

**Date:** July 5, 2020

**To:** Mr. Jake Jones

**From:** Abhijith Umesh

**Subject:** To discuss about the advent of employee activism in technological industry and its consequences.

**Purpose:**

The main intent of this memo is to discuss about the burgeoning topic of employee activism in the corporate world. Employee activism in its simplest terms is a collective action taken by employees to speak against their employers on controversial topics that impact the society [1]. Though sit-outs and protests were common amongst the labor class in the manufacturing units to raise their voice for pay hikes or demand pending salaries [3], there is a shift in trend today where coders, testers, engineers and white-collar workers are coming forward to discuss about the social and environmental change. Workers are now seen caring for a big picture than just personal interest. Employees are not scared about getting fired and have taken to protests and strikes to oppose their employer's business practices.

Employee activism has forced giants in the technical space to withdraw some of the demanding initiatives. Recently 40 employees at the corporate Walmart offices staged a walkout with the sole purpose to stop the sale of guns. These efforts were fruitful as Walmart announced that it will no longer sell ammunition. To add, 20,000 employees from Google staged a protest against the firm's handling of sexual harassment which led to new company policies. Employees of Salesforce.com and Microsoft Corp. also persuaded their executives about their dealings with US Immigration and Customs enforcement. All these are setting positive vibes in the society and also putting a check on the firms so that they adhere to the values that benefit the habitat at large. Corporate employees must also use the power of employee activism in a limited fashion so that they do not embarrass the companies and put the confidential data at stake.

**Summary of employee activism in Amazon:**

Amazon, the e-commerce giant also witnessed the taste of the employee activism in September 2019. Amazon's cloud-computing business aids exploration by oil and gas company and thereby contributes to climate change. 'Amazon employees for climate justice' is an employee forum at Amazon that bases its principles on decreasing the carbon footprint worldwide. When the top executives did not pay heed to the issue, hundreds of employees walked out of Amazon offices and participated in global climate strike. These workers demanded a strategy for coping with climate change and reduce the dependency on fossil fuels that contribute to global warming. The activist

employees were targeted and warned that future infractions could result in termination. Rather than giving up, the activists built up pressure on the employer by soliciting a huge crowd that made it challenging to carry out business. As a result, the company took actions to disclose a measure that promised to substantially tackle the problem by 2030. It is really impressive to see how one of the big tech companies had to retract its policies by employee activism.

Amazon employees have slowly started criticizing the operational handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are already 74 warehouses and delivery facilities where the virus has spread rapidly and infected the workers. There is a slow emerging protest calling for safer working conditions. In the light of this incident, two employees who openly voiced their opinion were fired. It is felt like that the company was targeting the people who were vociferous and thereby attempted to silence everyone [2]. After a chorus of politicians and union demanded an improvement in the workplace conditions, Amazon is taking measures to curb the pandemic at workplace by providing masks, checking the temperature of employees and providing hand sanitizers.

#### **Actions:**

Employee activism is a good tool to check that the companies do not violate the laws and thwart the menace caused by a company on the environment. It is a good way for the leaders to listen to what their employees are upset about and cater to their demands. Many a times, executives do not heed to the employee's problems that leads to all the stir in the company. An Ideal company must have a good culture, work life balance, adhere to the regulations and protect the surroundings.

However, employees must not take undue advantage of the employee activism by throwing tantrums. Additionally, people may get carried away by rumors without in-depth analysis. Employees must also make efforts to convince their executives during all-hands meetings by keeping the matters as much confidential as possible. If there is a data breach or leak in the confidential data, the company may suffer high time losses. An average data breach loss comes to a total of \$3.92 million USD [4]. In order to overcome such problems, a company's executive must conduct quarterly surveys and check to see if there are any genuine feedbacks given by the employees that the company can incorporate there by not paving way for activism.

#### **Citations:**

[1] Social Activism in and Around Organizations - Forrest Briscoe and Abhinav Gupta, 30 Nov 2017 <https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2016.1153261>

[2] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/04/13/amazon-workers-fired/>

[3] <https://www.hrkatha.com/features/employee-activism-is-reaching-serious-levels/>

[4] <https://www.ibm.com/security/data-breach>