

The Need for Culture Change: A Roadmap to Advance & Promote Women of Color in Tech

A research project led by



Supporting Partners



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Executive Summary

At the writing of this document, the nation is immersed in a deep racial justice and equity debate. This debate stems most directly from the recent murders of Ms. Breonna Taylor, Mr. George Floyd, and other Black people, at the hands of law enforcement. By now, this debate far surpasses the issue of police brutality. It puts us, front and center, at a critical juncture in the history of race relations here in the U.S. But, will there be a national reckoning, and will it lead to a watershed moment and renewed impetus for positive, sustainable change? Will there be the much needed sea change in behaviors/attitudes, policies, and practices to solidly affirm racial justice and equity across the board?

Here we find ourselves, in the midst of this major national conversation, controversy, and urgency, writing about women of color (WOC) in the tech sector. Our project about women of color in tech is resoundingly timely and pressing, given the current debate and environment in which we are living.

Why focus on WOC in the tech sector? Simply put, the tech sector (be it math & science or high tech) has been a node of mostly White; mostly male control. This, despite WOCs contributions and remarkable potential, as well as countless research studies repeatedly showing that a diverse workforce produces better outcomes/returns for businesses.¹ Perpetuating current practices in the tech sector stall opportunities for WOC to grow and advance in their careers; their chances of promotions often nipped in the bud. Also, women of color currently represent 39% of the female identified population in the United States, but by 2060, they will be the majority.²

This research project centered on a series of four focus groups and seven individual interviews with WOC in tech, engaging in focused dialogue with forty project participants. Additionally, through a literature review, we garnered the most up to date statistical information about WOC in tech.

This project was conducted in partnership with LeaderSpring Center, Forefront, and Latino Futures – Consulting & Think Tank Project, and it was fully funded by Kapor Center.

The locations of this project's focus groups and interviews included Boston, MA; Columbus, OH; New York, NY; San Francisco, CA, and Seattle, WA.

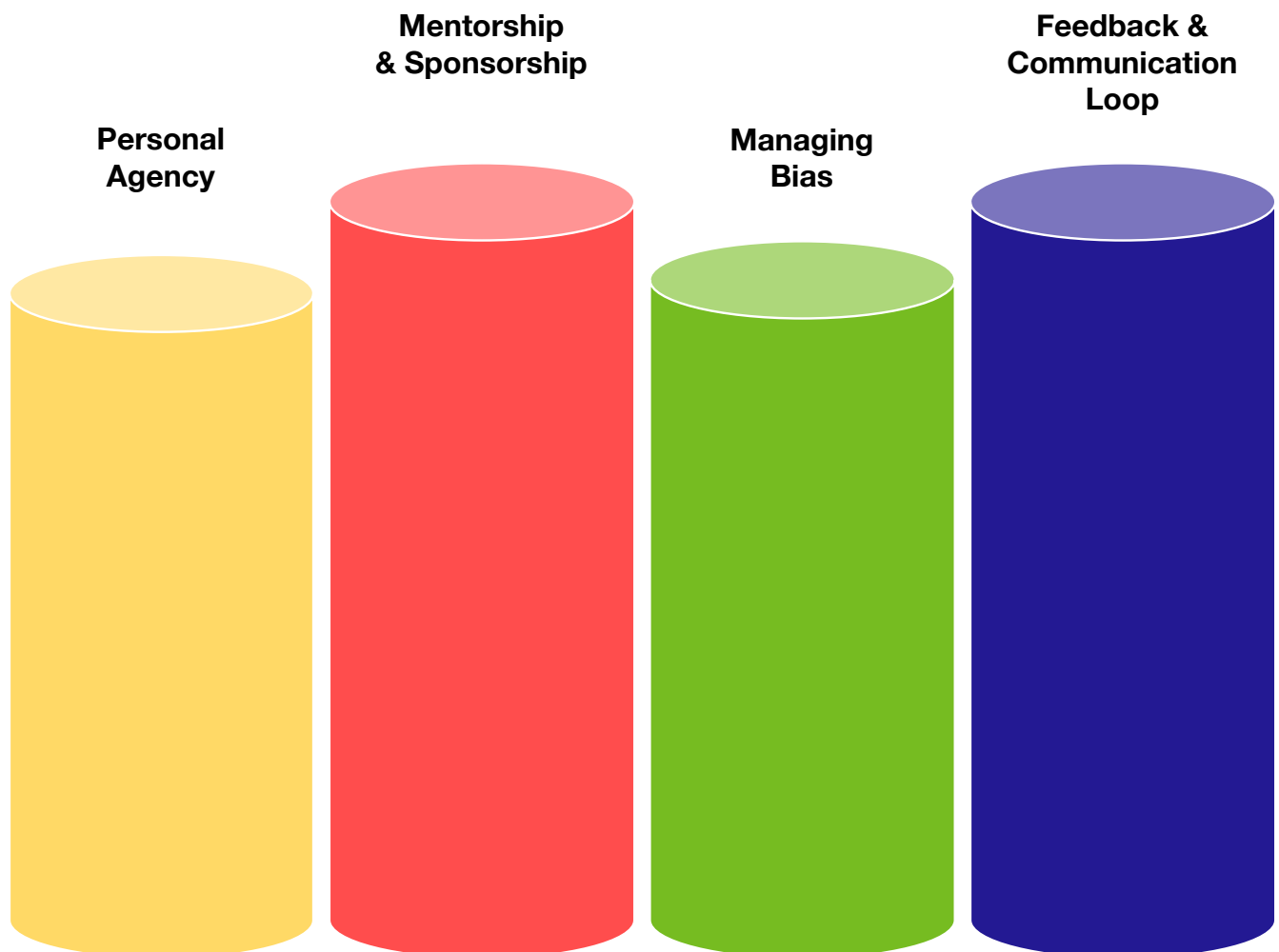
The critically important participation of WOC in focus groups and individual interviews provided the substantive insight required to produce this Summary Report, and its accompanying comprehensive PowerPoint.

