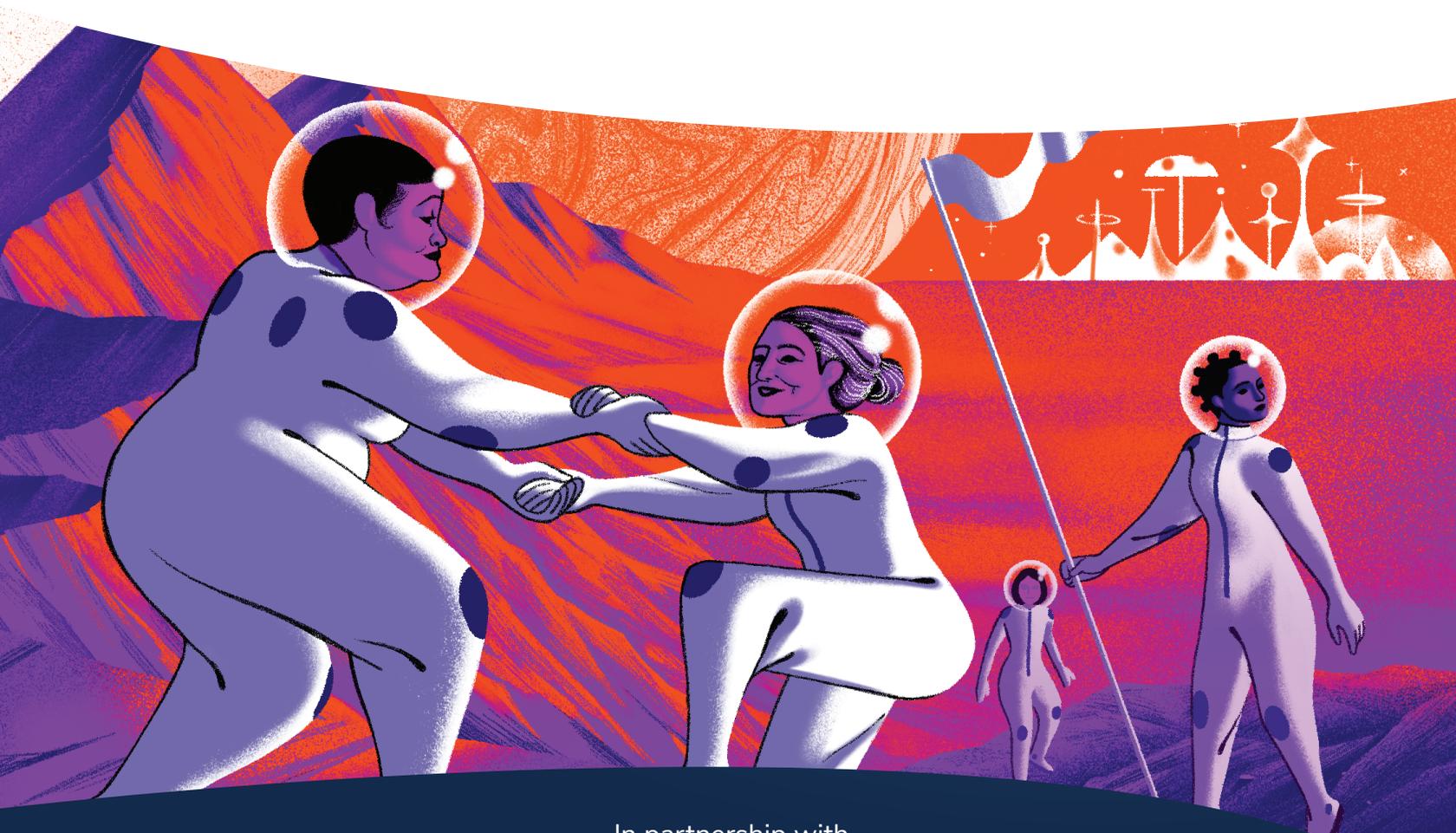


Developing a Foundational Approach to Gender Equity in Tech

May 2019



In partnership with



This white paper was authored by Swati Kumar from [Hugo](#). It reflects the company's views at the time of writing. The content is based on a study conducted in partnership with [Advancing Women in Product \(AWIP\)](#) along with other research on the state of women in the workplace.

We thank our partners — [Atlassian](#), [BlueJeans](#), and [Freshworks](#) — for their support in producing this white paper. In particular, we appreciate Aubrey Blanche, Head of Diversity & Belonging at Atlassian, for her advice and contribution. However, we note that this white paper in no way reflects the organizational views of our supporting partners.

