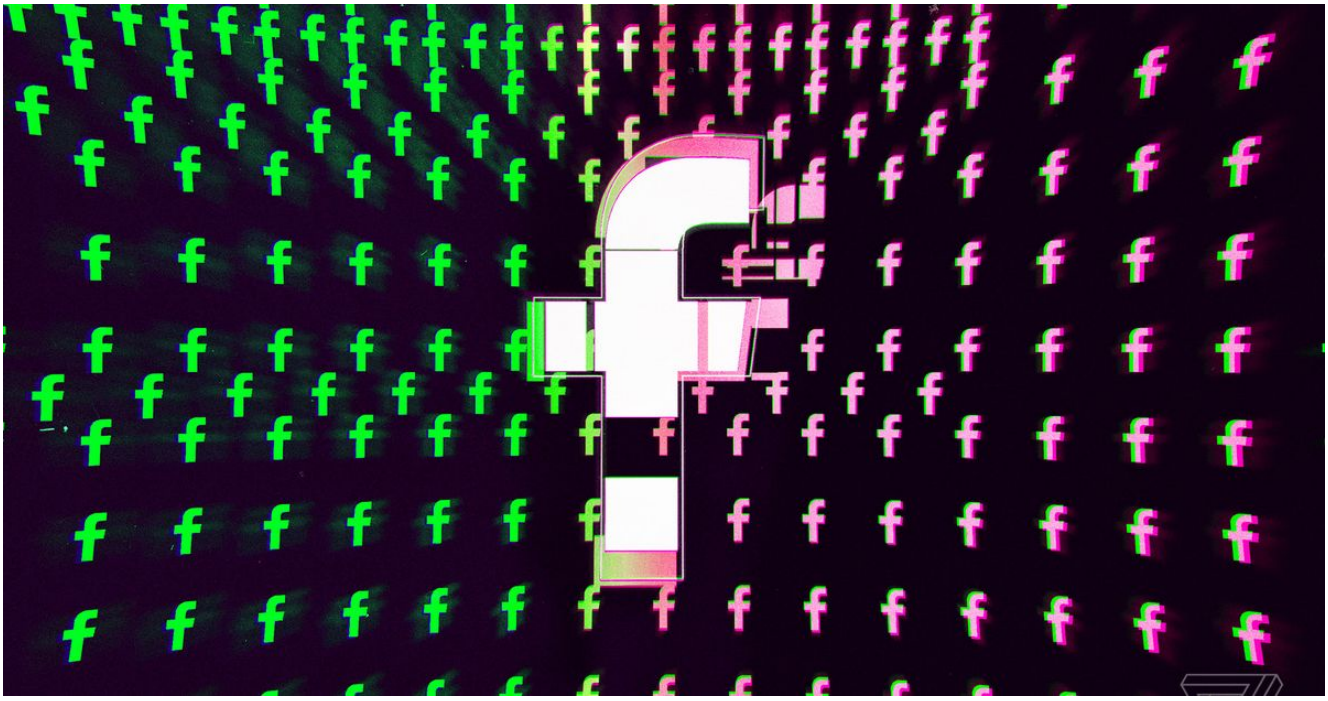
Facebook fractures its secretive hardware division



Roughly a year and a half ago, Regina Dugan, a former director for the US government's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, took the stage at Facebook's F8 developer conference. There, she told the audience that Facebook was working on brain-computer interfaces that might one day let you type with your thoughts.

It was a bold proclamation, and it helped at the time paint a picture of Facebook as a risk-taking, moonshot-hunting Silicon Valley juggernaut in the mold of Google and its X lab. Now, 18 months later, some of those projects are still reportedly in the works, but the team responsible for them no longer go by the DARPA-inspired name Building 8. And Dugan, who had joined Facebook from her time running a similar skunkworks group called ATAP that was pursuing an ill-fated modular smartphone project for Google, is now gone, having left Facebook more than a year ago.

According to a report today from *Business Insider,* Building 8 has been disbanded, with its projects redistributed to new

teams within the company's augmented and virtual reality division. According to Andew "Boz" Bosworth, the executive in charge of AR and VR at Facebook, it's misleading to characterize Building 8 as having been "killed," as *Business Insider* put it:

> *This is misleading. We renamed the Building 8 team Portal after that device launch. The research we initially started in Building 8 continues in our Facebook Reality Labs research group.*
>
> *— Boz (@boztank) December 14, 2018*

Instead, the two most high-profile projects from the division — the brain-computer interface project and an AI- and AR-infused video chat device — have been split up between two divisions. (*Business Insider* reported as much, but Facebook seems to take issue with the headline.) That video chat device became Facebook Portal, and the team that developed it formally replaced Building 8 when the device launched in October, as reported by *Yahoo* at the time. The Portal group, according to Facebook, will be responsible for future hardware projects that involve new, cutting-edge camera technology, as well as AR and VR.

Meanwhile, the brain-computer interface project is now operating out of Facebook Reality Labs, a division created back in May when Facebook underwent a substantial reorganization. Reality Labs is run by Michael Abrash, an early video game pioneer and technologist who came to Facebook by way of Oculus and holds the title of chief scientist.

Facebook, like Google, wants to innovate its way to future businesses

Facebook once sought to cultivate the type of mystique garnered by Google's X lab and its skunkworks projects, which have produced legitimate ventures including its self-driving unit, Waymo. Facebook hired Dugan to make that plan a reality,

and her early departure may have caused the company to temper its ambitions slightly. And to be fair, Google parent company Alphabet has also struggled at times with the reality of running multiple, money-losing divisions oriented around long-term bets. That eventually led to some cost-cutting and reorganization, as well as executive turnover at drone delivery outfit Project Wing and the high-speed internet division Access (formerly Google Fiber).

It’s still possible Facebook could one day develop a brain-computer interface or, as Dugan promised alongside that announcement at F8, a way to hear using your skin. For now, however, it seems like the more realistic outcome is that the Portal group takes up the responsibility of shipping real products, while Oculus, Facebook Reality Labs, and the broader AR/VR division at the company continue to think hard about how to invent the future of computing.

https://www.theverge.com/2018/12/14/18141524/facebook-building-8-reality-labs-ar-vr-portal-skunkworks-hardware-division