



# Women At Work Report 2020



# Wundamail: Women At Work Report 2020

Wundamail's annual Women At Work Report investigates the behavioural science and economic data behind gender attitudes in the workplace.

The respondents worked across a range of blue-chip enterprises, large companies and micro-businesses. We surveyed a nationally representative sample in order to better understand the gender challenges and issues facing women in business today.

# The State Of Play

## Imposter Syndrome is a Myth: Women lack negotiation skills, not self-belief

Nowadays, a brief glance across any glossy corporate website will inform you of the company's commitment to gender equality. And yet, these promises are failing to translate into actual gender diversity. As the proportion of women in the global workforce stalls at 15%, there is little evidence of progress.

That's what we discovered in the **Wundamail Women At Work Report 2020**, in partnership with the Diskette Behavioural Research Programme. We drew on data from 10,000 trained professionals in the US and UK, representative by region, ethnic background, socio-economic status, gender, and inclusion of both high-income and low-income bracket workers. Wundamail collected all data between 03/01/20 and 12/01/20.

And the problem has nothing to do with education, skills, or intelligence. Women perform better in an academic context, earn more places at top universities, and score more bachelor's degrees than men. They're working as long and as hard as men, and are staying in the workforce at the same rate as men. So why can't they negotiate an equal salary?

Conventional wisdom points to the female propensity for "imposter syndrome": feelings of chronic self-doubt that persist despite external proof of their competence. It's a popular female narrative, and one that ties in conveniently with the self-help, wellness and magazine industries.

And yet, the **Wundamail Women At Work Report** suggests otherwise. Data indicates that both Men and Women feel equally equipped for management positions, and are confident advocating for themselves in a high-pressure work situation. So why has gender progress lurched to a standstill?

To find the answers, Wundamail examined job security, hiring and promotions, advocating skills and career ambition. Below, we share the results from the full report, diving deep into career process and employee experience that will prove most fundamental for companies to achieve gender parity in the next year.



## Job Security

As the global job market swings toward remote and flexible working, traditional office culture is quickly becoming a relic of the past. By 2021, 1 in 5 businesses worldwide will have taken steps to incorporate remote policy into employee packages, for example. In theory, this development should benefit working mothers, single parents and those with caring responsibilities most of all. Discouragingly, the survey results tell a different story.

Respondents were asked how secure they felt in their current job, on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being extremely confident). Over 25% of the men surveyed checked a 9 or a 10, compared with just 6% of women.

This notion was reinforced further when respondents were asked how long they expected to stay at their current place of work. Male respondents anticipated a 3-5 year stint on average, whereas female respondents predicted to stay between 1-2 years.

Over 15% of women predicted they would stay for less than 6 months, compared with 9% of men. In addition, 10% of men felt confident they would continue at the same company for 10 years or more, compared to just 5% of women.

## Hiring and Promotions

The two most reliable drivers of gender equality in the workplace are hiring and promotions. Business must strive to remove both conscious and subconscious company bias in these areas, if they want to promote equal representation at all levels.

Year on year, young women outperform their male counterparts within the structure of academia. They attain higher grades, perform better in exams, and secure more places at elite US colleges and universities. Why then, are they significantly less likely to be hired after graduation? And less likely to ascend the corporate ladder once they get there?

### How secure are you in your current job?



**MEN**  
Ranking a 9 or 10

**WOMEN**  
Ranking a 9 or 10

**25%**      **6%**

### How long to you expect to stay in your job?



**MEN**      **WOMEN**

**3-5**      **1-2**  
years      years

## Men and women are equal in confidence..

The answer lies in female aspiration and ambition. According to Diskette Behavioural Research, Men and Women feel equally equipped for management positions. Our study showed that 65% of men and 67% of women feel they "could easily do their manager's job to a better standard than them".

Furthermore, 79% of Men and 76% of women state that they feel confident advocating for themselves in a high-pressure work situation. These results certainly contradict the prevailing narrative: that female under-representation in top-level positions stems from an inherent lack of confidence, education or faith in their abilities.

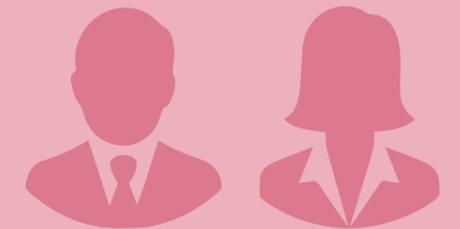
## ...but the gap opens up when it comes to ambitions and aspirations

It appears that the issue may stem from a female lack of realistic ambition, rather than confidence as the media narrative seems to suggest. When asked whether they would "aspire to take on their manager's role in the future", 72% of men claimed they would, compared to just 47% of women.

This is genuinely illuminating, and offers a convincing explanation for what McKinsey research would call the "broken rung" on the career ladder. This alludes to the fact that most women face an impasse on the path to senior leadership at the first step up to manager. Their report indicates that for every 100 men promoted and hired to manager, only 72 women are promoted and hired. This "broken rung" blocks women from progressing into senior leadership at all. As a result, men end up holding 62 percent of manager-level positions, while women hold just 38 percent. This has an extremely negative impact on equal representation in the C-suite.

Perhaps more revealing is Diskette's investigation into attitudes to pay rises. Only 62% of women reported that they would feel confident advocating for a raise, compared with a sizeable 88% of men. On average, men were twice as likely to talk finance in career conversations, whereas women preferred to focus discussion on qualitative factors such as skills, achievements or career progression.

