**Equal Employment Opportunity and its links to the participation of women in the Construction Industry: The Case of Australia**

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Australia is currently experiencing a resources boom and jobs in the male dominated fields of construction and engineering are at a premium. Employment in the construction industry, historically and today, is overwhelmingly male and, with an ageing population this predominately older male workforce will be retiring in greater numbers in the coming decade. Despite more that 25 years of anti- discrimination legislation and equal opportunity legislation these industries still employ few women in operational roles. This paper investigates the issue of the low representation of women in the construction industry. Our investigation involves the analysis of 95 organisation progress reports on the equal opportunity strategic programs in the construction industry. Findings indicate that this industry is not engaging with equal employment opportunity programs and further that equity outcomes for women in the industry are not evident.

**The Construction Industry**

The construction industry is the most male dominated of all industries worldwide. It is the most male dominated industry in the UK (an OECD country) with 16% women employed but two-thirds of these in clerical roles (Fielden, Davidson, Gale and Davey 2001). In Nigeria (a non-OECD country) Adeyemi, Ojo, Aina and Olanipekun (2006) identify that the construction industry is the core of Nigeria’s economy and responsible for 70% of the fixed capital formation with more that 3 million workers of which few are women. In Australia the construction industry is the fourth largest contributor to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and accounted for 6.8% of GDP in 2008-09. In employment terms it is Australia's fourth largest industry and as at May 2009 it employed 984,100 people representing 9.1% of the total workforce. This makes the construction industry the fourth largest employer, only exceeded by the Retail Trade (11.2%), Health Care and Social Assistance (11.0%) and Manufacturing (9.2%) (ABS 2010a). Only 12% of construction industry workers are women indicating a high degree of horizontal segregation (ABS 2013). In common with the pattern in many other countries, most women are in support roles. A high degree of vertical segregation is obvious with only 16.1% of managers and less than 1.9% of CEOs being women (EOWA 2011).

The rationales for the lack of women in construction are plentiful. Numerous studies, undertaken predominately in the UK, indicate that the image and reputation of a male culture in construction has been identified as a primary reason (Cartwright & Gale 1995; Dainty, Bagilhole and Neale 2001; Fielden, Davidson, Gale and Davey 2001; Worral, Harris, Stewart, Thomas and McDermott 2010). Cartwright and Gale (1995) found that the organisational culture is particularly masculine and that education acts as its gatekeeper, restricting access to that industry by women. This is particularly true for women in project management. Dainty, Baglihole and Neale (2001), in interviewing 82 matched pairs of women and men in construction found that men gain promotion more rapidly than women, particularly during the first ten years of their careers. HRM practices that maintain current workplace environments were valued by men to support their careers. While men resisted changes to the construction culture, women’s priorities were to create a change in workplace culture to facilitate their equal participation particularly through access to greater flexibility of work practice. Fielden, Davidson, Gale and Davey (2001) used a series of focus groups from four areas within the construction industry including building contractors, housing associations, construction organisations and one group of EEO change agents to identify poor image and reputation of the construction industry as the primary barrier with limited terms and conditions of employment; lack of training provided by the industry; male networks and word of mouth recruitment. In addition, they found prejudice against all those not fitting the acceptable stereotype of young, white, male, working full-time, and negative attitudes towards women which acted as barriers for women. Worrall et al (2010) interviewed more than 230 construction workers and conducted nine focus groups of women working in the industry and, once again, the male dominated culture and inflexible working practices were identified as the main barriers to women working and being promoted in the industry.

In perpetuating the male dominated culture in the industry, Ellison (2001) found the very low representation of women within senior management groups has meant biased decision-making by a male dominated core. Using the findings from 2000 surveys of female and male surveyors, Ellison found that despite women and men having equal educational qualifications, women remain under promoted in comparison with men, yet women are not physiologically or rationally disinclined to invest time, money or effort into the advancement of their careers in this sector. Adeyemi et al (2006) identified one perpetuating factor of the male dominated culture in construction, that of women themselves. In interviews with female professionals in the construction industry in Nigeria, it was found that women viewed some jobs as suitable to women and some for men. Specifically, outside jobs were viewed as male and inside jobs viewed as female. It was determined that this was due to the hot tropical sun in Nigeria.

While women do not participate equally in the construction industry worldwide and those who do work in predominately service roles, there are women making inroads into traditional male jobs in construction. Those who do remain in the industry often occupy special niches to avoid the male culture (Gale 1994) or develop bespoke long-term careers for individuality and to avoid any resistance through the male dominated culture (Dainty, Baglihole and Neale 2001).

