

## **Bringing Social Justice Rhetoric and Deliberation into the Engineering Writing Classroom: the case of Amazon "cubicle activists"**

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# **Bringing Social Justice Rhetoric and Deliberation into the Engineering Writing Classroom: the case of Amazon's "cubicle activists"**

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## **Abstract**

The tech industry has seen a growth in employee protest activity against both internal policies for workers, but also expressions of concern over wider social issues including US immigration policy, climate change, personal privacy, and military contracts. Companies including Microsoft, IBM, Tableau, Salesforce, Facebook, Google and Amazon have exhibited a variety of responses to manage this growth in social justice related petitions, walk-outs, and protests from their employees. Responses have ranged from firing individuals to meeting demands at least in part.

Study of these activities in the engineering writing classroom has multiple benefits in terms of developing student's sense of deliberate purpose, persuasive communication skills and understanding of ethical limits within the field of engineering. This paper reports on the potential value of using a case study depicting Amazon's "cubicle activists," a group who organized to protest what they considered to be their company's lack of serious involvement in addressing climate change, given Amazon's economic power and global reach. Students at the master's and undergraduate level have engaged with this case and written reflective papers to identify ethical dilemmas and pathways to change within current global structures as well as professional documents providing industry with recommendations. This current paper argues the multiple benefits of bringing social justice issues of relevance to engineering students in a technical writing course.

## **Introduction**

Employee activism in high-tech companies includes mid and upper-level management and engineers who have spoken out on a variety of issues both inside and outside their organizations. Topical areas of protesting have ranged from immigration, climate change, the ethics of company contracts with defense companies to allegations of sexual misconduct inside companies. This trend has been termed "cubicle activism" and has attracted media interest and the characterization of these actions as a new form of social protest. Companies are grappling with how to manage such pressures; facilitation, inaction, and clamping down bring differing responses. None of these tactics seem thus far to have quelled activism in many high-profile companies, that meanwhile have also retained their desirability as employers for engineering graduates.

This "turn" in social movement focuses to a great extent on the overall logic of governing systems and collective identities; in essence, it attempts to interrogate established systems. The case of Amazon exemplifies how broader societal causes have been forwarded within an organization and provides for examination of the rhetoric and structural elements that employee

activists move within. It is unclear how sustainable these movements can be, and whether organizational structures can in fact enact change that emanates from lower tiers of an organization. In line with other current social movements, these employee efforts are non-hierarchical and fluid, and rely largely on rhetoric to change the views of stakeholders and the opinions of the public (De Jordy, Scully, Ventresca & Creed, 2020).

A few distinct features of these activities are thought to include the construction of arguments, language, and use of social and communication networks. Thus, students can look at a real issue, analyze alternatives, carry out supplementary research and develop recommendations for different stake-holders in this case: company management, shareholders and employees seeking pathways to change from within.

## **Motivation**

Leydens and Lucena (2017) have described the “socio-technical” constructs of engineering concepts, models and systems, noting that social justice dimensions related to implementation and creation are often invisible or are considered separately in engineering courses. As social justice rhetoric and actions are not often integrated into engineering courses, there are few opportunities for prompting engagement and consideration of the human element behind the products of technology (Scott & Welch, 2014).

Further, according to Mignolo, (2011), the poverty, inequities, commodification, etc. behind progress and globalization are rarely discussed as the end products and rather are considered as problems that technology can address. In addition, the field of engineering education is recognizing the need to challenge students to engage with the intersections between technology and societal concerns. Mazzurco for instance details the need for greater emphasis on “long term technical” considerations, an area that students often omit from view. Such considerations in a humanitarian engineering (HE) project for example include local norms, laws and ethics, and other socio-material contexts. Developing attunement to broad contextual issues like power dynamics can determine the outcome of a project, and in fact whether it even will proceed. Thus, raising student’s awareness to the multitude of socio-technical factors that form the systems that engineers operate in both contributes to understanding of their own role as well as encourages better understanding of complexities and how to engage in meaningful technical collaboration in working with clients and stakeholders (Mazzurco & Daniel, 2020).

## **Literature Review**

A vast literature on social protest and labor activism exists across multiple fields, including organizational behavior, political science, economics, sociology, rhetoric along with many other disciplines. To focus the background literature addressing engineering employee activism, a brief examination of the literature on structural and rhetorical elements of activism in modern organizations is helpful in highlighting key drivers of this trend.

