

THE VIEWS OF MANAGEMENT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN A LARGE SOUTH AFRICAN ORGANISATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to report findings of an investigation into management's views on particular aspects that are considered important for the success of affirmative action in a certain large South African organisation. The key areas of performance in respect of the implementation of affirmative action are identified as equalising opportunities, eradicating discrimination, the process of actively integrating affirmative action into human resource planning and the general management of the organisation and the process of taking affirmative action beyond the boundaries of the organisation into the community. The results provide a basis for investigating aspects that may help with the implementation of affirmative action, on the one hand, and aspects that might hamper or undermine its successful implementation, on the other. The article also reflects management's views on the extent to which the aforementioned issues actually contribute to the successful implementation of affirmative action in their respective departments/sections/teams within the organisation. The target population for the study was the total number of managers (1005) in the D and E bands (Paterson grading system) in the organisation, from which a stratified random sample was taken to form the group of respondents totalling 300 managers. Based on the findings some conclusions are drawn, potential implications spelled out and recommendations made.

1 INTRODUCTION

On 16 October 1998, when the State President signed the Employment Equity Act (55 of 1998), the reality of affirmative action dawned upon many a South African organisation. The country has now formally moved into what is known as the crossover phase, the phase of moving from our history of unfair discrimination against certain "designated groups" (as categorised in terms of the Employment Equity Act - or EEA in short) towards a situation of "substantive" equity. On the question of moving from "formal" equity towards "true" equity it is stated in Swanepoel et al (1998:154-155) that whereas the EEA will formalise the issue of affirmative action and introduce the notion of "legal" equity, the real challenge will probably lie in the realm of bringing about "true" employment equity. As stated in Swanepoel et al (1998:155): "'True' or 'substantive' employment equity is, however, much more difficult to achieve in that it requires a fundamental and honest change of heart among all relevant parties. This will entail, inter alia, a change of attitude"

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One of the key parties or roleplayers during this phase of implementing the EEA at organisational level will most certainly be management. In the process of working towards true employment equity, existing management must be viewed as crucial in making employment equity work - in particular also as far as it may impact on the competitiveness of the organisations being managed. Especially important are the commitment, mindsets and attitudes of managers.

Research in the early nineties for instance showed that many white male managers at that stage believed that blacks and white women are less capable than white men (Human 1991). Such views can destroy self-confidence and motivation and may become a negative self-fulfilling prophecy. Negative expectations may lead to the anticipated outcome. Further, the fear of losing status and enjoying lesser career prospects may also cause resistance (Human 1991:16). Perceptions, fears, stereotypes and beliefs of this kind may, if not managed properly, typically contribute to white resistance to the implementation of affirmative action and may consequently form an important stumbling block in the process of moving towards a situation of "true" equity in the workplace.

If potential stumbling blocks and identified problems are to be addressed in order to allow affirmative action to be successfully implemented in any organisation, the views of all levels of management on various related issues would appear to be crucial. Kemp (1994:17) researched constraints which were experienced by organisations in implementing affirmative action programmes and came to the following conclusion:

The success or failure of implementing affirmative action lies with the management of organisations. They either make it happen or not. Those who criticise affirmative action are actually criticising the management of the organisation where it failed.

From a management perspective the issue must therefore become the following: "How do we go about implementing affirmative action in a way that impacts positively on the competitiveness of our organisations?" In this respect it will be vitally important to take cognisance of the views of management.

Lately there has been a lot of public debate about the progress made to date on affirmative action. Great emphasis seems to be placed on the "hard" side of affirmative action - the targets and the extent to which the workforces of organisations are becoming 'equitably represented' in terms of the EEA. But underlying all of this is the issue of the "hearts and minds" of managers who have to implement affirmative action and the EEA. There can therefore be little doubt that employment equity 'audits' will have to include a process of gathering information about the views of management on aspects related to the implementation of affirmative action. After all, the management of people in their employ has always been part of the job of the manager.

From a management perspective affirmative action should be all about transforming the "people factor" in our organisations. It is well known that in terms of world competitiveness ratings South Africa's performance has been and still is exceptionally poor on the human resource factor. Proper implementation of affirmative action could well become the means of changing this situation. Unfortunately, however, recent research findings indicate that perceptions regarding the implementation of affirmative action in South African companies are still poor (Hofmeyr 1997). It would therefore make so much more sense for organisations to endeavour to find out what their different employee groups think and feel in relation to this topic. As a matter of fact, the employment equity legislation will place a premium on "consulting" all relevant parties.

Large organisations especially should use affirmative action programmes to assist with the removal of social and economic inequalities in South African society. The research underlying this article was conducted in a large organisation employing more than 50000 employees at the time of conducting the research. In view of this organisation's important role in bringing about socioeconomic change in South Africa, its success in implementing affirmative action as such can also be viewed as a vital element in the reconstruction and development of the country.

In the light of the foregoing, the said organisation has introduced various interventions over time to equalise opportunities and to further affirmative action. These include upliftment programmes such as numeracy and literacy training, accelerated technical training and bridging courses. Development programmes include secretarial development programmes, an accelerated supervisory development programme and an accelerated management development programme. The accelerated supervisory and management development programmes focus on both the managerial and the technical competencies required by supervisors and managers.

The said organisation has also established an affirmative action steering committee (represented by all the unions, staff associations and management) to develop and monitor the organisation's affirmative action policy and related initiatives. The development of an affirmative action policy document was based on inputs from the management board and various unions, staff associations, line management, consultants and external stakeholders (eg the Black Management Forum). The affirmative action policy was approved as early as 1993. Implementation of the affirmative action policy has therefore been a key challenge in this organisation for a number of years. At the stage when the research was conducted, the issue in question was the progress (or lack of progress) in respect of policy implementation and the potential dynamics underlying the rate of progress.