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Summary

Over the past few years, gender equity in the tech industry has become more of a priority for leadership and diversity advocates alike. The latest diversity in tech movement started with Tracy Chou asking “Where are the numbers?”¹ in 2013. The #MeToo movement in 2016 further propelled this, after which lasting change has been highly anticipated. In this light, it is important to consider which efforts have been implemented and how successful they have been. Understanding the state of women in tech today helps us formulate the best way to effect change for tomorrow, which is why Hugo and [Advancing Women in Product](#)² (AWIP) have collaborated to conduct a survey of 580 respondents to learn more about the topic. In addition to the information collected as a part of this survey, we used several third-party studies to prepare this document. Based on the information collected, we know that while women are doing their part to achieve equality in the workplace, the industry continues to fail people of marginalized genders. Many of the efforts being made today are starting from the top of the company, so we

will shift our focus to explore additional grassroots efforts that can get the job done on a daily basis by the average worker.

This document discusses the current state of women in tech including:

- » the issues with personal voice and how to use technology as an equalizing factor
- » the disproportionate advancement of white women over women of color
- » opportunities to improve how women see themselves in the workforce today

It will also discuss what the tech industry must do to build a bright future for all women in tech by setting clear goals and exploring all the actions that can be taken at a grassroots level to affect change quickly. Readers will come away with an idea of the components of their ideal communications tool stack.



¹ <https://medium.com/@triketora/where-are-the-numbers-cb997a57252>

² <https://www.advancingwomeninproduct.org>

Purpose

The systemic exclusion of many groups, including women and gender minorities, has been an inherent facet of the tech industry for years. Due to recent changes to the cultural climate, these issues are coming to the forefront more than ever. As a result, companies have publicly “committed to gender diversity,” according to the [Women in the Workplace 2018](#)¹ report.

“The problem is, recent studies are showing that the cultural shift, despite its many strengths, has been unable to affect widespread change in the workplace.”

Encouraged by the more recent #MeToo movement, a cultural revolution has taken place over the past decade by reallocating attention to the discrimination of gender minorities. The problem is, recent studies are showing that the cultural shift, despite its many strengths, has been unable to affect widespread change in the workplace. In a 2018 survey of 400 participants by [Fairy God Boss](#)², 78% of men and 75% of women said that they don’t believe the #MeToo movement has had a significant impact on the workplace. Although companies have continued to report

their strong commitment to gender equity, they haven’t successfully invested in programs and approaches that have created company and industry level change.

Hugo commissioned an independent study to dig deeper and wrote this document in partnership with Atlassian, BlueJeans, and Freshworks to discover a better approach to building balanced, equitable teams in the workplace. This method hopes to highlight a new grassroots approach to building equitable teams that augments ongoing leadership-driven efforts.

Ultimately, while gender discrimination is beginning to get the attention it deserves, we must take cues from the efforts and few successes on offer today to work toward creating balanced teams made up of people with a diversity of identities and experiences rather than simply approaching a binary, ineffective goal of ending only gender discrimination in tech.



¹ <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/women-in-the-workplace-2018>

² <https://fairygodboss.com/research/careers-and-home-life>



Methodology

Resources Used

We consulted a variety of sources to fully understand the current state of women in tech, the events that led to it, and its potential future. The 2018 Women in the Workplace study, the [2013 Pew Research Center Study](#)¹, and Men and Women on Career and Home Life 2018 by Fairy God Boss were particularly useful.

These existing studies gave us significant insight into the split of women in the workplace by demographics as well as their feelings about their work and work-life balance. The information that we still needed was around the topic of how women actually function in the workplace and the significance their voices are given on a day-to-day basis. To learn more about this, we created our own survey.

***Note:** The studies cited here use binary gender classifications, which we recognize doesn't accurately represent anyone. We also recognize that this limits our ability to completely capture the experience of trans and non-binary individuals.