This effort was set forth to identify WOC's direct experiences in the tech sector in order to compile a panoply of critical first-hand findings. Additionally, in-depth analysis of findings led to a set of recommendations for the tech sector. These recommendations, presented later in this document, were created, and are shared in a spirit of collaboration. The goal is to help create culture change in the tech sector by offering: A Roadmap to Advance and Promote Women of Color in Tech.

A Roadmap to Advance and Promote Women of Color in Tech

This Roadmap centers on a four-pronged framework consisting of foundational equity-building pillars, namely: Personal Agency, Mentorship & Sponsorship, Managing Bias, and Feedback & Communication Loop.

In essence, the road to improvements must include direct action to ensure WOC can express their own personal agency at work without fear of dismissiveness or prejudgement. Further, companies need to provide effective mechanisms to build strong mentorship & sponsorship relations for their WOC employees to support career advancement. Tech companies must also manage bias, ensuring that training services for managers address this issue, as biases often undermine career advancement and promotions of WOC. Lastly, tech companies must ensure an equitable and ongoing feedback & communication loop that is constructive, objective, and equitable in order to provide WOC with clear guidance to support them in their projects' successes.





This research project based its focus group discussions and personal interviews on a highly customized project questionnaire. The project's leaders believe, based on experience and the literature, that to create transformational changes in tech to advance and promote WOC, businesses need to act on all four pillars in a concerted fashion.

This document provides details on what was found from conversations with WOC. Subsequently, recommended actions for each of the four pillars provide a clear roadmap for companies to strive towards much-needed action to bring about equity for WOC in the tech sector. It must be noted that at the time of this writing, and over the last several years, WOC have been leaving the tech sector in increasing numbers due to the prevailing detrimental conditions they face at work. These detrimental conditions range from dismissiveness to aggression, and everything in between. Between 2007-2015, the sector witnessed a 13% decline; the downward trend continues to this day.

The following pages open with a description of the project, including its goals, methodology, and the reasoning behind it, as informed by the most up-to-date statistics about WOC in tech. Subsequently, this roadmap provides a summary of findings from discussions with WOC, stating what their views and experiences in the tech sector are. Most importantly, a set of recommendations, following findings, provides a clear roadmap —a set of actions—that tech companies can act on to improve conditions for WOC, and, along the way, enhance their overall outcomes and returns.

Time and time again, research shows that diversity in business is not only a matter of equity and justice, but it is also a sound investment in a company's financial performance. The lack of change within the tech sector suggests that this financial message needs further dissemination and repetition. It behooves companies to dismantle racist practices. This will enable them to become equitable entities, and boost their financial performance.

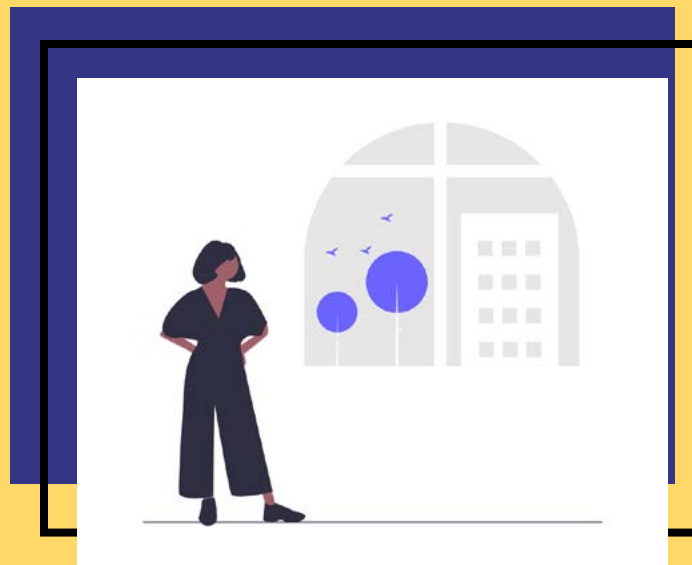
Project's Underpinnings and Goals

To begin, it is perhaps best to provide the three buttressing underpinnings informing the thrust of this project, and the general vision of its collaborators. Namely:

- 1. Women of Color should be considered assets in the tech sector.**
- 2. Their leadership must be cultivated, acknowledged, and rewarded.**
- 3. There should be no barriers for WOC to become CEOs.**

These core underpinnings are further supported by this project's four guiding goals, as follows:

- 1. To serve as a catalyst for change.**
- 2. To inspire businesses to examine their practices.**
- 3. To develop internal strategies to increase representation and retention of women of color.**
- 4. To examine bias and stereotypes that devalue contributions made by women of color.**

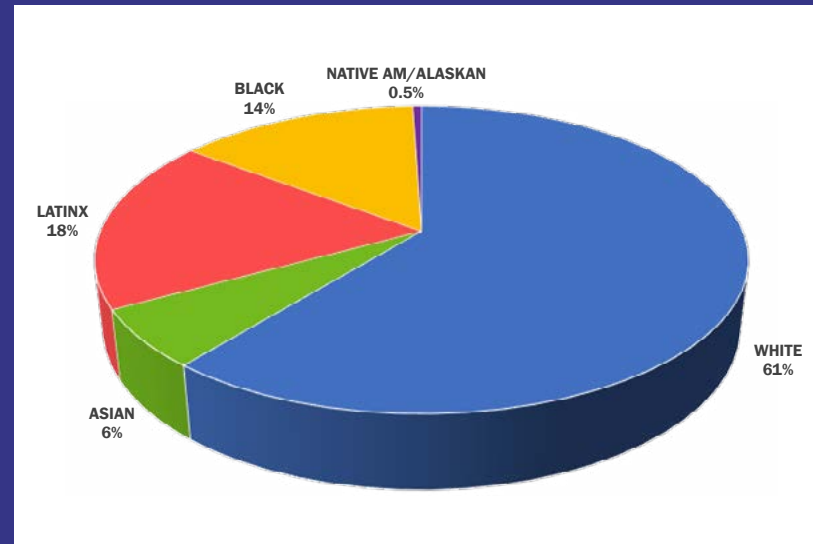


Project's Target Groups & Data

Honing in on specific target groups is one of the hallmarks of this project. Target groups included Black, Latinx, and Asian women.

