

# Organisational justice and employee responses to employment equity

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## Abstract

*The aim was to determine employees' perceptions of fairness regarding employment equity practices and to determine whether there are differences in perceptions between demographic groups. The study was conducted in an organisation in the Health Services industry by means of a diversity questionnaire. Employees' responses were measured along 10 dimensions of employment equity. The analysis was done for gender, race, age and job levels. The results indicated statistically significant differences in fairness perceptions between race groups and job levels. The study concludes that employment equity strategies should be adapted to suit an organisation's specific needs.*

## 1 Introduction

It has been several years since the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 (EEA) was promulgated amid high expectations that equity would be introduced in the workplace (Human 1996; Thomas 2002). However, the debate around the implementation of employment equity is ongoing. On the one hand equity in the workplace is viewed as a fundamental part of removing gender and class discrimination (Vavi 2004). It is also viewed as crucial to the stability, economic and global success of the country (Human 1996; Mdladlana 2003, Thomas 2002). On the other hand, employment equity (EE) and affirmative action (AA) practices have been associated with negative results such as tokenism and reverse discrimination (Maritz 2002; Motileng, Wagner & Cassimjee 2006; Thomas 2002; Twala 2004), a high degree of stress for the beneficiaries of such practices and the lowering of standards and productivity (Motileng et al 2006).

Shortcomings in the implementation of employment equity and initiatives such as Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment will have negative effects on the overall transformation goals of South Africa (Commission for EE Report 2006). Many reasons have been advanced for the shortcomings of these initiatives and various authors suggest that, although numerical goal setting is important, organisations should realise that achieving EE success entails more than simply complying with legislation in terms of getting the numbers right (Human 1996; Thomas 2003). The twofold purpose of the EEA 55 of 1998 requires not only equitable representation or getting the numbers right but also fair treatment in employment and the elimination of unfair discrimination.

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Therefore, organisations should also focus on fairness perceptions and the principles of organisational justice as highlighted in the following sections.

According to Kovach, Kravitz and Hughes (2004), the only way to promote equity and diversity without incurring allegations of reverse discrimination is to implement a fair, transparent and defensible AA programme. The Society of Industrial and Organisational Psychology (SIOP) Committee (1995) also concluded that justification of AA measures contributes to employees' perceptions of whether the programmes are fair. In other words, if employees are convinced that AA is necessary to redress inequalities, then they would be more likely to accept the programmes. Thus, EE and AA programmes will only be effective if they comply with legal as well as fairness requirements (Coetzee 2005; Cropanzano, Slaughter & Bachiochi 2005; Kovach et al 2004).

## **2 Aim of the study**

The aim of this research is to determine employees' perceptions of the fairness of employment equity practices and to determine whether there are significant differences between the perceptions of the various demographic groups. To achieve this aim the following aspects are discussed: the background to the implementation of employment equity legislation, barriers to and best practices for the implementation of employment equity, the theory of organisational justice and the implications of perceived unfairness at work. This is followed by a review of the results of the empirical study and the recommendations.

## **3 Background**

Since the inception of the Government of National Unity in 1994, South Africa has emerged from isolation and is now competing in the global marketplace (Thomas 2003). In order to do this successfully, South Africa has embarked on major societal and economic reforms specifically aimed at eliminating discrimination (Greeff & Nel 2003; Thomas 2003). To facilitate this process of transformation, various anti-discriminatory laws have been passed, specifically in relation to redressing previous inequalities in education and the workplace. These include the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997, the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998, the Employment Equity Act (EEA) 55 of 1998, the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000, the Preferential Procurement Act 5 of 2000, and the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act of 2003.

The EEA (55 of 1998) was promulgated specifically to speed up the process of redressing the inequities of the past in the workplace. Section 2 of the EEA (55 of 1998) defines the purpose of the Act as follows:

*The achievement of equity in the workplace by:*

- (a) promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination; and
- (b) implementing affirmative action measures to redress the disadvantages in employment experienced by designated groups, in order to ensure their equitable representation in all occupational categories and levels in the workplace.

The terms "employment equity" and "affirmative action" are sometimes used interchangeably but are two different, although related, concepts (Human 1996; Portnoi 2003). According to Uys (2003), affirmative action is intended as a short-term, specific

corrective measure to systematically address historical injustices. Some examples would be: reserving specific positions for those previously disadvantaged or introducing mentoring programmes for women. Affirmative action refers to the process (strategy) and employment equity is the desired outcome (Human 1996; Portnoi 2003). In other words, affirmative action measures are implemented as a means to achieve equity in the workplace.

