

Whereas, Alphabet may face business risks related to employee morale and user trust due to insufficient protection for employees voicing ethical and human rights concerns regarding company practices.

Resourcing whistleblower protections is vital to a well-functioning system. For example, the U.S. Department of Labor has reported a major problem with whistleblower protections is the “lack of resources and proper tracking of complaints, as well as a complicated patchwork of regulations that aim to protect whistleblowers.” And according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, “A non-retaliation policy alone, without a system to ensure its respect (such as disciplinary action against those who retaliate), is unlikely to encourage reporting.”

Furthermore, a specific focus on protecting human rights is a necessary component of a system of strong whistleblower protections. A United Nations Report on whistleblower protection recommended: “Disclosure of human rights or humanitarian law violations should never be the basis of penalties of any kind.” A 2018 letter from fourteen human rights groups urged Google to “Guarantee protections for whistle-blowers and other employees speaking out where they see the company is failing its commitments to human rights.”

New York University’s AI Now recommended companies “provide protections for conscientious objectors, employee organizing, and ethical whistleblowers.” In October 2019, the European Union adopted a rule to protect whistleblowers in several new areas, including privacy and data protection.

This topic is one that Alphabet is currently grappling with. In 2017, Google asked the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to overturn a policy that allowed workers to organize on company systems and prevented companies from retaliating; in 2019, as part of a settlement agreement with NLRB, Google must tell workers they will not be retaliated against for exercising their rights. In November 2019, employees protested actions of the company’s investigations team, claiming it was illegal retaliation for organizing, violating the NLRB settlement, and labeling Google’s actions “brute force intimidation.” Google then reportedly fired workers active in organizing, reportedly for violating data security policies.

These controversies clearly touch on how the company is addressing human rights issues. Reporting indicates that many of the employees who have resigned in a very public manner discussed in their resignation letters retaliation and punishments related to speaking up about the ethics and human rights implications of company projects and business – e.g. China, Project Maven, and other projects.

A George Washington 2019 report found whistleblowing report volume “is associated with fewer and lower amounts of government fines and material lawsuits.”

Resolved, shareholders request the Board of Directors to issue a report (within a reasonable time, at reasonable cost, and excluding confidential information) evaluating the company's whistleblower policies and practices and assessing the feasibility of expanding those policies and practices above and beyond current levels to cover, for example, information concerning the public interest and/or information concerning rights contained in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.