The basic research problem underlying this article was that there was a lack of information within the particular organisation regarding the views of this organisation's managers in respect of various aspects related to the organisation's affirmative action policy and its implementation.

The overall purpose of the study was therefore to ascertain management's views on particular aspects relating to the success (or failure) of affirmative action in this large South African organisation. These aspects are *equal opportunity*, the *eradication of discrimination*, the process of *actively integrating affirmative action into the organisation* and the process of *acting affirmatively in the community*.

The results provided a basis for investigating the processes which promote affirmative action, on the one hand, and any aspects which might hamper or undermine its successful implementation, on the other. Secondary objectives included finding out what management's views were on the extent to which the aforementioned issues actually contributed to the successful implementation of affirmative action in their respective departments/sections/teams.

2 WHAT AFFIRMATIVE ACTION ENTAILS : THE APPROACH FOLLOWED IN THE CASE IN QUESTION

Taking into account various descriptions in the literature and many other "definitions" of affirmative action (such as those of Maphai 1993:6-9; Byars & Rue 1994:26; Mercer 1986:10-14; Sachs 1991:14-15; Innes 1992:7-12; Gerson 1993:26; Njuguna 1992:1), it is clear - at least from a purely theoretical point of view - that affirmative action as a concept is not easy to define. One

should add to this the fact that a number of organisations disapprove of the notion of affirmative action, and that this has led some of them to devise rather vague and undefined programmes such as “diversity management”, “social responsibility” or “equal opportunities”. Three years ago Rapoo (1995:13) noted that the pro-affirmative action lobby was losing its debate because of a failure to articulate firstly what is meant by affirmative action and, secondly, how to apply it in practice. Already about half a decade ago Hofmeyr (1993) provided a description of affirmative action that include the following:

- ◆ It goes beyond the principle of equal employment opportunities and seeks to redress the disadvantages experienced by black men and women and, to a lesser extent, coloureds, Indians, white women and the disabled.
- ◆ It also implies compensating for disadvantages by means of accelerated development, training and education programmes, the setting of targets and timetables, and special recruitment and promotion drives to integrate disadvantaged persons into meaningful employment positions without lowering standards, the objective of all of which is to reach the stage where the composition of the workforce reflects the demographics of the society.
- ◆ It includes strategies to ensure that discrimination is eradicated and the organisation is socially committed to the wider community.

It is quite clear from the above that the EEA does not deviate much from Hofmeyr’s description. The researchers thus also viewed the meaning of affirmative action from this perspective, and for the purposes of this study affirmative action was considered to comprise four main issues (“pillars”):

- ◆ equalising opportunities
- ◆ eradicating discrimination
- ◆ actively integrating affirmative action into the organisation
- ◆ “acting affirmatively” in the community (taking affirmative action beyond the immediate boundaries of the organisation)

“Equalising opportunities” in this context was taken to refer basically to efforts aimed at working actively towards identifying potential, developing it and assisting the people identified as having the necessary potential to become equal role players. “Eradicating discrimination” was confined to practices aimed at identifying and removing unfair discrimination in the workplace, including aspects such as pay and benefits. The third key area of “active integration” essentially entails making affirmative action an integral part of general management practices and general human resource management practices - the latter in particular to include workforce planning practices. “Acting affirmatively in the community”, or taking affirmative action in the community, basically refers to social responsibility in respect of traditionally disadvantaged communities from which the organisation draws its human resources.

The affirmative action policy of the organisation was essentially built on these four “pillars” and managers were viewed as the most important role players in implementing policy. The research was therefore designed to obtain the views of managers on various aspects related to these four “key performance areas” of affirmative action in the organisation.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Target population and sample

The target population for the study was the total number of managers (1005) in the D and E bands (Paterson job grading system) in the organisation. A stratified random sample was taken from this group to establish the target population for this study. A total of 300 managers were eventually identified as the target population and of these, 247 responded, 200 of whom produced usable responses, representing the various categories of managers.

3.2 Questionnaire development

The questionnaire consisted of:

- Section I, which dealt with biographical details.
- Section II, which covered various statements on the affirmative action policy document (the "four pillars" mentioned above). The respondents were given a seven-point scale in column A and asked to indicate their response, choosing from alternatives which ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", regarding the importance of the statement (or activity) for the successful implementation of affirmative action in the organisation. Using the same scale the respondents had to indicate in column B the extent to which they viewed the various statements or aspects as contributing to the successful implementation of affirmative action in the respondents' various departments/sections/teams.
- Section III, which contained various more general statements, using the same seven point scale as section II, aimed at eliciting the respondents' personal views/ideas on aspects of affirmative action within the organisation.

A pilot study involving 109 managers representative of the various managerial levels was executed to enhance the quality of the final questionnaire. Minor changes were made to the draft questionnaire and the final questionnaire consisted of 117 statements in sections II and III.

3.3 Statistical analysis of the results and level of significance

The statistical analysis systems package (SAS) was used to process the data. The factor analysis program *Proc Factor* of the statistical software package Statistical Analyses Systems (SAS User's Guide: Statistics, 1985) was used. The method of factor analysis followed was the factor analysis principle (Mulaik 1972). It was decided to consider as significant all factor loadings equal to or greater than 0,30. Although all sections of the questionnaire were subjected to factor analyses, not all the results are reported in the light of the scope of this article.

