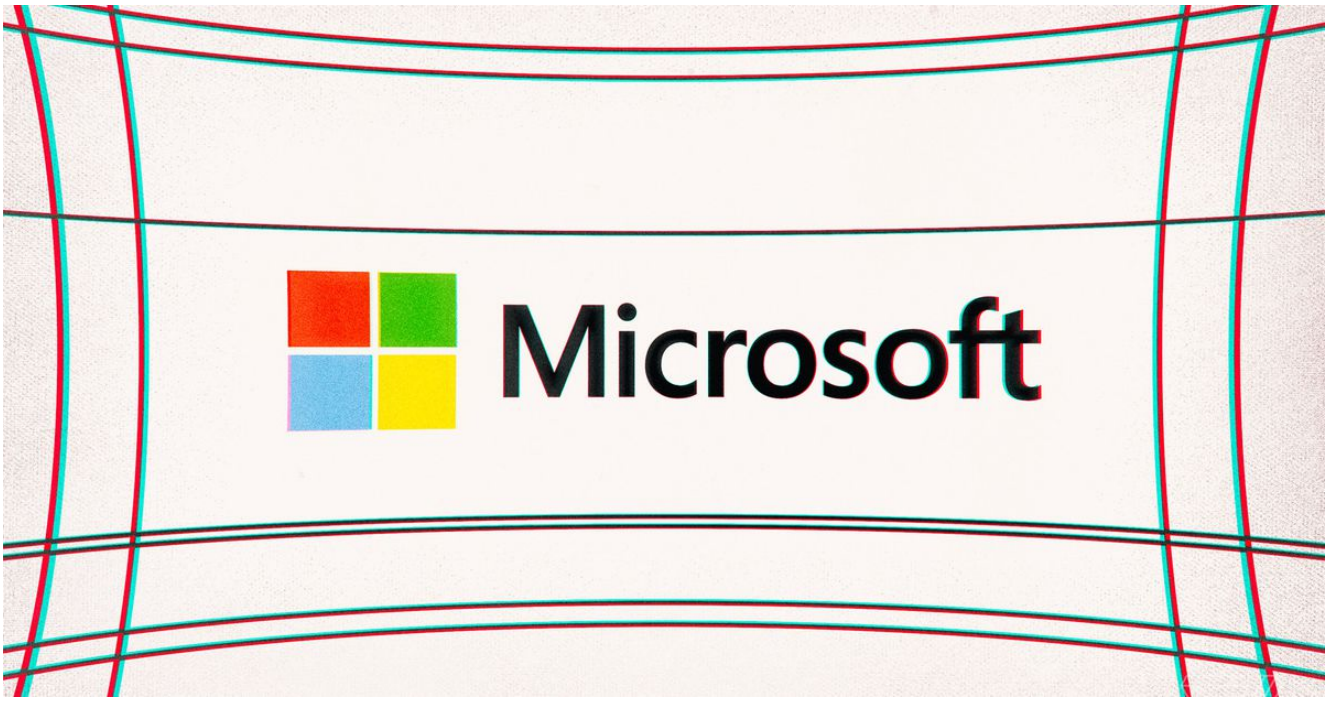
Microsoft faces down a new claim that pro-diversity hiring isn’t fair to white men



Microsoft employees have been using an internal message board to criticize the company’s pro-diversity efforts, referring to the hiring of women and minorities as “discriminatory” against white and Asian men, according to a report from *Quartz*. Microsoft has left these threads untouched, drawing criticism from other employees who feel the company talks up its diversity and inclusion efforts, but takes little meaningful action to reinforce them at a cultural level.

The sentiments, some of which were shared in threads earlier this year and late last year, highlight tensions within the company at an especially fraught time. Earlier this month, women at Microsoft began sharing stories of sexual harassment and discrimination and claiming the company has done little to nothing to resolve the issues. Their stories have since made international headlines and prompted a response from CEO Satya

Nadella, who says the company is as dedicated as ever to its diversity and inclusion efforts and will revamp how its human resources division investigates such cases.

