in the way of your confidence that you can be every bit as successful,” she says. “You need to ignore the evidence and proceed as if everything is completely equal and it’s an open playing field. If you get caught up thinking about how the cards are stacked up against you it will affect your confidence, it will affect your health, it will affect the way you communicate. Look the challenge in the face and just ignore it and move on,” she advised. [Aoife Geary](#)



Credit: Facebook

Fighting bias and boosting representation

Facebook's fifth diversity report was a mixed bag, but as its Chief Diversity Officer tells us there are a number of initiatives underway

Today, 'diversity' has become a cultural buzzword, a powerful marketing tool, and increasingly, a business imperative. "If you are trying to solve simple problems, you are better off with homogeneity,

because it's easier, it's simpler, it's more efficient. But it doesn't solve hard problems as well," says Maxine Williams, Global Chief Diversity Officer at Facebook, referring to research on diverse teams. "We think everything we do at Facebook, given the people we touch, the number of countries that we're in, the types of products...it's all complex."

Techworld sat down with Williams to discuss Facebook's latest diversity report, the company's drive for 'cognitive diversity' in every department and how the company is attempting to achieve it.

The firm's fifth annual diversity report was released in July and revealed a mixed picture. Women now hold 22 percent of technical roles, compared to 15 percent in 2014 (while the proportion of women taking a computer science degree in the US still hovers around 18 percent). Women hold 57 percent of business and sales roles, compared to 47 percent in 2014 and 30 percent of leadership positions, up from 23 percent.

Williams says the company's approach to diversity and inclusion is heavily data driven. It uses analytics to inform an understanding of representation issues, and form strategies based on these insights.

"That creates a kind of constant circle of learning, because as things change, as new insights come about, sometimes things happen that we can't understand," explains Williams. "Then, we work with research teams or data science teams, people analytics teams to dig deeper in those areas, so we can understand them more, so we can devise solutions for them."

This methodical approach applies to introducing new strategies, too. "What we will often do is all this analysis, and based on the data, determine a particular

strategy may work. We'll often roll it out – as a pilot first – and then if we are tracking the ROI on it and see traction, then we may scale it out more,” she explains. This means that initiatives spend a lot of time in the incubation stage, to ensure they have the most impact.

Gender equality up while number of BAME employees stagnates

While the diversity report revealed indicators of gender equality have gradually improved, other measures were slower to change. For example, the proportion of black and Latinx people in ‘technical’ and ‘leadership’ positions languished at 1- and 3 percent, and 2- and 3 percent respectively. Although it's worth noting that there is a much greater proportion of Asian employees than the US national average – occupying 50 percent of technical positions and 21 percent of leadership positions, compared to just 5.6 percent of the population.

This can at least partly be explained by the greater educational achievement of this ethnic group, which is higher than any other racial group, as well as the greater proportion of this group undertaking STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects (more than double the national average in 2014). Of course, these outcomes are in turn affected by a whole raft of additional factors such as expectations, family life, stereotyping and racism, cultural influences and so on.

With the aim of increasing representation, Facebook takes a ‘Diverse Slate’ approach to hiring, whereby for each position it is hiring for, there must be at least one candidate from an under-represented group interviewed.

Williams clarifies that these candidates would be held to the same standard as the rest of applicants. “What

you're talking about is doing a better job of finding more qualified people in those under-represented groups to allow them to compete for these jobs," she says. "And then you hold your competition bar exactly where you need it to be – but you can't hire them if you're never interviewing them. And what that does is it creates a muscle for doing better to source talent. And then, it invites everybody to participate. So, somebody who is not a hiring manager or a recruiter, can still participate in that by referring great candidates who are under-represented into this pipeline."

Internal bias

Internal bias is another issue that Facebook says it takes seriously. This is the internalized mental framework we all encode as a result of cultural conditioning. It's this conditioning that is responsible for the results of an identification task experiment, showing that test subjects are more likely to judge black people as holding weapons when they are actually holding innocuous objects, with the reverse effect evident in relation to pictures of armed white people.

