

**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.

Whistleblower protections are vital to a well-functioning company. The Department of Labor has reported a major problem with whistleblower protections is the “lack of resources and proper tracking of complaints.” 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.”

For years, Alphabet has faced controversies about retaliating against workers. In December 2020, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) alleged Google illegally fired and surveilled employees involved in labor organizing, alleging “interfering with, restraining, and coercing employees in the exercise of their rights.”

Also in December 2020, Google fired the prominent co-lead of its Ethical Artificial Intelligence team, Dr. Timnit Gebru, who was researching the risks of technology, including Google’s. The firing prompted media attention, social media backlash, and an open letter signed by thousands of employees stating the firing “heralds danger for people working for ethical and just AI — especially Black people and People of Colour — across Google.”

In 2019, employees claimed Google was violating a settlement agreement with the NLRB requiring Google to tell workers they will not be retaliated against for exercising their rights, citing “brute force intimidation.” Google then reportedly fired workers active in organizing, reportedly for violating data security policies. 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.”

Reporting suggests that many Google employees who have resigned or been fired, including executives, publicly report retaliation after voicing human rights implications of company practices, including systemic workplace racism<sup>1</sup> and sexism<sup>2</sup>, and projects enabling censorship<sup>3</sup>, surveillance<sup>4</sup>, and war.<sup>5</sup> “I’m proud of what I did, and I believe everyone has a right to know what their work is being used for,” said an employee who resigned after protesting Google’s contract with Customs and Border Protection.

These red flags suggest the potential for culture, ethics, and/or human rights problems internally.

A recent report from the \$100 trillion Principles for Responsible Investment states that effective whistleblowing mechanisms are a key feature of good governance – and implementation is best assessed through robust transparency and disclosures.

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

RESOLVED that shareholders of Alphabet, Inc. urge the Board of Directors to oversee a third-party review analyzing the effectiveness of its whistleblower policies in protecting human rights. A report on the review, prepared at reasonable cost and omitting confidential or proprietary information, should be publicly disclosed on Alphabet’s website.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/aug/18/women-google-memo-racism-sexism-discrimination-quit>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.vice.com/en/article/59nmkx/google-employee-alleges-discrimination-against-pregnant-women-in-viral-memo>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theverge.com/2020/1/2/21046522/google-china-dragonfly-ross-lajeunesse-human-rights-chief-censorship>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.vox.com/recode/2019/11/25/20982649/google-fired-rebecca-rivers-employee-questioned-work-customs-and-border-protection>

<sup>5</sup> <https://gizmodo.com/google-employees-resign-in-protest-against-pentagon-con-1825729300>