

Redesigning the recruitment process to address the underrepresentation of women in STEM

Today, 23 June, marks International Women in Engineering Day, however the underrepresentation of women in the South African science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) space remains a complex problem. Seugnet van den Berg, a founding partner at Bizmod, says that a variety of approaches and an investment in change is necessary from the industry if we are ever going to close the gender gap.



The benefits of a more balanced workforce are ample and include important bottom-line considerations as well as:

- Companies that employ female talent and utilise their competencies are 45% more likely to improve their market share and be more profitable.
- By focusing on gender equality and ensuring representation from women, organisations gain greater acceptance from stakeholders and communities.
- Female representation increases the likelihood of other women accepting employment at an organisation. It also aids in finding suitable female mentors and makes it easier for women to navigate the organisation.

Unfortunately, Van den Berg notes, girls who do have the opportunity of getting an education, typically don't choose STEM subject disciplines.

"Reasons for this vary depending on schools and the girls. But we know that two contributing reasons are that these fields are historically male dominated and there is a lack of female teachers in these subjects acting as role models."



Promoting women as agents of change in STEM sectors

Yershen Pillay 14 Feb 2022



STEM is used to shape our world

The reality remains that women make up just more than half of the population on Earth, and a lack of representation in the sector is affecting the world definitively. How so? The requirement to use STEM to shape our world. If women don't get involved in emerging projects, they will constantly, as we are shown by history, find themselves captured in a world built by men and mostly to suit the needs of men.

So how do we rectify this to ensure we can make a difference now? Van den Berg says it starts with the recruiting process. Organisations need to recruit based on potential and performance, not on gender, which means selection practises should be designed to incorporate a portfolio or body of evidence. Removing gender, and with it any bias, when presenting these is imperative. Organisational policies will need to be reviewed, reflecting the change in the workforce demographic, and amended to attract more females.

Finally, she says, the physical workplace and culture needs to be scrutinised to ensure that gender bias is removed and replaced with a gender-inclusive environment for all to thrive.

“By making these changes over time, we'll see a higher female representation helping to chip away at longstanding stereotypes.”

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