First, De Jordy, Scully, Ventresca & Creed (2020) address how broader societal causes are forwarded within companies and note that community activism has distinct differences from workplace activism, yet public discourse around societal concerns is often repurposed and

channeled into institutional settings like corporations. Scully & Segal note that assembling a protest in the workplace can in fact be easier than it is in society at large, although there are limits on employee's abilities to speak out freely. Workplace activism is also distinct from popular protests in that employees are essentially focused on changing their organization's practices and culture.

This type of contained activism is referred to as the "umbrella" – the passion for a cause develops under company management which provides protection, but also limits. Protection is reflected by management's encouragement to employees to work on issues such as diversity, inequality, as well as larger issues like climate change. They note the minimal amount of research that exists on the workplace as a site for social protest and suggest that this is an important setting for social movements as companies can be part of the source of the inequality and other problems that protests address, and secondly, corporations provide a platform for mobilization as a cohesive group with a shared identity can be identified and organized quickly.

An extensive body of literature examines the role of language in collective action related to labor. A contemporary examination of the rhetoric of protest is provided by Alexander, Jaratt, & Welch's edited collection of various cases of disruption and the rhetorical choices that were made in a variety of protests (2018). They examine what drives people to push for change by "making noise" and the rhetorical approaches that have been employed to disrupt.

Next, Germain, et. al. examine how social movements can draw attention to issues through marches, petitions and sit-ins. They also look at the extent to which these activities actually can influence changes in policy and processes by organizations. Additionally, they discuss the supporting role of digital communications to quickly disseminate information and organize as a new dynamic affecting how movements are shaped and maintained. In recent cases they examine, evidence is presented showing that corporations have acquiesced to such pressures, and thus protest can be an effective method to drive corporate social responsibility. They note that the Google walkout in 2018 demanding new policies on sexual harassment did ultimately lead to new company policies.

Next, Ehrenfeld (2020) provides a frame to better understand the features of social movements that originate within companies, and their possibilities for collective action. He points to the "imagined" dimensions of the public sphere and the character of post-human rhetoric that emerges from interactions with hardware, software, code that leads to unexpected and uncontrollable outcomes. Exploring the extent to which non-human actors affect the organizational activities and information flows of current social activist movements in corporations can further expand understanding of how activist rhetors can use, maintain and build communication networks (infrastructures) that support their messages.

Finally, DeLuca (2005) suggests the neglected but critical value of image events in environmental rhetoric, finding that current movements and organizations might better further their cause by making images central to communication, as written, verbal, and "logical" argumentation do not necessarily grab the public's attention or change perceptions about the human-nature relationship and the separation of man from nature which is the foundation for addressing some key issues of over-consumption, systems of production and the current

capitalist system. His view diverges from that of Ehrenfeld, as he seems to suggest that the idea of the public sphere is not adequate to create new systems and new ways of thinking as some views will not necessarily be incorporated by the community.

### **Employee Activism in Context of Amazon's Protest Activities**

The context of the current wave of employee protest within tech companies can be viewed within a broad context of current movements for social change such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and Schools Strike for Climate, among many other examples that have mobilized publics nationally and globally and suggest support via public opinion. Protest activity from within companies is largely focused on national and global social issues that are intertwined with company policies and products. Employee-driven efforts for social justice have occurred in the past, for example in the 1990s gay and lesbian workers sought to attain benefits for domestic partners, given the lack of legal protections (Chishi & Bolter, 2019).

Thus, employee activism in high tech companies can be seen within this broader environment of protest and topics of concern are in fact linked to broader public dissent related to large intractable issues outside the corporation such as immigration policy, inequality and notably climate change. Another impetus is suggested by Bennett (2012) who discusses the rise of individualized collective action such as consumer campaigns to change corporate behavior (e.g. the conditions of Apple's factory workers in China, garment workers in Bangladesh). These activities are a facet of protest targeted towards corporations.

### **Using the Case Study Approach**

The use of stand-alone case studies into engineering communication courses as a teaching tool to encourage broad thinking of ethics and societal impact of technologies. Case studies based on real world events can be tools to engage engineering students as discussion can be grounded in concrete scenarios as a vehicle for introducing abstract ethical principles (Bockman & Boehrer, 1990.) By examining case studies students can learn to identify issues, understand power relationships and key players, and identify the factors that underlie the issue (Merseth, 1991). Engineering students will have the opportunity to explore the myriad of circumstances, key facts and relationships and then analyze the situation and apply their ideas with the existing evidence.