Various groupings based on biographic and demographic variables were compared according to their mean response on the seven-point scales. The one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) *F*-test (Kerlinger 1986:211) was computed for tests of differences between the independent groups. Where more than two groups were compared and results were significant, Scheffé post-hoc tests (Kirk 1968) were computed to establish which pairs of groups differed significantly from each other. The items in column A (importance) and column B (contribution) of section II of the questionnaire were completed by the same respondents so that the measures were

related/dependent and therefore *t*-tests for dependent measures (Hays 1963) were computed to test whether the means of column A and column B differed significantly.

Conventionally, the levels 0,05 and 0,01 are used as levels of significance for statistical tests. It was decided, however, to set a level of 0,005 for each statistical test that would be performed. This may appear stringent but, in view of the large number of items and statistical tests that needed to be performed, this level proved to be helpful in managing the large number of statistical tests in the study.

4 RESEARCH FINDINGS

The scope of this article obviously does not permit a full discussion of all the research findings. Results in respect of each of the four pillars indicated are briefly discussed. The responses were interpreted as follows:

- *means of 4,5 and higher:* There is agreement that the particular item/statement (or activity) is important (column A) or contributes (column B) to the successful implementation of affirmative action.
- *means of 3,5 to 4,49:* The respondents are uncertain whether or not the statement (activity) is important or contributes to the successful implementation of affirmative action.
- *means lower than 3,5:* The statement (activity) was viewed as unimportant or it was felt that it did not contribute to the successful implementation of affirmative action.

The mean scores on all the relevant questionnaire items are contained in annexure A.

4.1 Equalising opportunities

This pillar covered questionnaire items that refer to issues such as the identification of potential, increased and accelerated training and development and the matter of coaching and mentoring. The mean item scores for the importance and contribution of this pillar are shown in figure 1.

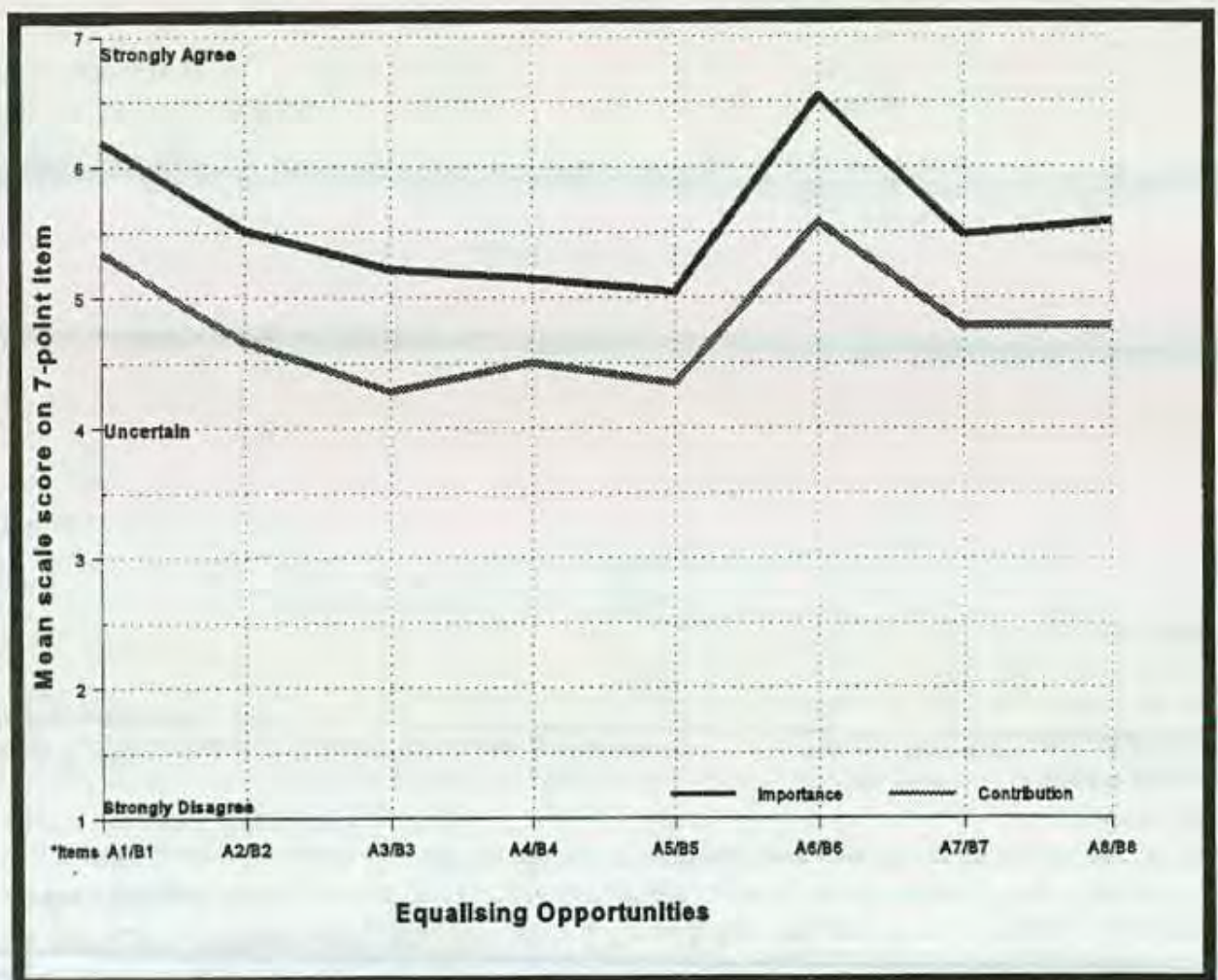
Importance

It was clear from the responses of managers to questionnaire items on the importance of the activities that relate to equalising opportunities that open and honest feedback to affirmative action appointees on their performance was considered to be the most important, followed by the development of affirmative action appointees and the provision of mentorship. The availability of affirmative action candidates and coaching, although important, was rated lower, followed by increased and accelerated development of affirmative action candidates. The lowest rated aspect, in terms of priority, was accelerated supervisory and management development, but this was still considered to be important with a mean of 5,05.