**Segregation in the Labour Market**

Occupational segregation by sex remains an issue worldwide despite the attention, research and equal opportunity legislation that has existed in many countries for more than 40 years. The term describes the propensity for women and men to work in different occupations (Blackburn, Browne, Brooks and Jarman 2002) and ultimately links this to the disadvantage women experience in pay, opportunity and benefits. Anker (1997) points out that occupational segregation is endemic across all regions, all economic levels, in all political systems, all religious, social and cultural environments, and that it is the most enduring aspect of labour markets around the world. It is more prevalent, however, in wealthy industrial countries (Blackburn et al 2002). Occupational segregation is a major source of labour market rigidity and economic inefficiency due to waste of human resources:

Excluding a majority of workers from a majority of occupations, as at present, is wasteful of human resources, increases labour market inflexibility, and reduces an economy’s ability to adjust to change. With the globalization of production and intensified international competition, these factors have assumed greater importance (Anker 1997:315).

The implications of job segregation are of major concern. Anker (1997) believes that these include equity matters such as pay differentials between men and women and the negative effects of how men view women and how women view themselves. These factors, and their consequences including mortality, morbidity, poverty, and income inequality, are not the only reasons that job segregation is disturbing. Both horizontal and vertical segregation are important. In countries examined by Blackburn, Brooks and Jarman (2001), namely Britain, the USA and Greece, it is the horizontal component of job segregation that is greater but both are important and need explanation. In determining whether gender segregation amounts to inequality, Blackburn et al (2002:514) conclude that

vertical segregation and only vertical segregation measures the component of inequality. It measures inequality among *all* occupations giving a single vertical dimension….The horizontal component is orthogonal to the vertical one, and so measures the extent of occupational difference without any element of inequality.

In explaining job segregation’s persistence, Acker (2006) identifies ‘inequality regimes’ which underpin the systemic disparities in organisational outcomes that include (but are not limited to) opportunities of promotion, pay and job security. Inequality regimes are ‘loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions and meanings that results in and maintain class, gender and racial inequalities within particular organisations’ (Acker 2009:201). This inequality is implemented through practices firmly entrenched in human resources (HR) research and practice (Berry and Bell 2012) such as the organisation of work, pay, monetary rewards, benefits and, according to Acker (2006), these practices continue to underpin the gender, racial and class differences in poverty that exist in society. The ways in which organisations reproduce inequality is through markedly different pay, benefits, and levels of flexibility and autonomy within jobs, through unequal job classifications systems, and biased hiring and promotion practices.

Research into addressing occupational segregation suggests two approaches: the multifarious and the homogenous. Due to the array of causes and the burgeoning differential outcomes, Anker (1997) suggests multiple policies and programs are needed to address the burden of family responsibilities placed on women, stereotyping and prejudice against women; educational policies to open access to non-traditional occupations for both women and men; and equal opportunity and affirmative action to open new opportunities for women and men. On the other hand, Tam (1997) and Tomakovic-Devy and Skaggs (2002) emphasise the importance of training and suggest that the devaluation of women’s wages is a factor of the lower training time offered to some work. In the gendering of work it is most often these roles with lower training time that are allocated to women: ‘Being a woman seems to be a major barrier to on-the-job training. Women with aspirations to high earnings may find they have to follow the education route because of exclusion from more informal training opportunities in many workplaces’ (Tomakovic-Devy and Skaggs 2002:123).

Both these approaches highlight the importance of organisational policies and practices. Greater attention, for example, is needed at the organisational level examining how careers are embedded in organisations and how managers and supervisors make the hiring decisions (Browne and Kennedy 1999; Perry, Davis-Blake and Kulik 1994). However, the ability of organisational practices alone to deliver equality in practice has been questioned. In exploring whether policies designed to achieve equality of opportunity can be effectively delivered through managerial prerogative or through legislation, Dickens (1999:13) argues that ‘the market tends to produce discrimination, not equality’ and leaving equal opportunity to individual organisations is an insecure foundation for the overall improvement for women or members of minority groups. Noon (2007) elaborates on this ‘business case’ approach by suggesting employers take a short-term focus on equity issues as well as taking a blinkered view of what constitutes a benefit for an organisation.

Over the past decades countries worldwide have been implementing various types of legislation requiring or encouraging employers to address discrimination in employment, and encourage equal opportunity for employees to overcome the disadvantage members of some groups experience in the workplace due in part segregation and the inequity that results. Australia is a good case study to examine both organisational practice and the impact of legislation which mandates certain practices. The combination of anti-discrimination legislation and equal opportunity legislation which promotes practices specific to each organisation means that the impact of the organisational and legislative approaches can be assessed, at least to some degree.

