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Is Sheryl Sandberg's Power Shrinking? Ten Years of Facebook Data Offers Clues

Worker lists reveal which teams are growing fastest, and shifting power centers and priorities

By [Stephanie Stamm](#) [Follow](#), [John West](#) [Follow](#) and [Deepa Seetharaman](#) [Follow](#)

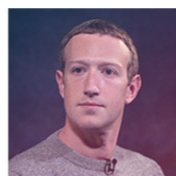
Oct. 1, 2021 8:05 am ET

Facebook Inc. has grown at an explosive pace. Since 2012, the year it went public, the total number of employees on staff has grown by an average of 38% a year, hitting 63,404 in June, according to company filings.

That expansion has helped the company scoop up more than a third of the global population as users and gobble up ever more digital-ad dollars. In recent years, facing criticism over problems on its platforms, Chairman and Chief Executive [Mark Zuckerberg](#) and other leaders have touted Facebook's hiring of tens of thousands of people to review content and enforce its rules.

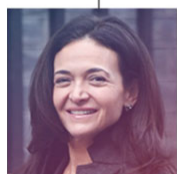
Those public numbers and proclamations tell only part of the story. The Wall Street Journal reviewed 10 years of Facebook annual employee lists, which showed names, titles and managers for Facebook's staffers and contract workers.

The data, part of an array of documents the Journal examined for its Facebook Files series, show which teams under which executives have expanded the fastest, providing an unusually detailed public view of the shifting power centers and priorities of one of the world's most influential companies.



Mark Zuckerberg
Chief executive officer

First-tier managers



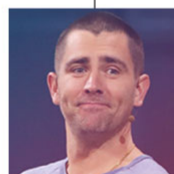
Sheryl Sandberg
Chief operating officer



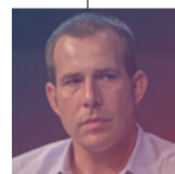
David Wehner
Chief financial officer



Mike Schroepfer
Chief technology officer*



Chris Cox
Chief product officer



Javier Olivan
Vice president of central product services

*Announced he will be stepping down in 2022.

Note: A color filter has been used on the photos.

PHOTOS: Mark Lennihan/AP (Zuckerberg); Stefan Rousseau/AP (Sandberg); David Paul Morris/Bloomberg News (Wehner); Nikki Richter for The Wall Street Journal (Schroepfer); Stephen Iam/Reuters (Cox) Susana Gonzalez/Bloomberg News (Olivan)

The findings include:

- Javier Olivan, who oversees teams assigned to expand Facebook's user base and analyze activity on the platform, has had by far the biggest growth in staffers

reporting up to him of all the executives who answer directly to Mr. Zuckerberg in recent years.

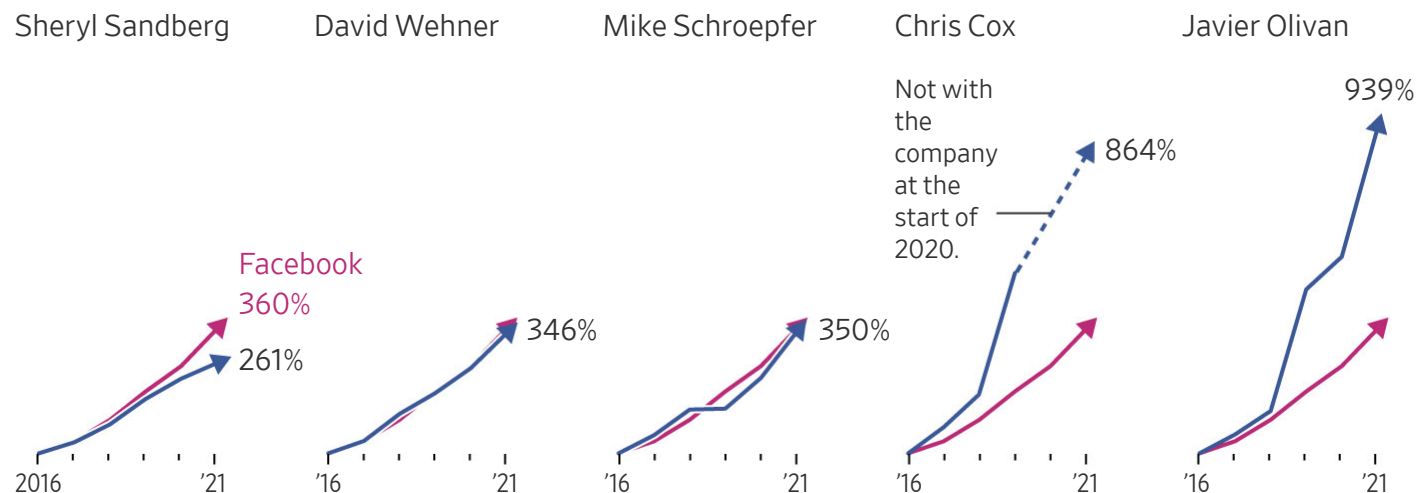
- Facebook's rolls of contract workers have grown even faster than its staff, numbering more than the company's own employees as of January 2019 and nearing 98,000 this year.
- Sheryl Sandberg, who is chief operating officer and has long been seen as Mr. Zuckerberg's No. 2, has had her share of Facebook's staff decline in recent years. Over the past year, though, the legal team, which is part of her portfolio, has grown about 60% faster than the company overall as Facebook confronts antitrust challenges, shareholder lawsuits and other legal problems.

