

# “It’s a Never-Ending Quest to Find and Develop Talent”

BUILDING A DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE CULTURE IS  
ESSENTIAL TO AT&T’S CORPORATE SUCCESS

*Featuring an interview with:*

**Mark Collins** Senior  
Vice President Mobility  
Sales and Service  
Operations





## Mark Collins

Senior Vice President  
Mobility Sales and Service Operations  
AT&T

# Leveraging a Diverse Talent Pool to Increase Corporate Competitiveness

What is diversity? That question, both provocative and deceptively simple, has significant import for global enterprises today. When applied to the challenges and opportunities of developing skilled science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) workforces, the issue of diversity takes on extra urgency. Certain groups have historically been underrepresented in STEM workforces, with fewer still ascending to management ranks. These populations include women; people of color; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) workers; the disability community, and veterans, including those injured during service. As a consequence, companies are increasingly taking a broader view of diversity, seeking to create workplace environments that are inclusive for all. Employees' differing values, work styles, ages, and even soft skills are also factors companies now consider.

“We compete in a global marketplace for talent,” says **Mark Collins, Senior Vice President, Mobility Sales and Service Operations, AT&T.** “Our initiatives are aligned with the idea that the global marketplace is going to produce the talent we need to compete in the future. And so all of our diversity and inclusion initiatives are focused towards that end. It's one of those great things where doing what's good for society is also good for the marketplace and good for shareholders, because it raises the talent level of the workforce that you need to carry corporate assets and capabilities into the next century and beyond.”

Traditionally, diversity and inclusion programs have focused on ensuring that workers representing different races, genders, physical abilities, and sexual orientations are afforded the same opportunities as other employees. AT&T is regularly cited as one of the top 10 diversity and inclusion leaders in the U.S. for its work to ensure equity in recruiting practices, talent development and management, and promotion.

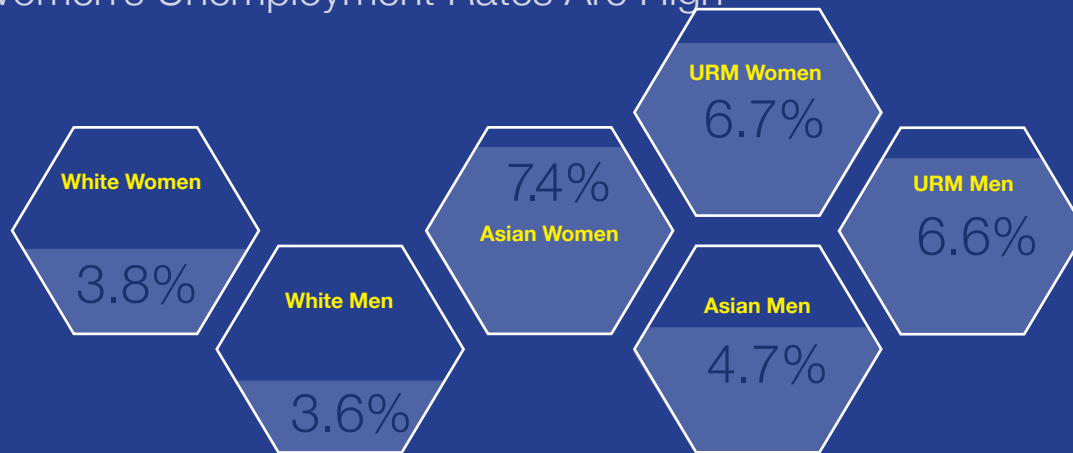
That model is a good start. According to National Science Foundation statistics, STEM workforces still skew heavily white, with 51 percent of roles filled by white men and 18 percent by white women in 2010, the latest year data was available. In addition, unemployment rates for STEM-educated Asian women, underrepresented minority (URM) men and women are about three percent higher than those for white men and women.<sup>1</sup> (Statistics on other populations are unavailable.)

But it may be limited. Today's workforce is affected by the same trends – globalization, industry disruption, pervasive technology use, multiculturalism, and changing values – that are shaping society. What does corporate diversity look like in this context?

## Technical Expertise Is the New Normal

“Technical proficiency requirements are growing exponentially,” says Collins. Online collaboration and productivity tools are now de rigueur in modern enterprises, meaning that even non-STEM workers need to possess fairly sophisticated technology skills. “What

## STEM-Trained Minority Men and Women's Unemployment Rates Are High



Higher education, MOOCs, and other training can help all workers keep STEM skills fresh.

Source: National Science Foundation Website.

you're seeing is much more of a bias towards technical talent in terms of an all-Internet Protocol (IP) world. One of the things our chairman has done is to migrate our collection of networks to an all IP platform with a focus on 2020.”

In addition, STEM employees need to commit to constantly updating their skills. Technical expertise, such as coding, can become quickly outdated with the introduction of new platforms or evolution of current systems. “You have to dedicate yourself to the idea of being a student of the game and being a lifelong learner. You can either use it as a competitive advantage or have it used against you,” says Collins. He says that AT&T’s Mobility CMO function is driving deeper into big data, looking for experts who can use advanced analytics to evolve advertising, marketing operations, pricing and promotion, and distribution disciplines.

