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Managing Expectations may help Women of Color persist in the tech workplace

SUMMARY

Women of Color (WOC) are vastly underrepresented in the tech sector and experience a high level of turnover once employed. Research and interventions to remedy this disparity have largely centered upon understanding and addressing pipeline issues and more recently, workplace biases. However, a new study by psychology researchers at Stanford examines the ways in which one's expectations about their ability to contribute at work upon entering a new company or starting a new position influences their sense of belonging and intention to stay. The study was conducted with 900 new hires (56 WOC) at a large Silicon Valley tech firm who were randomly assigned to an intervention or control group. The intervention, facilitated by the Stanford research team, was designed to mitigate concerns and level expectations regarding normal challenges around fit and success that are typical when changing roles or companies. The intervention consisted of sharing stories with the new hires from current employees about early career challenges of contributing and how these challenges improved with time. New hires also heard stories from current employees about how they solicit contributions from others. The control group received the tech company's standard onboarding process. Although the small sample of WOC in the study made it impossible to run official statistics on this group specifically, post intervention surveys at intervals of 1-week, 3-months, and 6-months showed promising preliminary results not just for WOC but also for Men of Color and women more broadly.

INTERVENTION INNOVATIONS

The intervention was associated with:

- Curbing the drop in **belonging and fit**
- Curbing the drop in **commitment to the company**
- Curbing the drop in **self-perceived potential for success**

The study team recommends tech companies set realistic expectations about company culture during onboarding to help new hires navigate common work challenges and feelings associated with fit and contribution.