

The equal opportunities and managing diversity approaches



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Introduction

Workforce diversity acknowledges the reality that individuals differ in many ways, visible or invisible, which could be in age, gender, marital status, social status, disability, colour, religion, ethnicity and culture (Kossek, Lobel and Brown 2005). However, the predominant diversity issues in each country are different.

Gender inequality is the oldest and most common diversity issue worldwide. Nonetheless, most women and men are at a disadvantage in areas of job and trainings, wages and salaries, and are constrained to certain occupations without reference to their capabilities and skills. The diversity of the workforce in the 21st century makes the business environment more challenging with competitions and uncertainty. Thus, organisations know that they need a skilled workforce to take the competitive advantages in order to respond flexibly and quickly to the changes in the business environment. Bolton and Houlihan (2007) argue that a diverse workforce of skills, experiences, languages, cultural understanding allows a company to operate globally in providing services to customers and having a variety of viewpoints, and also improving an organizations success and competitiveness as well as increased “ efficiency and effectiveness”.

Equal opportunities and managing diversity approaches have strengths and weaknesses as well as some similarities and differences, coupled with some contrasts. This paper will give the comparison and the contrast between the strengths and weaknesses of these two approaches. From this analysis, the discussion of which equal opportunities and diversity approaches could each

contribute to develop an organisational programme in order to counteract the disadvantages of inequality of gender groups will be given. This paper is divided in four parts; the first is an introduction showing an overview and the structure; the second consists of the strengths and weaknesses of the two approaches , comparing and contrasting equal opportunities and managing diversity; the third is the discussion of what these two approaches could each contribute to the development of a programme of an organisation in order to counteract disadvantages of members of a social group, that is gender; and the final part is the conclusion.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY APPROACHES

There are different views as to what constitutes equal opportunities.

Nonetheless, it is possible to define the main features of this approach. This approach means combined efforts, equal participation and shared responsibilities regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, and sexuality.

According to Kirton and Greene (2005), these social groups are protected by law, therefore staff and customers have the legal rights to be treated fairly and equally. An Equal Opportunities policy can be defined as “ engaging in employment practices and procedures which do not discriminate, providing equality between persons of different groups to achieve full, productive and freely chosen employment” (Lean Lim, 1996: 34).

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (the body that regulates and monitors the UK’s equality legislation) is one that stresses the significance of caring for people equally irrespective of their social group. Its objective is that individuals should be appointed and rewarded on the basis of job-

related criteria. Gender, disability, sexuality or ethnic origin should not be
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considered to be a relevant criterion in their favour or to their disadvantage. If otherwise, equal treatment may be considered unlawful if it has a disproportionate effect on members of one social group.

MANAGING DIVERSITY APPROACHES

Emerging from the USA during the late 1980s, the ' diversity approach' began to be discussed as a means of providing both a business and social-justice incentive to drive equality within organisations (Copeland, 1988a, b; Solomon, 1989). Unlike equal opportunities approaches, which aim for workplaces where an individual's sex and race is of no greater significance than the colour of their eyes in determining the treatment they receive, the core idea behind managing diversity seems to be to encourage organizations to recognize differences (Bolton & Houlihan, 2007).

Managing diversity is generally seen as “ proactively capitalizing on the different skills, qualities and viewpoints that a diverse workforce has to offer” (Kirton and Greene, 2000, p. 178-9). Managing Diversity is about the realization of the potential of all employees where certain group based equal opportunities need to be seriously questioned, in particular affirmative action and targets (Kandola and Fullerton, 1994a). Diversity approaches that encourage managers to ignore the realities of inequality and discrimination will mean that the status quo is maintained (Ouseley, 1996, p. 7).