According to Deane (2006), the main implications of complying with the legal requirements of the EEA 55 of 1998 for organisations, and specifically designated employers, are that they are required to consult with employees, conduct a workplace analysis, prepare an employment equity plan (including affirmative action measures), and report to the Department of Labour on the progress made in implementing the employment equity plan.

#### 4 Barriers to employment equity

Various barriers to the implementation of EE and AA programmes have been identified, and different criticisms have been advanced (Coetzee 2005; Human 1993; Thomas 2002; Twala 2004). Although these barriers manifest at the national, organisational and individual levels, as presented in table 1, they should not be viewed in isolation but rather as a set of interrelated factors that affect the implementation of EE (Coetzee 2005; Human 1993; Leonard & Grobler 2005; Thomas 2002; Twala 2004).

**Table 1**  
**Barriers to employment equity**

Level	Barrier
National	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills shortages</li> </ul>
Organisational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Costs</li> <li>• Focus on numbers vs. transformation</li> <li>• Lack of communication</li> <li>• Incompatible organisational culture</li> <li>• High job requirements</li> <li>• Management resistance and leadership style</li> </ul>
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceptions of reverse discrimination</li> <li>• Unrealistic expectations</li> <li>• Negative stereotypes</li> </ul>

*Skills shortages:* In general South Africa has a poor skills profile, largely because of the poor quality of general education available to the majority of South Africans (Van Dyk et al 2001). As a result, the pool of previously disadvantaged persons who are able to fill high-level positions is small (Coetzee 2005). In the National Remuneration Guide released by the accounting firm Deloitte and Touche, 81% of organisations indicated that they experience difficulty in recruiting employees because of skills shortages (Sapa 2007). In the same report, 61% of respondents indicated that they were encountering a scarcity of employment equity candidates.

*Costs:* Costs may be created for the organisation as a result of having to offer higher salaries in order to attract employment equity candidates. A survey conducted by Deloitte and Touche, known as the National Remuneration Guide, revealed that 35% of employers had to offer a premium to attract employment equity candidates (Sapa 2007). In other words, a black person may be offered a higher salary for the same job

in order to attract black applicants (Thomas 2002). This creates salary discrepancies in some cases and is financially unsustainable for smaller companies (Van Dyk et al 2001).

*Focus on numbers vs transformation:* According to Human (1993) and Thomas (2002), EE and AA programmes are generally seen as a recruitment issue to fill targets and not as the induction into and development of the person in the organisational context and culture (Human 1993; Thomas 2002). Under the reporting requirement of section 20 of the EEA 55 of 1998, organisations are evaluated in terms of how well they meet their employment equity targets (Coetzee 2005). However, focusing only on numbers without considering skills and development aspects is not going to achieve the transformation that is needed (Coetzee 2005; Thomas 2002).

*Lack of communication:* A diverse workforce presents unique challenges for communication (Uys 2003). Diversity poses barriers to organisational communication because of cultural differences in aspects such as language, frames of reference and value judgments (Werner 2007). In South Africa there are 11 official languages and it is really a challenge to develop a common understanding of terminology, roles and responsibilities (Uys 2003).

*Incompatible organisational culture:* Blacks may find it difficult to fit in with historically white corporate cultures and as a result they often feel alienated from the organisational culture (Thomas 2003). Thus, the organisational culture could prevent, and even actively obstruct, the chances of individuals or certain groups' achieving success in the organisation (Claassen 2005).

*High job requirements:* The focus of apartheid was black exclusion and not necessarily black incompetence (Twala 2004). Blacks must realise that there is nothing wrong with them if are not yet able to meet the requirements of a certain job (Twala 2004). However, high job requirements are sometimes a subtle form of discrimination, for example a tertiary qualification may be required for a clerical position (Cascio 1998).

*Management resistance and leadership style:* According to Thomas and Ely (1996), the main reason why organisations do not achieve the business benefits of a more diverse workforce is the leader's paradigm for managing diversity. Many leaders of organisations do not regard EE and AA programmes as a strategic business issue and as a result there is a lack of management commitment to the process (Human 1993; Thomas 2002; Thomas 2003; Twala 2004). Even if managers value diversity, they do not necessarily know how to manage a diverse workforce (Kidder, Lankau, Chrobot-Mason, Mollica & Friedman 2004; Werner 2007). This manifests mostly in middle and first level management (Thomas 2003).

*Perceptions of reverse discrimination:* One of the main issues concerning the implementation of affirmative action measures to achieve employment equity is that previously advantaged groups view it as a form of reverse discrimination (Coetzee 2005; Human 1993; Thomas 2002; Twala 2004). It is also felt that people who were not part of the apartheid regime, for example young white males, are now bearing the brunt of the new legislation (Twala 2004). In addition, it is not clear whether all blacks and women were in fact previously disadvantaged and need to be affirmed (Twala 2004).

