

# The equal opportunities and managing diversity approaches



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Compare and contrast the strengths and weaknesses of the equal opportunities and managing diversity approaches. Using the analysis above, discuss what the equal opportunities and diversity approaches could each contribute to the development of an organisational programme to contract disadvantage of members of ONE of the following social group:

**Gender**

**Ethnicity**

**Disability**

**Sexuality**

**(2800 words)**

Intro: Diversity

The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique and recognizing our differences. Diversity is inevitable. It occurs in every man's day to day life without even noticing it. It occurs in every part of the world. According to Dictionary. com (Anon 1, 2010), diversity is defined as the state or the fact of being difference. The dissimilarity is such as age, gender, ethnicity, different lifestyles and cultures, educational backgrounds, working methods, experiences, religious belief, sexual identity and against disabled people. Diversity in organisations reflects the changes that were occurring at the time of theorising equality developments. Organisations approach these issues by managing them using equality policy-making. Diversity has advanced from a traditional view to a more contemporary view because it

covers a much wider framework than legal requirements in this modern society.

The world's increasing globalisation requires more interaction from diverse cultures, beliefs, and backgrounds than ever before. People no longer live and work in an insular marketplace; they are now part of a worldwide economy with competition coming from nearly every continent. For this reason, profit and non-profit organisations need diversity to become more creative and open to change. Maximising and capitalising on workplace diversity has become an important issue for management today.

Today, in an organisation, each and every employee must accept the differences between individuals and respect them. Differences are seen in two aspects: people being valued for being diverse and unique which bring the uniqueness of a particular individual or organisation and the other aspect, a person marked as different, getting different treatment (Lecture Notes).

Diversity issues are now considered important and are projected to become even more important in the future due to increasing differences. Companies need to focus on diversity and look for ways to become totally inclusive organisations because diversity has the potential of yielding greater productivity and competitive advantages (Society for Human Resource Management, 1995 cited in Green et al, 2002).

Diversity is beneficial to both associates and employers. Although associates are interdependent in the workplace, respecting individual differences can increase productivity. Diversity in the workplace can reduce lawsuits and <https://assignbuster.com/the-equal-opportunities-and-managing-diversity-approaches/>

increase marketing opportunities, recruitment, creativity and business image (Esty et al., 1995 cited in Green et al, 2002). In an era when flexibility and creativity are keys to competitiveness, diversity is critical for an organisation's success.

### Managing Diversity

Managing diversity is defined as a management process that embraces the challenges of managing a workforce that is heterogeneous in terms of culture, ethnicity, religious belief, political affiliation, sexuality, gender and disability (Oxford University Press, 2009). Managing diversity is about assessing differences and treating people with dignity and allowing everyone, not taking into account their differences, to be able to perform to their level of ability. Managing and valuing diversity is a key component of effective people management, which can improve workplace productivity (Black Enterprise, 2001 cited in Green et al, 2002, p. 2). Demographic changes, such as women in the workplace, organisational restructurings, and equal opportunity legislation, will require organisations to review their management practices and develop new and creative approaches to managing people. Changes will increase work performance and customer service.

According to Smed et al (1994 cited in Liff, 1996, pp. 14-16), there are four approaches of equality: dissolving differences, utilising differences, accommodating differences and valuing differences. Dissolving differences may be seen more as equal opportunity than diversity management. Valuing differences, apparently, is the main approach to diversity management. This

approach includes providing and initiating for the people, such as training and educating employees in the organisation to help them understand the organisational processes and boost their confidence.

Accommodating and utilising differences, unlike dissolving and valuing differences which represents the dominant strands in the diversity management, are almost similar to some equal opportunity approaches (Liff, 1996, pp. 14-15). According to Kirton et al (2009, pp. 5-7), inequality in the neoclassical economics, the employment outcome reflects every individuals preferences and choices. Inequality existence is due to the system of production that is based on the principles of market competition.

### Equal Opportunity

Equal opportunity aims to ensure that our working and learning environments are free from discrimination and harassment and that policies, procedures, structures and services created by government and organisations do not disadvantage anyone based on their disability, socio-economic background, location, language, cultural or ethnic background, gender, sexual preference, marital status or religious and political conviction.

Equal opportunity is defined as an elastic notion that is caused by the appropriate measurement of the particular problem (Anon 2, 2010). In equal opportunity, differences are dissolved under the equality policies (Liff, 1996, pp. 13-14). Differences exist between every living being, however, they do not need much attention from the legal approaches.

