Lessons from the James Damore Affair

On Diversity, Bias and Discrimination, following the "Google Manifesto"

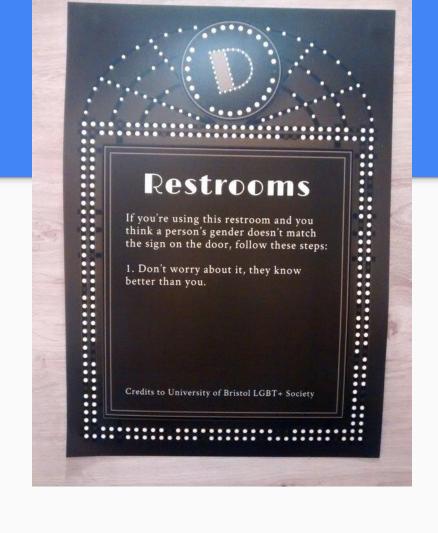# "Google's Ideological Echo-Chamber"

Material claims of the memo (besides politics of what may or may not be said):

- Google thinks all disparities in representation are because of oppression
- But natural differences between men and women explain disparities
- Google thinks we should discriminate to correct for this oppression
- But discrimination to reach equal representation is unfair and bad for business

In response, Damore was fired for "perpetuating gender stereotypes"

Why this talk?

- Disparities in the F/OSS community are wider than in industry
- Israelis don't speak about diversity
- More generally, Israelis tend to make technical presentations mostly about code
  - Which tends to limit view points
  - This ignores skills that can make coding more efficient and fun

Why diversity?

- Representation of users
- Making full use of the pool of talent (both potential and current)
- Being fair in recruitment (of employees or volunteers)
- A diversity-friendly environment is more comfortable for all
- A diverse workplace is better equipped to accommodate changes in the life of an employee

Major problems with the memo

- Completely ignores representation of users
- Focuses on Women, ignoring other underrepresented groups
- Ignores provable loss of talent
- But most importantly, harmful to fellow employees

The costs of not keeping an inclusive workplace

The case of Susan J. Fowler and Uber

"When I joined Uber, the organization I was part of was over 25% women. By the time I was trying to transfer to another eng organization, this number had dropped down to less than 6%. Women were transferring out of the organization, and those who couldn't transfer were quitting or preparing to quit."

The case of Sarah Sharp and the Linux Kernel

"I could no longer contribute to a community where I was technically respected, but I could not ask for personal respect [...] I did not want to work professionally with people who were allowed to get away with subtle sexist or homophobic jokes."

What should be done?

People who don't have fun programming at work, will not make it a hobby.

To improve diversity in Open Source, we need industry to:

- Change the work environment to be more friendly
- Recognize the importance of non-code work
- Recognize the importance of Soft Skills

But also, help people of underprivileged groups get into tech

Two kinds of "Corrective Discrimination"

Accept poorer performance

- Unfair
- Divisive

- Generates poorer performance
- Discourages putting in effort and leadership in the workplace by the non marginalized groups

Invest more training

- Levels the playing field
- Brings people together and gives experience in "people skills" with a wide range of people
- Improves performance
- Uncovers "hidden" talent

One important minor point…

This arises from data Damore brings (which has issues, but still…)

- Women are more into People (vs. Things)
- Women are more agreeable
- Women are more cooperative
- Women are less assertive

=> Women are better leaders, but not as good (or have less personal incentive) in getting into leadership positions

Diversity is not about politics , It's about economics and human capital

Thanks!

Genia Kozlov
https://www.facebook.com/genia.kozlov
https://www.linkedin.com/in/genia-kozlov-b515386/
geniakozlov@gmail.com

Shai Berger
Twitter: @shaib_il
shai@hamakor.org.il