"Those are things that could touch every part of the system like a cancer, because it might affect how people recruit. It might affect how they manage talent. It might affect how people perform, who gets promoted, everything," argues Williams. "So we have invested deeply in a suite of learning and training programmes which are focused on that."

She points to research demonstrating that when you show recruiters two of the same CV with different names, not only is the one with a 'whiter' sounding name more likely to be called to interview, but the recruiter

will afterwards believe they've seen a CV with eight years more experience. To counter this, Facebook has developed training tools that focus on helping people to understand the internal biases they may hold, as well as how to counter them. "It's knowing what they are [biases], because people walk around – particularly if you're somebody of privilege – you walk around in this haze, thinking everything's equal for everybody, so you don't understand why," says Williams. To counteract this, Williams stresses that solely helping employees to recognise that they hold these biases isn't enough.

The first programme released was Managing Bias. This was followed up with Managing Inclusion, aimed at managers of inclusive, diverse teams, and Be the Ally, which helps diverse team members be more supportive of one another. Now the team is testing some deep learning, 3D, immersive courses to help train employees on structural inequality, injustice and oppression. Due to popular demand, Facebook has made these tools available to other companies too, including airlines, and insurance firms.

The company targets bias in a number of other ways, too. "We do things like a tool where when you write feedback, there is language that prompts you to say, 'Are you being biased?', 'make sure you're using the same type of language to describe a woman's behaviour as you would a man's,'" explains Williams.

'It starts from your opportunities from birth'

What does Williams think about the diversity report? "It was a good look back to see that we were finally able to have some confidence in saying what works and what didn't work," she says. "And that the things that we were

doing were working for women, but not working as well for people of colour. We need to figure out more why. We have a lot of research projects going to figure out why is this not happening.”

Does she have any ideas? “There’s a fundamental thing, which is there’s been research by others to show that race is going to have a far more debilitating impact on your ability to succeed than gender is. So white women will always do better than people of any race because of racism. The question is, how does one company tackle that?”

She makes the point that when recruiting for top positions, Facebook tends to recruit from top level positions externally, making the point that if these people have not reached these positions in other firms, it is hard to remedy this. Although a case could be made for training up candidates selected in-house. But there are, of course, bigger structural inequalities to contend with.

“It’s out there in society. It starts from your opportunities from birth. In fact, it starts from the opportunities that your parents had. It’s just so hard, but we are trying to understand and do what we can to adjust what we need to adjust and own at our end to at least make it better.”

To help increase the pool of candidates available to select from, Tech Prep is another Facebook programme that’s targeted at those from under-represented backgrounds. It’s an online learning tool for both children and their guardians to help them understand more about a career in this area. “Those are the types of things which for the long term, what we’re hoping to see is a more robust volume of under-represented people – like you want to see that volume going up,” says Williams.

The company is also working with traditionally Black or Hispanic colleges on initiatives such as Crush Your Coding Interview, the Facebook University training programme and Engineer in Residence initiative.

Of course, employing people from representative backgrounds is only half the battle, with employees at tech companies such as Uber often complaining that the company culture is inhospitable to under-represented groups and that they don't receive adequate support. Williams claims that this is not the case at Facebook, where she says there are structures in place to create an inclusive working environment.

“We have support for everybody and we see HR as having the responsibility to support all of the people. What that means is that you meet different people where they are, whoever they are and give them the type of support that is necessary so they can deliver on their potential,” says Williams.

“So we have training programmes, we have coaching, we have whole learning and development team that's looking at how do people learn. We do work with managers, to coach managers as well.”

A company of Facebook's size and reputation is increasingly held accountable for its practices. As its new ad campaign directly addresses, the company is attempting to counter the narrative of fake news, unscrupulous data collection and attention hijackery circling the company. Does the tech behemoth feel a sense of societal obligation when it comes to promoting diversity within its walls?

“I think it's connected to what our product is,” argues Williams. “So, we feel that we want to connect the world for good – not just for connection's sake. It's

because we believe that if people are more connected, there's more understanding. There would be more closeness and less separation, less isolation, all of those things." [Laurie Clarke](#)



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