### Advantages of Equal Opportunity

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Equality of opportunity sets, that is, rendering the sets of choices available to different individuals the same (Roemer, 2002: 456). It aims justice for all by preventing discrimination. Equal opportunity for all might be provided with the harmony of social, cultural, economic and legal conditions that affect each other successively.

According to Liff (1996, pp. 11-12), equal opportunity do not focus on differences. Under equal opportunity, everyone regardless of their age, gender, or ethnic origin should be treated equally. In the UK, a legal framework underpins the importance of equal opportunity approaches to treat everyone equally (Liff, 1996, p. 12). This approach primarily protects gender against inequality and being discriminated at work. Although differences exist between people, differences should not be acknowledged in this approach; instead, it should be ignored. In an organisation, it should not be assumed that men are more committed to the job compared to women. The chances of a married woman going away on maternity leave should not be judged just because she is married. There is a possibility that this woman might not want to have kids. There is also a possibility that a man at work might meet with an accident and be away for nine months on sick leave. Therefore, men and women should be treated equally in an organisation. Ethnic minorities should as well be treated equally and organisations should not have the assumption that people of different ethnicity could not speak their language. There are many ethnic minorities from Commonwealth countries speak English as their first language, because the British influence during the British Colonial in their countries. For that reason, ethnic

minorities should also be treated equally and should not be assumed that they do not speak the international language.

The main aim to create equal opportunity is to create a context where every individual is able to demonstrate and perform to their relevant capabilities. They should be judges on the basis that they are equal.

### Limitations to Equal Opportunity

Not focusing on differences, equal opportunity found its limitation to accommodate other minorities, such as aged people, religious belief and disability. These minorities may need special attention or legal framework enforced to protect them from being discriminated. According to Liff (1996, pp. 12-13), in an organisation's decision making, individuals' gender and ethnicity are stripped of to be equal. Any form of unfair, unequal treatment because of age, disability, marital status, ethnicity, religion, social-economical background, and any other factor that can give rise to unfair treatment is called discrimination.

Discrimination may be defined as selection of the candidates for a work according to the criteria's which are not related to the job directly (Daft, 1991) Discrimination prevents equality of opportunity in any way. If an employer asks for a requirement that is not a bona fide occupation qualification (BFOQ) candidates who do not have that special requirement cannot apply for the work. Some approaches of equal opportunity appear to break the principle of ignoring differences (Liff, 1996, pp. 12-13).

### Advantages of Managing Diversity

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Unlike equal opportunity, diversity management focuses on differences (Liff, 1996, pp. 11-12). By employing a diverse workforce can be beneficial to both the organisation as well as the stakeholders. Diversity management strategies can help create a link between the internal and external aspects of the work of an organisation. The organisation is, then, better able to understand the demographics of the marketplace it supplies. By knowing the marketplace and the customer better makes the business easier to manage, especially if the organisation employs men and women, people from many generations, people from ethnically and racially diverse backgrounds and so on. The diversified workforce gives the organisation a better understanding of the demographics as well as the marketplace. For instance the marketing department of an organisation with a diversified workforce will better understand the market structure and the demand of the market from its different employees' knowledge and experience. It, therefore, makes the organisation better equipped to thrive in the challenging market. A diverse workforce in an organisation would improve employees' satisfaction and inspire all of their employees to perform to their ability. Company-wide strategies can then be executed. The work pattern will, eventually, show a better productivity, profit, and return on investment. Employees will feel safer and more secure working for an organisation with a better managed diversified workforce.

A diverse workforce that feels comfortable communicating varying points of view provides a larger pool of ideas and experiences. The organisation can draw from that pool to meet business strategy needs and the needs of customers more effectively. Hence, it can supply a greater variety of



solutions to problems in service, sourcing, and allocation of resources.

Employees from diverse backgrounds bring individual talents and experiences in suggesting ideas and a collection of skills, such as languages and cultural understanding, which are flexible in adapting to fluctuating markets and customers demands on a global basis.

### Disadvantages of Managing Diversity

Diversity in the workplace brings about many benefits to the organisation, as well it can lead to many dispute. Managing diversity, according to many organisations is more than simply acknowledging differences in every employee. Apparently, it is more difficult to motivate and manage a diversified workforce. Miscommunication occurs in managing diversity, due to having people from all walks of life. Different gender sometime interpret things differently based on their gender instinct, different ethnic group may have different culture in doing things and by having too many people of different religion and not understand each one of them may cause a big trouble when organisation an event. Perceptual, cultural and language barriers need to be overcome for diversity programs to succeed. Ineffective communication of key objectives results in confusion, lack of teamwork, and low morale.

