

## The Day Google Stopped Working

By Elsie Cheang, J.D. Candidate 2020 | November 9, 2018

When the clock hit 11 a.m. on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, almost 17,000 Google employees around the world walked out of their offices to [protest](#) the company's poor handling of what seemed to be a pattern of sexual misconduct allegations against employees. The walkout, which commenced in Singapore and traveled its way to Google's headquarters in California, was the first of its kind at a major tech firm.

The protest followed a New York Times [article](#) delineating Google's haphazard responses to a host of employee misconduct allegations against senior executives and management. The most shocking revelation was [Google's silence](#) about a credible misconduct claim brought against Andy Rubin, the "Father of Android." The company had continued to praise Mr. Rubin and agreed to a \$90 million exit package for the executive when he left the company in 2014. In addition to the walkout, protesting Google employees also demanded [a list of changes](#) to the tech giant's internal policy, which included "an end to forced arbitration in cases of harassment and discrimination" and "a clear, uniform, globally inclusive process for reporting sexual misconduct safely and anonymously".

Incidents of sexual misconduct and mishandling of employee allegations have long [plagued](#) Silicon Valley, and the Google protest further heightens the need for tangible policy changes. However, the grassroots movement that grew within Google to call for concrete company changes suggests that non-government actors like employees themselves may be the source of change needed to finally circumscribe a sense of accountability, responsibility, and consequences for abusers of power and the entities behind them.

The role and power of non-government actors should not be understated. In fact, they are responsible for initiating and perpetuating some of history's biggest social, political, and cultural movements, such as the global fight to end AIDS/HIV stigma. Where U.S. labor laws might be deficient, thousands of employees in one of the world's biggest technology companies have successfully sounded the alarm and voiced grievances to Sundar Pichai, Google's chief executive, and Larry Page, a co-founder of Google and the chief executive of its parent company, Alphabet.



To ameliorate the frustrations and agitations of a 94,000-person workforce, Pichai and Page have to now reassure their employees of not only the company's immediate actions, but also its future promises. Given that this large-scale, grassroots protest originated within a corporate behemoth such as Google and will likely lead to changes at the company, other non-government actors will hopefully feel empowered to similarly push companies and entities to adopt real, tangible changes in the workplace.