

The President
SAICE
Thornhill Office Park
Bekker Road
Midrand

3 August 2018

Attention : Errol Kerst

Dear Sir

Re: Concerns regarding pronouncements of the SAICE CEO regarding Women in STEM Careers

As a practicing female engineer in South Africa with more than 20 years' experience in my profession, a member of the South African Institute of Civil Engineering (SAICE) and as the Immediate Past-President of Consulting Engineers South Africa (CESA), I cannot but unequivocally state my disappointment at the statements made in the CEO's Letter "Out on a limb" in the SAICE Magazine July 2018 edition. These views expressed in such a widely read magazine, I find inconceivable, have left me disturbed and cannot be left unchallenged. My development from being a young black female engineering graduate to reaching the level of President of CESA has not left me unscathed. Many other practicing women engineering staff (young and old) have probably shared similar experiences to that of my own. The gender bias in engineering is real. The engineering profession is male-dominated and can be extremely alienating for young female engineers.

Many young women engineering staff are members of SAICE and are also employed by firms that are members of CESA. If the impression that the SAICE CEO has created through questioning women's role in the STEM professions are left unchallenged, young women engineering staff can be left with the impression that this is truly the prevailing view of women in our profession and is shared by others, further increasing their feelings of alienation.

CESA has clearly expressed its views on transforming our industry. Our members firms are working tirelessly in increasing the number of women engineers through the provision of bursaries and increased development opportunities. Perhaps one of the target areas that often don't receive sufficient attention is the organizational culture we work in. Women engineering staff are challenged by barriers in the work place that there is very little understanding of or appreciation for. These include a male-dominated culture, experiencing additional stresses to perform, limited access to networking opportunities predominantly designed around male social activities as well as sexual harassment. These are further exacerbated when women get married and start to have children. Yes, we go on maternity leave and our priorities do change, but this does not necessarily diminish our productivity and contribution in the workplace and to our profession. If these challenges are not adequately addressed, the engineering profession and CESA will find that our most talented women engineers will leave the profession.

The views expressed by the SAICE CEO is another example of the bias that women in consulting engineering are facing. CESA views women engineers as contributors to the future of the consulting engineering profession and will work tirelessly in advancing the role of women in our profession and within its member firms.

As a fellow voluntary association and member of the Council for the Built Environment Professionals who all have women professionals growing in numbers, we ask SAICE to clearly question their position on women inclusivity in the civil engineering profession, identify and acknowledge the barriers that women are facing within the civil engineering profession and fully commit to create a more inclusive environment for women engineering staff to actively participate in. The SAICE CEO and SAICE itself, owe all women involved in STEM careers and also those young girls that are considering careers in the field of STEM, an apology. It would be remiss of us not to reflect on the need for a respected Organisation such as SAICE, to ensure that adequate communication protocols are established and maintained as we do not agree that it bodes well for an Organisation to distance itself from the pronouncements of its CEO, especially on platforms which carry the SAICE identity.

In conclusion, let us be bold and use this opportunity to address the inequalities that women engineering staff are facing on a day to day basis. It is a time for supportive action especially in the light of the dismal rate at which women are pursuing careers in engineering in our Country.

Regards



LYNNE PRETORIUS, PR.ENG

Immediate Past President of CESA



NERESH PATHER, PR.ENG

President of CESA