*Negative stereotypes:* Suspicion and heightened criticism of EE employees still prevail (Thomas 2002). These employees are often not given appropriate support and in some cases they are even deliberately excluded from informal networks and

important information is even withheld from them (Human 1993; Thomas 2002; Twala 2004). This may lead to underperformance even if they really have the necessary abilities and skills.

*Unrealistic expectations:* People from designated groups who still need training and development to comply with job requirements may have unrealistic expectations of their own abilities that will increase conflict in companies (Thomas 2002). Members of designated groups who expect secured positions, regardless of whether they meet the job requirements, may adopt a culture of entitlement that undermines their initiative and self-confidence (Maritz 2002; Thomas 2002; Twala 2004).

## 5 Best practices

The concept of a “best practice” implies the idea of “better than” compliance with legislation (Jain, Sloane & Horwitz 2003). Several best practices that should be implemented by organisations to address the barriers, as discussed above, and enable the effective implementation of EE have been identified (Claassen 2005; Human 1996; Human 2005; Thomas 2003; Twala 2004; Werner 2007). These include *training and development* to address skills shortages, *transparent communication* with regard to EE issues, creating management commitment to EE as a business strategy, *reviewing employment practices* and job requirements to remove unfair discrimination, and creating an *inclusive organisational culture* that promotes equity and diversity. In addition, organisations that can effectively provide a pro-business *justification* for a diverse workforce may be able to reduce unfavourable attitudes towards EE and AA programmes (Cropanzano et al 2005; Kidder et al 2004).

Another factor in the successful implementation of EE is the issue of the *fairness* of employment equity practices. Research has established that people’s perceptions of fairness and justice are largely based on their norms and values (Cascio 1998; Greenberg 2001; Huysamen 1995; Potgieter & Van der Merwe 2002). The perception of a fair outcome should not be confused with a favourable outcome (Cropanzano et al 2005). A favourable outcome is in the individual’s best interests and a fair outcome is consistent with moral standards and norms. The outcome of employment practices may be unfavourable, namely the person did not get the promotion because of AA, but it may still be perceived as fair because the person who was appointed is suitably qualified. The fairness aspect of employment equity links to organisational justice theory.

## 6 Organisational justice

Organisational justice theory has been extensively studied in recent years and the concept of justice and fairness permeates many actions and reactions that take place in organisations (Nowakowski & Conlon 2005). This is because when a decision, procedure or interaction is seen as inappropriate employees will usually experience a fairness violation (Nowakowski & Conlon 2005). Justice perceptions and specifically the relationship between fairness and various organisational outcomes such as valued attitudinal and behaviour outcomes (for example satisfaction, turnover, withdrawal and organisational commitment) have been directly linked in recent research (Colquit, Conlon, Wesson, Porter & Ng 2001). Thus, organisational justice attempts to describe and explain the role of fairness in the workplace (Greenberg 2001).

Justice in organisational settings can be defined as the focus on the antecedents and consequences of two types of subjective perceptions, namely the fairness of outcome

distribution and allocation and the fairness of the procedures used to determine outcome distribution and allocation (Colquitt et al 2001). Different forms of organisational justice have emerged, namely distributive, procedural and interactional justice.

*Distributive justice:* The first fairness construct studied was distributive justice. Adams (1965) originally defined this form of justice in terms of equity. According to Adams (1965), people determine fairness by evaluating their perceived inputs relative to the outcomes they receive. Then they compare this ratio with some referent standard to establish whether the outcomes they receive are fair in relation to their inputs.

*Procedural justice:* The justice literature became more complex with the introduction of procedural justice as a complement to distributive justice. Original work on procedural justice was done in the context of legal procedures. Researchers noticed that parties in dispute resolution procedures responded not only to the outcomes they received but also to the process that was followed to determine those outcomes (Nowakowski & Conlon 2005). That resulted in the development of the construct of procedural justice.

Procedural justice is defined as the fairness of the process that is used to arrive at decisions (Nowakowski & Conlon 2005). Central to the development of the concept of procedural justice is the work done by Thibaut and Walker (1975). They determined that control or influence over the process, also called "voice", plays an important role in creating high levels of procedural justice.

*Interactional justice:* The application of justice theory to organisations has highlighted certain issues relating to procedures and outcomes. For example, in the same company the same supposedly fair procedure could create very different reactions among employees, depending on the way in which different managers might implement and enforce the procedure. Bies and Moag (1986) initially referred to this aspect of justice as interactional justice.