Joe Osborne, a Facebook spokesman, disputed the accuracy of some of the Journal's numbers. In a written statement, he said: "Imputing Facebook's priorities based on the company's org chart is flawed and irresponsible. Many of our initiatives and projects run across different teams and functions, such as our work on privacy or the 40,000 people working on safety and security."

The data show that teams reporting up through managers who oversee Facebook's products, analytics, advertising and marketing are growing at a much faster rate than Facebook overall. The expansion of the teams focused on growth has continued since the 2016 U.S. presidential election, a period when Facebook

also has emphasized its trust-and-safety efforts in response to Russian interference and other problems on the platform.

Change in number of staff since 2016 for executives directly under Mark Zuckerberg



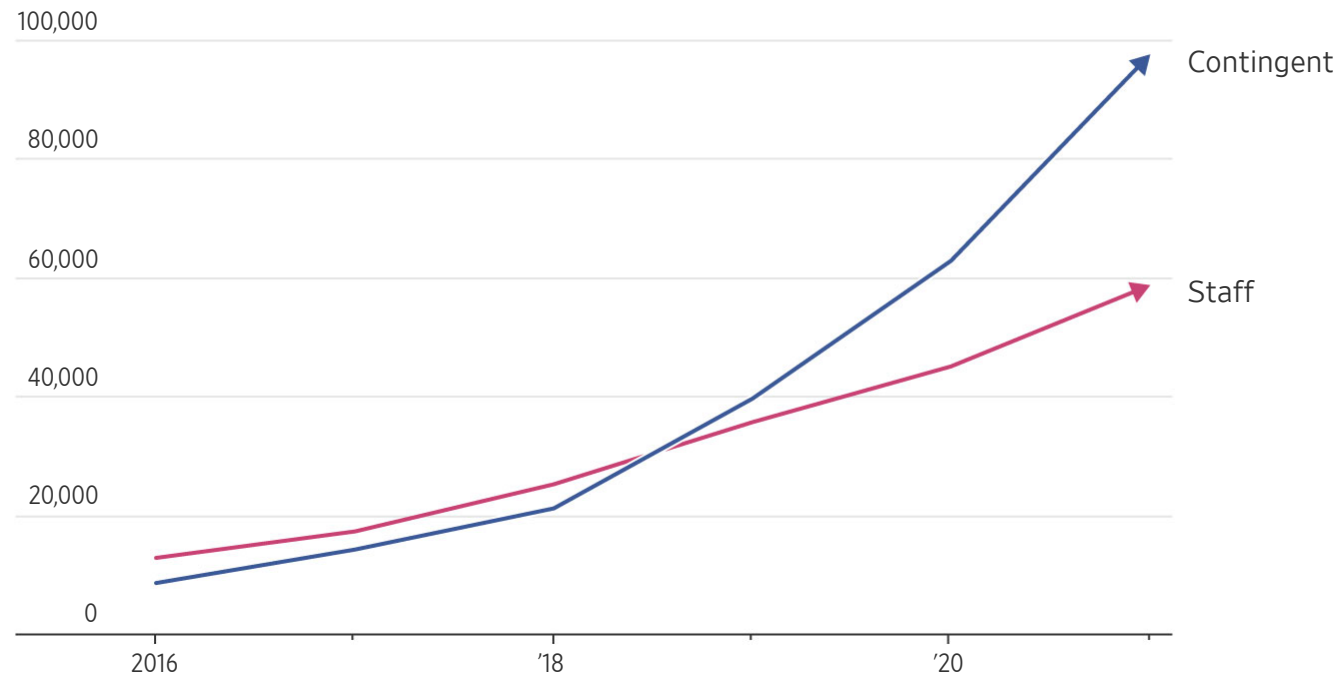
Note: Chart doesn't include contract workers.