The 2019 Future of Women Leaders Study

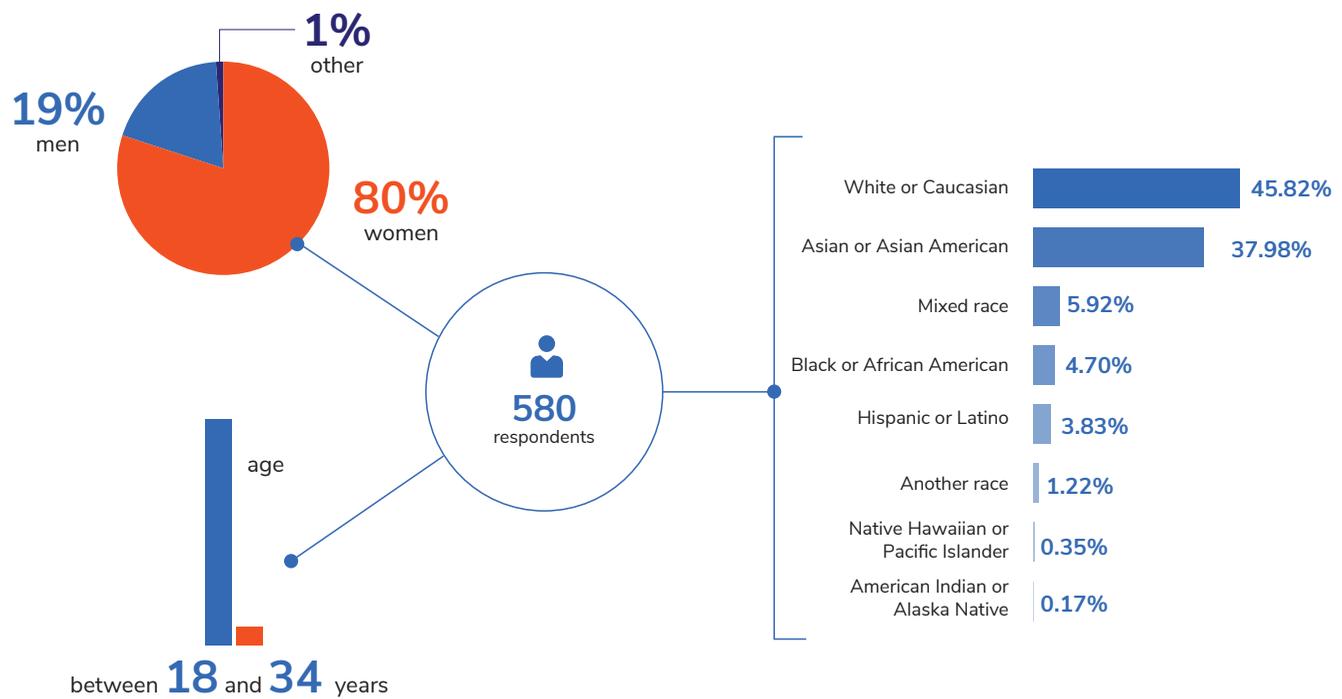
In partnership with [Advancing Women in Product \(AWIP\)](#), Hugo commissioned a survey to learn about how men and women feel about the efforts to create balanced teams in their companies (and whether they needed them at all). The goal was also to learn how much confidence men, women, and separate demographics have in their organizations' ability to successfully carry out these efforts.

Our survey included 25 questions, which included:

- » demographic information
- » employee opinions on the state of equity in their teams
- » the impact of company efforts to bring about change
- » their confidence in future success within their companies and the industry

AWIP and Hugo targeted employees in the tech industry for the survey that yielded a total of 580 respondents. Of these, 80% identified as women, 19% identified as men, and 1% identified as “other” or neither. Respondent race ranged from Caucasian, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latinx, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and Mixed

Race. More than half were Caucasian with Asians following. Most respondents were between 18 and 34 years old and were at a Manager level or lower at work. Because the data collected varied a bit in terms of numbers by demographic, the analysis was done by considering parts of the whole rather than individual values.



Current Events and Trends

What makes now the best time to consider this topic and its impact is the sequence of recent events? Starting in Hollywood in 2016, the #MeToo movement has expanded from industry to industry and even country to country. It has even spawned subsequent movements such as #TimesUp. These

events came with a certain set of expectations for the impact on our society and the tech industry. To ensure they remain on track, it is important to check on the momentum and progress often. Here, we'll highlight the tech industry with a focus on the efforts and future requirements of companies looking to make a change.



The State of Women in Tech

It is undeniable that companies have pledged to make workplace culture better for women. Still, **64% of women**¹ faced microaggressions in the workplace last year — and that’s just those who self-reported. These issues have even continued to seep into manager-employee relationships. In the 2018 Men and Women on Career and Home Life study by Fairy God Boss, male supervisors promoted **52% of the men**² who had been promoted, while only **30% of women**³ could say the same. When it comes to advancing in the workplace, women continue to take a back seat compared to their male colleagues.

“When it comes to advancing in the workplace, women continue to take a back seat compared to their male colleagues.”

So whose fault is this? Do women need to work harder to achieve equal rights? In fact, women negotiate for raises **just as often**⁴ as men. They leave their companies at the same rate (**15%**⁵) as men. They make their desire to advance at the company very clear. Women are doing well in their efforts to balance their treatment in the workplace. It appears to be their companies and cultures that tend to fall short.

