

Equal employment opportunity

Sociology, Empowerment



One of the key responsibilities of a human resource management professional is the management of diversity and equal employment opportunities within the organisation. Equal employment opportunity refers to the situation in which every individual has access to employment and its benefits. Equal employment opportunity (EEO) refers to the outcomes of human resource management policies and practices and employee and management behaviour.

EEO is aimed at transforming an organisation; reviewing the processes associated with the creation and use of power by some groups; and implementation of new measures and policies which attempt to remove bias from procedures such as recruitment and promotion. Managing diversity accepts that the workforce consists of a diverse population of people, with visible and non-visible differences including sex, age, background, race, disability, personality, and work style. There has been a lot of debate recently about affirmative action (AA).

Affirmative action (also known as positive action) is where organisations take special initiatives to redress perceived gender or ethnic imbalances in the workforce. At first, affirmative action aimed to eliminate racial imbalance in hiring policies; later it was extended to protect people of color, women, older people and people with disabilities. Equal opportunity laws bandiscrimination. Affirmative action goes further by requiring employers to take " affirmative" steps to achieve a balanced representation of workers. Affirmative action may take many forms. One example would be providing special training solely for women.

However, some people see affirmative action as an insult. Some people see affirmative action as assuming that they are not capable of success based on their own merits. This paper will examine whether affirmative action is an insult to women and any other member of an AA target group. The argument put forward for affirmative action is that it allows minority groups, who would otherwise be disadvantaged, to get to the starting line and to allow for a level 'playing field'. Affirmative action is used as a tool to break the perceived injustice and discrimination of the past.

In Australia, the Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986 requires the removal of direct and indirect discrimination through the application of the merit principle in employment policies. Contemporary writing puts forward the theory that managing diversity should be based on 'no preferential treatment'. Although there is no specific quota system in the above Australian legislation, AA has in the past often been associated with the requirement to maintain certain quotas based on minority group representation.

A move to 'no preferential treatment' means that individuals are not given preference for employment based on specific group membership. Giving preferential treatment to a minority group is sometimes referred to as the 'remedial action' AA. This means that whereas some people are benefiting by virtue of their group membership, other individuals are excluded, even though their developmental need might be as great. Singling out individuals based on a minority quality (sex, religion etc) can be seen to be an insult to that individual.

This is particularly true if the individual has all the attributes and skills that would normally mean success. The impression given is not about fairness or equal opportunity, but rather about achieving numbers or targets. There is also 'research that suggests that, as currently construed, affirmative action policy can thwart rather than promote workplace equity. The stigma associated with affirmative action can fuel rather than debunk stereotypical thinking and prejudiced attitudes". Managing diversity should not focus on minority groups.

Managing diversity should focus on the problems of the individual. It should focus on identifying what the individual needs in terms of development. Actions ought to be targeted on any individual who has a particular development need and not restricted to those who are members of a particular group. However, all of the above is idealistic. There has often been a realism in the marketplace that contrasts the above. In some respects, affirmative action has been a necessary tool to ensure that minority groups have representation in the organisation.

The goal has been not so much to achieve a quota or a target, but rather to force down the walls of discrimination that many organisations have had in the past. In this respect, affirmative action should not be seen as an insult to minority groups. For as some minorities may have all the skills necessary to gain a certain appointment or job, it is all but useless if the employer (or the person who makes the decision on who gets hired) has a bias against that person based on their minority attribute (whether that be sex, religion or

what not). Women, in general, have been the main beneficiaries of affirmative action.

The number of women entering the professions, including medicine, law and accounting, has increased substantially in 30 years. Women of all races have increased their share of professional positions in corporations, and it is arguable that there would be no women police officers, fire fighters, bus drivers or construction workers without affirmative action. Affirmative action is not an insult to women (or other minority groups), but rather a method to ensure that the glass ceilings that have implicitly existed in the workforce in the past are destroyed.

Affirmative action does not mean that minority groups are employed simply based on minority attributes. Affirmative action means that employers make that extra effort to ensure that their organisation reflects the wider community. However, women have yet to achieve equality in the work place. There is still a large portion of the female workforce working in a narrow range of low-paying, low-status jobs. They are under-represented in many occupations. Up until the 1970s, there were few women in law schools; few opportunities to go outside of jobs traditionally reserved for women.

Many women face invisible employment barriers that block access to advancement opportunities into higher-paying jobs with increased responsibilities. Some women are stuck in low-wage jobs with little or no opportunity to advance into supervisory or managerial positions. When women do obtain managerial jobs, they often are confined to specific

departments with less authority and outside the track to upper-level, senior management jobs. These 'glass ceiling" barriers prematurely halt the progress of women in the workplace and prevent them from developing their full potential and talents as workers.

Affirmative action programs help to shatter the glass ceiling because they expand opportunities for qualified women and can lead to higher wages, more advancement opportunities, and improved financial security. One of the key responsibilities of a human resource management professional is the management of diversity and equal employment opportunities within the organisation. One method of ensuring equal opportunity within an organisation is by the use of affirmative action. Affirmative action is a policy to encourage equal opportunity and to level the playing field for groups of people who have been and are discriminated against.

Affirmative action has been considered essential to assuring that jobs are genuinely and equally accessible to qualified persons, without regard to their sex, racial, or ethnic characteristics. Affirmative action was not established to punish any particular group or place people into positions they are not qualified for. It was established to involve everybody; to have the opportunities for economic, academic and social success accessible to everybody. It should not be regarded as an insult to women or other minority groups. Affirmative action does not mean that minority groups are employed simply based on minority attributes.

Affirmative action means that employers make that extra effort to ensure that their organisation reflects the wider community. Affirmative action has been useful to society. Through equal opportunity programs, workplaces are much more diverse than several decades ago, because of the opportunities for seeing work and education have been expanded to include everyone.

Affirmative action should not be regarded as an insult. It should be regarded as a tool and medium that ensures that suitably qualified people are provided with jobs, and not discriminated against based on a minority attribute.