
EOWA Roundtable
Are we getting there?
Measuring Change at Work

Prof. Glenda Strachan,
Griffith University

What is the goal?

- Equitable treatment of women at work
- Women can maintain workforce participation
- Women in non-traditional employment
- Women in senior positions

Over 2 decades much has been achieved but issues of women in senior positions, some areas of non-traditional work and issues like equal pay remain problems.

Managing Diversity and EOWA Act

- The international literature on managing diversity focuses on individual organisational programs that meet organisational needs and national legislative/social goals.
- The legislation in Australia does this – it is unique and arguably represents best practice in an international comparison.

1990s analysis of quality of reports

- Organisations seemed to find the level of engagement with which they felt comfortable: for some it was the minimal compliance of just doing a report; some did a few things; some produced comprehensive plans and monitoring.
- There did not appear to be much movement from lower to higher performing.
- Most complied by submitting reports.

Analysis of 2003 reports in finance and transport industries

- Where there was clear legislation eg sexual harassment, most companies complied and had policies.
- The majority of the reports concentrated on the issues around working conditions, especially 'flexible' conditions, carers' leave etc. While important in securing and keeping women's attachment to the workforce, it **does not address career path issues**.
- Little mention of issues around recruiting and promotion, a big focus in the early years of the legislation. It could be that gender equity and gender sensitive procedures are so embedded in the organisation that they are no longer worthy of mention or it could be that good practice in this area is forgotten.
- Not a lot of emphasis on issues pertinent to moving women into more senior position.
- Virtually no mention of equal pay.

Interviews in best practice organisations, 2003-04

- A wide variety of good practice. In the large hospital and smelter the level of sophistication of understanding of the HR Manager was extremely high and no-one interviewed could suggest anything else that should be done.
- In two smaller organisations (several hundred employees) without HR managers, practice was deficient.

EOWA Act

- EOWA Act is critical in focusing on organisational policies and practices. Without it, there is only individual complaint-based mechanisms that address some (few) instances of employment discrimination after they have occurred.
- Compulsory **public** reporting on a regular (annual) basis – this unique feature means wider engagement than in overseas voluntary systems.

Monitoring: goals, targets, KPIs

- Clear plans with targets that can be reviewed (key performance indicators) definitely lacking. This means that it is difficult to tell if an organisation is changing goals or achieving them – it may be the case that the organisation itself cannot tell this as it seems likely that if there were clear goals they would include these and progress towards them in the reports. The reporting form should require goals to be attached to the programs.

The reporting form

- The lack of direction in the form leads to the conclusion that many organisations do not have a cohesive program but lump in a number of issues that they think may be relevant. Most of these are policies that can be loosely described as creating a family-friendly workplace – but do not tackle or consider other issues such as moving women into senior positions.
- The reporting form could be used to assist organisations in being more comprehensive in the way they view the issues – and prompt consideration of issues that are important but rarely commented on.

Cost of compliance

- The arguments for equity and diversity are now firmly established as bringing business benefits.
- On this basis, having clearly delineated planning, implementation and review processes is cost effective and indeed beneficial for the business. If this is done, then doing a report on an annual basis is a quick and easy process.
- This may be more difficult for smaller organisations without a specialist HR Manager. The EOWA could provide additional support to assist this group. Once a program is in place then the reporting part is not time-consuming or costly.

Conclusions

- Need to move more organisations towards best practice.
- Need to emphasise specific consideration of issues such as recruitment and promotion, career paths, equal pay.
- Clear directions to organisations pays off – if there are clear minimum requirements then more organisations will follow these.