Contribution

With regard to the views of the managers in respect of the actual contribution of the various aspects in the process of the implementation of affirmative action in their departments/sections/teams, the respondents again considered open and honest performance feedback to contribute most, followed by the development of affirmative action appointees. Mentorship and coaching were also considered to make a contribution - although a less important one - followed by the identification of affirmative action candidates by means of appropriate recruitment techniques. Of all the items that were viewed as actually contributing to the implementation of affirmative action in their departments, the respondents were least positive about increased and accelerated development. Although the respondents did not view any aspect as making a contribution whatsoever, they were uncertain whether accelerated supervisory and management development and the availability of a sufficient number of affirmative action candidates did actually contribute to the successful implementation of affirmative action in their departments/sections/teams.

FIGURE 1: MEAN ITEM SCORES FOR PILLAR 1: EQUALISING OPPORTUNITIES



*Items in columns A and B (sec II) which refer to equalising opportunities

Difference between importance and contribution

In terms of the differences in the activities with regard to importance (column A) and contribution (column B), it is clear from the findings that:

- The activities relating to equalising opportunities were viewed as important by managers.
- The lower scores for column B (contribution) and the uncertainty of managers in respect of certain activities are an indication that problems exist in the implementation of many of these issues in the respondents' departments/ sections/teams.

Differences in biographical variables

No statistical differences were found between the subgroups composed in terms of age, length of service, gender, job grades and education with regard to their responses to equalising opportunities.

4.2 Eradicating discrimination

This pillar refers to issues such as the identification and removal of discrimination as well as the eradication of differential benefits. The mean item scores for importance and contribution of this pillar are shown in figure 2.

Importance

It is clear that in general the managers agree on the need for the eradication of discrimination in the workplace. However, where activities relate to eradicating discrimination by means of adjusting certain human resource management practices in order to facilitate the preferential treatment of affirmative action employees, the respondents were negative and they viewed such practices as unimportant (eg adjusting promotion systems to favour affirmative action candidates). They were also clearly negative about the idea of favouring the appointment of traditionally disadvantaged persons who possess minimum entry qualifications but who are not as well qualified as their white male counterparts. In terms of the different modalities of affirmative action, these managers therefore reject the intermediate modality.

The managers were however especially positive about very basic aspects such as equal access to infrastructure (such as social functions, canteen facilities and change rooms) and equal, non-discriminatory conditions of work for all employees.

Contribution

From the responses of managers regarding the actual contribution of the various aspects to the implementation of affirmative action in their departments/ sections/teams, the pattern is essentially the same, with access to social activities and physical facilities considered to contribute most, followed by the eradication of discrimination in policies and conditions of service. The eradication of other *qualitative* aspects was also viewed as being important, followed by the provision of additional training and development. Managers also agreed on the value of regular communication about affirmative action in the workplace.

However, the managers were uncertain whether making the workforce more representative by the active integration of traditionally disadvantaged groups into the organisation and the proactive recruitment and advancement of these groups was actually contributing to the successful implementation of affirmative action in their departments/sections/teams. Practices or activities with regard to the favouring of disadvantaged persons in appointments and the adjustment of promotion and advancement systems to favour affirmative action candidates for employment were not considered to contribute to the implementation of affirmative action in the respondents' departments/sections/teams.

FIGURE 2: MEAN ITEM SCORES FOR PILLAR 2: ERADICATING DISCRIMINATION



* Items in columns A and B (Section II) that refer to eradicating discrimination

Differences between importance and contribution

In terms of the differences between the means of activities with regard to importance (column A) and contribution (column B), it is notable from figure 2 that the biggest gap exists in respect of the communication of affirmative action policies and plans. Huge gaps also exist in respect of making the workforce more representative at all levels and across all functions and in relation to the provision of additional training and development to traditionally disadvantaged employees in order to facilitate the eradication of past injustices.