Differences exist between people, and in line with the diversity approach are seen as important issues for management to respond to. However, these differences are not seen as distributed thoroughly as such, while the intention of such an approach is an environment in which everybody feels

valued, social group equality is not being given any specific significance as an objective of organizational policies. Instead diversity issues are said to “exceed beyond obvious physical differences and include communication styles, problem solving, professional expertise, management level, training and education, and work principles” (Caudron, 1994, p. 56). Managing diversity policies attempt to discover individual needs and desires which would help people work more effectively and respond through, for example, career management or benefit schemes.

Compare and contrast the strengths and weaknesses of the equal opportunities and managing diversity approaches

Managing diversity has its origin in the USA (Kandola and Fullerton 1994), but has now become a strategic business issue for organizations worldwide (Wilson and Iles 1999). However, there has been considerable debate on the areas of difference between equal opportunities and managing diversity in literature.

Research by the Australian Centre for International Business (ACIB) indicates that diversity improves the quality of management’s decisions, and provides innovative ideas and superior solutions to organizational problems (ACIB 2000). Managing diversity is premised on recognition of diversity and differences as positive attributes of an organization, rather than as problems to be solved (Thompson 1997). McLeod, Lobel and Cox (1996) and Wilson and Iles (1999) found that a diversity of workforce has a greater quality solution to brainstorming tasks, displays more cooperative behaviour, and can raise organizational efficiency, effectiveness and success. Besides the full use of these skills and potential of all employees, managing diversity

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effectively can contribute to organizational success by increasing diverse markets (Cox and Blake 1991; Iles 1995; Gardenswartz and Rowe 1998) and improving company image (Kandola 1995). Therefore, valuing diversity may become a source of competitive advantage, increase the quality of organizational life and ultimately be good for business (Cassell 1996). The popularity of the diversity approach stems from these positive arguments.

Diversity Management is ' an alternative model to traditional EO policies and practices or the second generation of EO' (Thompson 1997, p. 195). In contrast to the negative perspective of discrimination against staff in EO the emphasis of diversity management is on a positive perspective of differences among all individuals (Maxwell et al. 2001). Diversity management does not only recognize but also values and harnesses workforce differences, such as individual characteristics, backgrounds, orientations and religious beliefs, so that individual talents are being fully utilized and organizational goals are met. While EO is primarily driven by legislation, diversity management is driven by the business case (Kandola and Fullerton 1994).

MD takes advantage of the growing cultural pluralism that results from the internationalization of business, development of world markets, growing workforce mobility, and the increasing awareness of individual differences (Lawler 1996). EO starts externally and is enforced through legislation, whereas diversity management starts internally, through the efforts to create an atmosphere of equality and a fully inclusive organizational culture at work (Gordon 1995).

There are a range of objectives organizations wish to achieve through effective HR diversity management. At the top is compliance with legal EO requirements. Other objectives include mainly creativity, flexibility, employee attraction, employee retention and better marketing capabilities. Through effective diversity management, diverse teams aim at achieving greater innovation and creativity, enabling them to outperform homogenous teams (Cox and Blake 1991; Richard 2000). While there is evidence that short-term progress is affected by conflict and communication problems, by bringing a wider range of perspectives to problem solving, diverse teams foster speed and innovation and produce substantially higher quality solutions over whole development cycles.

Moreover, by bringing equality to employment relations, organizations tend to attract and retain an adequate and qualified workforce. Cox and Blake (1991) argued that the benefits of effective diversity management include reducing turnover, absenteeism and attracting the best candidates as the labour market shrinks. Past research indicates that those individuals who belong to the 'dominant' group within an organization tend to have higher job satisfaction and commitment as they experience higher co-worker support, superior rewards, access to adequate resources, and greater autonomy (Kossek et al. 2005). Young (1990) argues that an approach which ignores group differences fails to provide a basis for change. She highlights three major failings: the norms and standards of dominant groups are not questioned, members of such groups are not encouraged to reflect on their own specificity, and subordinated groups come to see themselves as having a problem. For companies willing to take an extra step in accepting diversity

and equality can bring a variety of benefits and taking up these ideas means that there is no separate or particular way of treating employees, as each has their own personal needs, values and beliefs.

