

The gender gap done differently

Ranked 19th (out of 149 countries) in the 2018 Global Gender Gap Report published by the World Economic Forum (WEF), South Africa is ahead of the curve when compared to many other nations. The question is raised, does the gender gap exist and, if so, why? However, it is different to what many people think. Nicol Myburgh, Head of HR business unit at CRS Technologies examines this in greater detail.

"The gender gap is largely a perceived one due to a number of reasons – one being personal preference. I consider a gender gap to be when a man and woman in the same job, with the same qualifications, skills, experience, and so on, are treated differently. It is not the generic approach of looking at income and finding the one group to make more money than the other."

Different approaches

According to Myburgh, the WEF report indicates that women are more inclined than men to obtain their qualifications in Arts and Humanities, Health and Welfare, Social Sciences, and Journalism and Information. Men, on the other hand, generally prefer Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Veterinary, Business, Admin, Law, Engineering, Manufacturing, Construction, Information and Communication Technologies, Natural Science, Mathematics, and Statistics.

"The key here is that men tend to be more interested in studying and working in professions that pay higher average salaries than those of women. Furthermore, a report in the US has found that female business owners there make less than their male counterparts because money is not their primary motivator."

According to a Rochester Institute of Technology study, women place a higher premium on shorter work weeks, proximity to home, fulfilment, autonomy, and safety. The study also shows that women are more likely to leave the workforce for periods of time to raise their children.

When they return, they are more likely to seek less-demanding and more flexible jobs, which often pay less. Interestingly enough, the Census Bureau's American Community Survey reveals that single, childless women earn more than their male counterparts of the same age in major cities across America.

Government's role

"Even though the 2018 Global Gender Gap Report shows that personal preferences see some industries being dominated by females, there is still a difference when it comes to the size of an organisation. For example, large corporates usually having policies, committees, and plans in place to ensure equal representation throughout the business while SMEs do not."

For its part, government introduced the Employment Equity Act that regulates equity in the workplace. It prohibits unfair discrimination on grounds of race, gender, pregnancy, marital status, family responsibility, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, HIV status, conscience, belief, political opinion, culture, language, birth or any other arbitrary grounds. The Act also promotes equality with the aim for businesses to reflect the demographics of the country on all occupational levels.

Additionally, the BBBEE codes were introduced as an affirmative action measure, making it exceedingly difficult to do business without complying with them.

"In South Africa, there is an enabling environment to move beyond the traditional perceptions of what a gender gap is. In conclusion, the Employment Equity Act is well written and enforces its code of good practice on Equal Pay for work of Equal Value well."

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