Interactional justice can be divided into two separate forms of justice, namely interpersonal and informational justice (Greenberg 1993). These two forms of justice focus more on the behaviour of the decision makers than on the structural aspects of procedures or the specific outcomes (Nowakowski & Conlon 2005). *Interpersonal justice* refers to the sensitivity, politeness and respect people receive from their superiors during procedures. This primarily serves to alter reactions to outcomes, because sensitivity can make people feel better even if the outcome is unfavourable (Colquitt et al 2001). *Informational justice* refers to the explanation, justification or information provided by decision makers as to why outcomes were distributed in a certain way. Information should be comprehensive, reasonable, truthful, timely and candid. This information helps people to evaluate the structural aspects of the process (Colquitt et al 2001).

## **7 Implications of perceived unfairness**

Distributive justice refers to the "what" of EE and AA practices (Opatow 1997). It focuses on whether societal resources such as jobs, promotions and educational opportunities are distributed fairly. This could also include societal harms that threaten livelihoods or career success. In general, political and economic policies lead to specific distributive outcomes (Opatow 1997).

Procedural and interactional justice refers to the "how" of EE and AA practices (Opatow 1997). It focuses on the fair and consistent application of procedures to all

groups. According to Kickul (2001), employees will react most negatively to unfairness when the organisation did not use equitable procedures and appropriate conduct - in other words, when procedural as well as interactional justice violations occurred.

In South Africa economic and political reform legislation, such as the EEA 55 of 1998 and the BBBEEA 4 of 2003, already defines the “what” of EE and AA practices. Seeing that the “what” is fairly fixed, it can be concluded that the “how”, namely procedural and interactional justice, will play an important role in the justice perceptions of EE and AA practices in South African organisations.

Why should we be interested in determining and improving fairness perceptions of employment equity practices and outcomes? Because when things at work are perceived as unfair employees will tend to display rejection and resistance (Coetzee 2005). Perceived injustice is followed by moral outrage and victims as well as observers feel anger and resentment as a natural reaction to what they experience as unfairness (Beugre 2005; Nowakowski & Conlon 2005). This may lead to a display of aggressive behaviour. Thus, employees’ fairness perceptions regarding the implementation of EE may affect the achievement of EE objectives.

Aggression is not the only outcome of perceived justice violations. Research has shown that violations of distributive, procedural and interactional justice lower employees’ job satisfaction, organisational commitment and trust in authority figures (Coetzee 2005; Colquitt et al 2001). A number of withdrawal and negative behaviours such as absenteeism, staff turnover, neglect of duties and insubordination may also occur (Beugre 2005; Colquitt et al 2001). In addition, a key organisational outcome, namely performance, is negatively affected specifically by perceived procedural injustice (Colquitt et al 2001).

## **8 Method**

### **8.1 Research approach**

The research was quantitative and descriptive in nature and the survey method was used. A survey is “a method used to gather self-report descriptive information about the attitudes, behaviours, or other characteristics of some population” (Rosenfeld, Edwards & Thomas 1995:548). The research has a cross-sectional design. Cross-sectional design studies show how the units being surveyed differ from one another at a single point in time (Swanson & Holton 2005). The study was conducted at a private organisation in 2007, several years after the enactment of employment equity legislation. The EE committee at this company was established in 2002 and EE plans and reports have been submitted to the Department of Labour every year as required.

The aim of the study was to determine employees’ perceptions of the fairness of the procedures followed in implementing employment equity within the specific organisation.

### **8.2 Participants**

The study was conducted at a private South African company in the health services industry. The employees at the organisation who participated in the study range from technical and administrative staff to senior managers.

The population of the organisation at the time of the study was 3299, of which 28.7% were male and 71.3% were female. Because of logistical and time concerns it was decided that the sample would consist of areas where employees were concentrated in

larger numbers. The sample consisted of a total of 520 employees. It was a sample of convenience and completion of the questionnaire was voluntary.

The sample consisted largely of females (76%), with males making up 24%. Whites (61.5%) and Africans (27.2%) comprised the majority of the sample; Indians and Coloureds comprised 5.4% and 5.9% respectively.

The largest percentage of respondents were between the ages of 25 and 34 years (34%), with a more or less equal distribution in the 35 to 44 year (25.6%) and the younger than 25 year (21.8%) groups. A considerably lower percentage of respondents were between 45 to 54 years of age (15.5%) and the lowest percentage consisted of people older than 55 years (2.9%).

Job levels fell into four main groups, namely senior management, middle management, junior management and non-management. The sample consisted mostly of employees on the non-managerial (63.1%) level. The junior management level consisted of 21.9%, the middle management level of 11.6% and the senior management level of 3.4%.