As a Kapor Center-funded project, one of several in their WOC in tech overall effort, we know that other groups are focusing on Native American/Alaskan women in tech. Thus, this latter group was not part of our undertaking, though we recognize the importance of ensuring that the voices of Native American/Alaskan women in tech must be heard; they represent only .05 percent of the tech workforce, indeed a minuscule level of representation.

Female Population by Race and Ethnicity

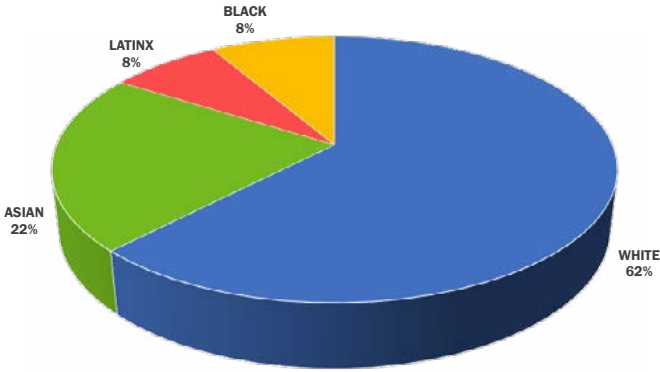


Women of Color in the Employment Market

Entry Level	18%
Manager	12%
Senior Manager/Director	9%
Vice President	7%
Senior Vice President	5%
C-Suite	4%

As a whole, the percentages of WOC in the U.S. overall employment market is small. Further, the higher the position, the lower the percentage is of WOC represented in those positions.⁴

WOC in Computing and Math



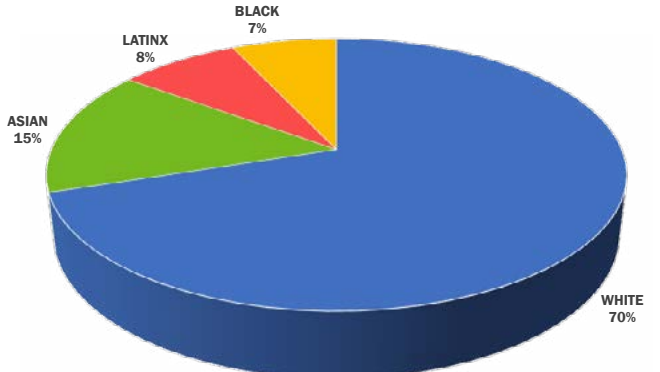
Now, let's look at WOC in tech (which is comprised of computing and math industries as well as high tech). A significant point to note is that the numbers of WOC in tech have been dwindling. This decrease, according to WOC in the sector, is attributed to a lack of opportunity for advancement and promotions, as well as bias. Here are statistics for WOC in computing and math, and in high tech.

The numbers for women of color in high tech are very similar to those for computing and math. One exception is Asian representation, which is 13 points higher in computing and math vs. high tech (23% vs. 13% respectively).

The numbers of WOC in tech are far surpassed by those of Whites. For example, in high tech, Whites surpass Black women by nearly a tenfold, 67% vs. 7%. In Computing and math, Whites hold an 80% advantage over Latinx women, at 66% vs. 8%. The racial and ethnic disparities are large, apparent, and persistent.

In a study of the career and economic progress of minorities in the tech sector, conducted by Ascend Foundation, they found that the number of Black women declined by 13% over a 12-year period.⁵

WOC in High Tech



In sum, given the declining numbers of WOC in tech, and the detrimental experiences impacting their lives at work, the issues addressed in this document are of paramount relevance in the pursuit of equity. It is our hope and goal that the tech sector will review this report with an open mind. If the data above aren't sufficient incentives for change, there's one more to consider:

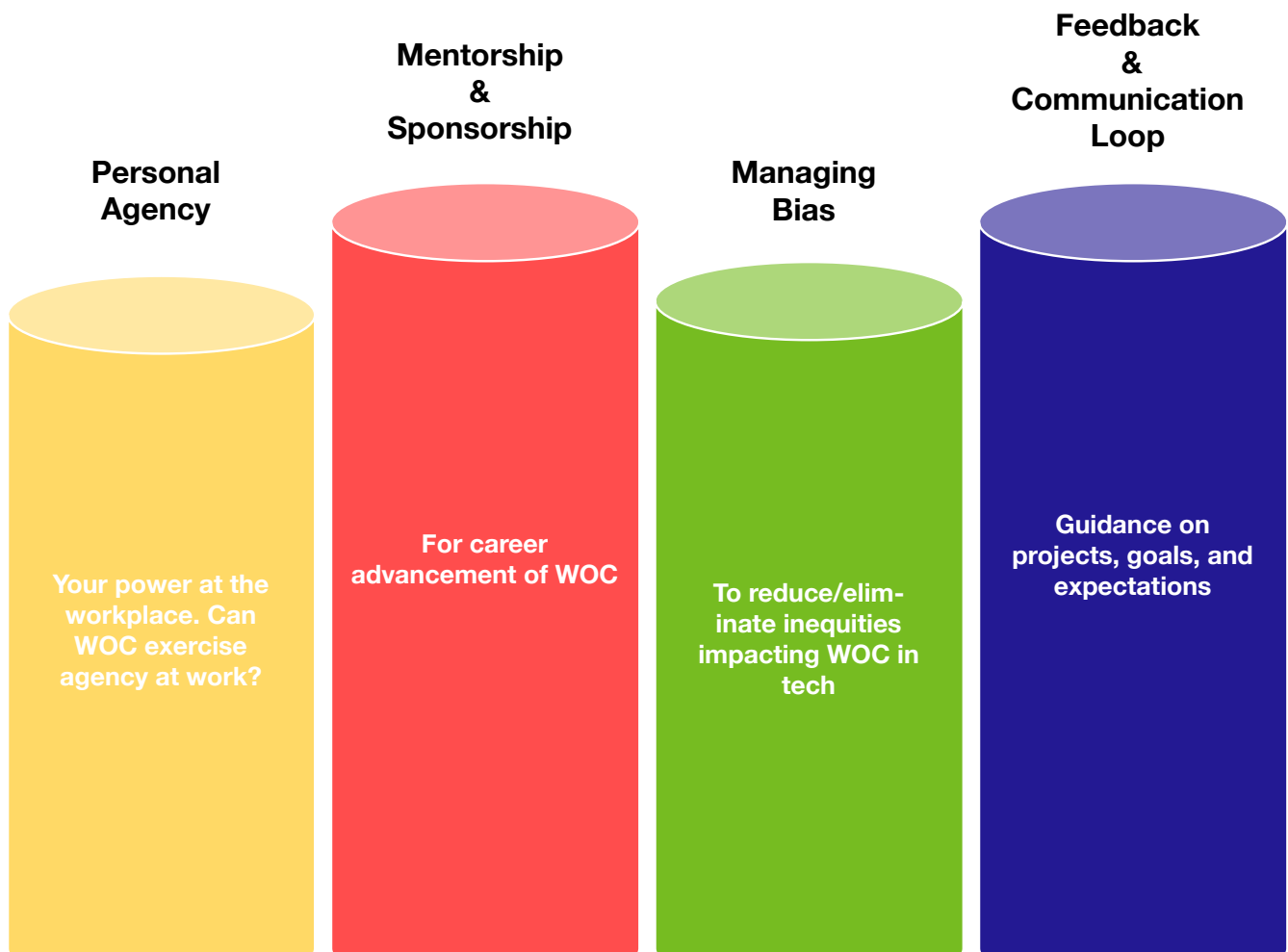
Companies with less gender and ethnic/cultural diversity are nearly 30% less likely to achieve above-average profitability.