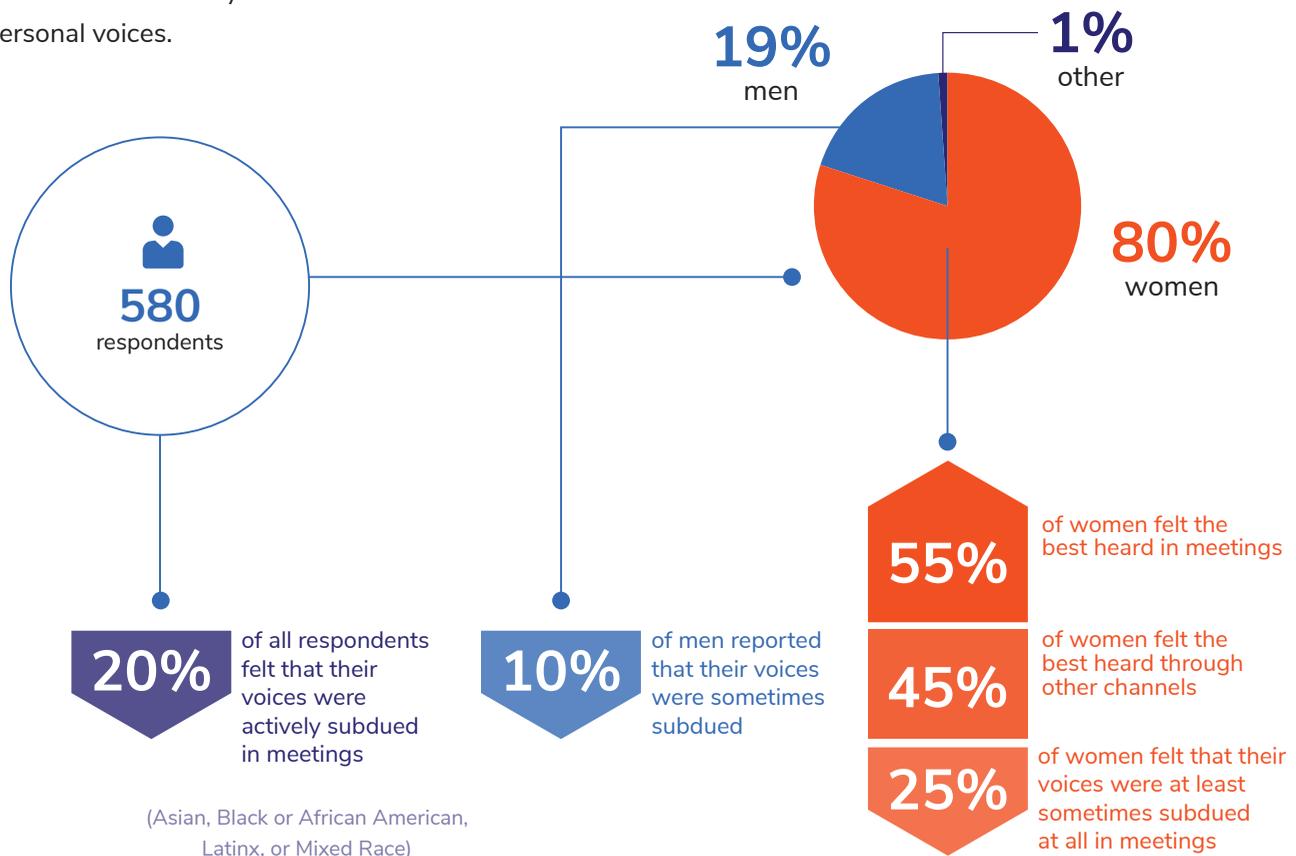
Of course, real change doesn’t happen overnight — or even within a couple of years — but it is important to pay attention to the things we do on a regular basis that contribute to the gender imbalance that continues to permeate the workforce. To start on this journey, we will explore the different tools and avenues employees have available to express their personal voice, the evolution of the white woman in the workplace, the difference between equity and equality, and what a woman’s confidence looks like and means today. We will learn about the different facets of the state of women in tech and identify the problems that can be and need to be solved.

Personal Voice

The employee's most important asset in the workforce — whether before or during an interview, or at the office itself — is their personal voice. How important someone is to a team depends on the value of their ideas. In order for companies and teams to see the value, however, employees must first and foremost communicate the ideas in a way that is widely and properly heard.

This is where we run into problems. Those who identify with minority groups tend to have a quieter and more obscured personal voice. As we determined earlier, this is not due to an issue with the way they operate at work — the issue is the environment. So what is among the most important and malleable pieces of the communications process? The avenues and software we use for communication today. These are the avenues for our personal voices.

The most obvious of these are in-person meetings. Hugo's survey of 580 respondents reported that 55% of women felt the best heard in meetings and conversely, 45% of women better heard in other forums. At the same time, 25% of women felt that their voices were at least sometimes subdued at all in meetings. Only 10% of men reported that their voices were sometimes subdued. To make matters worse, 20% of all respondents felt that their voices were actively subdued in meetings, and they all identified as Asian, Black or African American, Latinx, or Mixed Race. Although women feel most heard in meetings compared to other channels, this does not necessarily mean they are heard well or enough. This only gets worse with women of color.



Then there's email, the most commonly used form of asynchronous text communication in a company, and Slack, the most commonly used form of synchronous text communication — particularly in the tech industry. Hugo's survey also showed that men consistently feel more heard through every channel except for email and Slack. This presents an opportunity for women and non-binary genders. Email and Slack provide an equalizing factor that should be well utilized and emulated with other tools as well.