The concept of diversity includes acceptance and respect. It's all about understanding the uniqueness and difference of each individual. Diversity allows the exploration of these differences in a safe, encouraging, nurturing environment, and improves the understanding of different groups. None of these principles (EO and MD) can stand alone as they work hand in hand to strengthen each other to achieve integration - the ultimate mission.

EO AND MD APPROACHES TO CONTRIBUTE TO DEVELOP THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ORGANIZATIONAL PROGRAMME TO COUNTERACT DISADVANTAGES OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION.

The question is not, therefore, one of accepting that individuals are different but creating an atmosphere of inclusion and making a commitment to valuing diversity and equality. Past research has suggested that managers should actively manage and value diversity and equality. This might involve policies to raise awareness of the significance of the experiences of different groups within the workforce.

MD and EO policies need to find a way to establish equivalents between different characteristics. For example, how do organizations choose appropriate selection techniques such that it is possible to compare fairly the skills of applicants? Or what policies would allow the evaluation of the relative merits of two managers who work in very different ways? Although there are regular claims that diversity training has allowed managers to

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accept and welcome such differences. The answer might be to focus on performance or competence; that is to focus on the results rather than the methods used.

Why organisations need to recruit and retain equal genders?

Many scholars have suggested organizations measure the identity profile or demographics of defined work groups (Cox 1993), the dominant organizational culture, and the perceptions of various employee groups in order to identify cultural barriers that may hinder the full and effective participation of all employees (Kossek et al. 2005). A critical analysis of the current HR diversity practices, such as recruitment and selection procedures, criteria for entry into jobs, selection tools, and diversity training programmes are also important. Such an analysis helps to overcome unfairness, remove the glass ceilings and eradicate tokenism and resistance (Human 1993).

Gender Equality Duty was established in April, 2007, following a binding legal duty on employers to treat men and women equally, not necessarily treating them the same but attending to their needs and addressing them. All organizations must recognise the need to eliminate favouritism and prejudice; and promote equal opportunities between men and women.

Recruitment and selection

Recruitment policy is one way of demonstrating equal opportunity and managing diversity approaches. Both EO and MD approaches give their requirements that all decisions that are made within organisations regarding to employment must base on individuals' merit and skills, must be objective.

Organisational policies and procedures aim to encourage employees to

contribute their best. Organisational programs especially those regarding to recruitment, promotion, working conditions, training, performance management can show the contribution of EO and MD approaches to these programs to equalise gender inequality.

Managing growth in workforce diversity and increasing the representation of women and minorities is a critical HRM strategy of recruitment and selection for most organizations (Thomas & Ely, 1996). Human resource managers usually tend to bring people into the organization and promote employees who fit or have values similar to the decision makers or gatekeepers. Therefore, recruitment and selection should avoid what Schneider (1987) called the A-S-A (attraction-selection-attrition) cycle in order to develop multiple cultures in the organization. Human resource professionals and managers who recruit and interview job seekers in a multicultural workforce need to be aware of the ways in which the interviewers' beliefs, attitudes, and stereotypes influence interview behaviour.

Organizations need to ensure that employment policies and practices provide developmental opportunities, career planning, reduction of work-family conflict, and mentoring for disadvantaged gendered groups. Morrison (1992) proposed that managing diversity can complement affirmative action strategies and new employment policies and practices to address the failure of organizations to promote women and racial and ethnic minorities into higher levels of management.