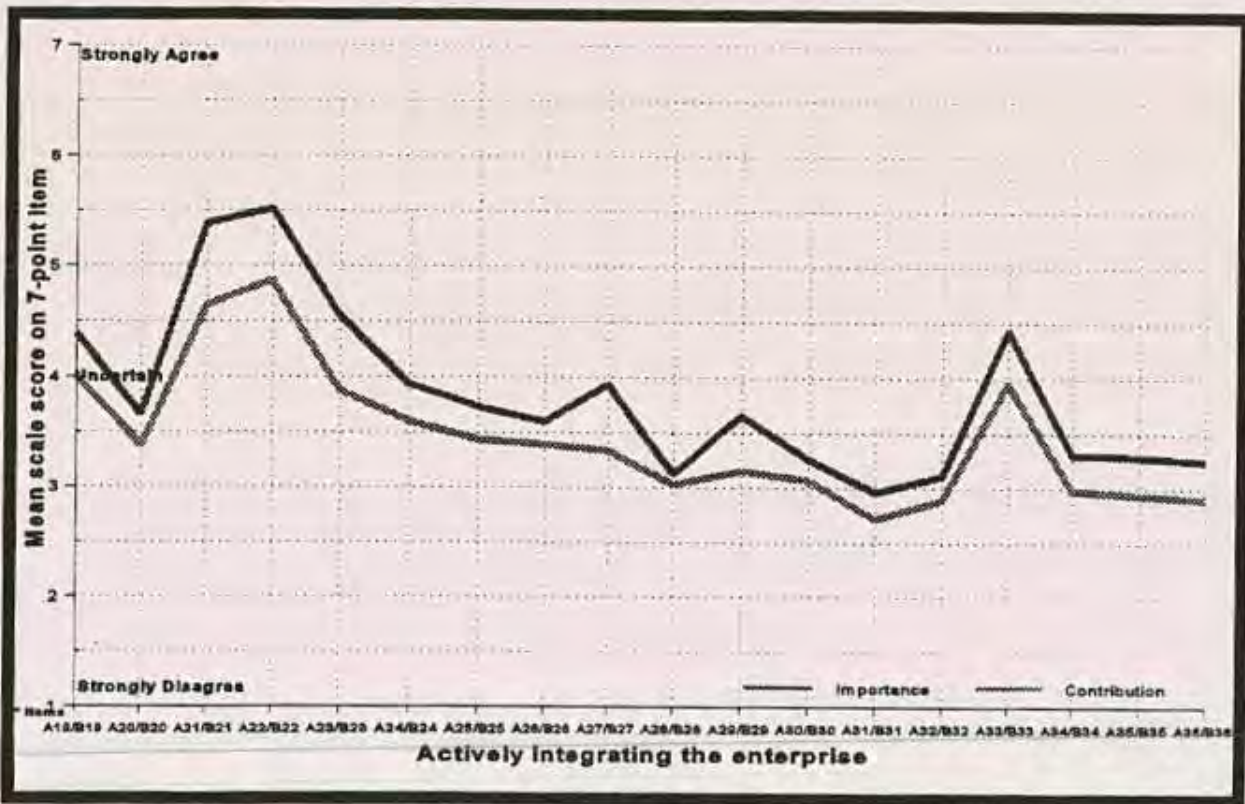
Differences in biographical variables

No significant statistical differences were found between subgroups composed in terms of functional area, age, length of service, gender, Paterson job grades, race or education.

4.3 Actively integrating affirmative action into the organisation

As explained earlier, pillar 3 refers to the alignment of affirmative action with the general management of the organisation and in particular with human resource planning practices such as the setting of targets and objectives, the earmarking of vacancies and "space creation". The mean scores for importance and contribution in respect of the items relating to this pillar are shown in figure 3.

FIGURE 3 MEAN ITEM SCORES FOR PILLAR 3: ACTIVELY INTEGRATING THE ORGANISATION



*Items in columns A and B (section II) which refer to actively integrating the enterprise

Importance

It is clear from the responses that the attendance of workforce diversity programmes and the integration of affirmative action appointees by means of succession management, followed by the participation of managers who are specifically appointed to facilitate and enhance affirmative action in general in ongoing team discussions, were regarded as the important factors for making affirmative action an integral part of organisational fabric. None of the other interventions that are registered as important in the literature on the integration of affirmative action into the organisation were viewed as important by management.

In respect of certain practices the managers were even negative. They are opposed to the earmarking of certain vacancies to be filled by race groups other than whites, they feel rather strongly negative about the idea of specifically creating positions for affirmative action employees (this does not refer to positions created for development purposes as per item 33 though - about which they are far more positive) and they definitely don't believe vacancies that occur as a result of general staff turnover should be filled exclusively by members of the traditionally disadvantaged groups.

Contribution

According to the responses of managers in respect of the actual contribution made by some of these aspects towards the implementation of affirmative action in their departments/sections/teams, the managers did not consider that any of these interventions made a contribution, apart from succession management and the presentation and attendance of workforce diversity programmes.

Differences between importance and contribution

As far as the differences between importance and actual contribution are concerned, the gaps were the greatest in respect of diversity programmes and succession management and also in respect of special measures to speed up the process of accommodating the disabled.

Differences in biographical variables

Significant statistical differences were only found in respect of tenure groups and race. Although the Scheffé results were not significant at the 0,005 level as far as tenure groups were concerned, it appears from the means that the main differences lie between the groups with 20 years of service and more and the groups with fewer years of service. It would appear that the persons with 20 years of service and more feel much more uncertain about creating space for affirmative action candidates than do respondents with fewer years of service. This is important because most of the respondents in each of the categories were persons with 20 years of service and more. However, they appear to view training and development interventions more positively.

