Microsoft Makes Strides in Diversity, But There’s Still a Long Way to Go



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Microsoft just released its sixth annual—and most detailed—diversity and inclusion report, emphasizing the consistent increase in the representation of women and minorities in its companies while acknowledging there’s still a long way to go.

In a post accompanying the release of the report, Microsoft’s chief diversity officer Lindsay-Rae McIntyre wrote that in addition to showing the progress the company has made toward a more diverse and inclusive workplace, the publication marks a renewed commitment by Microsoft to their “mission to consciously and intentionally include everyone.”

In an email to Adweek, a Microsoft spokesperson added, “There will always be more work to do when it comes to creating welcoming, inclusive spaces where every person feels valued and feels they can do their best work.”

At a moment when consumers wants brands to prove that their professed values match with corporate policies and actions, Microsoft is succeeding in some areas but has work to do in others. The company added twice as many women than men to its ranks over the past year. In the U.S., the number of African American/Black employees has risen 17.3% overall, with Hispanic/Latinx employees seeing a 12.5% bump as well.

Additionally, the report said there's no pay gap between women and men, or non-white and white among U.S. employees. The company gauges employee sentiment on several levels of inclusion. According to the report, 88% of Microsoft employees expressed positive feelings on factors such as authenticity, belonging, and a belief in Microsoft's commitment to diversity.

Despite gains in some areas, the work is far from done. There are still four men to every one woman at the executive level, and the overall percentage of women working for the company is just 27.6%. Despite hiring significantly more women than men in 2019, it only represented a 1.2% increase in the percentage of female staff. More than half of the company's employees are white, and that majority increases by over a dozen percentage points at the executive level.

To support the direction the software giant wants to go in recruiting and hiring, Microsoft said in its report that it has set up training and apprenticeship programs for people with nontraditional backgrounds or disabilities. And to ensure current employees are supported, its benefits program provides a healthcare package that includes less common features such as parental leave for all employees regardless of gender, mental health care and transgender care.

That kind of holistic care is key to building and retaining a diverse workforce, according to Wayne Sutton, co-founder and CTO of Change Catalyst, which uses strategic advising, startup programs, resources and events to improve inclusivity in the

tech world. “The entire tech industry has to go beyond percentages as a benchmark to look at diversity of employees in their workforce,” Sutton said.

To get a good measure of diversity and inclusion, companies have to answer more nebulous questions like whether employees feel comfortable, supported and included at work. “Those things all matter in terms of an inclusive culture, not just the employees’ identity,” Sutton said.

Microsoft’s model, with its employee sentiment analysis and support systems, could be a good start. Sutton said he hopes this report sparks more conversations in the tech space about what it really means to have an inclusive and diverse culture and supportive leadership.

Lack of diversity is a longstanding issue in Big Tech, which has caught the eye of lawmakers. In their own assessments, Google, Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest share a common theme: There’s still work to do.

Microsoft’s push toward a more diverse and inclusive workforce is reflected in its award-winning “Changing the Game” campaign by McCann New York. The brand’s Super Bowl spot, “We All Win,” features an adaptive Xbox controller being used by differently abled children to connect with their peers through gaming. The 2-minute ad garnered 1.1 billion impressions and was the most effective ad played during the Super Bowl, according to Unruly.

McCann took home the Grand Prix for Brand Experience and Activation at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity in June for the project. The campaign also took home several Constellation Awards for collaborative marketing at Adweek’s Brandweek event.

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