### **8.3 The measuring instrument**

The measuring instrument utilised in this study was a validated questionnaire that had been used in previous research (Duweke 2004; Van Rooyen 2000). The instrument collected demographic information, namely data on age, gender, race, job level and disability. The following 10 employment equity dimensions were included in the instrument: Vision and strategy, Leadership, Transformation/change, Human resource practices, Performance appraisal, Gender equity, Individual satisfaction, Valuing diversity in teams, Conflict management, and Interpersonal dimension of diversity. The two dimensions of "teamwork" and "impact of diversity workshops" in the original questionnaire were excluded. The reason for this was that the survey was not conducted after a diversity training intervention and the purpose was not to examine teamwork per se. The dimensions focused on the following:

#### *Vision and strategy*

If an inclusive organisational culture is to be created, in other words if employees are to feel part of the organisation, they must be inducted into the vision and objectives of the organisation. Employees must personally agree with and buy into the organisation's vision and employment equity strategy.

#### *Leadership*

One of the critical success factors for effective EE is management support. Employees' perceptions of leadership and management processes in general may influence their satisfaction with other organisational practices. Issues of trust are also important as a desired organisational outcome.

#### *Transformation / change*

Communication is a critical component of dealing with any organisational change and communication regarding the implementation of EE practices is no exception. Resistance to change can be overcome through regular, open communication. Ongoing awareness and sharing of plans and strategies are crucial.

#### *Human resource practices*

A key criterion for the success of EE is the review of all employment practices to ensure that they are transparent and free of unfair discrimination. This includes looking at

selection tools, job requirements and all other employment practices, as required by the EEA 55 of 1998.

### *Performance appraisal*

Performance appraisal forms part of employee development and the determining of individual training needs. Regular performance feedback is a critical performance development tool. Clear performance roles and standards reduce stress, and recognition increases employee satisfaction.

### *Gender equity*

Gender equity refers to whether men and women are treated equally and not unfairly discriminated against, on the basis of their gender, in promotion or remuneration. This aspect is related to the dimension of fair employment practices.

### *Individual satisfaction*

Individual satisfaction refers to employees' overall satisfaction with the working environment. This includes feeling that their skills are effectively utilised and that they are making a valued contribution to the organisation. Employees should experience a sense of belonging to the department and organisation. Issues of trust and respect between employees and management as well as between co-workers also impact on individual satisfaction.

### *Valuing diversity in teams*

A critical factor in employment equity is that the need for diversity should be acknowledged, valued and viewed as a business benefit and not a liability by all members of the organisation, that is both managers and employees. This dimension also indicates whether tokenism, racism and victimisation are perceived to occur in the company.

### *Conflict management*

This dimension focuses on the manner in which conflict is dealt with in the organisation. The focus is twofold, namely on whether conflict is dealt with effectively and resolved, and on whether it is dealt with in a culturally sensitive manner.

### *Interpersonal dimension of diversity*

The interpersonal dimension of diversity relates to the general relationship and interaction amongst employees and with management. It explores the degree of openness and comfort that employees experience while working within a diverse workforce.

### *Reliability*

The reliability of the questionnaire was determined by means of Cronbach's alpha coefficient. A desirable reliability coefficient would fall within the range of 0.80 to 0.90 (Anastasi 1976), but some researchers argue that 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein 1994) or between 0.80 and 0.60 is acceptable (Bartholomew, Henderson & Marcia 2000).

The overall reliability of the original questionnaire is 0.94 and the internal consistency of the dimensions is between 0.78 and 0.87. In this study the overall reliability of the questionnaire was 0.97. The dimensions measured in this study were the same except for the two dimensions of "teamwork" and the "impact of diversity workshops". Thus, the instrument was considered reliable on the basis of previous studies.

**Table 2**  
**Cronbach's coefficient Alpha scores per dimension**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Number of items</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>
Vision and strategy	4	0.709
Leadership	11	0.949
Transformation/change	12	0.859
Human resource practices	11	0.939
Performance appraisal	8	0.910
Gender equity	5	0.798
Individual satisfaction	7	0.861
Valuing diversity	16	0.896
Conflict management	4	0.713
Interpersonal dimension	8	<b>0.452</b>
Overall score	86	0.971

The majority of the Cronbach's Alpha scores are satisfactory, with the exception of one dimension, namely the interpersonal dimension (0.45) and this will be taken into consideration when interpreting the results.

#### **8.4 Procedures**

Hard copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the entire sample. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by not requiring identifying information such as names and employee or identity numbers and by providing self-sealable envelopes. Two hundred and forty-five employees out of the total sample of 520 responded. This represents a response rate of 47%.