Resistance to change and accept diversity management in their workplace silences new ideas and inhibit progress. The inability to manage diversity in a proper way in the workplace can be extremely harmful and can costs the organisation by creating negative image, high employee turn over rate, loss of advertising revenue, discrimination suits, litigation time and money.

Diversity management, if handled insensitively, may invade employees' privacy and poorly handled programme may result in conflict and ill-felling.

Hence, cultural bias is another factor to diversity management disadvantages. It refers to prejudice and discrimination. According to Liff (1996), prejudice refers to an unjust behaviour and preconceived opinion and attitude towards an employee based on his or her culture group identity or religious belief. Discrimination on the other hand refers to observable adverse behaviour for the same reason. It also means a judgement of recognition and understanding of the difference between different people.

In some organisations, assimilations are created to create a situation in which some individuals are different and they are likely to fail. Deep-seated prejudices may be brought into the open, causing short-term tension. Implementation of a diversity programme may, in the short term, be expensive.

## Sexuality

Sexuality was defined as 'something which a society produces in complex ways' (Weeks, 1986, p. 25 cited in Hearn et al, 1996). Diverse social practices caused meaning to social activities, of social definitions and self-definitions, of struggles between those who have power to define and regulate and those who resists.

There are five factors of sexuality: sex discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual orientation, gender identity and sexual attraction (Kormanik, 2009). When an employment decision is based on sex and gender, it is a sexuality

factor of sex discrimination. In the construction site, for example, construction workers are usually men. This is because women is seen as the more feminine sex and could not be able to carry weights. Sexual harassment is a form of teasing and demeaning behaviour made by a group of people about an individual. Usually, at a workplace the more feminine female worker is likely to be sexually harassed by her male co-worker. Sexual orientation, on the other hand, is an individual's erotic or affection deposition to the same and or opposite sex. A person's sexual orientation is the attraction to the opposite sex and or even the same sex. Gender identity is the individuals' psychological sense of the sex, either being male or a female. According to Jamison (1983: 46 cited in Kormanik, 2009), sexual attraction is a quality or feature that attracts that one person experiences the exhilaration of inclination toward another person.

#### Equal Opportunity and Diversity contributes to disadvantages of Sexuality

In the past, people are more conservative and have inherent ideas from cultural and philosophical past which makes them perceive that accepting lesbians, gay men and bisexuals will wreck the society, culture and beliefs and reflects some form of devils. Even in the modern society, there are people who cannot accept lesbians, gay men and bisexuals and tend to treat them in a way that these lesbians, gay men and bisexual people are unable to for into the society. Many heterosexual parents think if they accept lesbian and gay people or bisexual people in their society, it would eventually rein the society, itself, especially the younger generations. It is the lesbian and gay people and the bisexual people's biggest fear is being refused by the public, the society and relationship with other colleagues in <https://assignbuster.com/the-equal-opportunities-and-managing-diversity-approaches/>

the workplace and fear that the job or promotion opportunity is in threat.

There might be some fear towards being discriminated in the overall labour market. In the education and children channel broadcast industry, lesbians, gay men and bisexuals are being discriminated and not offered the job.

Parents fear that their children will grow up into a homosexual or bisexual.

Heterosexuals who discriminate against lesbians, gay men and bisexual people often harass them verbally. Whether at work or in public, heterosexual people often act as though they are more superior to the homosexual and bisexual people and patronise them which makes the homosexual and bisexual people felt patronised and afraid and feel intimidated to face the public in their true identity. For that reason, homosexuals and bisexuals are more likely to be harassed, especially at work, compared to heterosexuals. The issue of sexuality was avoided in organisations in the past. No one was supposed to bring up the issue of sexuality of homosexuals and bisexuals as it opposes many cultures and religions and many societies' conservative attitude towards them. It was not against the law to refuse the homosexuals and bisexuals in an employment or refuse any of their benefits. In the labour market, the workforce is usually dominated by the heterosexual people. Homosexuals and heterosexual people try to be like heterosexual, in order to keep their job and their current position in the organisation.