Staffers under Mr. Olivan, whose title is vice president of central product services, increased more than 900% in the five-year period, the data show. Chief Product Officer Chris Cox, a longtime Zuckerberg lieutenant who left in 2019 and returned just over a year later, also rapidly expanded his sphere.

The company has been adding contractors, known as “contingent workers,” even faster than it has been hiring staff employees. Ms. Sandberg oversees the largest group of contractors. More than 60% of the almost 98,000 contingent workers as

of January report up to Ms. Sandberg, by that measure giving her oversight of the largest number of people working for Facebook. Mr. Osborne, the Facebook spokesman, said the Journal's figure for contingent workers is inaccurate and incomplete, and declined to provide the company's numbers.

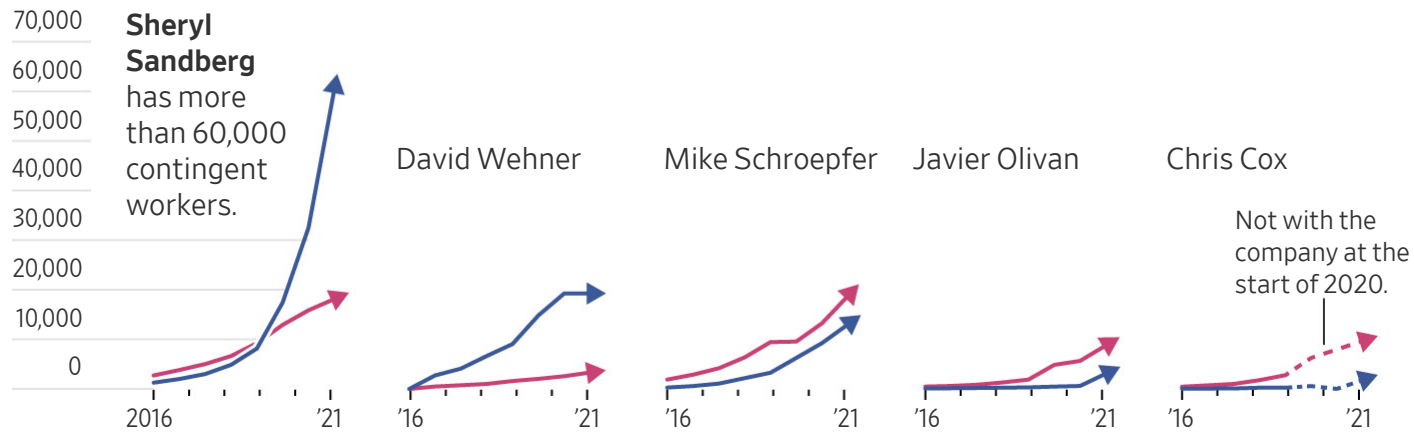
Facebook employees by employment status



Note: Interns are included in staff count and make up less than 1% each year.