**Equal Employment Opportunity**

Equal opportunity legislation has been argued to have improved the employment status of women around the globe (Thornton 1990; Cockburn 1991; Still 1993; Konrad and Linnehan 1995; Sheridan 1995; French 2001; French and Maconachie 2004). While there has been a lack of evaluation by independent researchers (Konrad and Linnehan 1995) and limited assessment of equal opportunity legislation, its implementation remains complex, with the general consensus being that women have made occupational gains since the introduction of the legislation (Still 1993; Strachan, Burgess and Sullivan 2004). However, the extent to which legislation has influenced the change is still being debated. Konrad and Linnehan (1995) confirmed the importance of regulation for the imposition and inducement of unpopular organisational change but identified that institutional pressure is also an important element of equal opportunity as it determines administrative structures used in addressing disparity. They suggest both the majority and protected groups have difficulty accepting administrative structures designed to address disparity through affirmative action. Yet, it is proactive affirmative action which correlates with increased participation of women.

As well as legislation, Kanter (1976) supports the use of specific policies to encourage equal opportunity. Social structural policies or those that challenge biased organisational structures and decision-making are identified as influencing outcomes for increased participation of women. Despite their considerable use in Australian organisations, Sheridan (1998) recommended more proactive policies that include work and family balance issues to recognise the limitations that family roles have placed on women in the past. French and Maconachie (2004) note that equity management policies that recognize role-related differences and gender specific EEO structures of support including mentoring and networks for women, particularly in isolated male dominated areas of work, are predictors of increased numbers of women in management, whereas, the use of social structural policies are not predictive of increased numbers of women in management.

The use of a combination of both various EEO structures and policies are increasingly reported. Liff (1999) notes that those organisations currently awarded in Britain for their equal opportunity policies are those that are implementing side by side policies that show positive action with those that present a more radical challenge for organisational culture and practice. Multiple implementations of different equity management strategies are increasingly recommended (Sheridan 1998; Liff 1999; Dickens 2000; French 2005). Liff (1999) also identifies the need for social regulation in addition to legal regulation through consultation with employees and their unions as an important further requirement in equity management to ensure employee needs are included on the equity agenda.

The difficulty faced by women working in non-traditional industries and occupations is recognised as being different from women working in traditional areas or from men working in female dominated workplaces. Previous arguments that men and women gravitate toward different types of jobs based on the innate differences in the sexes (McIntyre 1994) have largely been replaced by discussion of the deeply embedded gendered cultures of work and the problems of reconciling promotion and family responsibilities (Bagilhole 2002). This study investigates the EEO strategies and practices employed by more than 90 organisations in the Australian construction industry in 2010 to determine if these strategies are a predictor of increased numbers of women in construction or in construction management.

**The Australian Workforce**

There has been a significant increase in participation of women in the Australian labour force over the last 50 years. In 2012 women's participation was 65.2%, almost double that of 1961 (34%) (ABS 2013) which ranks Australia 14th among OECD nations (n=34). Women constitute more than 40% of the workforce. Changing social attitudes, the availability of safe contraception and planned parenting, as well as adequate child care facilities have all helped women develop their careers. The growth in the availability of part-time work and flexible work practice has also helped. A higher proportion of women now return to work after having children than ever before. There is also considerable diversity now in how families participate in the labour force. The traditional male breadwinner arrangements have declined since the 1960s, and now both partners of families are more likely to be employed. People have access to more paid leave entitlements and types of leave than those of 50 years ago the latest being the national Paid Parental Leave scheme which was introduced in January 2011. Other recent changes include the national industrial relations legislation, the *Fair Work Act 2009*, which effectively gives parents and others caring for young children the right to make formal requests for flexible work arrangements (Skinner and Pocock 2011; Burgess, French and Strachan 2010; Strachan 2010).

The type of jobs occupied 50 years ago in Australia reflected the importance of physical work predominantly associated with trades and lower skilled jobs, often referred to as blue collar work. The most common occupations in August 1966 were Tradesmen, production process workers and labourers (44%); Farmers, fishermen, timber getters (12%); and Clerical (9%). The shift away from production to service industries has reduced the opportunities for blue collar workers and increased the opportunities for white collar workers. The most common occupations in August 2011 were Professionals (22%); Clerical and administrative workers (15%); and Technicians and trades workers (14%) (6105.0 - Australian Labour Market Statistics, Oct 2011). There has been little change in the representation of women across industries in the past five years. Women constitute 79% of employees in the health care and social assistance industry, with education at training at 70%, retail trade 55% and accommodation and food services 54%. Women are under-represented in the traditional male industries: women comprise only 12% of employees in the construction industry, 15% in the mining industry and 21% in the transport industry (ABS 2013). However these percentages include those in clerical and sales positions, occupations in which women usually dominate.