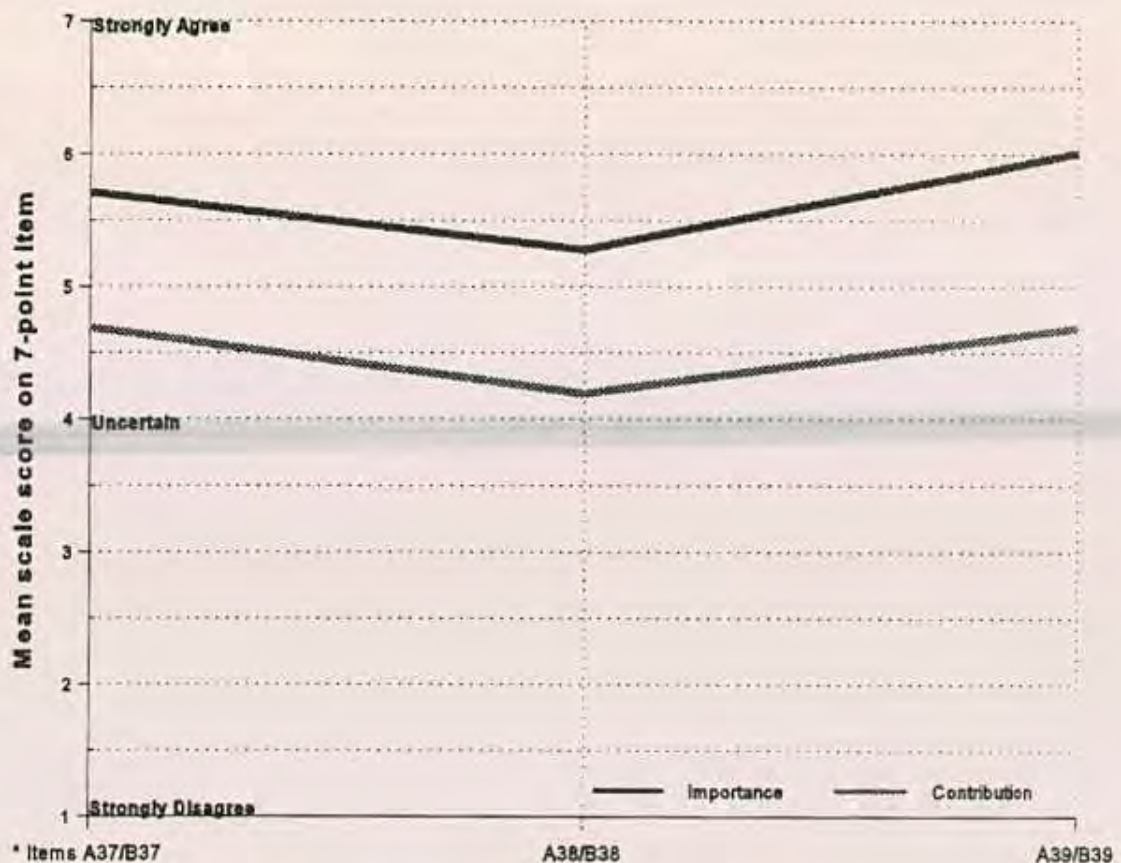
As far as race is concerned, white respondents differed from black respondents as regards a few of the items. Blacks believe more strongly that it is crucial that managers' performance in implementing affirmative action should be evaluated. The literature suggests that managers' evaluation of affirmative action objectives is an important intervention for reaching the goal of integrating the organisation. Whites, on the other hand, do not consider such evaluation to be

important. Blacks also regard the filling and earmarking of vacancies for people from the traditionally disadvantaged groups as more important than whites do.

4.4 Acting affirmatively in the community

This pillar covered the involvement of the organisation in special school projects, in small business development and social investment. The mean item scores for importance and contribution of this pillar are shown in figure 4.

FIGURE 4: MEAN ITEM SCORES FOR PILLAR 4: ACTING AFFIRMATIVELY IN THE COMMUNITY



Acting affirmatively in the community

*Items in columns A and B (section II) which refer to acting affirmatively in the community

Importance

All the activities relating to community involvement were viewed positively by managers in terms of their importance for the implementation of affirmative action.

Contribution

According to the responses, the managers agreed that involvement in special school projects and the organisation's involvement in the community at large contribute to the successful implementation of affirmative action. However, they were uncertain whether small business development contributed.

Differences between importance and contribution

In terms of the differences between importance and contribution it is clear from the research results that huge gaps exist in respect of all three of the issues covered by these questionnaire items. The greatest shortfall in terms of actual contribution relative to importance relate to the organisation's involvement in the community at large.

Differences in biographical variables

No statistical differences were found between subgroups composed in terms of functional area, age, length of service, gender, Paterson job grades, or education.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The four pillars in the model, namely, equalising opportunities, eradicating discrimination, actively integrating the organisation and acting affirmatively in the community, will form the basis of the discussion of the research conclusions.

5.1 Equalising opportunities

From the literature the issues relating to equalising opportunities are regarded as extremely important for the successful implementation of affirmative action in organisations. The managers that completed the questionnaires in the survey underlying this article also generally rate these issues as important for the successful implementation of affirmative action in the said organisation.

However, the mean scores regarding their views on the actual contribution of these activities to the successful implementation of affirmative action in their departments/sections/teams, were significantly lower, which indicates that problems are being experienced with implementation in those areas. More particularly, the managers were clearly not positive about the availability of sufficient numbers of affirmative action candidates. It can be speculated that this viewpoint specifically relates to the availability of candidates who are suitably qualified. This speculation becomes an even greater probability if one takes into consideration the fact that the respondents were also not very positive about the extent to which increased and accelerated training and development of affirmative action candidates is taking place and actually contributing to the implementation of affirmative action in their departments/sections/teams, and neither were they positive about the contribution made by accelerated supervisory and management development to support the advancement of affirmative action candidates into management levels.

Linking all of this to the fact that the respondents viewed "open and honest performance feedback to affirmative action employees so that they can fulfil their potential" as an extremely important prerequisite for the successful implementation of affirmative action in the said organisation, clearly

indicates that the approach preferred by the respondents in order to equalise opportunities, and their views on where the actual major shortcoming in respect of this pillar of policy implementation lies in their workplace, is the longer term developmental approach.

As mentioned in the introduction, affirmative action ought to be about transforming the people side of our organisations, and as Charlton and Van Niekerk (1994) point out, change cannot be achieved by quick-fix solutions. From the literature on the topic of affirmative action in South Africa it has been clear over the past five years at least that most of the experts have been propagating a longer term developmental approach. The research results therefore confirm that managers view this approach as superior and also that there is a general perception that this approach is lacking in the organisation in question. The approach to equalising opportunities, according to the research results, ought to be performance driven and this requires training and development - both formal off-the-job and on-the-job training.

In order for training and development in the workplace (departments/sections/teams) to successfully equalise opportunities while at the same time enhancing the competitiveness of the organisation, it is important that training be tied as directly as possible to work performance and business objectives. A way to address this is by structured "performance coaching", where the employee (affirmative action candidate) receives on-the-job knowledge, but at the same time his or her potential is developed and performance strengths identified. This has to be the responsibility of the line manager, not the human resource specialist. It is also a structured and ongoing process of identifying potential candidates, developing them by means of formal training as well as on the job coaching and mentoring and in this way gradually but purposefully preparing them for the 'real thing'.