Collaboration platforms, from project management tools to document sharing, provide a channel for certain interactions that once would have required a meeting. A relatively recent addition to the list, they are very commonly used today to speed up feedback processes and promote agile methodologies in the workplace. Using such software has great potential in improving workplace efficiency, but it is also important to maintain a human element in these interactions. Losing this very important component of work culture will only make it harder to carve a unique personal voice.

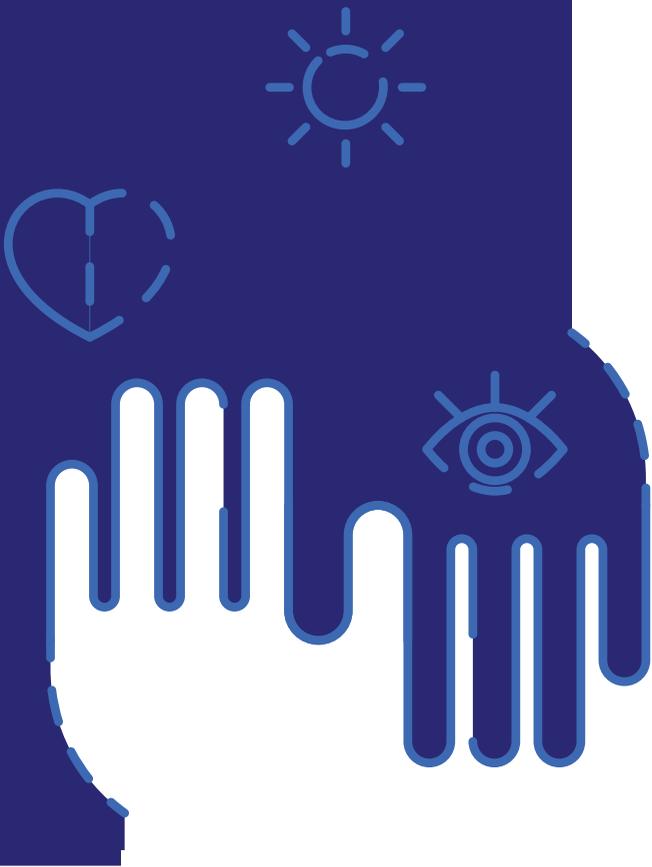
Last, but not least, when we talk about communication in the modern workplace, it is imperative that we consider remote employees and meetings. There are positives and negatives to explore when it comes to remote work. The lack of in-person meetings can make the use of other potentially equalizing channels and tools more frequent, but can also separate people from their company's culture. This isolation, if improperly handled, has the potential to further set aside a person's ideas and personal voice.

White Women vs. Women of Color

The evolution of our culture shows that a woman's place in the workplace has improved, with a current representation of 48%¹ of entry-level employees. This robust number, however, doesn't apply to women of color, who make up only 17% of entry-level employees. This gets much worse as they move further up the corporate ladder. Women of color represent only 8% of directors and senior managers. Only 4%² of senior VP's and members of the C-suite identify as women of color.

There has been a clear improvement in the presence of women at work, but the gains have skewed heavily toward white women. This is an important distinction to understand because balanced teams are not created by moving just one demographic to the other side of the scale. Companies achieve balance through equity and equality across gender identity, race, age, etc.

“There has been a clear improvement in the presence of women at work, but the gains have skewed heavily toward white women.”



Equity vs. Equality

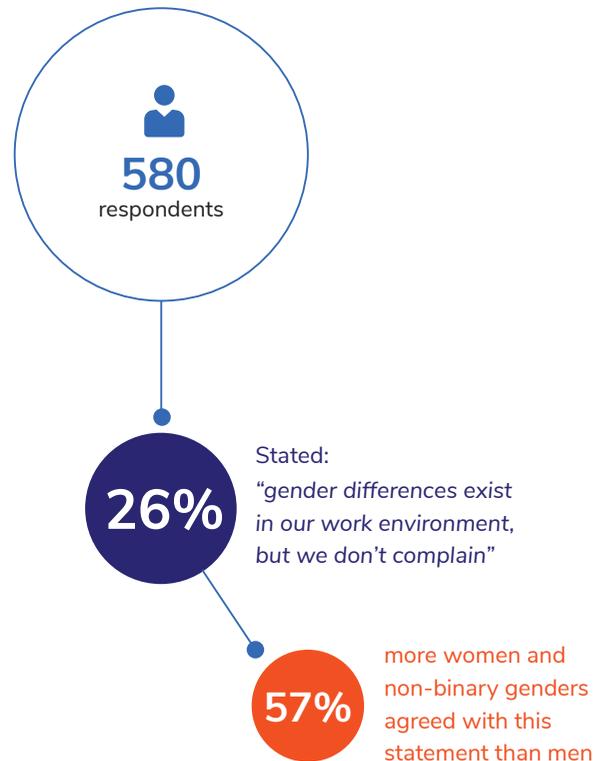
As we clarify our goals for creating balanced teams, it is also necessary to distinguish if we are looking for equity or equality and the implications of each. Equity is achieved when organizations give individuals what they need to be successful. Equality, on the other hand, is when companies make an effort to treat everyone the same way — equally.