Working conditions

Effective diversity management requires a culture of inclusion that creates a work environment nurturing teamwork, participation and cohesiveness (Carnevale and Stone 1994; Dwyer, Richard and Chadwick 2001). Diversity culture should be emphasized in organizational vision, mission and business strategy and the HRM strategy. The formation of a diversity culture requires a significant commitment of resources and leadership. Formalization of HR diversity policies is also necessary as Reskin and McBrier (2000) argued that organizations with written documents for hiring and firing had higher percentages of women in management

Most people would accept that there are differences between men and women, and between those from different ethnic groups, which are likely to affect their work opportunities. For example, studies continue to show that women, whether they work or not, spend far more time than their male partners on domestic work, especially where children or adult dependants are involved (Bonney and Reinach, 1993; Gregson and Lowe, 1994; Kiernan, 1992). Men are more likely to have uninterrupted working lives and to work full-time than white women. So, for example, it is unlawful to consider only men for a particular job (unless there is a genuine occupational requirement), or to ask for someone over 6ft tall, but it is acceptable, in most circumstances, to only offer a job on a full-time basis even though it is recognized that this will make it difficult for many women to undertake.

In relation to gender equality such an approach to managing diversity stresses the need for policies which respond to gender-based differences between employees. Some of these, for example training in skills where <https://assignbuster.com/the-equal-opportunities-and-managing-diversity-approaches-essay-samples/>

women have traditionally been under-represented, are about overcoming past disadvantages and allowing women to be more successful within current organizations. Others, such as allowing all jobs to be worked on a part-time or job share basis, are about acknowledging that the organization itself has to change. Some literature talks explicitly about creating an organization where everyone feels they belong rather than one in which only white males feel comfortable.

Training, Promotion and Career development

High quality diversity awareness training is one HR function that enhances the effective integration of diverse group members. Awareness training builds a common understanding of the value of diversity, assisting in building social cohesion so that it improves individual and organizational outcomes. Rynes and Rosen (1995) found in their study that 75% of trainees, who took diversity training, left the training with positive diversity attitudes, while only 9% of trainees actually entered with favourable attitudes. 68% of employees were sceptical prior to training, whereas only 7% reported scepticism after training. Roberson, Kulik and Pepper (2003) recommended that companies must clarify training objectives and systematically conduct a training needs assessment.

Social psychological research on stereotyping and linkages to prejudice reduction must also be tightly incorporated into training design. A top down training strategy may be valuable – providing awareness training to senior managers first and team-building training last. Education and training should be tailored to the specific needs of the organization, division, level, team or individuals. Critical to the success of education and training is the important <https://assignbuster.com/the-equal-opportunities-and-managing-diversity-approaches-essay-samples/>

step of linking training to the strategic objectives of the organization. Kossek et al. (2005) suggested that external facilitators involved in diversity training may help to achieve higher levels of productivity in a shorter time given work group diversity can lead to increased conflict among members in the short-term.

Professional development and career planning is another area where discrimination is visible and needs careful attention while designing diversity management policies. If the HR practices concerning career progression do not effectively reflect diversity issues, diverse employees would have negative perceptions of the whole process (Richard and Kirby 1999). Therefore, organizations should ensure providing equal opportunities for promotion and personal development to all employees. Both male and female employees should be regularly included on panels that evaluate, select and promote managers. The problem of assessing candidates for promotion who are 'different' can be reduced if some of the decision makers are non-traditional managers. Direct intervention by top-level executives in the promotion process is sometimes necessary to ensure that diversity goals are not overlooked. The main point is that candidates must not only be recruited, but they must be adequately prepared to take on demanding managerial assignments (Loden and Rosener 1991, Morrison 1992).

Scholars have suggested that mentoring is another strategy for managing diversity. A successful senior mentor is matched with more junior women or minority employees, with the objective of enabling under-represented demographic groups to move through the invisible barriers and advance in their careers (Ragins 2002). Kandola and Fullerton (1994, p. 47) give the <https://assignbuster.com/the-equal-opportunities-and-managing-diversity-approaches-essay-samples/>

example of allocation of training: “ diversity takes individuals as the primary focus of concern, not groups”. If someone has a training need this should be addressed regardless of whether they are a man or a woman, and people should not be assumed to have (or lack) particular training needs just because they are a man or a woman. Schwartz (1989) suggested that those women who want to put a career first should be treated in the same way as men. Those who want to combine work with family commitments could have more gradual promotion, space for career breaks and part-time work and still be valued by the organization.