- Delivering through Diversity, 2018. McKinsey and Company

The Project

As mentioned above, a four-pronged framework informed the development of this project. Through rigorous discussions and research from the start, the project's leaders arrived at this framework to create a streamlined and focused methodology. This approach enabled the team to build a roadmap that is clear and concise. Further, the recommendations on this roadmap are driven by evidence-based findings stemming directly from the WOC in tech who participated in this project's focus groups and individual interviews. This project solicited input from a total of forty WOC in tech. Each focus group had a host, a facilitator, and a note-taker. Focus groups were in person, and individual interviews were conducted by phone. The same questionnaire and facilitator guide created for this project was utilized for the focus group sessions and the individual interviews.

Each of the four topic areas provides contrasts and similarities expressed by participants in their respective focus group. This highlights nuances of opinion and experiences by and among WOC in the tech sector. Clearly, these opinions are understood as those expressed by the women participating in the focus groups. That is to say, this is not intended to serve as an overarching finding for the universe of WOC in the tech sector. Rather, these nuances and contrasts are nuggets of information illustrating different experiences, and what they represent to WOC at this juncture.



Agency

“**In terms of interrupting in meetings, if a WOC did that, there would be serious repercussions. Not when a White man does it.**”

- Research project participant

Question No. 1

As a woman of color working in the technology sector, what can you tell us about whether you are able to perform your job and exercise personal agency to the fullest of your abilities and potential in the workplace?

At times, some focus group participants indicated feeling empowered to do their job, and occasionally expressed being supported by their supervisors and the organizations where they work. A case in point: At one of the focus group some participants indicated that their companies encourage women to join the tech sector, and support from the top makes them feel power and agency. A project participant spoke about this in the following manner:

“My company provides initiatives for women, which is helpful in building the pipeline.”

Another participant indicated:

“My manager empowers me and my colleagues to partner with people at all levels.”

A counterpart argued:

“I tend to have a lot of input, I want to understand, and I’m getting much more involved in recruiting. I have felt like I can add to what is going on in the field.”

On the surface, the above shows empowerment and agency. However, as another participant continued talking, challenges to her approach and agency became apparent:

“I have my own meetings; they (White men) think they can schedule (their meetings) over mine. Some said I was giving too much pushback. I feel like I’m treated

differently than a male in the same position.”

Someone else spoke positively about her agency as an entrepreneur and a vendor, however, she indicated being “Shutdown when coming from a place of curiosity.”

Overall, the experience for WOC in their jobs is indeed less than ideal, as someone said “this is disenchanting.” Many argued that while companies put money into diversity and inclusion initiatives, the internal culture of the place overrides any such efforts. As a result, many project participants argued that it is very hard to be their true selves at work, and to have the ability to exercise full agency. Many said they have to leave their Black lives aside in order to fit as much as possible at work.

Furthermore, often WOC find themselves being characterized as aggressive or angry, when what they are doing is sharing thoughts or ideas for projects. A double standard is clear, as they see men doing the same and being praised, not shamed. In this light, many argued, it should not be the responsibility of the WOC in the workplace to change culture; that should rest on the head of the company, and to ensure it trickles down evenly and consistently.

Some argued that performance excellence can be impeded or significantly curtailed by the level of organizational resources available to White men vis

a vis those at the disposal of WOC; greater for the former, and lesser for the latter.

In all focus groups, we find that women have experienced, or currently experience, differences between them and their White colleagues (male and female). These differences manifest themselves in the form of:

1. Dismissiveness towards them, their opinions matter less than those of male colleagues.
2. Great levels of demand and an urgency to keep proving themselves while finding that there is a gap in the support they need from those higher up.
3. Being passed over for promotions, which are mostly given to non-WOC.
4. Having White (men typically) colleagues regularly speaking over them, and dismissing them at meetings.
5. Little support from the leadership.
6. Inadequate budgets.

Question No. 2

Whose responsibility is it in the workplace to create a thriving environment for women of color?

The overarching opinion is that there often is a Diversity and Inclusion policy in the workplace. However, there is still a great need to provide strong diversity and inclusion training to dismantle prevailing implicit/unconscious bias. A thriving environment can ensue, as a focus group participant argued:

“When efforts are intentional.”

People at the top can help build a thriving environment for everyone.

In addition, and based on accomplishments, WOC should be advanced to mid and high-level

management positions to further enhance a thriving environment for them, and for everyone. One effective way to achieve this is for WOC to identify initiatives of interest to them in the company and become involved; making intentional contributions.