Case studies are frequently utilized in engineering education to analyze defined problems using actual information in order to build skill in applying and developing different skills depending on the field of engineering. For the chemical engineering student for instance, this methodology allows students to assess alternatives to a problem, manage and synthesize information and work with a team. (Herrera, Cruz, et.al, 2016). Vallor notes that many cases used in engineering focus on discrete explosive events such as the Challenger or Union Carbide in Bhopal. While these "catastrophic" cases are useful in identifying the multiple layers of organizational and individual responsibility, students can also benefit from critical examination of work in their field that may have profound implications in scale and scope, and where direct lines of responsibility are contested and are embedded in societal, political and economic systems and thus seem out of reach for individual intervention.

## **Amazon's Engineers Argue for Environmental Justice: Case Study**

The genesis of employee activism from within high tech companies has been identified in December 2016 when US immigration policies were set in place, Google co-founder and president of Alphabet Sergei Brin joined protesters at San Francisco International Airport. Several companies spoke out against Trump's Executive Order for a travel ban, including Netflix, Oracle and Google, perhaps giving employees a model or signal about speaking out on social issues.

The first travel ban had the effect of energizing tech employees, who felt direct effects as foreign students and highly trained temporary foreign workers were among those affected. The second wave of employee activism occurred in 2018 and was also related to immigration policy, but this time involved demands that companies including Microsoft, Salesforce, Deloitte, McKinsey and others cut their contracts with ICE (Chishti & Bolter, 2019).

The next galvanizing event was the November 1st 2018 walkout of 20,000 Google employees over the company's decision to give generous payouts to executives accused of sexual harassment. This walkout was the largest event ever in the industry and inspired subsequent organized protest at Amazon.

In late 2018 a coalition of activist workers, the Amazon Employees for Climate Justice, a coalition of activist workers, concerned about the company's carbon footprint and business with the oil and gas industry began discussing how the company could be persuaded to reduce its contribution to climate change. Amazon at this point had already pledged to use renewable energy sources for some of its infrastructure, but had not made a large commitment nor agreed to release figures about its carbon footprint unlike a few other tech companies.

Activist employees created a climate proposal (which was rejected by shareholders at the annual shareholder's meeting in May 2019). In April 2019, the group posted an open letter to Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos and Amazon's directors asking for the company to take more comprehensive measures to address climate change. Posted on the website Medium, the letter has more than 8,100 signatures, representing 1% of the company's workforce (Peltz, J. 2019).

In September 2019, 1,800 employees from Amazon offices around the world, along with tech workers from other companies in the world's first "cross-tech" walk out tried to encourage the company to take a stronger leadership role in combating climate change. The day before the walkout, Bezos announced plans—the company's "Climate Pledge," to convert to renewable energy by 2030 and to be carbon neutral by 2024. The activists applauded this gesture, but claimed that it was not enough, and that the company needed a more urgent and intensive response. Additionally, the Climate Pledge was perhaps intended to assuage customers that the company is in fact making changes (Peltz, J, 2019).

This protest apparently (according to employees) led to Amazon enforcing a stricter communications policy for its employees, requiring permission to speak publicly on matters related to the company. Amazon spokespeople however, have stated that the updated policy

predated the march and was put in place to make it easier for employees to get approvals for speaking events (Greene, J., 2020). This tightening of policy produced a reaction.

I'm proud to work at Amazon, but policies that silence employees who are challenging us to do better runs counter to our own leadership principles," said Nolan Woodle, an associate contracts manager at Amazon. "When there is an issue of such importance, we have to be able to talk about it. Silencing employees is simply not the right approach. (Paul, Jan. 27, 2020)

In January of 2020, the Amazon Employees for Climate Justice, a coalition of activist workers, concerned about the company's carbon footprint and business with the oil and gas industry organized an effort to intentionally break Amazon's updated external communications policy. In an email sent to all Amazon employees they asked for signed statements that would be published online (Greene, J., 2020). The following is an excerpt from the email:

Our strength is in numbers. The idea is to intentionally break the communications policy so prolifically that it is unenforceable. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "*One has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws.*"

Here's the plan. Add your name to your choice of several prewritten, intentionally-policy-violating quotes (or write your own), and then we'll publish all the quotes in a Medium post. Quotes can be critical or complimentary, because either way violates the policy.

A range of over 400 employees including software engineers, mid-level and higher-ranking employees provided forceful statements that were posted on the website, *Medium*.