#### **8.5 Analysis**

The data were analysed in a quantitative manner by means of a statistical package called SPSS (Statistics Package for Social Scientists). Firstly, descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions, means and standard deviations were generated. Secondly, inferential statistics such as t-tests and analysis of variance techniques were utilised to compare variables and determine differences between group responses. Firstly, differences between male and female perceptions on the 10 employment equity dimensions were analysed and then the differences between male and female perceptions for the other independent variables, namely age, race and job level, were examined. The interaction effect of the independent variables was also examined by means of factorial ANOVA.

### **9 Results**

#### **9.1 Overall EE profile**

The overall means and standard deviations of responses to the 10 EE dimensions are presented in table 3. Overall employees seem to be satisfied with the EE practices of the organisation as not one of the dimensions obtained a very low mean. In general, employees seem to be most positive about the vision and strategy (3.87), leadership (3.80), the interpersonal dimension (3.78) and conflict management (3.68). In general,

employees seem to be most negative about human resource practices (3.27), performance appraisal (3.35) and valuing diversity (3.41).

**Table 3**  
**Overall EE profile**

Dimension	Mean	Std Deviation
Vision and strategy	3.87	.693
Leadership	3.80	.895
Transformation/change	3.48	.675
HR practices	3.27	.883
Performance appraisal	3.35	.948
Gender equity	3.54	.810
Individual satisfaction	3.49	.853
Valuing diversity	3.41	.661
Conflict management	3.68	.761
Interpersonal dimension	3.78	.448

## 9.2 Differences between groups

### Gender

To compare the differences between the perceptions of males and females, their respective mean scores on each of the EE dimensions were calculated. Overall, males and females are positive about all the EE dimensions and females are generally slightly more positive than males. Both genders are specifically positive towards leadership and the interpersonal dimension. Both genders are most negative about HR practices and performance appraisal.

A t-test was done to determine whether the above differences are statistically significant or not. Table 4 presents the means, standard deviation, and p values of males and females on each dimension. The t-test revealed that, except in the areas of vision and strategy, there are no significant differences between the perceptions of males and females about EE in the organisation.

**Table 4**  
**Comparison between males' and females' mean scores on EE dimensions**

Dimension	Mean		Std Dev		p-value
	Males	Females	Males	Females	
Vision and strategy	3.92	3.85	0.514	0.744	0.013*
Leadership	3.72	3.83	0.814	0.922	0.540
Transformation/change	3.32	3.53	0.685	0.669	0.851
HR practices	3.07	3.34	0.813	0.895	0.322
Performance appraisal	3.25	3.38	0.930	0.956	0.931
Gender equity	3.61	3.52	0.789	0.820	0.689
Individual satisfaction	3.39	3.53	0.822	0.864	0.917
Valuing diversity	3.29	3.44	0.614	0.675	0.574
Conflict management	3.59	3.70	0.781	0.756	0.894
Interpersonal	3.74	3.80	0.494	0.437	0.611

\*  $p < 0.05$

The results indicate that neither males nor females perceive unfairness with regard to treatment or opportunities for advancement based on gender. This is contrary to other studies, where significant differences between males and females were recorded (Duweke 2005; SIOP Committee 1995; Van Zyl & Roodt 2003) and consistent with another study where no significant differences based on gender were found (Coetzee 2005). The reason might be that, in this study, the majority of the population (71.3%) is female. In addition, females are far better represented on the junior management levels than males and more or less half of middle and senior management are females. Thus, females may not perceive the same barriers as in other organisations, where the majority of the population and/or managers are males.

### Race

The respective mean scores on each of the EE dimensions were calculated per race group. The Indian and Coloured race groups were combined to make interpretations more meaningful.

All race groups seem to be positive towards the EE dimensions and specifically towards the vision and strategy (3.87), leadership (3.80) and the interpersonal dimension (3.78). All groups are the most negative about the fairness of human resource practices (3.27) and performance appraisal (3.35). The combined group of Indians and Coloureds seem to be generally the most positive towards most of the dimensions. Whites seem to be generally more positive than Africans. Thus, Africans seem to be the most negative of all the race groups and specifically the most negative towards the aspects of human resource practices (2.82), valuing diversity (3.13) and transformation/change (3.17).

To determine whether there are statistically significant differences between the respective race groups, a one-way ANOVA was performed. The results are presented in table 5.