### Could you easily do your manager's job to a better standard than them?



**MEN**      **WOMEN**

**65%**      **67%**

### Do you aspire to take on your manager's role in the future?



**MEN**      **WOMEN**

**72%**      **47%**

So what does this indicate? These findings offer significant insight into the attitudes that support the gender pay gap. Though men and women feel equally confident advocating for themselves on a personal level, women are less likely to provoke direct financial discussion, and invite negotiation. The issue doesn't stem from an inherent female confidence crisis, nor "chronic imposter syndrome" as magazine articles frequently suggest.

Unequal representation in the workplace can therefore be remedied by endowing women with the practical skills they need to advocate, articulate, and most importantly, negotiate. Their lack of "ambition" can be tackled by providing access to female mentors and sponsors- it is often said that "you can't be what you can't see". Women feel able to take on more responsibility, but are not naturally conditioned to place themselves in the shoes of their (frequently male) managers.

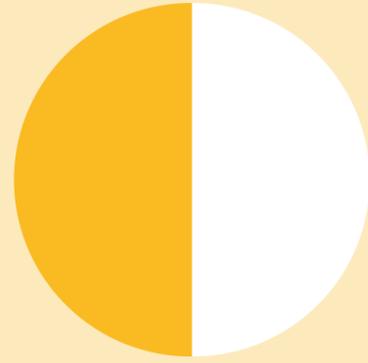
This perpetuates the false perception that women do not wish to progress into senior roles, and are less motivated, driven and ambitious than their male counterparts.

## Imposter Syndrome

According to the survey, 87% of women feel confident holding members of their team accountable, compared to 89% of men. This data further opposes the common narrative that lack of self-confidence, or it's headline grabbing sister "imposter syndrome" is the chief factor holding women back in the workplace.

**Men and women appear to feel equally assured in terms of authority, position and ability. And yet, the gap opens up when it comes to actual confrontation.** Over half of women say they only "confront someone when it is required", while a further quarter "avoid confrontation at all costs". In addition, 84% of women have previously feigned agreement with someone's opinion "purely to avoid confrontation".

On the other hand, over half of men describe themselves as "confrontational within reason", with a further quarter claiming that they actively "relish confrontation". This suggests a staggering inconsistency: women's perceived "confidence" levels don't match up with their confrontation skills. On average, women were three times less comfortable using assertive language or dealing with conflict.



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# So... how should businesses seek to practice equality?

In light of Diskette's research, it is more important than ever to provide women with the skills and space to advocate for themselves. Specifically, this must go beyond simple encouragement: businesses must put in equality infrastructure such as practical workshops and training to give women a voice.

Women today don't need to be told to "believe in themselves"- they already do. What they do need are practical negotiation skills, actionable training and role models in senior positions. To achieve this, businesses should look to improve manager support, mentorship, and impartial hiring and promotion practices.

## Key actions for businesses in 2020:

### 1. Implement A Fair Communication System

Do all your employees feel able to contribute suggestions and voice their concerns? As the above research illustrates, it's no longer enough to simply give your female employees a seat at the table. As a leader, it's important to make sure you're giving your team a fair platform to have their say, with no interruptions or distractions.

Modern tech can help eliminate the fundamental subconscious bias present in boardroom culture across the globe. Daily update tools, communication platforms and chats can help to give everyone a space to voice their opinion without being talked over, dismissed or talked down to.

**Software like Wundamail, for example, help to create a culture of accountability when it comes to communication. Each day, Wundamail sends a question to the whole team, then compiles the responses into a single group email. Team activity is collated, condensed and circulated for all to see- so nobody misses the stuff that matters.**

### 2. Focus on Managing Individuals

Are you considering the long-term career ambitions of your employees? Your female team members are more likely to feel they have equal opportunities for growth and advancement when you show you are paying attention to their career progression. Do you advocate for new opportunities for them within your organisation, or introduce them to new skills on a regular basis?

When managers show an active interest, women and men report feeling equally supported in the workplace. Sometimes it's as simple as a five-minute chat or a coffee once a month. Large organisations can ingrain this kind of culture by ensuring their managers and HR teams have the tools and training they need to more fully support their team members—and by rewarding them when they do.



### 3. Keep Focused On Inclusivity

Arguably, the way most organisations deploy email tends to actively discourage inclusivity. Smaller group chats spring up, individuals are excluded from replies, and long email chains alienate newcomers. You have to choose between making critical decisions at scale (which wastes time), or nailing down a plan with a few key people at the water-cooler.

The problem is that when company strategy plays out behind the scenes, ideas and information get lost in the grapevine. Things inevitably come out of left field, and employees struggle to voice their opinion. Without direct communication, it is near impossible to inspire, or motivate a group of people to get behind a cohesive vision. So, what's the point of investing in diversity if only to negate the benefits with a poor inclusivity strategy? Employees in this kind of environment will understandably feel undervalued or under-utilised, and are therefore less likely to succeed overall.

Setting up automated email feedback within a team is the best way to embed inclusivity within the very fabric of the organisation. By giving the whole team an accurate snapshot of team thinking each day, everyone can contextualise and understand company decisions and objectives. Employees are kept informed and ready to react and adapt to internal, societal and global changes. Ultimately, every single individual becomes responsible for executing team strategy, and accomplishing powerful change.