Performance coaching, combined with appropriate employee rewards, raises the self-esteem of employees, enhances their commitment and their contributions to the organisation, and improves their performance. It is logical that if this type of development results in new skills and measurable performance improvement as well as confident and realistically ambitious employees, then the organisation will receive a good return once all of this impacts positively on the actual business performance of the organisation. At the same time, healthy and positive relations with employees can be built up. These relationships are the foundations of "performance coaching" and are of vital importance for the successful implementation of affirmative action in the organisation.

5.2 Eradicating discrimination

There is no doubt that much has been achieved in eradicating overt discrimination in many South African organisations. Unfair discrimination is prohibited by the country's Constitution, it has been clearly defined in the Labour Relations Act (66 of 1995) and it now forms the topic of chapter 2 of the EEA as such. The EEA proscribes any form of direct or indirect unfair discrimination by any employer on any arbitrary ground - and it contains a list of no less than twenty such grounds on which discrimination is not allowed (such as race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, etc). This aspect of eradicating unfair discrimination has therefore almost become one which is generally considered necessary. As such it could have been anticipated that the respondents would be positive about measures to eradicate discrimination in the organisation in question.

Rather surprisingly, however - or perhaps even disturbingly - certain aspects were viewed rather negatively by the respondents. Nearly all these aspects in columns A and B that were viewed

negatively by the respondents from the point of view of eradicating discrimination relate to the adjustment of criteria or systems in order to enhance the appointment or advancement of traditionally disadvantaged persons. The managers were extremely negative about favouring affirmative action candidates for promotions or employment and advancing them in preference to white males.

Since it is hardly foreseeable that progress can be made with affirmative action unless such measures are taken - in view of the general growth rate in employment creation and the fact that international pressure to be competitive are forcing organisations to become more "lean and mean" - such negative views point to a prevailing resistance and some form of an attitudinal problem regarding an accelerated and purposeful effort to employ and advance people from the designated groups in order to do away with the injustices caused by the discriminatory practices of the past. Although the managers are positive about basic aspects such as access to facilities, there is great cause for concern about resistance to any form of measures that might be perceived as having a negative impact on the career advancement of existing managers.

The issue of "white fears" therefore seems to be with us still, and if affirmative action is not to cause deteriorating relationships and poorer performance, this is an issue that will require serious attention: "What are employers going to do to alleviate white fears and resistance to measures that may be viewed or experienced by these managers as career limiting, 'reversed discrimination' and as generally demoralising?" One thing is quite certain, few South African organisations can afford to allow existing managers to become more negative, less committed, or less productive or performance driven owing to negative attitudes. So, if such negative attitudes are picked up by means of a survey such as the one underlying this article, the crucial thing is that this should lead to definite action to address these attitudes. Otherwise affirmative action will become something that will eventually be to the detriment of all.

Another interesting finding relates to the difference in means (between importance and contribution) with regard to the communication of affirmative action policies and plans at departmental/sectional/team level. It is well known that strategy and policy implementation requires that all the relevant details be known by those who actually have to implement the strategy or policy. The "implementors" have to be knowledgeable, understand and actually buy into whatever policy they have to implement. If not, the all too frequently found gap between policy/strategy and practice will be present. In the organisation in question this definitely seems to be a potential problem that may hamper the successful implementation of affirmative action. Whenever there is a lack of information and common understanding as to what the actual details regarding affirmative action policies and plans are, uncertainties, assumptions and aspects like rumour mongering can easily start creating a negative spiral that may ultimately derail efforts to make a success of affirmative action.

5.3 Actively integrating affirmative action into the organisation

This pillar seems to be closely linked to the more progressive elements of the pillar dealing with the eradication of discrimination as discussed above. From the responses of managers to the items relating to the active integration of affirmative action candidates into the organisation, it is clear that these are considered to be poorly implemented and that the managers do not even feel that many of these are important, although, according to the literature, they are in fact extremely important.

Again, the issue of affirmative action measures that may be perceived as threatening by existing managers is illustrated by the research findings.

The fact that the managers oppose ideas such as “space creation”, the earmarking and exclusive filling of certain vacancies by non-whites and the creation of positions specifically for affirmative action appointments, all point to the fact that line management has not yet really accepted the urgency of the matter or their responsibility for taking rather drastic measures to get affirmative action implemented fairly quickly. The fears, apparent unwillingness and resistance to taking measures that may be viewed as having the potential to impact negatively on their own career prospects and that may favour affirmative action employees at a perceived cost to themselves are therefore definitely prevalent in the organisation under investigation, and these are - as mentioned previously - aspects that cannot be ignored.

Furthermore, blacks consider the fact that whites need to be evaluated in terms of the implementation of affirmative action more important than whites do. It is possible that those who have been the victims of discrimination in the workplace in the past appear to be more convinced of the need to adopt firm measures to redress the injustices of the past. Once again, there are clearly signs of resistance on the part of existing (white) managers.

5.4 Acting affirmatively in the community

From the research results it is clear that in a country with a history of discrimination and apartheid policies, taking affirmative action in the community is an important issue that organisations need to attend to. Fortunately, the overall assessment of this pillar was positive in all respects. The managers realise that the damage done by the unfair discriminatory practices of the past has had an impact that goes beyond the immediate working environment. An acceptance of the notion of the embeddedness of business organisations in society at large brings with it the acceptance of the responsibility of these organisations to implement affirmative action beyond the boundaries of their organisations. As such, social responsibility should perhaps no longer be viewed as anything other than a strategic business priority.

