

Hudson

Women at Work

Bored with the Boardroom?



Executive Summary

A Research Paper by Hudson

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Women at Work: Bored with the Boardroom? examines the changing roles, perceptions and aspirations of women within the modern workplace. It forms part of an annual programme of qualitative and quantitative research conducted by global recruitment and HR consultancy, Hudson, looking at issues and trends affecting the employment market. The research was conducted amongst women in professional and managerial roles, their male colleagues and employers (both male and female) spanning a range of sectors, business sizes and regions.

Increasing dissatisfaction with conventional work patterns, particularly amongst female workers, has become a growing concern for employers, one which could threaten the future sustainability of the overall workforce and have a potentially long-lasting impact on business performance.

The report reveals a significant number of female workers have already left, or are seriously considering escaping, the conventional '9 to 5' working world in a bid to reinvent their working patterns. And it is not just working mothers who are seeking greater flexibility in their careers; women of all ages and in all sectors are expressing a desire to break with traditional ways of working in favour of more flexible and stimulating working styles. The potential impact on the composition and productivity of the UK workforce could be profound – the report revealed that almost half (47%) of all female professionals do not expect to be working full time by 2010.

Employers recognise that women are becoming more likely than men to pursue alternative careers or working patterns, but few are fully prepared to respond to this disenchantment with corporate life. The vast majority (87%) of employers do not have a specific attraction and retention plan in place targeted at women, nor are they mindful of their demands. Whilst most employers believe they are committed to providing flexible working opportunities, less than two thirds of employees believe this is an option within their company.

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Many professional women do not feel as though they are being given enough choice to work in a way which suits them or maximises their abilities - whether that is flexible hours or working from home. As a result, female professionals feel women are not fully represented at senior management level or able to progress as quickly as they would like - over half of female workers (56%) believe senior management roles at their place of work are dominated by men. Employers may be committed to providing equal opportunities, but within the conventional working structure, growing numbers of women do not feel able or permitted to take full advantage.

There is also a clear disparity between what employers say they are doing and what they are seen to be doing - 85% of employers believe they are actively committed to providing flexible working opportunities, but only 58% of female workers agree. The majority of women still feel as though their earning potential is impeded and that they are not being afforded sufficient autonomy or responsibility in their roles.

Organisations need the skills and experience that women offer: a balanced workplace benefits all employees. However, many women appear no longer prepared to compromise or tolerate outdated working systems or change their modes of working to suit conventional hierarchies. They want more control on when, where and how they work, and if these options are not available to them in their current position, it seems they are more and more willing to set up their own businesses, go freelance, retrain or pursue an alternative career. To increase and sustain female representation in the workforce, it is not women who need or are prepared to change: the onus is increasingly on employers to be flexible and to adapt.