One participant said:

“WOC should vocalize to their company the diversity and inclusion issues they experience and/or witness because without these actions things will likely never be improved.”

Another participant added:

“We should bring our ideas and contributions to others, share our stories, for example at happy hour, or other after-hour gatherings.”

People talked about trusting their own decisions. A participant added:

“As minorities, we have to break into spaces that do not look like us.”

Differing opinions emerged regarding the subject of Black culture. For some, it is up to Blacks to educate Whites, while for others, it is the responsibility of Whites to learn about Black culture. In their words: “It is our (WOC) responsibility to let others know about Black culture in order to build a better work environment.”

Yet, a counterpoint surfaced: “It should not be on me to educate Whites about Black culture and people. It should be on them.”

A thriving environment for WOC depends on both employers and employees, requiring distinct and equal levels of commitment from each party— one side acquiring and implementing diversity and inclusion practices and the other voicing and sharing experiences, and engaging in self-advocacy. To date, the practice of self-advocacy has been easier said than done. For WOC, to voice opinions and experiences can be a tough, if not perilous undertaking due to the punishing biases to which they are often subjected.

Mentorship & Sponsorship

We define mentorship as having someone who provides guidance. This person could be someone at work or from the outside. We define sponsorship as having an internal champion or advocate at work that provides career growth opportunities that propel you to the next level or promotion faster than any mentor can.

Question No. 1

Do mentorships and sponsorships matter in relation to career advancement? Please share your thoughts, opinions, and/or observations based on your work experience.

Most believe that a mentor and/or a sponsor can provide guidance and help them with advice and career advancement.

In general, project participants view mentors and sponsors as a valuable support mechanism. A mentor can “help one learn how to act before responding to a boss, or someone else at work.” For some, finding a mentor or a sponsor depends on how she connects with her network, which implies that a network is important for WOC in the tech sector.

Further, a participant argued:
“A mentor does not have to identify with you.”

Someone else added:
“You -the one seeking a mentor- need the knowledge of how to engage with people who don’t look like you.”

In fact, project participants argued that having a mentor who is not of your racial or ethnic background can

offer an advantage to the mentee, for example, by gaining experience in working with people from other backgrounds.

Further, this is of necessity because:
“The likelihood of finding a WOC in high positions is low, so, in practical terms, WOC will do well by connecting with people who do not look like them.”

Some participants make clear differences between mentorship and sponsorship whereby, according to them, the former is about relations and general advice, and the latter is more focused on goal setting towards specific achievements, requiring detailed specificity. Further, they argued that these programs need structure.

Attending company-sponsored events is important, and can help foster relationships with potential supporters.



“ Sponsorships advanced my career. ”

- Research project participant

Question No. 2

If you could design mentorship and sponsorship programs at your workplace, what would these programs include? Why?

Some WOC in the company might have an idea that is really valuable. “There must be someone there to help push it forward.” This implies that mentorships and sponsorships can be quite beneficial, not only to the employee, but to the company as well.

It would be helpful to have peer-to-peer and near-peer-to-peer mentors, as these arrangements help build community, and provide strong support for WOC in the workplace. In someone else’s opinion, a triad comprised of junior, mid, and senior staff members also helps build community, and supports ongoing interactions among people in different levels of leadership and in different departments.

Knowing what other departments are doing helps to have a broader and deeper sense of what a company is pursuing, which can help spark new ideas. WOC can benefit from such types of sponsorships at work, and develop a broader and deeper knowledge about their places of work.

Having companies feature new employees, for example via email, helps build relationships, particularly if the features include some interesting facts about the new employee, i.e. travel or other interests and pursuits. Programs should also ensure to foster relationships that stimulate a sense of equality and equity, despite differences in rank. Formal mentor/sponsor structures can be quite helpful to those who may not be easily inclined to, and/or comfortable establishing relationship with new people.

For some, if mentor and mentee share a racial and/or ethnic background, the mentor, having “been there,” will have a greater ability to understand the needs of the mentee compared to someone with a different background.

It is clear that the subject of race has to be addressed in the work setting, otherwise, biases will persist, and

change will be harder. These are, in the words of one participant: “Hard conversations that have to take place.”

Speaking about the importance of customized, person-centered support, a participant indicated: “It is important for mentors and sponsors to be consistent, empathetic, and compassionate. In addition, mentees need to know themselves and show up authentically.”

Someone else added that for a mentor/mentee program to work well, “Mentors and sponsors need to ask questions; perhaps questions we have never been asked before. In addition, mentors and sponsors should not be using cookie-cutter approaches. Their support needs to be tailored to the needs and situation of each mentee.”

Perhaps the most salient aspect of a mentor and/or a sponsor-mentee relationship is for the mentors and/or sponsors to facilitate a discussion. In addition, it is important to encourage a mentee to articulate a vision for her career.

Other key points include:

1. Make people feel like they count.
2. Provide self-advocacy training for WOC.
3. Understand the difference between mentor and sponsor.
4. Ensure high level people are paired with junior level positions.
5. Ensure sponsors work with WOC to set time-specific objectives.

Feedback & Communication Loop

Question No. 1

What can you tell us about feedback and communication loops at work, in relation to your work, and work experiences?

It is very important to have transparency and honesty in communication with peers and those higher up. Managers' goals should be ensuring that those that report to them succeed in their jobs.

Many participants report that their experiences in feedback and communication loops are not always fruitful, and some have experienced racial/ethnic bias.

Often, WOC have to "code switch" in order to match the environment in which they work. HR should be aware of the environment and cultural differences that can make a workplace accessible and comfortable to all.

Some suggestions for improving feedback and communication loop activities include:

1. Have regular, weekly one-on-one meetings between manager and direct reports.
2. Make feedback timely and actionable, and ensure it is equitable.
3. Rules of engagement – need to communicate.
4. Ask: What do you recommend I should do?
5. Tell your manager that you need action steps from her/him, as well as guidance on prioritizing activities.
6. Remove emotion/stick to facts.
7. Give the employee guidance and time to fix mistakes, improve on things, and be creative.
8. If one does not agree with feedback, engage in conversation, don't just accept the feedback.
9. Ensure WOC have the tools needed for the workplace, provide training if necessary.
10. Understand the manager's and employee's preferred forms of communication.
11. Ensure constructive feedback is the framework for communication.



