



**WE FIND THAT  
WOMEN HAVE THE  
SAME TECHNICAL  
CAPABILITIES  
AS MEN**



**JOLENE VAN HEERDEN | EMPLOYER**



**Name of Company:**  
Mahle Behr



**Sector:**  
Automotive  
Components  
manufacturing



**Number of Employees:**  
836



**Position in Company:**  
Communications  
Manager



**Location:**  
Pinetown,  
KwaZulu-Natal



**Percentage of Female Employees:**  
38%



**Company Size:**  
Large Enterprise



## **WORKFORCE DIVERSITY IS KEY TO INNOVATION AND PERFORMANCE**

We believe that the diversity of our workforce is absolutely key to innovation and performance. That is why we strive to create a corporate culture that fosters new ideas, attracts and retains talent, and gives employees the opportunity to realise their full potential. Within the workplace at Mahle we promote gender equality and one of our values is that everyone is equal. We are, however, aware that in a male dominated environment like engineering a lot of females start doubting their skills and abilities.

We try to counteract this by exposing females to interesting areas of the business where they might not normally be involved as we hope this gives them the opportunity to see their strengths and talents and learn what they are good at. One example of the success of this approach is a young woman in the maintenance department who developed an interest in engineering after being exposed to the field. We are funding her studies and she is currently finishing her degree in electrical engineering while being mentored by four male colleagues.

At MAHLE, when we make any employment decisions, whether selection or promotion, we refrain from any discrimination. We specifically target 50% females in our graduate programmes and prioritise training for females. We encourage women to apply for positions where there is an underrepresentation of women and provide opportunities for them to move between projects and be involved in different types of projects.

## **WE HAVE MADE A LOT OF PROGRESS**

A key highlight is seeing how far we have come since I joined. When I started here, 15 years ago I found it tough and challenging as a female in a male dominated environment. It was hard to make and sell creative inputs. Now, there is an openness to change, and I see a very strong commitment to creating gender balance. We are passionate about gender equity both externally through bringing women into the company and internally, supporting women to thrive in their roles.

## **THERE IS STILL WORK TO BE DONE**

At the leadership level we do have work to do in terms of gender equity. I think a lot of companies have lots of work to do. We find that female employees are telling us 'I want better, I want to be better' so we provide and create opportunities for them to move up and gain experience across different projects and fields.

Our human resources manager is female and through her leadership we focus on female employees, especially in engineering, and help them with training opportunities and to progress and be promoted. We also encourage men in the organisation, particularly those in engineering roles, to mentor and support the women that join the company. We want women to feel supported and not like they are competing with the men.

## **WE ALL NEED TO BE ACCOUNTABLE FOR ADDRESSING GENDER IMBALANCES**

We believe that as an industry we need to attract more women. Part of this is a dual partnership between industry and the education department. Industry must communicate its requirements so that the curriculum is relevant to the workplace. Ensuring that maths and science curriculum at schools is made exciting is key, and science labs are often an important component. This makes the role that industry could play in understanding and supporting the infrastructure needs at educational institutions, including mobile science lab requirements, really important.

The industry could also look at working with government to agree on targets for increasing and retaining females and this could be done together with a coordinated approach of identifying and implementing programmes that address gender imbalances. Another aspect is ensuring that the culture within companies is accommodating for females. Companies need to provide spaces for female voices to be heard, and the necessary support to help them prosper. Companies need gender equity strategies with long term sustainable goals and clear plans and targets for female engineers.



**AT MAHLE, WHEN WE MAKE ANY EMPLOYMENT DECISIONS, WHETHER SELECTION OR PROMOTION, WE REFRAIN FROM ANY DISCRIMINATION.**



Opportunities for young girls need to be understandable and accessible and females within the industry need to be encouraged and motivated.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR GIRLS TO SEE AND TOUCH ENGINEERING

Our main programme which aims to attract females into engineering (and hopefully to Mahle in the future) is our CSI initiative, Science2Go. The initiative focuses on schools and more specifically on girls and the aim is to get them passionate about maths and science from an early age. There is a perception amongst some girls that they can't do maths and science, and as an industry we have a responsibility to change that perception.

South Africa is calling out for more female engineers and this and our other school initiatives aim to make the industry more attractive to girls and increase the representation of women in the industry. We believe that it starts at the grassroots level which is why we have focused on schools with Science2Go. We are passionate about going into schools and we provide opportunities for girls and boys to touch and see science and engineering in action to help them get excited and plant the seed of engineering from an early age.

We also take our female engineers into schools to help motivate the girls. It is important to us that we nurture the girls right the way through their schooling and so we start in primary school, contact them again in high school through various competitions and have additional touch points when they are getting ready to go to university. We also support them with funding to study mechanical or industrial engineering at university.

We have seen and reaped the rewards of this programme and some of the girls from the programme are now working at Mahle.

WE HAVE ALSO SEEN AN ENORMOUS  
43% INCREASE IN GIRLS AND BOYS WHO  
ARE TAKING UP MATHS AND SCIENCE IN  
GRADE 10-12

Science2Go +  = **43%**  
INCREASE IN  
MATH TAKE UP

### SUPPORTING WOMEN IS IMPORTANT

We find that women have the same technical capabilities as the men. Our women in the engineering professions are mostly in technician roles and industrial engineering. We believe it is important we support them as an organisation and provide them with opportunities to grow. We also give them a voice to share their experiences and their challenges and how they overcame them. When challenges are raised or assistance is needed in a certain area, we offer them support. We also celebrate their achievements through our communication platforms.



**WE ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT  
GOING INTO SCHOOLS AND  
WE PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES  
FOR GIRLS AND BOYS TO  
TOUCH AND SEE SCIENCE  
AND ENGINEERING IN ACTION**

