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Fired the AI Director. Disbanded the Python Core Team. Is Microsoft Abandoning Its Own Future?

When AI-First Means People-Last: Microsoft's Layoffs Leave Python and AI Teams Gutted.

7 min read · May 29, 2025

Dylan Cooper   (Follow)

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In its latest round of global layoffs, Microsoft appears to have hit software product development teams the hardest. According to documents reviewed by Bloomberg from the Washington State government — where Microsoft is headquartered — software engineering is the single most affected job category, accounting for over 40% of the approximately 2,000 roles cut in the state.

Among those laid off are members of the **Faster CPython team,** the group behind most of the performance improvements in recent Python versions. In addition to software engineers, many project-related roles have also been severely impacted. Data shows that nearly 600 positions in **product management and technical project management** were eliminated in Washington alone, representing around 30% of the total layoffs.

Even Microsoft's **Director of AI, Gabriela de Queiroz,** was reportedly let go. According to a source familiar with the matter, the cuts also targeted managers and employees assigned to AI-related projects. In contrast, more customer-facing roles such as sales and marketing were less affected by the layoffs.

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01 Several Core CPython Contributors Depart

The Faster CPython team, composed of six engineers including Python's creator Guido van Rossum and core developers Mark Shannon and Michael Droettboom, was introduced publicly by Microsoft in a 2022 blog post.

Reportedly, the team was originally formed under van Rossum's leadership to help implement the *Shannon Plan* proposed by Mark Shannon — an ambitious goal to "make Python five times faster in four years." Van Rossum noted at the time: *"This would be too much for a volunteer. From the start, I thought we should try to get Microsoft to hire Mark and a small team to support him. It's important work, and it's too much for one person to handle."*

Not long before that, Microsoft had lured van Rossum — then 64 — out of retirement, appointing him as a Distinguished Engineer and granting him the freedom to choose his own projects.

"So in the end, I decided to return to my roots, form a team, and work on making Python faster," van Rossum said. The project clearly held deep personal significance for him.

Since its inception, the Faster CPython team drove many of the major performance improvements in recent Python releases, including a specialized interpreter, a JIT compiler, garbage collection (GC) optimizations, and *stack references* (stackrefs).

"This was Microsoft's way of giving back to Python," van Rossum explained. Microsoft has long supported Python in various ways — through free courses for Azure AI users, the VS Code Python extension, bundled Python on Windows 10, and by being a sponsor of the Python Software Foundation (PSF) since 2006.

However, just yesterday, core CPython developer Brett Cannon revealed on LinkedIn that three key members of the Faster CPython team — Eric Snow, Irit Katriel, and Mark Shannon — were all laid off in Microsoft's latest round of global job cuts.

Public records show that Eric Snow, a CPython core developer since 2012 and a member of the Faster CPython team since early 2021, was focused on improving Python performance. He proposed and worked on the *Per-Interpreter GIL*, a major step toward better multithreading in Python. This made it possible in Python 3.12 to run interpreters that don't share the Global Interpreter Lock (GIL), paving the way for improved performance on multicore processors.

Irit Katriel was mainly responsible for exception handling in the CPython team. She co-authored PEP 654, released in Python 3.11, which made it possible to raise and handle multiple unrelated exceptions simultaneously. Prior to Microsoft, Katriel worked at Intel's development center in Haifa, Israel, building performance simulators for the Merced processor. She later spent 15 years in banking technology after completing her Ph.D.

Mark Shannon, the technical lead of the Faster CPython team, has been contributing to CPython since 2010. Known for his deep expertise in Python performance, he authored the *Shannon Plan* in 2020. Shannon also participated in several Python Enhancement Proposals (PEPs), including PEP 412, 590, 626, and 659.

Just a month ago, Guido van Rossum was reported to have returned to the Python community as *BDFL (Benevolent Dictator For Life)*. After stepping down from that role years ago, he was later voted onto the new Python Steering Council shortly before his retirement — bringing him back into the core decision-making circle.