**Table 5**  
**One-way Anova results for race group**

Dimension	P-value
Vision and strategy	.057
Leadership	.005**
Transformation/change	.000*
HR practices	.000*
Performance appraisal	.381
Gender equity	.021*
Individual satisfaction	.017*
Valuing diversity	.000*
Conflict management	.034*
Interpersonal dimension	.249

\*  $p < 0.05$

The results revealed that there are significant differences in perceptions between the race groups. Africans are significantly more negative on almost all aspects of EE than Whites. Africans also responded that conflict is not managed effectively. This relates to interactional justice violations. Perceptions that there is unfair discrimination and treatment in terms of selection procedures, promotions, development opportunities and

remuneration based on race still prevail. This relates to distributive and interactional justice violations. There is also a perceived lack of trust in the leadership of the company. There is a perception that management and staff view diversity as a liability. There is a perception that EE appointments are based on tokenism and not competence. There is a general lack of trust among employees. This relates to procedural and interactional justice violations.

The fact that blacks are significantly more negative than whites or Indians and Coloureds is contrary to studies that suggest strong support from employees for EE programmes directed at their own race groups (Coetzee 2005; SIOP Committee 1995). Opatow (1997) supports the notion that Whites view programmes directed at women or people with disabilities more positively than those directed at blacks. Thus, because blacks are most negative, whites more positive and Indians and Coloured are the most positive, there might be a perception that EE practices in this organisation are not specifically directed at blacks but rather at other races (Indians and Coloureds) and women.

### Age

To compare the differences between the age categories the respective mean scores on each of the EE dimensions were calculated. Overall, all age groups seem to be positive towards all the dimensions of EE and specifically towards the vision and strategy (3.87), leadership (3.80) and the interpersonal dimension (3.78). All age groups are the least positive about human resource practices (3.27) and performance appraisal (3.34). Specifically, the age group 35 to 44 years is very negative towards human resource practices (3.17) and performance appraisal (3.15). The age group 45 to 65 years seems to be the most positive on all dimensions.

To determine whether there are statistically significant differences between the respective age groups, a one-way ANOVA was performed. The results revealed that there are no statistically significant differences in perceptions based on age group (table 6). In other words, employees have no perception of unfairness or unequal treatment based on age. This finding is supported by the SIOP Committee results (1995). However, other studies have shown significant differences based on respondents' age (Coetzee 2005; Duweke 2005; Walbrugh & Roodt 2003).

**Table 6**  
**Results of one-way Anova for age groups**

Dimension	P-value
Vision and strategy	.488
Leadership	.834
Transformation / change	.137
HR practices	.502
Performance appraisal	.236
Gender equity	.244
Individual satisfaction	.375
Valuing diversity	.247
Conflict management	.727
Interpersonal dimension	.782

### Job levels

To compare the differences between the respondents' job level categories the respective mean scores on each of the EE dimensions were calculated. Overall all job levels seem to be positive towards the EE dimensions and specifically towards the vision and strategy (3.86), leadership (3.79) and the interpersonal dimension (3.79). All job levels seem to be the most negative about the fairness of human resource practices (3.26) and performance appraisal (3.33). The non-management level is the most negative on all aspects and specifically about human resource practices (mean 3.14). The middle and senior management level is the most positive on all dimensions.

To determine whether there are significant differences between the respective job levels, a one-way ANOVA was performed. The results are presented in table 8 below. The results revealed that there are significant differences in perceptions between non-managers and managers (table 7).

**TABLE 7**  
Results of one-way Anova for job level

Dimension	P-value
Vision and strategy	.821
Leadership	.027*
Transformation/change	.082
HR practices	.007**
Performance appraisal	.052
Gender equity	.395
Individual satisfaction	.000*
Valuing diversity	.456
Conflict management	.017**
Interpersonal dimension	.063

\*  $p < 0.05$

There is a perceived lack of trust between employees and management. The reason might be perceived procedural and interactional justice violations. Management does not provide feedback on performance and is not involved in the individual development of employees. This relates to interactional (informational) justice violations. Management does not give recognition for or appropriately reward performance. This relates to distributive justice. There is a perceived lack of trust among employees. Employees are dissatisfied with the manner in which conflict is dealt with. This relates to interactional (interpersonal) justice violations. Employees have the perception that management does not value diversity but rather considers it a liability. There is a perception that management is not committed to the employment equity strategy and processes of the company.

Managers are generally more positive about and satisfied with EE practices than employees at staff level. This is consistent with the findings of other studies (SIOP Committee 1995; Coetzee 2005) that support the notion that employees whose jobs involve the implementation of EE practices are more positive towards these practices.

