

Nadella gaffe over pay raises women's ire

WASHINGTON, USA: Microsoft chief executive Satya Nadella's gaffe over women, pay raises comes as the US technology sector is facing up to questions over diversity and gender equality.



Microsoft Chief Executive Satya Nadella put his foot in his mouth when he told women to trust 'karma' to provide them with pay increases, causing outrage among women's rights groups. Image: Wikipedia

Nadella swiftly backtracked from his comments in which he suggested working women should trust karma for pay raises.

"I answered that question completely wrongly," Nadella said in a memo to staff, aiming to quell a firestorm over his comments at a conference last week.

Yet Nadella touched a nerve at a time when Silicon Valley faces renewed scrutiny over the gender pay gap and a lack of diversity in both the workforce and top management.

"The technology sector is still a non-traditional occupation for women," said Ariane Hegewisch, Study Director at the Washington-based Institute for Women's Policy Research, which monitors issues on women and employment.

"There's not a lot of evidence that karma has been friendly to women in this area," she said.

Men paid 40% more than women

Research earlier this year by Joint Venture Silicon Valley, a California think-tank, found that men in the region who hold graduate or professional degrees earn 73% more than women with the same educational qualifications. The gap was 40% for those with a bachelor's degree.

An "Equal Pay Project" campaign launched last week calculated that American women over the course of their careers are paid \$435,000 less than male counterparts, adding up to a staggering \$29trn in aggregate.

In recent weeks, major technology firms have been looking at the issue with "diversity reports" that examine the composition of the workforce.

Microsoft reported earlier this month that its staff was only 29% women. At Google, the figure was 30%. For Facebook, the percentage was 31%, but only 15% are in technical jobs.

According to research from the National Centre for Women and Information Technology women obtained 18% of computer science degrees in 2012, down from 37% in 1985. The report said women held 25% of jobs in the technology industry, down from 37% in 1990.

Male geek culture blamed

Researcher Catherine Ashcraft of the University of Colorado said that despite a wealth of educational efforts to promote women's participation in computing, there has been little increase in the number of women in the field.

She said these programmes often fall short because they take a narrow view of their purpose, ignoring important factors



Ariane Hegewisch of the Institute for Women's Policy Research says women are earning significantly less than their male counterparts in the technology sector. Image: [Institute of Women's Policy Research](#)



University of Colorado's Catherine Ashcraft believes little has been done to encourage women into the technology field, which is still dominated by male geeks. Image: [Colorado University](#)

that shape girls' identities and education/career choices - not least broader narratives around gender, race, and sexuality.

The technology sector has its share of well-known female CEOs - Marissa Mayer at Yahoo, Meg Whitman at Hewlett-Packard, and co-Chief Executive Safra Catz at Oracle - despite the small proportion of women in the industry overall.

Hegewisch said that the technology sector has become more difficult for women since the 1980s.

"The geek culture has become stronger and the work-all-night culture is stronger, so this might be pushing women out," Hegewisch told AFP.

She said women remain under-represented in just about every segment of the technology industry, in contrast to some other fields like finance.

"Women might study maths or science, but they might go into general business, because the working conditions and culture in technology fields is not that welcoming," she said.

Nadella's comments came coincidentally during an on-stage discussion at the Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing conference in Arizona.

The Microsoft boss stunned the audience by saying that women, instead of asking for a raise should just trust that the system will actually give you the right raises as you go along.

Nadella later scrambled to damp down the controversy, in comments in Twitter and in a memo to Microsoft staff.

But Hegewisch said that the fact that Nadella made the slip-up at a conference for women in computing suggests he lacks a grip on the issues.

"It shows he doesn't really have a clue about the debate," she said. "And it shows just how far we have to go."

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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