

How are women faring in South Africa's evolving employment landscape?

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In August every year, South Africa observes Women's Month to celebrate the important role women play in the workplace and in society. The reality, however, is that there is still a significant gap in equality among men and women in terms of pay and rank across most job sectors.

According to Stats SA data released in the Quarterly Labour Force Survey of the 2nd quarter of 2021, women accounted for 43,4% of total employment in the second quarter of 2021. Of those in managerial positions, 66,9% were men compared to 33,1% of women.

The University of Stellenbosch Business School shared a report confirming that only 20.7% of the board members on JSE-listed companies are female and many JSE-listed companies do not even have a single female director, while the 2021 PwC Executive Directors Report revealed that only 14% of CEOs, CFOs and executive directors of JSE-listed companies are female. This indicates an additional barrier of gender-based discrimination for women striving towards executive positions.

What are some of the advantages of having greater gender balance in the workplace?

Gender equity is not only the 'right' thing to do, but it also makes business sense. Corporates that don't prioritise attracting and retaining female talent may be missing out. Looking at male and female job seekers, our data reveals that job sectors like manufacturing, construction, and design & marketing seem to have more female job seekers than male job seekers with tertiary qualifications.

| Candidates with Tertiary qualification | | | |
|--|------------|------------|------------|
| | Female | Male | Difference |
| Across all Occupations | 47% | 46% | 0.5% |
| Admin, Office & Support | 42% | 42% | |
| Architecture & Engineering | 57% | 54% | 3.0% |
| Building & Construction | 47% | 40% | 6.7% |
| Business & Management | 51% | 49% | 1.6% |
| Cleaning, Maintenance & Repair | 38% | 38% | |
| Community & Social Welfare | 46% | 45% | 0.3% |
| Design, Media & Arts | 54% | 48% | 5.7% |
| Education, Training & Library | 51% | 52% | |
| Finance | 50% | 54% | |
| Information Technology | 57% | 53% | 4.3% |
| Legal | 59% | 59% | |
| Manufacturing & Assembly | 47% | 39% | 7.9% |
| Marketing | 55% | 50% | 5.1% |
| Medical & Health | 41% | 43% | |
| Restaurant & Hospitality | 36% | 36% | |
| Sales | 40% | 39% | 0.8% |
| Science & Technology | 60% | 57% | 3.4% |
| Warehousing & Logistics | 39% | 36% | 2.8% |

Along with accessing a greater pool of talent, research indicates that recruiting women can boost the bottom line. According to data from S&P 500 companies, analysed by BoardReady in 2021, there was a strong connection between board diversity and revenue growth during the pandemic. When comparing revenue from 2019 and 2020, companies where women held more than 30% of board seats outperformed their peers in 11 of 15 sectors.

Furthermore, studies suggest that having a strong representation of women in senior roles creates less gender discrimination in the employment process and a greater retention rate. In addition, women aid creativity. Companies with women in senior leadership roles often experience the phenomenon of 'innovation intensity', producing 20% more patents than teams with male leaders. More female representation within organisations is also associated with higher status. Fortune's most respected companies have twice as many women in senior management than other companies.

Given the value that women can bring to the workplace, what steps can corporates take to bridge the gender gap and position themselves as Employers of Choice for SA's top female talent?

While the global Covid-19 pandemic has irrevocably changed the world of work and ushered in a 'new normal', it has also presented corporate companies with new opportunities to level the playing field and create greater gender equality in the future. CareerJunction's latest data reveals where these opportunities may exist.

Creating more remote/hybrid work opportunities

Women desire flexibility in terms of where, when, and how they work. Historically women have been disadvantaged when applying for certain roles because they often must juggle multiple roles as spouse, mother or caregiver while simultaneously pursuing a career.

The recent shift away from traditional office-based employment means that companies can now access a wider pool of talent by creating remote/hybrid job opportunities for women.

It is interesting to note that significantly more women are applying for remote roles than men in several job categories. For example, female applications increased by 368% for teaching jobs with the 'work from home' option, while male applications increased by 119% for remote teaching jobs.

Increase in applications for remote job opportunities

| Occupation (Job SubCategory) | Male | Female |
|-----------------------------------|------|--------|
| Teaching | 119% | 368% |
| Technical / Business Architecture | 283% | 297% |
| Representative / Sales Consulting | 241% | 278% |
| Middle / Department Management | 239% | 262% |
| Financial / Project Accounting | 229% | 252% |
| Systems / Network Administration | 251% | 226% |
| Staff Recruitment / Selection | 202% | 210% |
| Team Leader & Supervisor | 88% | 159% |
| Business Development | 130% | 151% |
| Admin Clerk | 71% | 86% |
| Real Estate / Property Agent | 53% | 69% |
| UX / GUI Design | 5% | 63% |
| Journalism / Writing / Editing | 12% | 27% |

Other occupations which have seen a more gender-balanced increase in remote job applications are shown in the table below.

| Occupation (Job SubCategory) | Male | Female |
|--|------|--------|
| Client / Customer Support | 65% | 64% |
| Senior Management | 188% | 166% |
| Business Analysis | 38% | 38% |
| Data Analysis / Data Warehousing | 94% | 80% |
| IT Project Administration / Management | 74% | 74% |
| Systems Analysis | 200% | 163% |

Considering which industries are attracting SA's top female talent

The top three fastest growing job sectors over the last 12 months were admin, office & support, the legal sector, as well as the marketing sector, followed by the architecture & engineering, and design, media & arts sectors. Looking at these top three fastest growing sectors in terms of recruitment, female applicants are taking the lead since most applicants across these sectors were female. If your organisation falls within one of these sectors, you could be well placed to attract quality female candidates when you place a job advert.

On the other hand, male applicants dominated the applications for architecture & engineering jobs as well as design, media & arts vacancies over the last 12 months. So, if your organisation falls within one of these sectors and you'd like to attract SA's top female talent, you may need to share more information about the additional value you can offer as an employer in terms of work-life balance, employee benefits, and so on.

Conclusion

In an increasingly competitive job market, South African corporates looking to differentiate themselves as employers of choice would be wise to consider the value that women can bring to the table and play their part to bridge the gender gap in the workplace. In the short term, corporates can start reducing the pay gap by offering more equitable packages for their job vacancies and proactively searching for equitable talent by identifying suitable female candidates for executive positions.

In the medium term, employers should focus on training, mentoring, and supporting women as soon as they join the company to support skills development and the opportunity for career growth. Finally, in the long term, corporates can achieve greater gender equity by fast-tracking female employees to ensure there is a higher percentage of women in executive and leadership positions.

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