**Cross tabulation between gender and job level**

			Job level			Total
			Non-management	First level management	Middle and senior management	
Gender	Male	Count	38	14	5	57
		% of total	16.3%	6.0%	2.1%	24.5%
	Female	Count	109	37	30	176
		% of total	46.8%	15.9%	12.9%	75.5%
Total		Count	147	51	35	233

**Cross tabulation between gender and race**

			Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Race	Black	Count	25	40	65
		% of total	10.5%	16.7%	27.2%
	Indian and Coloured	Count	10	17	27
		% of total	4.2%	7.1%	11.3%
	White	Count	23	124	147
		% of total	9.6%	51.9%	61.5%
Total		Count	58	181	239

**Race and job level**

			Job level			Total
			Non-management	First level management	Middle and senior management	
Race	Black	Count	48	9	6	63
		% of total	20.6%	3.9%	2.6%	27.0%
	Indian and Coloured	Count	19	6	2	27
		% of total	8.2%	2.6%	.9%	11.6%
	White	Count	80	36	27	143
		% of total	34.3%	15.5%	11.6%	61.4%
Total		Count	147	51	35	233

### 9.3 Interaction effect of variables

The one-way ANOVAs revealed significant differences in perceptions between race groups and job levels. Thus, it was decided to perform factorial ANOVAs to determine the interaction between and simultaneous effects of these variables. The results indicated that the independent variables of race, gender, age and job level in this study did not show significant interaction between or simultaneous effects on employees' perceptions of the EE dimensions.

## 10 Recommendations

The case organisation needs to address several barriers to EE namely the unfair human resource practices, lack of training and development, and the lack of communication about and justification for EE practices and decisions. A positive aspect

that could be exploited is employees' agreement with the vision of the organisation. Perceived procedural and interactional justice violations are evident in the reported lack of trust between management and employees as well as ineffective conflict management procedures. In terms of fairness perceptions the employment equity strategy should focus on improving the fairness perceptions specifically of blacks, the 35 to 44 year age group and employees at the non-management level. Specific recommendations include the following:

- Maintain management commitment to the EE process by continuously promoting the strategic and competitive advantages.
- Build on employees' personal agreement with and positive views on the company's vision, strategy and leadership.
- Review the human resources practices in the organisation which are mostly perceived as unfair, especially by non-management levels, blacks and the 35 to 44 year age group. Focus especially on the procedures for recruitment, promotions, development and remuneration. Ensure that they do not unfairly prevent blacks from being promoted and ensure that they improve perceptions of procedural justice.
- Train managers to understand and value diversity as a business benefit and not as a liability. Managers need to value and utilise diversity in their teams.
- Manage change more effectively by means of regular and open communication. Focus especially on Africans to ensure they understand the EE practices and processes within the organisation. Explain and justify to all employees the need to implement more aggressive affirmative action measures in the areas where representation needs to be increased.;
- Provide adequate training and development opportunities to enable blacks to meet the job requirements for managerial positions.
- Explain and justify to employees all appointment decisions related to employment equity targets.
- Implement applicable and fair measures for the recognition, feedback and reward of performance. Benchmark the organisation's remuneration policy against those of similar organisations. Adapt the remuneration structure if necessary. Focus on the needs of blacks, the 35 to 44 year age group and non-management levels.
- Train managers in conflict management techniques and interpersonal skills to enable them to build better relationships with their employees, create trust and improve perceptions of interactional justice.
- This organisation, and other organisations, should follow an integrated approach to the implementation of EE strategies and practices. In other words they should focus on applying best practices, such as training and development, communication, fair employment practices and creating an inclusive organisational culture. At the same time the principles of procedural and interactional justice should be incorporated when implementing these practices.
- Repeat the survey to monitor progress and measure the success of any corrective actions that have been implemented.

## **11 Conclusion**

It is 10 years after the promulgation of the EEA 55 of 1998 and employees in this organisation still report perceived unfair treatment and discrimination. This implies that

the organisation has not reached the goal set by the EEA 55 of 1998, namely the achievement of equity in the workplace. Perusal of this organisation's EE reports may show progress in terms of the second part of the purpose of the EEA, namely equitable representation in occupational categories at all levels. However, the intention of the EEA is not to create an either/or situation. In other words an organisation cannot achieve equity in the workplace by *either* promoting fairness *or* ensuring equitable representation. To achieve equity in the workplace, the organisation has to promote fairness *and* ensure equitable representation otherwise they are in effect failing to comply with the aims of the legislation.

The fact that the results of the differences in the fairness perceptions between groups are consistent in some instances with other research results and inconsistent in others supports the notion that employees' thresholds for enduring injustice may differ from one organisation to another (Beugre 2005). Therefore, organisations should evaluate their own organisational practices and how their employees perceive the fairness of such practices before they plan and implement their EE strategy.

This study was limited to a single organisation in the health services industry. This makes it difficult to generalise the conclusions to other organisations but also emphasises the finding that there is no single generic employment equity strategy that can be implemented at all organisations. Although general guidelines for implementing best practices can be followed, organisations should adapt their EE strategy and practices according to their own specific needs.

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