5.5 Recommendations

Taking into account the views of the managers who participated in this study on the importance and actual contribution made by various aspects to the successful implementation of affirmative action in their departments/sections/teams, a number of recommendations can be made:

- Adopt a realistic and longer term perspective and utilise the developmental approach. Devote a lot of resources to the identification of employee potential among members of the designated groups. Integrate the identification of potential with investments in appropriate training and development efforts and make extensive use of aspects such as performance management, succession planning, coaching and mentoring.
- Become more “socially responsible”. Get involved in community development and especially in scholarship programmes. Identify people with high potential through the organisation’s community scholarship programmes and mathematics and science education programmes. These peoples should be accorded special attention in training and development for serious technical and engineering careers.

- Place less emphasis on psychometric tests and qualifications and more on the potential and competencies required to do the work and the abilities of individuals.
- Regular and proper communication of affirmative action policies and plans at workplace level should be implemented more effectively.
- In light of the respondents' negative views, fears and apparent resistance to the intermediate and strong modalities of affirmative action, it is suggested that the following be considered:
 - The concept of 'suitably qualified' should be carefully defined and applied and the underlying reasons and potential implications should be workshopped well with existing managers who feel threatened. Selection criteria included in the concept of suitably qualified should put a very high premium on competence and ability to perform on the job. The appointment of incompetent people who are not quite suitably qualified should be avoided and the fears and concerns of existing managers in terms of their own career prospects should be properly addressed.
 - Tests which reflect educational achievements should be used with caution. Measured potential and proven performance and competencies should be the most important criteria.
 - Evaluations should be done by peers, supervisors and subordinates who are able to contribute. Negative reports should only be accepted if they consistently reflect a particular failing.
- Integrate stress and diversity workshops to address the fears and issues that are stressful for people responsible for implementing affirmative action and those affected by affirmative action interventions.
- Ensure that the management of diversity workshops also focus on the individual. In order to change attitudes and perceptions it is recommended that serious attention be given to helping managers (and other employees) to learn aspects such as the following:
 - how to understand their inner conversations ("inner theatre") and the role their self-confidence plays in their own performance and the influence this has on others
 - to move away from seeing the world on one level and to create the ability to differentiate and reintegrate according to changed circumstances
 - skills in communicating with themselves and others so that they effectively use both their own skills and abilities and those of others according to prevailing circumstances

From the research it is clear that further investigations need to be conducted to find solutions to the problem of how to motivate existing white managers with fewer future career prospects or a perceived reduction in opportunities.

It is also clear that surveys on the opinions of various stakeholders regarding the implementation of affirmative action in South African organisations can provide very valuable information that may assist in the process of working towards 'true' employment equity.

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ANNEXURE A: The means and standard deviations of the items of column A (importance) and column B (contribution) with regard to the four pillars

COLUMN A (IMPORTANCE)			COLUMN B (CONTRIBUTION)		
Item no	Mean	Standard deviation	Item no	Mean	Standard deviation
PILLAR 1: EQUALISING OPPORTUNITY					
01	6,1950	1,0257	01	5,3417	1,4818
02	5,5100	1,4665	02	4,6632	1,8226
03	5,2110	1,6623	03	4,2828	1,9252
04	5,1400	1,6746	04	4,5025	1,8144
05	5,0450	1,6933	05	4,3467	1,7767
06	6,5550	0,7208	06	5,5858	1,5479
07	5,4874	1,4663	07	4,7878	1,7263
08	5,5879	1,5443	08	4,7828	1,7004
PILLAR 2: ERADICATING DISCRIMINATION					
09	2,2850	1,7083	09	2,4494	1,6168
10	5,1407	1,7056	10	4,3869	1,7454
11	5,9300	1,1755	11	5,0202	1,6978
12	5,8100	1,2253	12	5,2160	1,5434
13	4,8850	1,6810	13	4,3015	1,7084
14	2,7200	1,7106	14	2,7424	1,6461
15	6,6550	0,6543	15	6,3417	1,0701
16	6,6231	0,7612	16	6,3451	1,1123
17	6,6300	0,7250	17	6,2110	1,2414
18	5,8693	1,5351	18	5,4292	1,6223
PILLAR 3: ACTIVELY INTEGRATING THE ORGANISATION					
19	4,4070	2,0425	19	4,0151	1,9209
20	3,6683	2,0963	20	3,3756	1,8464
21	5,3857	1,4439	21	4,6428	1,6501
22	5,5226	1,4558	22	4,8787	1,6996
23	4,5577	1,8244	23	3,8888	1,8325
24	3,9396	1,9787	24	3,6060	1,8293
25	3,7300	1,9815	25	3,4371	1,7594
26	3,6000	1,9873	26	3,3919	1,7801
27	3,9450	1,9210	27	3,3417	1,7791
28	3,1350	2,0291	28	3,0301	1,8611
29	3,6650	2,0625	29	3,1557	1,7868
30	3,2663	2,0011	30	3,0707	1,7840
31	2,6984	1,8172	31	2,7272	1,6849
32	3,1161	1,9068	32	2,8974	1,7140
33	4,4422	1,7423	33	3,9696	1,8049
34	3,3147	1,7878	34	2,9898	1,6505
35	3,2900	1,7030	35	2,9447	1,5576
36	3,2500	1,7500	36	2,9045	1,5909
PILLAR 4: ACTING AFFIRMATIVELY IN THE COMMUNITY					
37	5,7135	1,3938	37	4,6938	1,7681
38	5,2842	1,6036	38	4,1989	1,8330
39	6,0150	1,2338	39	4,6969	1,8411