The quotes below demonstrate several persuasive tactics employed to influence Amazon's management and other employees in the company.

"There is no better way to innovate on behalf of our customers than protecting our planet."

— *Pablo Ganga, Software Development Manager*

Here's the thing: At Amazon, we talk incessantly about delighting customers and working backwards from the customer. This is a lovely idea, if taken holistically. But currently we assume every customer cares only about getting one-day delivery, regardless of the ripple effects. This is simply not reality. There is a large, money-spending demographic of customers world-wide in search of responsible companies who don't sacrifice people (and planets) for profits. In not being that company, despite huge profit margins, Amazon is not only not raising the bar, we are catering to the lowest common denominator. And there will be — already are — consequences, faced by the most vulnerable. While I understand that overall change happens slowly, Amazon is capable of moving fast. I appreciate the Climate Pledge and the promise of a more fuel-efficient fleet, but more needs to be done. A lot more. History is watching.

— *JR Maxwell, Program Specialist*

Thus far, a direct response to this effort has not been made public, although it appears that none of the participants were fired for violating the company's communication policy after being warned that they could lose their jobs if they were to publicly criticize Amazon's climate policies. A subsequent expansion of protests, most notably an all-day live-streamed walkout on April 24, 2020 to demand that Amazon rehire workers who were fired for protesting a lack of safety protocols to protect warehouse and delivery workers from Covid-19 did seem to contribute to the company putting in place broader safety measures. Protester's statements encourage their company to meet their employee's expectations for leadership and ethical, humane policies. A tweet, below, (May 5, 2020) from a member of the Amazon Employees for Climate Justice is an example.

We, as Amazon Employees for Climate Justice, will continue working with our colleagues to call on Amazon to become the leader we know it can be...that the planet needs it to be. If you work at Amazon we hope you'll contact and join us. Thank you for your courage+integrity. @AMZNforClimate

The protest was led by leaders of the Employees for Climate Justice group, Amazon experience designers, Maren Costa and Emily Cunningham. They were in fact fired by Amazon in early April 2020 for violating the company's external communications policy (Nickelsberg, 2020).

## Outcomes

Considered one of "America's most trusted brands" Amazon employees are pushing the company to earn its reputation and uphold a higher standard of corporate responsibility. While protester influence thus far could be characterized as incremental, rather than transformative, discussion and analysis of this case study has a three-fold purpose.

First, it is intended to help students delineate the rhetorical and situational capacities behind social justice protest in the workplace. Second, students can explore an imagined future alignment of public advocacy for environmental and societal justice, matched with public (customer) concern for the environment and other social issues. This linkage has provided fuel for employee protests in the past such as gay rights, and thus could provide a the "boundary-spanning" drive for "cubicle activists" to move their company's agenda. Finally, analysis of Amazon's actions to address issues of societal concern overall—from the executive level of their organization down to those of employee activists provides "raw material" for engineering students to grapple with the social and technological systems that they will take part in.

Students in a master's level professional writing course have addressed an assignment prompt that asks them to read the case, conduct preliminary independent research, and then provide an analysis of the primary features of the Amazon case along with generalized recommendations for their company/supervisors to consider in terms of how they will handle this trend in relation to their own company. Over 1,000 students have completed this assignment with many noting that it was challenging to synthesize their own investigation using source material with the basic outlines of the case provided in the case study. Next, students have been tasked with writing a



professional communication as an employee within a company to their boss, describing the employee activism trend and providing recommendations. In both prompts students are able to analyze the case from different perspectives with a focus on understanding dynamics of the protest activity, systemic and organizational power, and then suggest potential outcomes.

Learning outcomes in brief exhibit a realization of the dilemmas faced by individual employees who wish to challenge their company's policies. The contradictory messages of thinking independently and critically which are engrained in Amazon's corporate culture have been put to the test as employees at Amazon spoke out. An additional feature of the case that students note is the value of social networking tools that support networking across a global company, organizing and quick dissemination of information. Rather than feeling that speaking up is the purview of the lone whistle blower employee who learns of unethical or dangerous practices, this case shows how like-minded employees can strategize and work together to promote reform. Students frequently wish to understand whether this case shows that change from within a system is possible and want to see more concrete evidence of progress than is possible at this time. The consequences for some individuals in leadership roles in the Amazon protest activities have been termination of employment. These and other short and potential long-term consequences for the individual, the company, the issue itself prompt students to consider their own future decisions in terms of employment options as well as their responsibility as engineers in society.