The Australian workforce is characterised by gender segregation on both occupational and hierarchical grounds. The gender pay gap in Australia was 17.5% in 2012, comparable to the level almost two decades ago in 1994. In the construction industry the gap is 17.7% (EOWA 2012a). While women occupy many professional positions and lower levels of management, they are only 9.7% of executive key management personnel and 4.3% of the CEOs (EOWA 2012b).

**Equal Opportunity Legislation in Australia**

Australia has used two major legislative paths in tackling discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity at work. Anti-discrimination legislation has existed since 1975, variously incorporating the ground of gender since that date. Most significantly, the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* focused specific attention on this issue particularly in employment. The Act specifically includes sexual harassment, and includes clauses that mean that not only the employee but also the employer can be held responsible for the sexual harassment as the employer may be ‘vicariously liable’ for the action of the employee. In order to avoid this, the employer must be able to show that they have taken all ‘reasonable steps’ to avoid the occurrence of sexual harassment. At a minimum, this should include an organisational sexual harassment policy which is implemented and monitors, and procedures in place to deal with any instances (Hor 2012: 83-84). The second form of legislation was first introduced in 1986 and amended in 1999 as the *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act* with the aim to promote the elimination of discrimination and provision of equal opportunity for women and ‘the principle that employment for women should be dealt with on the basis of merit’ (section 2A). In 2012 this Act was replaced by *Workplace Gender Equality Act* in order to ‘focus on promoting and improving gender equality and outcomes for both women and men in the workplace’ (WGEA 2012). However, this paper analyses reports under the 1999 Act, as organisations have not yet reported under the new legislation.

The *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999* required all private sector organisations with 100 or more employees to submit an equal opportunity progress report reports on EEO strategies in seven areas specifically Recruitment and Selection; Promotion and Transfer; Training and Development; Work Organisation; Conditions of Employment; Sexual Harassment; Pregnancy and Breastfeeding. In any one year more than 2000 organisations in Australia submit an EEO progress report. This Act and its successor potentially go to the heart of organisational issues that are seen to be critically important for women in the construction industry. Issues such as recruitment, promotion, training, conditions of work and modes of employment as well as sexual harassment have to be specifically addressed by organisations in their reports. Under the 1999 Act there were no minimum standards (these have been introduced in the 2012 Act) and organisations were required to examine their own employment statistics and policies and take specific steps to enhance equality for women (Strachan, Burgess and Henderson 2007). However, as already discussed, despite almost thirty years of equal employment opportunity legislation requiring organisations to address any discrimination and overcome gender role differences at work women are still underrepresented across many of the traditional male dominated work arenas.

**Method**

This paper explores the equal opportunity progress reports of 95 construction companies to identify whether current intervention strategies are predictive, or not, of increased numbers of women employed in these organisations.

Data Gathering

The research was undertaken using secondary data gathered from information provided by 91 construction organisations reporting in one year to the Australian Government (specifically the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency) on their equity management practices. In 2011-12, 90 construction organisations submitted EEO progress reports to the Agency. The progress report, which becomes a public document, must detail the workplace profile of men and women and their job roles, the equal opportunity issues specific across seven (7) employment matters and strategies for addressing these issues as well as priorities of actions taken and future plans. For this study appropriate reports were downloaded from the Agency’s Online Searchable Database of Reports in May 2012 (EOWA 2012c). In order to be waived from annual reporting, (where the latest report is held by the Agency in confidence and is not publicly available) an organisation’s application must clearly demonstrate that it has analysed its workplace to identify the equal opportunity issues for women; taken all reasonably practicable measures to address each issue; and been compliant with the legislation for at least three consecutive years (EOWA 2006a).

In this project, content analysis of each progress report was undertaken of the organisational profile; the EEO issues identified by the organisation across the seven (7) employment matters and actions prioritised, and future plans. Content analysis measures the semantic content of the message and is ‘a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of a communication’ (Emory and Cooper 1991:457). The classification of the content analysis is addressed in the following section. Information was recorded in an SPSS data base.

Measures

1. Employment Profile. Employment details of men and women in specific job roles were aggregated to four main categories: management (including senior executives, management; supervisory staff, and professional staff), operations (including maintenance, technicians, trades and miscellaneous personnel); sales, and clerical staff.