While equality as an ultimate goal is ideal, it isn't always practical in the world we live in today. Not everyone has the same challenges and obstacles. Each individual weakness or imbalance requires its own set of tools and support. In other words, not everyone starts in the same place. Until we can get to a point where more companies give employees equal advantages, focusing on equity will move us forward more effectively.

How Women View Themselves

An additional caveat to keep in mind as we clarify our goals is the bias that women tend to have against themselves. Although women are asking for more and are recognizing the lack of results they get from their efforts, their own expectations may stunt them. Of the 580 people Hugo surveyed, 26% of respondents said that gender differences exist in their work environment, but they don't complain. 57% more women and non-binary people agreed with this statement than men. *They don't complain.*

So the fact that many women downplay how they feel about gender inequity in the workplace colors the responses we see in surveys.



The Significance of Confidence in the Workplace

It all comes down to confidence. Women have done a lot to boost the confidence with which they conduct themselves at work, but the systems are designed to suppress and quiet them. Companies need to do better.

*Too much focus*³ on numbers in sourcing and hiring permeates many of the efforts companies are making today. Because Diversity & Inclusion as a concept is relatively new, many of the companies less able to achieve balanced teams approach the issue with an everything-and-the-kitchen-sink attitude. They try a little bit of everything with the hope that they will eventually land on something

that works.

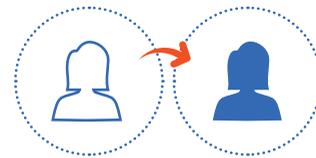
This is exactly what they shouldn't be doing, however, if their goal is to increase women's confidence in the workplace. In some situations, it may seem counterintuitive, but the best way to resolve the everything-and-the-kitchen-sink attitude is to create structure. From a bird's eye view, a well-structured plan for working toward balanced teams is, of course, essential. However, equally important is structure in meetings and other communication channels. Teams can achieve this by properly using collaboration tools to implement wide-reaching structure. Ultimately, this structure leads to a clear approach to equity and equality among teams.

The Problem Today

We've discussed a wide variety of topics here than can seem like they require individual plans. Really, it all boils down to this:



The overall attention companies pay to the state of women in the workplace has clearly improved over the years.



This improvement is, however, highly skewed toward white women; women of color continue to be left behind.



The core of the issue is the lack of a clear personal voice and a deficiency in the confidence needed to outwardly acknowledge the issue.



The approaches that exist today, while well-meaning, are ineffective due to a lack of a structured approach.



The Future of Women in Tech

Now that the problems are obvious to us, brightening the future of women in tech requires setting clear goals and coming up with solutions that are easy to implement in the long term on a daily basis.

Goals for the Future

Fortunately, the problems we have distilled are largely actionable. For the future, we want to balance gender equity by providing individuals the

tools they need to boost their personal voices and a clear structure in which they can be effectively implemented.

Successfully reaching our goals as an industry will require a work environment that provides options for a variety of tools, software, and services for employees to choose and implement appropriately. By providing support from the start, we will be able to move closer to a system of equality.

Crafting Solutions

Some of the largest and most successful tech companies today use exorbitant amounts of time, money, and personnel on diversity & inclusion efforts. These include a variety of ventures, from diversifying sourcing for hiring to providing career counseling particularly to marginalized groups. These efforts are important and admirable, but less generally effective than many have hoped.

Because issues surrounding the building of balanced teams often originate in day-to-day interactions within a company, organizations who make small changes in the fundamentals of how they communicate can affect big change overall. Clarity is a powerful force. Take how meetings are run, for example, as a microcosm for the larger business culture. When employees adopt equitable communication habits that enable everyone to have influence in meetings, they are creating a new standard culture for communication and decision-making across their organization.

Get Everyone's Input

To help remove bias during discussions, meeting organizers should clearly and directly offer everyone a chance to speak without applying pressure to any one person. This ensures that no one person carries the most weight or power in the room. The intern should receive the same level of respect in the meeting as the CEO, as should the non-binary product manager's input in comparison to their male colleagues.

Equalize Influence with Meeting Structure and Agendas

Using a strong structure also makes it important to create meeting agendas in advance. This

makes it possible for attendees to become participants before the meeting even begins without the pressure of a room full of people. Even the simplest agenda allows everyone to show up prepared to advocate for their ideas and share their knowledge with the team.

Invest in Others and Build Stronger Relationships

All employees of a company should consider implementing [Shine Theory](https://www.shinetheory.com)¹, the idea that making long term investments in the people around you (and relying on their help in return) develops strong and lasting relationships. Particularly in the workplace, this approach helps individuals build an omnipresent support system.