STEM workers in all geographies, business functions, and roles are working harder than ever to evolve their skills to meet business needs. And the learning starts early.

### Academics Still Matter

Establishing a robust, diverse STEM pipeline begins in middle and high school, with exposing students to STEM classes, technologies, and mentors to help them cast a vision for their professional futures. Like many companies, AT&T has made sizeable investments in early intervention programs to grow STEM skills of diverse youth.

AT&T is also harnessing lower-cost massive open online courses (MOOCs) to extend its reach and empower both entry-level workers and highly skilled STEM experts alike. The company’s NanoDegree, offered in conjunction with Udacity, enables students to learn the basic programming skills they need to qualify for such jobs as a data analyst or iOS applications designer.<sup>2</sup> The program, which offers a low-cost academic credential that can be earned in just six to 12 months, puts a STEM career within reach to economically disadvantaged students who simply can’t afford college and might not complete challenging coursework that spans four years.

In addition, AT&T has partnered with Georgia Tech and Udacity to offer an online master's degree in computer science, the first of its kind to be delivered via a MOOC platform. The degree, which costs under \$7,000, puts advanced STEM education in the hands of working professionals. In its first year of operation, the program had to turn away nearly 2,000 individuals due to high demand.<sup>3</sup>

MOOCs have the ability to help determined individuals catapult their careers to the next level, both in the U.S. and abroad. Individuals in emerging markets need no longer be constrained by limits in education or income levels if they have access to wireless connectivity and low-priced computing devices and possess a determination to succeed.

Inside the enterprise, AT&T's tuition reimbursement program helps current employees earn academic degrees related to their job and is heavily used by diverse individuals: In 2013, 41 percent of the 9,000 beneficiaries were women, while 57 percent were people of color.<sup>4</sup>

## Employees Create the Corporate Culture

AT&T's diversity and inclusion strategy encompasses management training, networks, and mentors. Senior leaders can create a platform that all can use, but employees play an important role in creating and helping a culture of inclusion take root and flourish. Collins points to AT&T's employee resource groups, where individuals "organize themselves into their own advocacies, because we learned over time that you can't get it done strictly by having senior leadership driving a set of initiatives. That's important, but you're limiting yourself if that's the only thing you do." These groups allow individuals to promote diversity awareness and respect, as well as share ideas and resources. AT&T plays host to a wide array of networks not only for women, people of color, and other underrepresented populations, but also to other groups organized around such goals as career growth.

"Diversity for AT&T is not pointed at a specific ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. It's everybody," states Collins. That means helping growing capabilities both inside the company and in myriad communities AT&T serves.

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## Diversity Extends Beyond the Enterprise

Putting proof to that belief, AT&T extends its diversity strategy to include customers and suppliers. The company has a robust multicultural marketing program and spent \$15.5 billion, or 28 percent of its total supplier spend, with diverse businesses in 2014.<sup>5</sup> Diverse STEM-focused suppliers who can help AT&T achieve its business objectives with the mobile Internet, wireless U-verse, and cloud services will likely see ample growth opportunity for both their businesses and employees over the coming years.

## A Broader Notion of Diversity and Inclusion

A broad view of diversity and inclusion is a message that resonates with workers, who

consider their values and work styles to be part of their cultural makeup. Millennials are bringing different attitudes to the workplace than Boomers, says a recent study. They expect opportunities for rapid advancement, a work-life balance, and flexible work styles, and many aren't interested in assimilating into corporate cultures. All of these trends are causing HR experts to rethink their strategies for growing and motivating the workforce.<sup>6</sup> Both Millennials and Boomers alike are also considering companies' social policies in their employment decisions. Companies that have strong commitments to social and political equality, enable innovation and entrepreneurship, and promote environmental sustainability are viewed as the most desirable employers by today's workers.

With global, highly mobile workforces; multi-ethnic workers; and more progressive attitudes it's a given that the mandate of diversity offices will change over time. Companies' investments in early education will bear fruit, as more diverse candidates enter the STEM pipeline and get hired for top jobs. Diverse employees will increasingly receive the support they need to build exceptional careers as individual contributors or managers. Best practices will

be so embedded in corporate culture that they will be unconsciously modeled by workforces. The C-suite will ideally be more often peopled by women, people of color, and a range of other diverse individuals. And diverse employees will increasingly sit across the negotiating table from diverse suppliers. However, diversity is a journey, not a destination, say CEOs at a roundtable discussion. As such, it's not something that can be just checked off and forgotten.<sup>7</sup> As companies strive to achieve strategic hiring and growth targets, they should never forget that diversity has a human face.

That's a call that all global enterprise leaders should take seriously, says Collins. "If you don't take a diverse and inclusive approach, then you're not availing yourself of all the resources available. You're not optimizing the potential of the market to produce key talent to take you to the next level. No business team that I've ever been a part of or been associated with has ever raised their hands and said, 'We have too much talent on our hands. We've got enough. Now we're just going to stop.' It's a never-ending quest to raise the bar, and one way you can do that is to make sure that the whole community – domestically and globally – is engaged."



## Endnotes

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