“ Because WoC are often thought of as dominant, angry, and/or aggressive, my feedback is generally not taken well. ”

- Research project participant

Question No. 2

Based on your work experience as a WOC in tech, if you were giving a presentation to tech company employers and HR staff on the subject of feedback and communication loops at work, what main points would you highlight and why?

“Feedback needs to have a regular cadence to it.”

Project participants offered a range of key points that, in their view, would be important to highlight if giving a presentation. Chief among these observations are the following:

1. Emphasize the importance of documenting things in writing.
2. Good feedback comes from a place of transparency.
3. Ensure the manager works with the direct report so that she can grow into the best version of herself.
4. Ensure feedback is ongoing.
5. Feedback must be equitable.
6. From the person one is evaluating, first ask about their strategies, to understand what lies behind their efforts/work.
7. Do not make assumptions, probe/solicit details in order to understand someone's work, goals, challenges and accomplishments.
8. Employ “radical candor” and talk every day at “feedback moments,” in addition to the more formal feedback sessions.
9. Ensure feedback goes both ways.
10. Take into account how the person receiving the feedback is or may be feeling. Can a different approach help reduce or eliminate comments that may come across as judgement?
11. Make feedback timely and actionable.
12. Build the relationship, this allows for deeper feedback.
13. If a WOC is the one giving feedback, there should not be a need to feel there has to be a justification for the comments. This is important as many WOC feel they need to justify their actions.
14. Uphold a constructive approach to feedback and communication.

Managing Bias

Question No. 1

As a woman of color in tech, have you experienced bias at work directly, and/or observed bias against other women of color?

Something that came up right away was the subject of lack of WOC in leadership positions. As a project participant indicated: “To start, at my workplace, I noticed there are no WOC in leadership positions.”

Implicit bias is clear for one focus group participant who indicated that as she opens up a conversation about diversity and inclusion at work, she can immediately detect her White co-workers becoming tense. Others agreed.

Another participant indicated that she tries to bring out the implicit bias conversation up in order to tackle relevant issues. This doesn't always bring out desired results. It is important to have ongoing bias training in order to see change.

A participant said: “In my position, I have so many conversations with managers about how to help them have conversations with staff, I know these managers make a lot of assumptions (about WOC).”

To deal with implicit bias we need to understand if it arises out of ignorance, negligence, or something else. We need to know this in order to address it appropriately.

“Bias generates a great deal of emotional labor for WOC.”

When bias takes place, WOC can address it, as a participant put it, this can be done by saying: “This just happened, what can we learn from it.”

In essence, bias can diminish someone, limit her potential, and career advancement.

Creating space between the event and the response is helpful. This allows one to assess the situation, and to understand whether and how to respond. In order to respond from a place of strength, it is important to be strategic and answer the following questions to oneself before responding:

1. Could this person retaliate if I address her/his bias?
2. Do I want to educate this person? If so why and to what end and how?
3. Can I leverage someone that can address the issue, perhaps someone that has a relationship with the biased individual? Could this be a positive or negative approach?
4. Do I have the capacity to address this bias issue with this specific person? How would I do it?

“ Bias can be subtle; this is the hardest part of bias. Overt comments are easier to handle, subtle bias is much harder. ”
- Research project participant

Question No. 2

If you were a public figure and expert on the subject of bias at work, and you were speaking about bias against WOC in the tech sector, what would you want to emphasize about the issue?

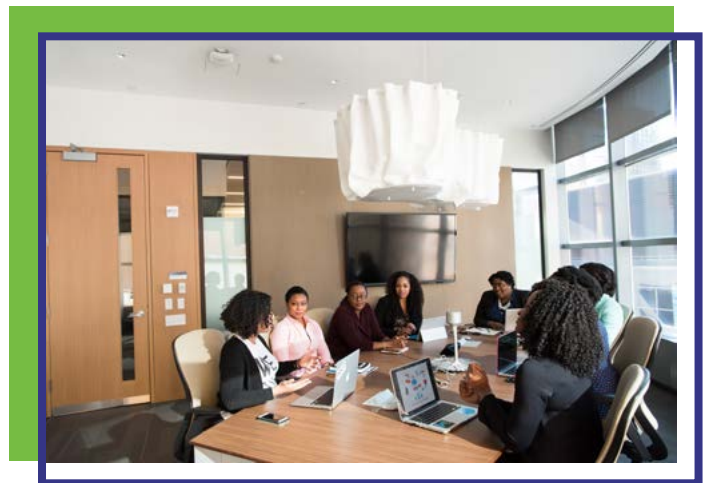
These are the main ideas proposed by participants, and stemming from this question:

1. We need more efforts to hire WOC into high-level positions, in such positions, they can help advance a culture of diversity from those places of power.
2. The beginning of an employee-employer, employee-manager relationship is the perfect time to start a dialogue.
3. For the manager and/or employer, it is important to see if WOC are staying in the job for more than six months to a year to ascertain whether there is bias at play, and hence tackle it.
4. WOC do not hide who you are and try to fit in. Be your best self.
5. EQ tests/training may help reduce and ultimately eliminate bias in the workplace, particularly if diversity and inclusion become part and parcel of the company's hiring and retaining practices.
6. Ensure there are solid conflict resolution practices at the workplace to fully address differences and difficulties stemming from bias and other issues impacting WOC and others.

7. Discuss the “pipeline” argument, which incorrectly suggests that there aren't WOC in the field to be recruited. Point to the biases in this argument.
8. Discuss microaggressions, and describe how these can be a manifestation of a bias.
9. Develop new, constructive habits and behaviors to override those more damaging and grounded in biases/racism.

A final thought and a critical point –a participant asked:

“Does the discomfort that your White colleagues have about race silence you?”



Recommendations

Agency

The culture of the place counts: While diversity and inclusion programs and practices are often in place, the culture of the place tends to override these efforts. There is a need to ensure that a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion is built and sustained, and this vision needs to come from the top. A company's culture that does not value diversity, equity, and inclusion can and often does reduce the ability of WOC to fully exercise their personal agency at work.