But Microsoft's lack of official response to internal anti-diversity messages speaks to the challenges the company faces in actually following through with its efforts. The situation is reminiscent of the one Google faced with James Damore, a software engineer who was critical of his employer's diversity efforts and published an internal memo that implied female workers are not as proficient at technical roles as male workers.

After several days, Google fired him for violating its code of conduct and "advancing harmful gender stereotypes," as CEO Sundar Pichai said at the time. The situation earned Google widespread criticism from conservatives claiming Google was punishing Damore for his ideology and drowning out dissenting viewpoints. Damore went on to file a wrongful termination lawsuit against Google that has since moved out of court and into arbitration.

In this case, it appears Microsoft employees are pushing back against the notion that women and minorities in tech face outsize discrimination and harassment, by saying the company is overcorrecting in its hiring practices and incentivizing managers to avoid hiring white and Asian men, which are predominantly representative of the tech workforce at every single major company in the industry. No disciplinary action appears to have been taken against any employees involved in these threads.

"Does Microsoft have any plans to end the current policy that financially incentivizes discriminatory hiring practices? To be clear, I am referring to the fact that senior leadership is awarded more money if they discriminate against Asians and white men," reads one of the posts, which racked up hundreds of comments, made by a female engineer on the Microsoft-owned

enterprise messaging app Yammer, according to *Quartz*. The posts, and others like it, have been made largely in the "CEO Connection" Yammer channel, *Quartz* reports, meaning they're designed to address topics employees want Nadella to address when he speaks to the whole company.

Microsoft employees are openly criticizing the company's pro-diversity hiring practices

Numerous threads like these remain open with comments intact, *Quartz* reports. Some include instances of employees dissenting from Microsoft's official stance on diversity and demanding more evidence that a diverse workforce is beneficial for the company.

Microsoft tells *The Verge* that higher-level employees, including a member of the human resources team, have posted in one of the threads to say the company does not allow for discrimination of any kind, while another official spoke up to clarify misconceptions about how diversity-based compensation works. Microsoft said that there has also been a significant amount of pro-diversity counterpoints expressed in the threads, and that the overall discussion has mainly involved a small number of employees numbering in the dozens. However, *Quartz* reports that one of the most active anti-diversity threads included more than 800 comments, while another separate thread from last year bemoaning the lack of diversity at Microsoft's Azure cloud computing division generated more than 1,000.

The company declined to comment further on disciplinary action or its policies toward letting employees voice criticisms like these.

The situation highlights a complex compromise on behalf of tech companies that are often loath to impose restrictions on internal employee speech, but which also tend to fail at following through on broad diversity goals and hard choices related to workplace culture. According to an email sent out

by Nadella after women began voicing instances of sexual harassment and discrimination at the company, Microsoft has instructed its employees that pushing back against its diversity initiatives may negatively affect their careers.

Microsoft has left the threads up and has not taken disciplinary action against anyone
“This past year, we increased our commitment with a new core priority on inclusion for every employee. If you are not helping to create an inclusive culture, your rewards, your career trajectory and possibly even your employment will be impacted,” Nadella wrote, adding that senior leadership members at Microsoft have diversity goals tied to their compensation. “Put together, I believe these new steps will move us farther and faster to create an inclusive culture that values diversity and helps us all exercise a growth mindset to learn from each other.”

Yet some Microsoft employees are now asking whether Nadella and his management team’s commitment to diversity and inclusion is genuine, since there do not appear to be negative consequences for criticizing its efforts. “HR, Satya, all the leadership are sending out emails that they want to have an inclusive culture, but they’re not willing to take any action other than talk about it,” one employee told *Quartz*. “They allow people to post these damaging, stereotypical things about women and minorities, and they do nothing about it.”

https://www.theverge.com/2019/4/19/18508013/microsoft-pro-diversity-hiring-inclusion-employee-criticism-claims