

# Google workers protest 'culture of retaliation' with sit-in

May 2 2019, by Suhauna Hussain, Los Angeles Times

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Google employees staged a sit-in Wednesday to protest what they call a "culture of retaliation" at the company—the latest in a series of demonstrations by tech industry workers.

It's unclear how many employees participated in the sit-in, but organizer Meredith Whittaker tweeted that hundreds of people protested at the New York office Wednesday morning.

The demonstration comes six months after thousands of workers at Google offices around the world walked out to protest how the company allegedly mishandled sexual misconduct claims.

Whittaker and Claire Stapleton, longtime Google employees and organizers of November's walkout, accused the company of retaliating against them for holding that protest in a message posted to internal Google mailing lists on April 22, Wired reported.

Whittaker wrote that she was informed her role at the company would be "changed dramatically," and that she would have to abandon her outside work on artificial intelligence ethics at AI Now Institute, an organization she cofounded.

Stapleton alleged in the internal Google message that she was told she would be demoted and one of her projects was nixed two months after the walkout. She said that after taking her concerns to the company's human resources department, her manager started ignoring her and her

work was delegated to others. Her position was restored after she hired a lawyer who prompted management to investigate, Stapleton wrote in the message obtained by Wired.

"Our stories aren't the only ones. Google has a culture of retaliation, which too often works to silence women, people of color, and gender minorities," Whittaker and Stapleton wrote. "Retaliation isn't always obvious. It's often confusing and drawn out, consisting of icy conversations, gaslighting, project cancellations, transition rejections, or demotions."

Since April 22, the employee activists have promoted a social media campaign #NotOKGoogle to gather other stories of alleged retaliation against Google workers.

The company denied allegations of retaliation last week. A Google spokesperson declined to comment, but pointed to a previous statement from the company about retaliation.

"We prohibit retaliation in the workplace and publicly share our very clear policy," the company said. "To make sure that no complaint raised goes unheard at Google, we give employees multiple channels to report concerns, including anonymously, and investigate all allegations of retaliation."

On Thursday, Google said it released a new site for employees to report concerns and publicly shared its policies on harassment and retaliation.

The protests at Google on Wednesday—which coincide with International Workers Day—appear to have taken many shapes. One Google software engineer tweeted that she is attending work but boycotting emails and meetings, and created an auto-response email explaining that she is unavailable because she's participating in the

protest. Some employees, she tweeted, plan to take a sick day—riffing off an allegation that Stapleton was urged to go on [medical leave](#) by the company after organizing the walkout.

Activism by employees of technology companies has grown more common across the industry in recent months.

Hundreds of video game developers are talking about unionizing. Amazon and Microsoft workers denounced their employers' work on military and law enforcement technology. Google's workforce has previously petitioned the company to afford more rights to contracted workers, reform its AI ethics board and stop developing a censored search engine for China.

The protests have had some impact. Soon after the walkout, Google stopped requiring arbitration in sexual misconduct cases. The [company](#) also scrapped its AI ethics council after backlash over controversial appointees and let go of a deal with the military to build object-recognition tech for drones.

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