In many organisations, however, discrimination and harassment against homosexual and bisexual people still occur. There is a strong discrimination against homosexual and bisexual people. Most of the cases are verbal and physical act against them, the lack of information, hence, makes it difficult to

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prove. Therefore, many lesbians, gay men and bisexual people rather conceal their sexual identity. It is easier for lesbians, gay men and bisexual people to conceal their identity compared to other groups of diversity (Kirton et al, 2010, p. 39). Sexuality can be easily concealed by not revealing it to anyone around. At work, heterosexuals usually dominate the work environment and those who are against homosexual people and bisexual people often harass them verbally, some even physically. Homosexual people and bisexual people are often seen as an object to the heterosexual which they can make fun of. Which makes the homosexuals and bisexuals develop some form of fear against the society and the society acceptance of them, despite those who are in favour of them, and tend to be quiet and shy.

Higher income earners who are identified as homosexuals or bisexuals reportedly found it more difficult to be open about their sexuality at work (Palmer, 1993 cited in Kirton et al, 2010, p. 40). In organisations, top management people are expected to be at certain professional manner and are expected to set an example to their subordinates. It goes the same for teachers to students and television presenter to children. According to Shape et al (1995 cited in Kirton et al, 2010, p. 40), it is unaccepted to many organisations that their top management people are open about their sexuality if they are homosexuals or bisexuals. In certain professional field, such as teaching, the health science, television broadcast and the military, people are expected to be clean or conceal their sexual orientation at work.

Many studies proved that gay men tend to receive lower wages compared to heterosexual men (Schmidt, 2008). On the other hand, lesbian women receive higher wages compared to heterosexual women (Schmidt, 2008).  
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In recent years, many European countries' governments enforced and reformed laws and rules and regulations to protect homosexuals and bisexuals at work. Some governments even protect homosexuals and bisexuals in their normal lives. According to the Employment Equality Regulation 2003, there is an act which protects homosexuals and bisexuals from sexual discrimination or harassment.

Like many other lawsuits, there are many cases seeking to protect homosexual partners from sexual harassment due to sexual orientation have been unsuccessful. In *Whitfield v. Cleanway UK Ltd* (2005), homosexuals and bisexuals are often being discriminated at work. A similar case was decided, *Reaney v. Hereford Diocesan Board of Finance* (2007) ET 1602844/06. The case involved homosexuals and bisexuals being discriminated on religious grounds. Some countries have policies against homosexuals and bisexuals, such as Algeria, Iran, Liberia and Nepal. There are countries would still legally punish homosexuality on religious grounds. Malaysia, for instance, fine and or jail sentence for up to 20 years (Anon 3, 2010). Some countries set death penalty to homosexuals and bisexuals to punish them. The Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts reviewed a case, *Weber v. Community Teamwork Inc* (2001) 434 Mass. 761, 752 N. E. 2d 700, where a lesbian plaintiff claimed she had been terminated from her job based on sex discrimination and discrimination based on sexual orientation. In *Muzzy v Cahillane Motors Inc* (2001) 434 Mass. 409, 749 N. E. 2d 691 reviewed by the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, the case involved a lesbian complaining that her boss, who was also a lesbian, sexually harassed her on the job. In both these cases, the Court found insufficient proof to support the

plaintiff's case (insufficient evidence that the work environment was intolerable) and dismissed those cases.

These cases reflect a hostile work environment, which is based on verbal and physical acts that make the workplace intolerable. It is more difficult to prove a compilation of acts, gestures, jokes and innuendoes.

## Conclusion

A diverse workforce is a reflection of a changing world and marketplace. Diverse teams bring high value to organisations. Respecting individual differences will benefit the workplace by creating a competitive edge and increasing work productivity. Diverse management benefits associates by creating a fair and safe environment where everyone has access to opportunities and challenges. Management tools in a diverse workforce should be used to educate everyone about diversity and its issues, including laws and regulations. Most workplaces are made up of diverse cultures, so organisations need to learn how to adapt to be successful.

Differences live forever and human mentality is not easy to be influenced over a few decades, therefore, discrimination continues and it is inevitable. It might need far longer time to manage the diverse culture of the world. According to the Fortune 500 in 2006, there is an increasing number of organisations that are taking steps forward managing diversity in the workplace. These companies begin to provide basic benefits to homosexual and bisexual staffs, such as the health benefits. Another reason for taking that step is to assist employees and management in moving through the

state of being aware of other employees' sexual orientation and gender identity.