

# Key differences between equal opportunities and managing diversity



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What are the key differences between equal opportunities and managing diversity at work and why such issues become of more importance to employers?

## **Introduction**

Manage diversity is linked with HRM strategy to address equal opportunity issue. It emerged in the end of 1980s due to demographic trend and emergence of the business case for equal opportunities.

Demographic changes first took place in north America, Johnston and Packard(1987) suggested organisations preparing to meet the challenges of demographic change in process of transforming the north American workforce. Later, Kandola (1995, p. 138) who was one of the pioneers of diversity management in the UK and Europe, indicated that the same demographic changes occurred throughout Europe. Basically, traditional disadvantaged group like women, ethnic minorities and elder entered labour market. Roberson and Kulik (2007, p. 24) implied these changes in demographic back ground was regarded as an opportunities for companies to be more creative and expand the market to untapped area and to create or maintain competitive advantage. Here came the key point of manage diversity initiatives, individual with diversity background within an organisation should be recognised and their talent . should be used to achieve different goals.

The development of managing diversity perspectives appeared when activist, practitioners and employers doubt the effectiveness and achievement of equal opportunities policies. In fact employers had fought

against EO policy (Ross and Schneider). They argued that EO need to be seen as business driven rather than hinder. Davidson and Fielden (2003) suggested that rather than EO policy, diversity policies are likely to be seen as more positive with regard to their recognition and celebration of the characteristics of diver group. There is a confusion within EO and Diversity policies, whether they are two completely different approach to employment or diversity management is a new approach to achieve the moral goals of equal opportunity.(Kaler 2001).

## **Difference between managing diversity and equal opportunities.**

Equal opportunities refer to traditional models of EO, it is about through legislation to eliminate discrimination. The basic definition of Managing diversity is:

“ accept that the workforce consists of a diverse population of people. The diversity consists of visible and non-visible differences that will include factors such as sex, age, background, race, disability, personality and work style. It is founded on the premise that harnessing these differences will create a productive environment in which everybody feels valued, where their talents are being fully utilised and in which organisational goals are met.”(Kandola and Fullerton)

The Key difference between managing diversity and equal opportunity is the driven force of implementation. Equal opportunity is external initiated and driven by legislation and society ethnic like fairness, justice and group parity and human right. While managing diversity is internal initiated and driven by

business-needs. Organisations focus on increasing effectiveness by fully utilisation of employee's skill and potential. Lack of recognition of these skills, usually regard as discrimination, is costly. Therefore fully recognition and use of employees with diversity background, represent equal opportunities, is crucial for business to improve effectiveness and give company a competitive edge.

Another difference between managing diversity and equal opportunity is the objective of tow approach. The goal of EO approach is to present social justice, human right and correct errors that have been made previously in the past: " to correct an imbalance, an injustice, a mistake" (Thomas, 1990, p. 108). On the other hand, the goal of managing diversity is to treat employees as individuals, acknowledge that each individual has unique needs and hence will need different sorts of assistance in order to succeed, describes Geber, 1992.

In addition, managing diversity and equal opportunity have essential difference. Managing diversity approach is all about business and economic within the organization. While equal opportunity is about society ethnic case to treat everyone evenly.

In practical, employers had fought against EO legislation because it was imposed upon them.

" so long as equal opportunities was equated simply with complying with legislation, then it's always going to be about group parity and getting the numbers ' right'. This was a recipe for inertia over the last fifteen years, this is pretty much what we experienced."(Rosss and Schneider 1992, p. 36).  
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EO is seen as a traditional case of fairness, justice and group parity, but employers are less likely to implement.

According to Torrington (Table 1), Managing diversity is driven by all managers because all managers are responsible for full reorganization and utilization of their underling's skill. As arnold(1997, p. 179) listed some of the actions taken in order to manage diversity, including forming multicultural workshop; forming ' core shop' in order to train a small group of advisory; advisory councils reporting to top management; rewarding manager for good performance; fast-tack development programmes. Almost all employees have equal opportunity to improve and be reward. On the other hand, equal opportunities is only driven by HR/personnel manager. Identify the legislation and employ right amount of employees, through this approach, only disadvantage group is benefited.

Finally managing diversity is changing company's philosophy while equal opportunity is changing systems and practices.

### 3. 0 Why have such issues become of more importance to employers?

To address this question, it is better to look back to the managing diversity emerge. There are two factors, one is demographic trends, Kandola (1995, p. 138) highlighted that it was anticipated that there would be increasing numbers of women and ethnic minorities entering the labour market, and overall age of working population would increase. Such demographic changes required expansion of labour pool to include ethnic minorities, female workers such traditional disadvantage group. Organization had to be prepared for dramatic demographic changes. Rather than regard them as <https://assignbuster.com/key-differences-between-equal-opportunities-and-managing-diversity/>

indiscrimination, employers celebrate their difference and use of their skill to create competitive advantage or reach previously untapped market. The idea is for company to turn demographic trends to its advantage. Egan and Bendick (2003) suggested the workforce is expected to on average older; be more dominated by women; to have more workers working part-time; and also shrink considerably in 30 years. Due to these changes, organizations have to adopt to the situation. Thus managing diversity is kind of necessity.

Another factor is business case for equal opportunities. As previously said, regardless of difference between individual is costly. In 1995 the Equal Opportunities Commission launched a research to prove equal opportunity is good for business. Including two parts 'benefit of equality' and 'Cost of Inequality'. (Tom Redman and Adrian Wilkinson 2001). Then in 2007, CIPD has highlighted three main benefit of managing diversity. These are associated with people issues. For instance argue that a wider range of labour who will be more creative, innovative and happier in their work environment. Because of such benefits, employers tend to implement managing diversity.

Managing diversity benefits company theoretically, but do diversity initiatives deliver? Although it is very hard to assess the success of managing diversity. Wright et al.(1995) carried out a research and concluded that discrimination such as ethnic and gender bias leads to no economic sense. Since the climate of competition becomes more cruel, no companies can afford the senseless practice of discrimination.

#### 4. 0 Conclusion

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In conclusion managing diversity emerged in 1980s as a result of demographic trends and the business case for equal opportunities. Equal Opportunities is externally initiated and legally driven, mainly focus on numbers and problem. EO approach only recognize a set of differences like race gender and disability while managing diversity and driven by business-needs. Business case approach focus on qualitative and opportunity and notice all the differences. Then essay talked about the prediction of future of demographic change and the managing diversity approach bring benefit to business. Subsequently a research is introduced to prove the positive impact of managing diversity approach. Due to these diversity initiatives, employers tend to implementing managing diversity approach.

Appendix:

(Table 1)

(Torrington et all., 2002, pp. 371):