Assumptions about WOC undermine their agency: There is a need to ensure that WOC are seen for who they are, not the stereotypes of who they are believed to be. Often, WOC come into contact with people that characterize them as aggressive or angry. This double standard prevents them from exercising their agency. Indeed, there is a pressing need to create a space that welcomes comments and perspectives from everyone, with the same level of interest and respect. Relevant training is key to replace dismissiveness and negative assumptions with objectivity and respect.

People at the top: With less risk, people at the top can set the tone for organizational culture. A fair environment can also cultivate WOC's talent, to advance them in rank, so they too can reach the top.

A diversity of cultures in a diverse workplace: Companies need to take responsibility for understanding the cultures represented in their workplace, including Black, and Latino cultures.

While WOC can help build this awareness, it behooves companies to ensure that their workplace has a sophisticated level of diversity understanding and appreciation.

WOC self-advocacy: Companies should be providing training for their employees' self-advocacy so as to advance their skills in this area. This could include peer-to-peer approaches, as well as, perhaps, being part of the work that mentees engage in with their mentors and/or sponsors. In addition, companies could enable WOC to identify relevant programs outside of the company and pay their fees.

Equity: Leaders are responsible to address bias and equity with intention in order to build equitable settings that allow for the agency to thrive.

Dismissiveness is damaging. Equity must be a guiding principle. The company must understand and value WOC's agency.

Equity must be the rule, and it must be applied to decisions about promotions so as to eliminate bias and discrimination's impact.

Ensure appropriate resources are in place to support the success of WOC in their jobs. This may range from fair budgets for their projects, to appropriate staffing to conduct projects successfully.



Mentorship & Sponsorship

The value of diversity: Fully understand the value of diversity for the business sector. There is plenty of information about this in the diversity literature. For example:

1. Racially Diverse Companies Outperform Industry Norms by 35%. January 30, 2015. Forbes.
2. The Other Diversity Dividend. July-August 2018. Harvard Business Review.
3. Why Diversity Matters. 2015. McKinsey & Company.

Relationship building: Ensure that WOC in the tech sector have access to mentors and sponsors within the company. Thus, create venues for WOC to be able to access high ranking individuals in their field to build relationships, and gain support. These events can be company-sponsored events that bring together WOC and possible supporters. Identify those that can be engaged in peer-to-peer & near-peer-to-peer mentorship and sponsorship relationships with WOC employees.

To foster relationship-building between WOC and mentors and sponsors, companies can feature employees on their newsletters, describing their interests, core competencies, and aspirations.

During the course of the focus group sessions and individual interviews, some participants interchanged mentorship and sponsorship. It is important to establish that there is a difference. As defined elsewhere in this document, for the purpose of this project:

We define mentorship as having someone who provides guidance. This person could be someone at work or from the outside.

We define sponsorship as having an internal champion or advocate at work that provides career growth opportunities that propel you to the next level or promotion faster than any mentor can.

Building community: A triad forged by junior, mid, and senior staff members also helps build community. Companies can help build this concept and practice within their mentor and sponsor programs.

Helping WOC connect with people in other departments is a way to enable them to learn about what else is happening at the company. This can help WOC come up with new and creative ideas of benefit to the company. Reaching a point where someone can be matched with a sponsor, such as another WOC at a higher level can be greatly beneficial. This will enable the person working with a sponsor to see the potential and imagine herself in those higher ranks.

Advise and support: Mentors need to ensure that their advice and support are highly customized to the needs and aspirations of each of their mentees, not applying a cookie-cutter approach. In this manner, encourage the mentee to articulate a vision for her career.

Feedback & Communication Loop

Training: Companies need to ensure that managers receive sufficient training in order to be capable to provide objective, and actionable feedback to their direct reports, the kind that is not biased.

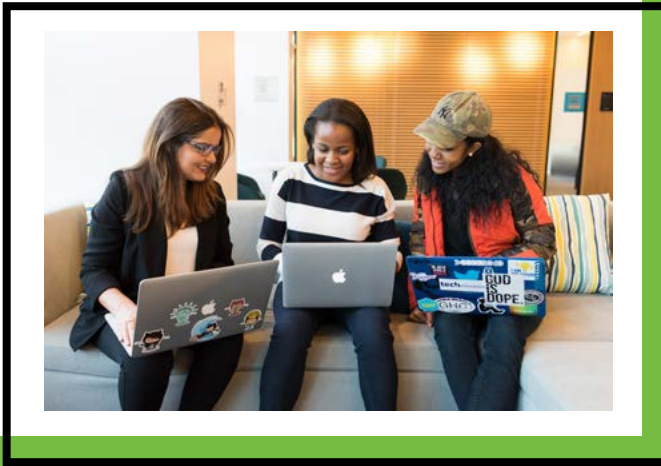
Managers must gain awareness of microaggressions, understanding what these are, how they are manifested, and their negative effects on WOC. During trainings, provide ideas for how to replace these negative practices with constructive behaviors and ensure managers know the difference.

Communication: Managers need to be equipped to clearly state their expectations in terms of content and timing of projects. They must be able to work with their direct reports in setting priorities as well. Communication needs to be transparent and honest, and manager's goals need to center their employees' for success.

Other aspects of effective communication include removing emotions and sticking to facts. Giving employees guidance to fix errors, and providing feedback that is actionable so that the direct report can take action.

Memorializing feedback, and equanimity: Ensuring the conversations are documented in writing is an effective way to memorialize actionable steps and direction for next steps. Feedback works best when both parties can offer comments to each other, instead of being unilateral, stemming only from the manager to the direct report.





Managing Bias

Begin with acknowledgements: Racism, discrimination, and bias exist. Acknowledge this, and then move forward with actionable strategies to manage, and ideally eliminate bias.

Training on bias: Train, and train again. Discuss the deleterious effects of bias, not only on the person impacted by it, but also on the company. Understand, and communicate effectively that a diverse company has greater opportunities for a bigger bottom line.

Tackle microaggressions: Train by providing examples and specific ideas on how to eliminate them.