Facebook employees by employment status

■ Contingent ■ Staff

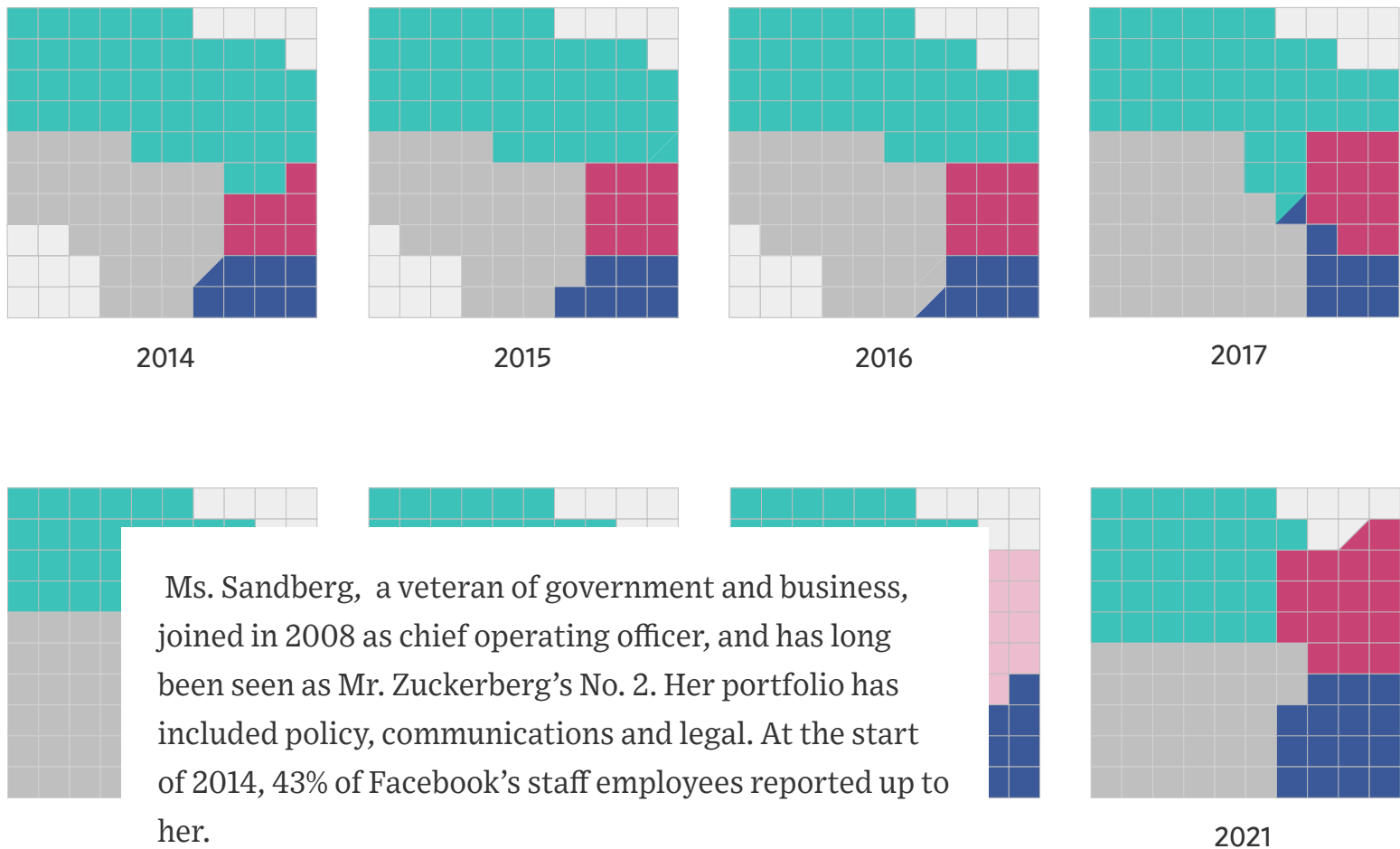


Note: Interns are included in staff count and make up less than 1% each year.

Many of those workers are responsible for reviewing content that has been flagged as potentially violating Facebook's rules. Those moderator roles are notoriously difficult because of the nature of some content, which can include violence and child exploitation.

Facebook's makeup, by managers reporting directly to Zuckerberg

■ = 1% of the company



Though Ms. Sandberg remains a top figure at Facebook, recent data show her share of Facebook's staff employees this year at 31%. That doesn't include the growing army of contract workers she oversees.

