

Google CEO Pichai cancels 'town hall' on gender dispute

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In this file photo dated May 17, 2017, file photo, Google CEO Sundar Pichai delivers the keynote address for the Google I/O conference in Mountain View, Calif. Pichai has canceled an internal town hall meant to address gender discrimination on Thursday, Aug. 10, after employee questions for management began to leak online from the company's internal messaging service. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg, File)

Google CEO Sundar Pichai has canceled an internal town hall meant to

address gender discrimination after employee questions for management began to leak online.

Pichai said in an email to staff that several Google employees became fearful for their safety and grew concerned about being outed for speaking up at the town hall.

He said the company will aim to create several other forums "where people can feel comfortable to speak freely." Pichai's email was sent about an hour before the event was to start Thursday afternoon.

The town hall was meant to hear out employee grievances over a flare-up that has consumed Google for much of the week. It began last weekend after engineer James Damore circulated a memo that claimed biological gender differences helped explain why women are underrepresented at the company.

Google fired Damore on Monday. The engineer has claimed he had a right to voice concerns over workplace conditions and filed a labor relations board complaint prior to being fired.

Google's internal "Dory" system allows employees to ask questions and then vote on questions posed by other employees so managers can address the most pressing ones. Wired magazine published some of the questions verbatim online Thursday. Screenshots of the questions with names attached had been leaked, although none with names had been published as of late Thursday, a Google spokeswoman said.

One high-ranked question asked, according to Wired: "The doc asserted that Google has a lower bar for diversity candidates. This is hurting minority Googlers because it creates the perception that they are less qualified. What can we do to combat that perception?"

Another echoed Damore's criticisms: "I am a moderately conservative Googler, and I am and have been scared to share my beliefs. The loud voice here is the liberal one. Conservative voices are hushed. What is leadership doing to ensure Googlers like me feel invited and accepted, not just tolerated or safe from angry mobs?"

A Google representative did not immediately respond to a message seeking comment.

Meanwhile, a graphic composed of the Twitter profiles of several Google employees who were gay, lesbian or transgender began to circulate online, assisted by conservative commentators such as former Breitbart writer Milo Yiannopoulos . That graphic drew hundreds of negative comments about the people and the company.

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