Understand the weight of bias on WOC, and thus the weight on your company.

Hiring and bias: The “WOC are not in the pipeline” argument is old, and untrue. Examine hiring practices, expand the scope of the pipeline by building relationships with people and institutions where WOC are getting their education. Ensure HR has the tools and directions needed for an unbiased hiring approach.

Assess whether WOC are staying on the job, or leaving. If they are leaving, pursue a truthful understanding for their departure. Monitor this regularly as a way of assessing whether bias has anything to do with attrition.

Ensure there are solid conflict resolution practices in place to tackle issues and/or difficulties stemming from bias.

Create a safe (non-retaliatory) and courageous space for real dialogue about biases.

Conclusion

WOC in the tech sector are looking for companies to make a commitment to their well-being in the workplace.

The roadmap recommendations contained within the four pillars represent the voices of WOC. Their voices illustrate how they need to be seen, heard, and supported to be successful.

As is the case with projects, on occasion, there are some limitations. Namely, a larger budget would have allowed for a broader project scope, reaching greater numbers of WOC in tech, including Native Americans and Alaskan Natives into this study. However, the findings and related recommendations contained herein represent a robust set of practices that can lead to significant culture change, if seriously undertaken and sustained by the tech sector.

A next step will be to develop a scorecard for organizations that seek to operationalize the recommendations in this report. Specifically, the scorecard will allow tech companies to track progress as they implement the roadmap recommendations provided in this document. To this effect, the easy-to-use scorecard template will consist of the recommendations listed above, as well as space provided for tracking and recording progress within specific timeframes, and ideas for continued implementation improvements.

The intent of this project is to give companies a roadmap and scorecard to change culture in the workplace, making it a more hospitable and safer place for WOC to contribute and advance.

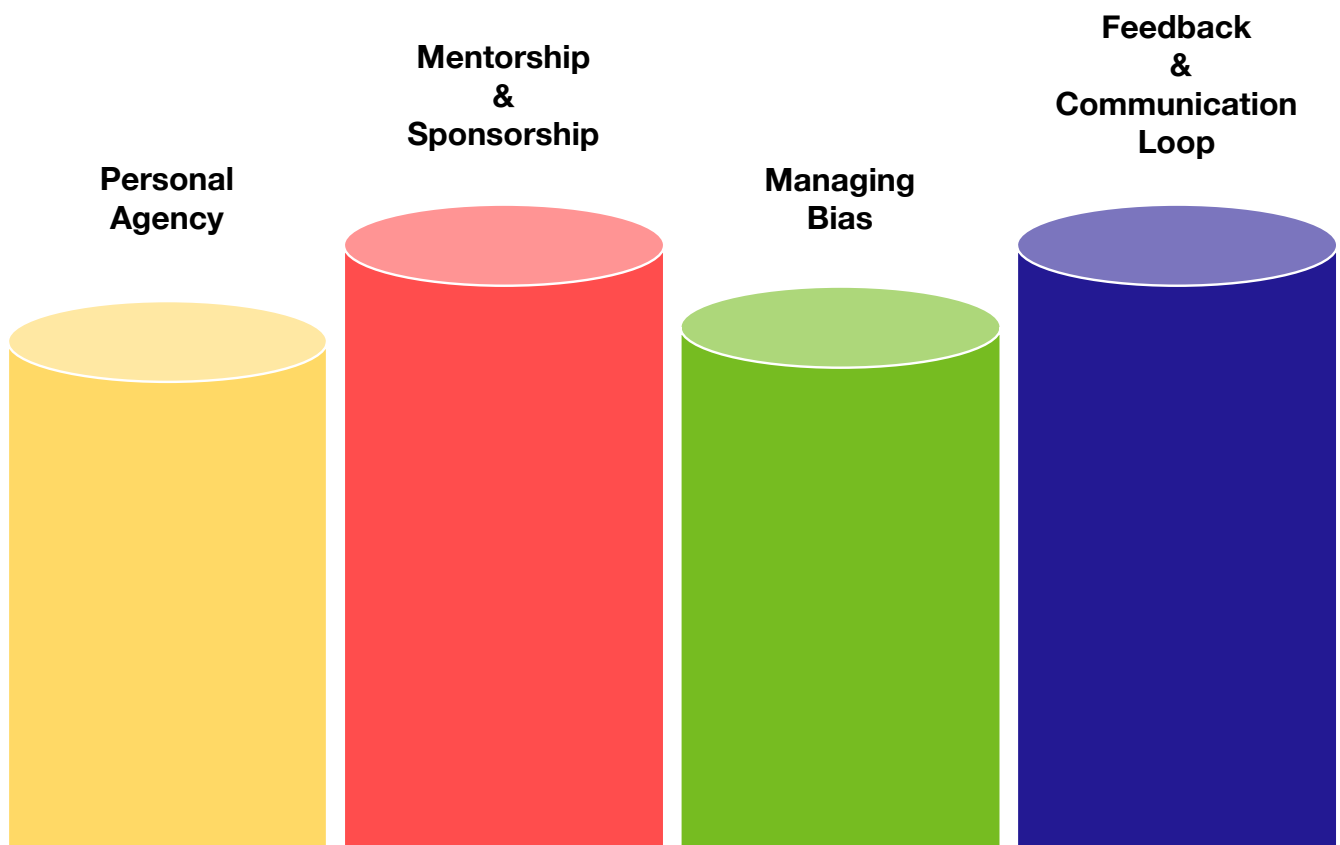
Putting the four-pillar roadmap into action can produce great results. Namely:

A company that takes on agency issues creates an environment that invites everyone to thrive, a place where all employees are encouraged to participate, and no one is dismissed.

A company that embraces mentorship and sponsorship programs as an effective mechanism to facilitate building strategic relationships is a place that pursues excellence and inclusion.

A company that fosters open, non-judgmental, and constructive communication and feedback loops is a place that values employees' talents and encourages growth across the board.

A company that deals with biases head on, and puts forth mechanisms to eliminate them —and its detrimental effects—, is a place that has a vision for greatness, equity, and fairness, and understands that a company where everyone thrives is a company that thrives.



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