

When office walls are gender barriers

By [Tandi Jacobs](#), issued by [Catchwords](#)

8 Aug 2023

Making office spaces work well for women is vital in ensuring companies are more equitable, and therefore more welcoming for their female staff. However, on a purely pragmatic level it makes perfect business sense too. A 2020 McKinsey report into workplace diversity found that corporations that were more diverse and inclusive were 35% more likely to outperform than their competitors.

That's quite a difference.

Moreover, this was the third such report since 2015 and the biggest commissioned to date, surveying some 1,000 companies in 15 countries, and it revealed that, year on year, that percentage is growing exponentially. Quite simply, where there are women there is success and – even putting aside sound concepts like fairness, good manners, and basic human niceties – a female-centric rethink is also an investment in the bottom line.

Other people won't be alienated by changes either, or shouldn't be anyway, because the standard old-style office space was designed to suit the 'average' man – average height, weight, shape, age – and that left out absolutely everybody who wasn't clocking in on the 50th percentile.

Which means most people.

So where to begin? Addressing stereotypes is an obvious starting point, as these often manifest in the physical layout of the workplace and reinforce gender-based tropes and attendant biases. For example, traditional workplaces with enclosed offices were generally occupied on a hierarchical basis with corner offices being the most highly prized. These were typically inhabited by men, hidden, secret, behind-closed-doors; they have come to signify authority and leadership.

Meanwhile, many of the service staff have typically been female and constantly visible as receptionists, caterers, and cleaners; these women are witnessed daily in caregiving positions.

This limits imagination, stifling opportunity and even curbing aspirations because, where stereotypes are endlessly reinforced, staff (of all genders) may become limited in their ability to challenge and sidestep, or even transcend, stereotypical roles – for themselves as well as others.

That's why it's time to tear down the walls, and to think outside the box, literally. And at Cushman & Wakefield | BROLL we are seeing more businesses doing exactly this.



Tandi Jacobs, operations manager, Internal Developers (ID)



MARKETING & MEDIA

We still live in a made-up man's world where real women don't fit

Bathobile Chime, Catchwords 2 Aug 2023



The new world of work instead focuses on fluid spaces, created to be flexible and inclusive so that everyone's needs are met. This may mean creating collaboration areas, meeting rooms, and non-exclusive bookable office spaces for private or quiet work. There should be equal and open access to natural light, views and desirable workspaces.

Signage, names, and even artwork are being considered differently too: to be inclusive, to be diverse.

Crucially, ablution facilities are increasingly being rethought. Whose loo gets priority? The ideal might be gender-neutral toilets – single restrooms even – with facilities that cater for all.

These are relatively simple practicalities to address, along with seating, heating, lighting and acoustics, but there are deeper issues to tackle too. Routine gender-inclusivity programmes, training and workshops addressing unconscious bias and promoting gender equality among employees and leaders can assist with this.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tandi Jacobs is operations manager, Internal Developers (ID)

- **Johannesburg: data centre hub for big operators in South Africa** 8 May 2024
- **Growthpoint student accommodation REIT thrives, adding R1.5bn of assets in 2 years** 30 Apr 2024
- **A rallying cry from the South African real estate sector** 19 Apr 2024
- **Parkdene Boulevard redevelopment bolsters growth of Boksburg node** 12 Apr 2024
- **Growthpoint Healthcare adds Johannesburg Eye Hospital to its portfolio** 5 Apr 2024

Catchwords



Catchwords is born out of one of the original real estate and retail property marketing and communication agencies in South Africa. We think strategically, stand for simplicity and work with agility.

[Profile](#) | [News](#) | [Contact](#) | [Twitter](#) | [RSS Feed](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>