Other best practices for equitable communication include:

- » Avoiding interruptions of anyone, by anyone
- » Actively listening to each speaker
- » Encouraging the sharing of "bad" ideas so that a lack of confidence (which generally veers toward minorities) doesn't discourage participation
- » Asking for clarification rather than making assumptions
- » Trying to see an issue from the other person's perspective during a disagreement

Employees of all (or no) genders, races, and backgrounds should be able to successfully support each other without needing to rely on those who identify as the majority to take notice.

Using Tools to Effect Change at a Grassroots Level

Teams can also apply solutions remotely and outside of meetings by expanding the channels of communication to include some of the newer tools and software, including chat and collaboration tools. Using these widely, often, and effectively makes it possible for those employees to thrive who

may have struggled with other channels like in-person meetings and emails.

While these newer tools have their own challenges in terms of maintaining a clear personal voice, teams can use them optimally to reduce bias and improve communication quality. The key is to find ways to maintain a human element in these interactions.

Company-Wide Chat

Communicating in person or by phone or video chat results in a skewed interaction where people in positions of power take the stage by having more talking time and attention. Communications by chat, if facilitated appropriately, allows people to speak whenever they see fit without the restrictions of rank, age, race, or gender that can come up automatically in a typical human conversation at work.

Knowledge Management Tools

Tools that allow employees to share knowledge seamlessly support a team that can make the best-informed decisions even when they are not in the room. Companies can accommodate a non-traditional work schedule using the proper communication tools and channels to reduce the number of time employees need to be in meetings or physically in the office.

Voice and Video Communication

Voice and video communication remove the bias created in the workplace toward people who can physically be in the office. Using remote voice and video communication tools, for example, employers can hire from target markets that are more representative than the standard tech hubs. These tools can allow parents to stay home with their children if they choose, team members to take a trip abroad, or individuals to work in distributed offices without missing a beat at work. They can help keep larger groups of people informed of decisions in real time rather than hearing about them secondhand. Companies can explore equalizing dynamics in a remote video setting to mitigate physical presence or dominance.

Workflow Tools

Workflow tools include the myriad of project management programs in the industry. They destroy decision-making bias that occurs by restricting information to certain people and not widely shared. These tools have the potential to interrupt the unconscious tendency of people to remember the successes of well-represented employees and the failures of under-represented minorities.

Remote Work

Making remote work possible addresses a major reason women leave the workforce — to take care of their children at home. Even for those who don't leave the workplace entirely, 40%² of women spend more than eight hours on household tasks such as cleaning and childcare. 32%³ of men, on the other hand, spend two to four hours on the same tasks. Using workplace tools to neutralize the impact of in-person meetings makes sure that women get an equal opportunity to move ahead in their careers without falling behind men due to their decision to have children.