In response to all this, one user exclaimed online: *"Are they disbanding the entire team?"*

That same day, **Michael Droettboom** confirmed the layoffs on LinkedIn, writing: *"Most of the Faster CPython team was laid off."*

Under the post, many expressed sadness and frustration. *"No one is safe. Even high-performing engineers aren't reassigned — they're just let go."*

Others pointed out: *"Open-source teams are often the first to go in large corporations,"* and *"If you're not directly generating revenue, you're usually the first on the chopping block."*

Last year, Google also reportedly laid off its entire Python team — a claim later confirmed by CPython core developer Thomas Wouters in a follow-up post.

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02 "Preaching AI While Firing the AI Director"

As Microsoft doubles down on AI, the sudden layoff of **Gabriela de Queiroz**, a senior leader in the field, came as a shock to many.

De Queiroz confirmed her dismissal on X (formerly Twitter), writing: *"We were asked to stop work immediately and set up out-of-office notifications. But I chose to stay a little longer — attend meetings, say goodbye, and finish what I could."*

She added: *"Am I sad? Of course. I'm heartbroken to see so many incredibly talented people I had the privilege to work with get laid off. These are people who deeply care, who go above and beyond, and who truly make a difference. But I believe something good will come out of this."*

With over 15 years of experience in AI strategy and product innovation, de Queiroz's departure sparked strong reactions across the tech industry. Many saw her role as critical to Microsoft's "AI-first" future and found the decision inexplicable.

"I have to say, this makes zero sense," one user posted. "A company that's shouting about AI from every rooftop… fires its AI Director? That's absurd. Another user joked:*"Has AI started running the company already?"*

But beneath the sarcasm was a growing concern over the future of tech employment: *"Is this a preview of the AGI era? Will more and more people in tech be out*

of work?" "Even top talent in emerging fields like AI are no longer safe in today's tech landscape."

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03 How Are People Reacting to All This?

On public social platforms, **hundreds of employees have voiced confusion, sadness, and frustration** over Microsoft's latest round of layoffs.

Reports indicate that the layoffs were carried out abruptly. Former Microsoft employee **Carsolina Walton** recounted how she was added to a meeting at the last minute — only to be told by a complete stranger that she had been laid off. *"A meeting suddenly appeared on my calendar… and when a stranger joined the call, I quickly realized I was part of the Microsoft layoffs."*

Many expressed disbelief at the scale and scope of the layoffs: *"Even people* inside *Microsoft don't understand it — except maybe those making the decisions."* *"It would be nice if they at least explained* why *this is happening."*

Some see this as a sign of the times: *"As AI advances, the need for human coders will nearly vanish. This is the reality every software engineer will face in the next 2–3 years."*

Others pushed back on that narrative, pointing out that even Microsoft's AI Director was laid off — undermining the idea that AI alone is replacing people.

Microsoft's official stance is that this wave of layoffs is part of a broader "organizational restructuring" — aimed at maintaining "competitiveness and agility."

According to internal sources and media reports, the layoffs were not performance-related. The tech giant, which has aggressively integrated AI into nearly all of its services, says the move is meant to streamline operations and prepare for the future.

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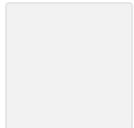
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Responses (37)

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What are your thoughts?

MonkeyAtATyperwriter
May 29

> "As AI advances, the need for human coders will nearly vanish. This is the reality every software engineer will face in the next 2–3 years."

That's ridiculous. AI is a tool. You still need someone to code using AI. Troubleshooting AI generated code and getting it to work often takes more expertise than writing the code by hand. The entire nature of Software Engineering involves... more

👏 342   💬 4 replies   <u>Reply</u>

Rafael Santos
May 31

The Whole AI thingy is now sounding more and more like a pyramid scheme.

👏 209   💬 3 replies   <u>Reply</u>

NTTP
Jun 1

> Even high-performing engineers aren't reassigned

no doubt many bureaucrats, layers of management, and corporate politicians remain...

👏 74   💬 2 replies   <u>Reply</u>

[See all responses]

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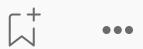
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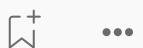
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