## **Conclusion**

In sum, use of focused case studies as a means of instruction for engineers to explore the intersection of technology and society is a compelling and concrete means to engage with current trends and bridge the gap between technical and humanistic inquiry. Protest activity generated from high tech workers, (testers, engineers, coders, etc.) working for large companies, or by white collar employees in general have been relatively infrequent and are a recent phenomenon. This type of case additionally moves beyond ethical situations that involve single explosive and catastrophic events that trace back through company bureaucratic hierarchies to situations that expose students to the systemic forces that they as engineers participate in and embed their identities.

Examining the Amazon case, regardless of eventual outcomes is an instructive means to inform and engage students about their role in society and professional responsibilities to their organization. As a final note on the possibilities of envisioning change from within, many among Amazon's labor force of 798,000 see that their company could be a positive and leading force, and thus have utilized a range of persuasive tactics to generate the company to acknowledge its potential role and act for the good of humanity and the company. Amazon has commerce-oriented, rather than humanitarian aims, as embodied in its mission statement to be "Earth's most customer-centric company." Activist employees have used this focus to point out that caring and understanding customer's needs necessarily is inclusive of the planet's well-being as this is a universal concern of its global customer base. In appealing to the company's future positioning, they suggest that there is not only an ethical, but a business imperative to take on a higher degree of corporate responsibility.

## **Appendix 1 Instructional Notes**

Students can examine the parameters of Amazon's workplace activism through various lenses to support deeper analysis of the case and assessment of the rhetorical moves of various actors and underlying context. Success factors and overall sustainability of tech employee activism can also be explored as this framework allows for generalizability and hence, wider application beyond the case of Amazon.

A learning objective is to help students gain awareness of their role in an organization, critically examine their work as engineers and its consequences, and identify how and if they wish to engage with the systems and structures they work within. Secondly, students will gain exposure to the rhetoric of engineer-led social activism. This case is unique in terms of the availability of comments and written statements made by engineers at Amazon regarding their views of the company's actions across a variety of social issues. Next, students are exposed to thinking around broad, non-finite issues such as climate change and the roles and responsibilities of their company and themselves. Finally, students can acquire strategies for interrogating the norms and decisions of individual tech companies and the wider swathe of technology-related companies experiencing similar dynamics.

### **Drivers of Employee-Driven Activism**

#### **1. Amazon's Workplace Activists**

The Amazon employees taking part in these efforts to persuade the company to take stronger measures to address social justice issues and climate change are mainly software engineers and mid-level executives; individuals who are well-paid and have stable career trajectories that they intend to have continue as they press for systemic change. The comments of these engineers indicate an intention to work within the company to encourage its decision-makers to use the power and influence of Amazon to address systemic issues outside the company.

Given that graduating engineering students often purport to care about the ethics of the company they work for, efforts have been made to demonstrate progressive values and openness as a company recruitment tool; having recruited employees that actually care about these things, companies such as Amazon and Google have to some extent facilitated current employee activism.

### **Communication Strategies and Rhetorical Choices**

The perception that Amazon has the power to make a significant difference is reflected in the rhetoric of Amazon activists. In making the case for Amazon to take action, many employee comments note that Amazon should/could take on a leadership role in the climate change battle. Another notable feature of many employee comments is the use of the company's own mission statements and training creeds to show a gulf between stated values and actual practice. Turning the tables on a company by arguing for change using their own core principles has allowed protesters to make powerful points for the audience they are seeking to influence: executives in the company as well as other fellow employees. The company's core values around customer-

centricity have been questioned by protesters who note that customers might have higher priorities than one-day delivery, and Amazon should consider this.

Several discussion questions can be raised for a focus on rhetorical elements. Students can examine the vocabulary used by Amazon employees to describe the company, objectives of the communication and intention. Identifying the arguments made in communications by Amazon employees, identification of the intended audience of these communications (within the company, external, other employees), discussion of the dissemination of employees' messages: to the public, online, via social media and the media. and the effect and reach of these efforts can be explored. Finally, the value of the effort in sum can be explored; what can realistically be achieved, what are the costs-benefits, what alternatives are possible?