Research suggests that well-designed training can achieve a number of objectives. These include giving participants an increased understanding of the rationale for equality initiatives, a greater awareness of their own stereotypes, a better understanding of the significance of different cultures for behaviour, and a context within which they can get to know others as individuals rather than as embodied stereotypes (Crosby and Clayton, 1990). Research by Goodman et al. (2003) revealed a positive relationship between emphasizing employee development and promotion, and the representation of women.

Pay

Pay inequality is a main cause of job dissatisfaction and de-motivation, and therefore a major HR diversity issue (McLoughlin and Carr 1997; Van den Bos, Lind, Vermunt and Wilke 1997). While the implementation of equal pay has significantly reduced earnings differences between men and women, gender income inequality still remains a global problem (Blau and Kahn 1994; Katz and Autor 1999; Brainerd 2000). Globally, women earn 20% to <https://assignbuster.com/the-equal-opportunities-and-managing-diversity-approaches-essay-samples/>

30% less than men (Kossek et al. 2005). In France, the gap between men's and women's pay stands at around 22% for those entering the labour market for the first time in the early 1990s, whereas this difference was 15% for people in the same situation in the late 1970s (INSEE 2002). Gender wage inequality ranged from 10% to 54% in urban industries and from 20% to 45.7% in the rural sector in the 1990s in China (Meng 1998; Gustaffson and Li 2000; Hughes and Maurer-Fazio 2002).

Pay equality contributes to effective diversity management and organizational performance. Diversity management in remuneration requires complete application of the principle of equal pay and a performance-based pay system. Empirical evidence suggests that the compensation structure, the wage determinants and the benefit schemes should be designed not only on common principles but also considering individuals in terms of their ability, knowledge and skill. An individual-driven remuneration system facilitates individual lifestyles and further promotes diversity.

Top management commitment to diversity should be reflected in the organizational vision, mission and business strategy in order to remove psychological and operational barriers to managing diversity. If such commitment is inconsistent with the current organizational culture, then a significant culture change may be necessary in order to create an atmosphere of mutual respect of all employees. Devolution of responsibility for people management is a central theme of HRM (Storey 1992) and of diversity management as well (Kandola and Fullerton 1994). Hence, management should be involved more in the decision-making process in order to fully understand and effectively implement diversity management.

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However, Connell (1997) argues that focus on only one social group such as gender at a time may create dangers. Vernon (1998) gives the examples of disabled black people who struggle with disabled white ones against racism, or disabled gay, lesbian people against disabilities and sexism. Gender should be included in studies on other groups such as disability, ethnicity, and sexuality (Watson, 2004).

Conclusion

The debate around managing diversity provides a valuable opportunity to rethink the strengths and weaknesses of equality approaches. Both approaches have to find solutions to the same types of problems: how can individuals be assessed equally and how can structures and cultures that work to favour some and disadvantage others be changed?

Organizations normally do not take individual differences into consideration when formulating and implementing training, appraisal and pay policies. Pay inequality, especially gender income inequality, still remains a significant issue in diversity management. Ethnic minorities are frequently not comfortable with open expression of their opinions. Empowerment of a truly diverse workforce is not yet a norm. Most organizations do not really have effective diversity management practices in operation. The major incentive for implementing EO is to gain greater marketing capability and attract ethnic minority customers by mirroring increasing diverse markets. Therefore, most organizations have not built the requisite diverse workforce nor launched diversity programs to unleash the potential of the diverse workforce they employ.

In the meantime, continuing economic problems and competitive pressures in many UK sectors have made it difficult to maintain a consensus about the importance of pursuing equality issues. At a time of growth it is possible to offer new opportunities to members of one group without this being seen as at the cost of some other group. In the current context equal opportunity is seen by many as an indulgence, inappropriate in a situation where few opportunities exist for anyone. In the absence of widespread acceptance or strong workplace pressure for equality, it is difficult to see this approach becoming dominant.