


# Google Culture War Escalates as Era of Transparency Gets Shut Down By Corrupt Google Bosses

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 Google Culture War Escalates as Era of Transparency Wanes

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(Bloomberg) -- Each morning, workers at Google get an internal newsletter called the "Daily Insider." Kent Walker, Google's top lawyer, set off a firestorm when he argued in the Nov. 14 edition that the 21-year old company had outgrown its policy of allowing workers to access nearly any internal document. "When we were smaller, we all worked as one team, on one product, and everyone understood how business decisions were made," Walker wrote. "It's harder to give a company of over 100,000 people the full context on everything."

Many large companies have policies restricting access to sensitive information to a "need-to-know" basis. But in some segments of Google's workforce, the reaction to Walker's

argument was immediate and harsh. On an internal messaging forum, one employee described the data policy as “a total collapse of Google culture.” An engineering manager posted a lengthy attack on Walker’s note, which he called “arrogant and infantilizing.” The need-to-know policy “denies us a form of trust and respect that is again an important part of the intrinsic motivation to work here,” the manager wrote.

The complaining also spilled into direct action. A group of Google programmers created a tool that allowed employees to choose to alert Walker with an automated email every time they opened any document at all, according to two people with knowledge of the matter. The deluge of notifications was meant as a protest to what they saw as Walker’s insistence on controlling the minutiae of their professional lives.

“When it comes to data security policies, we’ve never intended to prevent employees from sharing technical learnings and information and we are not limiting anyone’s ability to raise concerns or debate the company’s activities,” said a Google spokeswoman in an email. “We have a responsibility to safeguard our user, business and customer information and these activities need to be done in line with our policies on data security.”

The actions are just the latest chapter in an internal conflict that has been going on for almost two years. About 20,000 employees walked out last fall over the company’s generous treatment of executives accused of sexual harassment, and a handful quit over Google’s work on products for the U.S. military and a censored search engine for the Chinese market. Earlier this year, Google hired IRI Consultants, a firm that advises

employers on how to combat labor organizing, and it recently fired four employees for violating its policies on accessing sensitive data.

The extent of Google's employee rebellion is hard to measure—the company has tried to portray it as the work of a handful of malcontents from the company's junior ranks. Nor are the company's message boards unilaterally supportive of revolt. "We want to focus on our jobs when we come into the workplace rather than deal with a new cycle of outrage every few days or vote on petitions for or against Google's latest project," wrote one employee on an internal message board viewed by Bloomberg News.

Still, the company seems stuck in a cycle of escalation. Walker's internal critics say his Nov. 14 email is part of a broader erosion of one of Google's most distinctive traits—its extreme internal transparency. The fight also illustrates the lack of trust between Google's leadership and some of its employees, according to interviews with over a dozen current and former employees, as well as internal messages shared with Bloomberg News on the condition it not publish the names of employees who participated.

The conflict comes as Google is changing in other ways, too. On Dec. 3, Sundar Pichai, who took over as Google's chief executive office in 2015, became the head of Alphabet, its parent company. His elevation marks the end of the active involvement of Sergey Brin and Larry Page, who established Google's distinctive culture when they founded the company as Stanford graduate students.

Pichai has at times supported internal activism. He spoke at an employee protest against the Trump administration's immigration policies and apologized to employees for Google's track record on sexual harassment. His executives met repeatedly with critics of the company's military work. Some Google managers began signaling that they're losing patience with internal activism even before the firings, according to one person who worked with them. Executives have not met with dissenting staff leadership in many weeks, according to one of the employees.