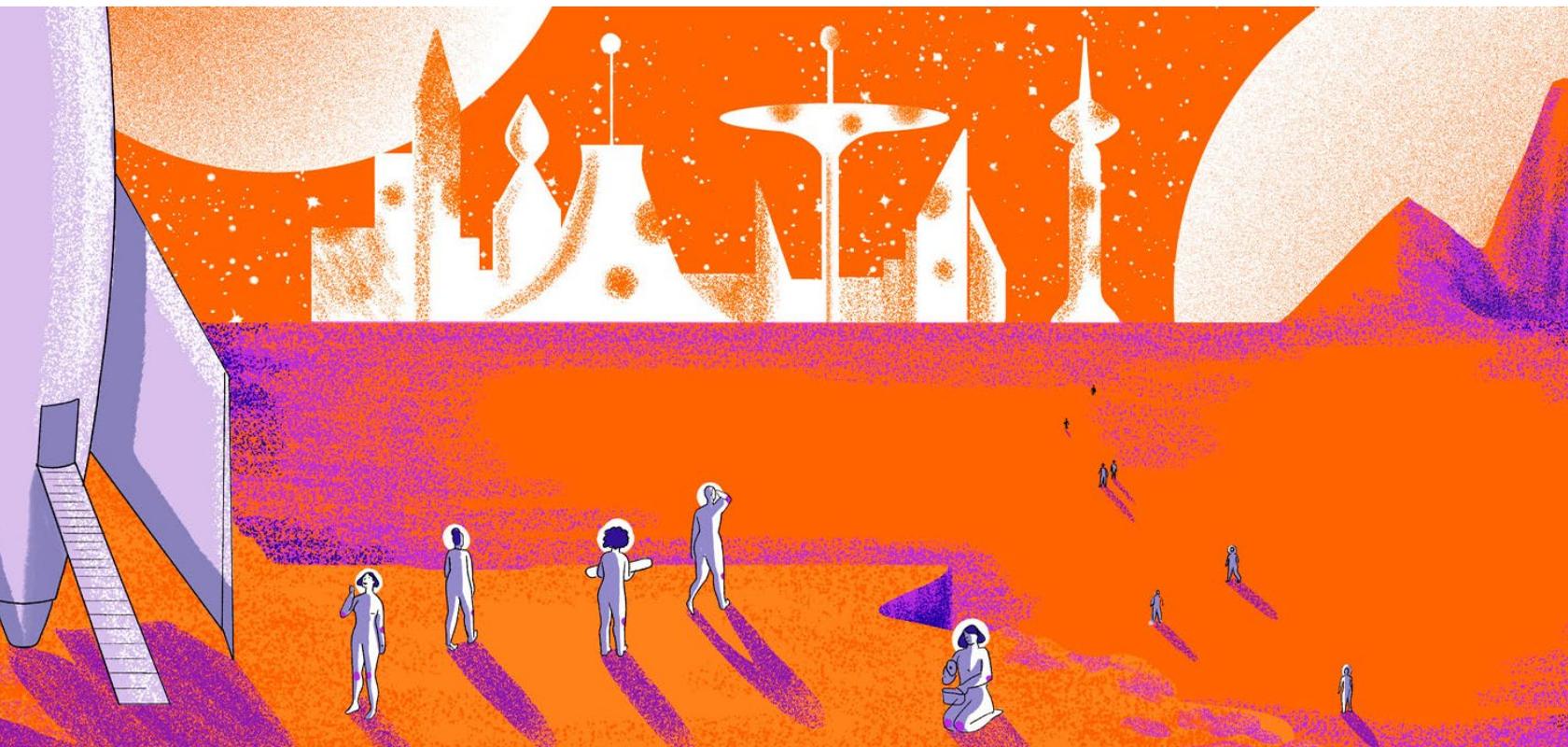
Communicating Appropriately to Everyone

Regardless of channel, there are some guidelines to apply to all asynchronous communications. First of all, it is important to work toward equity in a particular company by communicating with

employees in the way that works best for them, regardless of personal characteristics like gender, race, and parental or marital status.

It can also be useful to create documents for each employee that act as references⁴ for their colleagues on how to best communicate with them at work. This allows teams to effortlessly work with any team member, leader, or consultant in a way that is best for them and allows them to do their highest quality work.

Furthermore, regardless of the employee's location, all in-person communications should be actively shared with all relevant colleagues to ensure that an information hierarchy doesn't prevent people from getting work done. Incorporating this practice (unless information is deemed to be too sensitive) will also foster transparency and trust to complement the team culture.



^{2,3} <https://fairygodboss.com/research/careers-and-home-life>

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/31/business/questbacks-lead-strategist-on-his-user-manual.html>

Your Collaboration Tool Stack

Everyone should have their own suite of collaboration tools for the workplace. Based on our

research, here are foundations companies should consider before customizing their overall suite to their needs and culture



A Chat Tool

A chat application can function as a real-time or asynchronous communication tool, which means it is an ideal way to pass short messages quickly at any time. Regardless of location, a remote chat tool is generally used independently without any kind of eye contact or physical presence. By putting all conversations in the same place and on the same level, we can equalize access to information.



A Project Management Tool

This can refer to a range of different types of tools, from task management to customer conversations. A good management tool allows for an even and fair distribution of tasks as well as accountability. On the flip side, it also assigns credit where credit is due. As a result, it can act as a truer measure of an individual's output and value without cultural and political disruptions.



Audio/Video Conferencing Solutions

Whether you work remotely full time, work from distributed offices, are working from outside the office temporarily, or need to have a conversation with someone who is simply not around at the time, an audio and video conferencing application and great connected hardware can be very useful due to its ability to create an experience as close as currently possible to a replication of an in-person interaction. Like remote chat tools, audio and video conferencing solutions can equalize the share of voice and access to information.



Meeting Note Software

As Hugo's survey demonstrated, even with their weaknesses, people tend to feel best heard in meetings. In order to capture, retain and share their voices accurately, meeting notes software can help equitably collect input in preparation, ensure contributions aren't lost, and encourage collaboration via simultaneous editing and immediate sharing with people and their tools. Connecting meetings with pre and post-meeting digital collaboration aids in achieving the benefits of the varied collaboration channels discussed.

Conclusion

Minorities in tech, especially those with intersectional identities, are often working in environments that create little room for their personal voice, which can have a negative effect on their confidence. What progress has been made tends to focus on raising awareness of the problem, but often lacks actionable, specific strategies anyone can adopt to make change.

Our research suggests that there are three actionable strategies to begin creating change on every team:

1. Create a structure for meetings, including:

- » Providing a collaborative agenda ahead of time, encouraging input from participants
- » Giving equal weight and space to all participants
- » Share information transparently to avoid the creation of team silos and consider how meetings connect to other channels where people may feel better heard (e.g. chat, email or workflow tools)

2. Encourage the sharing of “bad” ideas to avoid silence due to a crisis of confidence

3. Create a stack of customized tools with equity in mind

- » Consider a set of foundation tools and solutions for teams, selecting the right tools in each category and considering how they integrate and work together
- » Recognize which additional tools each individual needs to avoid gender inequity on a daily basis

Download your copy at www.genderequity.team



www.hugo.team