### **Appropriation of Amazonian Language**

A majority of messages Each message was evaluated in terms of intertext, in other words, did the message refer to Amazon's mission, core values, corporate culture or shared language (e.g. "Amazonians" "customer-centricity." The company takes its forceful mission statement, "to be the Earth's most customer-centric company" along with fourteen leadership principles seriously, and makes sure that it is accepted and embraced throughout the company. Activist messages consequently note that Amazon's stated values include questioning the way things are done and remaining open to criticism appear to be at odds with the company's actions and policies to prevent employees from speaking out against the company.

A majority of messages use Amazon's own corporate language and company principles either to highlight how Amazon's stated values and policies are in alignment with expanding efforts to combat climate change, or to show how Amazon is not in fact living up to its principles. Many messages the employee's pride in working for the company, the innovativeness of Amazon and its high standards and quality employees.

In reviewing employee messages, an appeal to ethics dominates, with nearly 70% of messages containing such an approach. Next, an appeal to the business rationale for Amazon to play a leadership role in combating climate change is the second most used argument and is found in nearly 40% of the protest messages. This appeal to the business rationale for Amazon to "do the right thing" is evidence of a principal tactic taken in these messages which is to work within the institution. Thirty-four percent of messages used social justice arguments that focused primarily on the importance of allowing Amazon employees to speak freely outside the organization.

### **Technological Affordances**

Adept use of online communication to mobile and encourage participation and then to broadcast results has been a critical underpinning of high-tech employee activism. Maiorese (2017) highlights the use of social networking platforms by employee activists in tech fields to engage, solidify identity and organize in contrast to the minimal and ineffective use of social networking in IBM. Social communication tools that make it possible to network inside a company and externally are notable features of current efforts of employee activists, including those at Amazon who were able to mobilize interested employees, collect statements, circulate petitions among other efforts to generate interest in their message.

## **2. Organizational Structures and Corporate Culture**

Few mechanisms for changing organizational practices exist, even if a company does want more ethical business practices internally and to forge a leadership role for a social issue externally. Tilly (1999) has noted that there is a lack of research in understanding the mechanisms for corporations to enact reforms, including legal and regulatory requirements and leadership skills actually enact change from the top. If employees indeed succeed in gaining more direct involvement and participation in decision-making, how will such organizational change be accomplished? What examples or best practices exist in the US or internationally?

Amazon is known for having a tough and often punishing work culture that nonetheless, provides opportunity to create, invent, and “think big” (Kantor & Streitfeld, 2015). A degree of secrecy has also been identified as a trait of the company’s corporate culture. These two qualities seem at odds with the outspoken, yet respectful pushback of the company’s protesters. Amazon employees (Amazonians) are also encouraged to question workplace conventions and tear apart each other’s ideas in line with 14 leadership principles that include being curious and seeking diverse perspectives and disconfirming beliefs.

As in the case of Google which has historically encouraged speaking out on societal issues, these elements of corporate culture appear, intended ostensibly to increase work productivity, also seem to have provided a foundation for current protest activity. Whether employees in fact expect that proclaimed values match a company’s behavior, or any perceived disconnect provides an opening for activists to point out inconsistencies as part of an argument to push for change, the alignment of actions and company values seems to be increasingly acknowledged as a vulnerability by company management. Google, for instance removed the long-engrained phrase “Don’t be evil” from its code of conduct in May 2018 (Conger, 2018).

## **3. External Environment**

Scully and Segal (2002) have looked at bottom-up activism in high-tech companies and identify the backdrop to protest outside the corporation as an important factor in generating and retaining enthusiasm for a cause. Noting that the workplace is an important setting for social movements, given the increasing role that companies often place in issues that involve inequality and many other problems that protesters seek to address. They identify the interplay between society and organizational settings as an important feature driving activism in the workplace. Additionally, Germain, Robertson, and Minnis claim that social movements in general influence and drive change inside organizations, however their focus is campaigns that originate outside the corporation, such as anti-sweatshop protests (2019). Amazon’s employee activists have drawn energy and support from movements and disruption outside the company – both to expand their focus of protest beyond climate change, and to draw in additional support.

## **4. Interactions Between External and Internal Environments**

Opportunities for employees to organize and speak freely within the confines of their company structures have become more prevalent and have been identified as vehicles of expression that have supported the rise of employee activism (Yamada, 1998). Forums and community groups have been set up in many companies to provide employees with the opportunity to speak their

mind on issues of importance. Google has historically been known for a culture of openness and transparency which has been identified as a generating source for the rise of employee activism within the company. Google's slightly longer history with protest has offered inspiration to employees at other companies, and in fact Google walkout organizers have offered their knowledge to leaders in other companies.

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