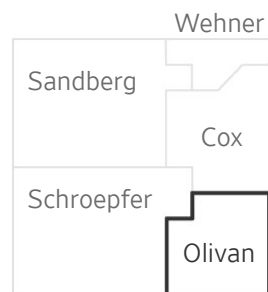
By the start of 2021, the proportion of Facebook's staff answering up through Chief Technology Officer Mike Schroepfer surpassed hers as the largest single block. He oversees engineers and coders. He said last month he will step down from his role next year. The Facebook spokesman said more recent numbers show Ms. Sandberg has more employees reporting to her than any other top executive.

The number of employees reporting to Messrs. **Olivan** and **Cox** has grown from a combined 15% of the total in 2014 to 31% this year, equivalent to the total for Ms. Sandberg.

*Chief Product Officer Chris Cox wasn't with the company at the start of 2020 and was labeled as an independent adviser in the data. Included here are executives who reported directly to Mark Zuckerberg that year: Fidji Simo (Vice President, Product Management); Stan Chudnovsky (Vice President of Messenger); Will Cathcart (Vice President of WhatsApp). From 2015 to 2018, WhatsApp CEO Jan Koum reported directly to Zuckerberg. All these teams are included in Chris Cox's grouping as he ran them in later years.

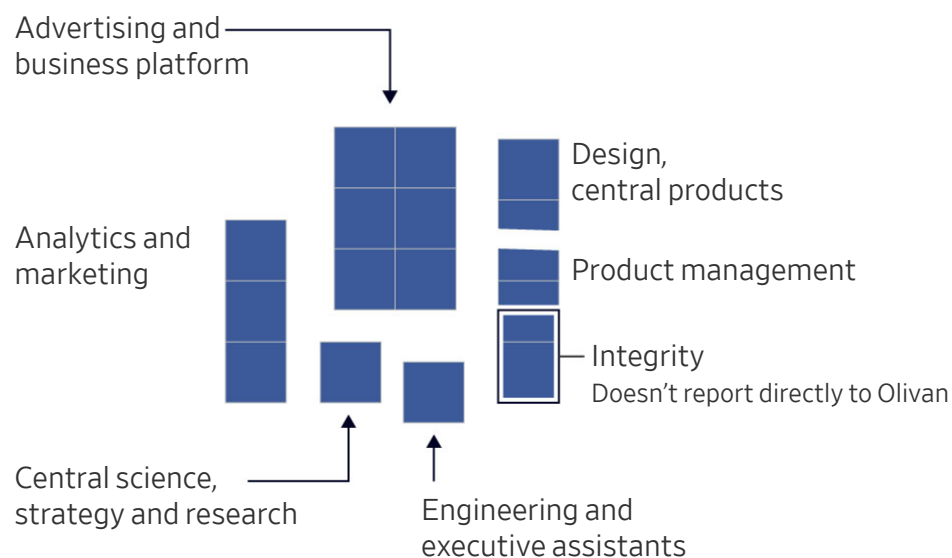
Note: Team counts are approximate and identified by the manager's title. Data as Jan. 1 of each year. The CFO in 2014 was David Ebersmen and has been David Wehner from 2015-present.

In addition to the growth teams, Mr. Olivan oversees many of the groups responsible for improving the quality and trustworthiness of content on Facebook, known as "integrity teams." Among many other things, they monitor and measure objectionable content and develop tools to minimize or eliminate posts that users don't want to see on the platform. Mr. Olivan's teams often take on some of the most complex and critical initiatives for the company. He is one of the longest-serving executives at Facebook.



Olivan's 2021 team makeup

■ = 1% of Facebook



Advertising as well as analytics and marketing make up the largest shares of staffers reporting to Mr. Olivan—41% and 21%, respectively. Integrity accounts for 9% of staffers reporting to him, although the company says most of the employees working on integrity issues are in other groups.

One team reporting to Ms. Sandberg that is growing quickly is the legal team under Chief Legal Officer Jennifer Newstead. The number of employees reporting to Ms. Newstead, including staffers and contractors, increased by 74% in the year through January, reflecting the growing array of regulatory, legislative and legal fights.

—Design by Andrew Levinson

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