

Women directors 'can broaden the skills bases of boards

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WOMEN should be made directors not just to right gender wrongs but to broaden board skills and experience bases and position them to meet governance requirements, says Sandra Burmeister, CE of recruitment group Landelahni Business Leaders.

"Although there has been movement in the right direction, mostly by government and parastatal organisations, most boards are still opting for experience over competence," she said. "This means that the same small group of men is being recycled across

different industries and companies."

Burmeister says the danger was that companies were getting no fresh business or strategic insights. "They were simply recycling the same knowledge and capabilities to which everyone else had access. Companies were choking off competitive advantage at the point in the organisation where it should be most focused."

A study by the Businesswomen's Association last year found women were significantly underrepresented in top corporate leadership positions. About 10,7% of all directorships were held by women in SA. Altogether, 278 women held 306 of the total of 2 851

directorships.

Burmeister says that one way to inject fresh, more relevant blood into listed companies is to ensure that at least 50% of board members are first-timers and that 50% are women, some of whom would also be first-timers.

Apart from bringing in a broader range of business knowledge and capability, this would create a continuing programme of training for business leaders, providing a continuous supply of people equipped with strategic abilities and the authority to ask searching questions about a company's performance.