2. EEO Approaches. The seven employment matters reported on are: recruitment and selection; promotion and transfer; training and development; work organisation; conditions of employment; addressing sexual harassment; pregnancy and breastfeeding policies. Information on each of the seven employment matters was classified according to the equal opportunity approach taken by the organisation. The classifications utilised were those identified by French (2001) in a typology of equity management approaches based on distributive structure, that is equal/equitable treatment through gender specific and non-gender specific procedures, and implementation strategies, that is activities compliant with legislation or following non-legislative recommendations. The classifications are as follows:

No reporting: This classification was used when no comments were made, or issues identified or no strategies outlined at all on any one or all of the seven employment matters.

Traditional:The traditional classification was used to identify an approach that refutes discrimination plays any role in workplace disparity between different employee groups and supports the different treatment of individuals in the workplace based on the choices made by individuals. This approach advocates against the specific implementation of equity measures, instead calling on women and minority groups to make different educational and lifestyle choices in order to create change (French 2001). In this study comments such as, *‘recruitment and selection is always based on the best match between the prospective candidate to the skills and competencies set out in the job description’; ‘women are mainly employed in clerical positions’; ‘when vacancies arise they are advertised externally and internally to ascertain the best person for the position’;*

Anti-discrimination: The anti-discrimination classification was used to identify an approach that acknowledges the importance of the removal of discriminatory practices and processes in order to offer equal treatment based on human rights principles. This approach fulfils the requirements of anti-discrimination legislation such as the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984.* Equal employment opportunity activity limited to equal treatment and/or equal outcomes for men and women was classified as ‘anti-discrimination’ (French 2001; Konrad and Linnehan 1995). In this study comments such as *‘no [job] advertisement is gender biased’; ‘all staff have attended seminars on harassment and are aware of the responsibilities and their rights under the policy’; ‘7 of the 9 women on maternity leave have returned to work either in their previous position or a part time position for an agreed period of time’.* Also comments such as *‘Our policy is to treat men and women equally’* were included into this category.

EEO: The equal employment opportunity classification was used to identify an approach that acknowledges the importance of the removal of discriminatory practices as well as the adoption of special measures designed to assist members of disadvantaged groups, particularly women. This follows the usage of the term ‘affirmative action’ in the original Australian legislation (*Affirmative Action {Equal Opportunity for Women} Act 1986*): ‘Affirmative Action is based on recognition and acceptance of the fact that it is not sufficient to make specific acts of discrimination unlawful. Further steps are needed to relieve the effects of past discrimination, to eliminate present discrimination and to ensure that future discrimination does not occur’ (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 1984: 8). In this study reports on specific strategies such as apprentice or graduate programs for the recruitment of women were classified as affirmative action in nature. Examples include *‘we attempt to ensure that there is a female employee on the interviewing panel to ensure that all applicants are given a fair go’;* ‘*a mentoring process has been established, including coaching with study and career guidance and advice for a number of female employees’;* *‘we continue to provide remote access to the company’s computer systems so that staff with family responsibilities can work from home’.*

Gender diversity:The gender diversity classification was used to identify an approach that acknowledges the potential for bias and discrimination against women within organisational structures and supports the neutral treatment of all individuals based on organisational requirements as a means of addressing any discrimination. While there is debate about exactly what constitutes policies and programs variously labelled ‘diversity’ and ‘managing diversity’ (Bacchi 2000; Kirton and Greene 2005), we have used the term ‘gender diversity’ to incorporate elements of organisational change. In order to classify policies as gender diversity, organisations needed to include elements of culture change within the organisation. In our policy classification, the category of gender diversity can extend on affirmative action, seeking cultural and systems changes that address root causes of prejudice and develop the potential of every individual. Proactive equal employment opportunity activity that included specific treatment to address the potential for disadvantage for all workers or different needs of all workers not limited to gender and often including external measures such as enterprise bargaining and union advocacy were included in this categorisation. In this study reports that included leave opportunities that were the same for both genders and included maternity, paternity and adoption leaves were classified as diverse in nature. Examples included: ‘*the processes established for consideration of individual needs in relation to work organisation and rostering have operated effectively this year with management, and unions combining efforts to ensure that problems and grievances were effectively resolved’;* *‘workplace flexibility is considered by balancing employee needs particularly those related to family with the organisation needs’; ‘every effort is made to provide employees with a means to balance work and family responsibilities including providing job sharing, flexible working hours, carer’s leave and recognizing the need to minimise overtime’. .*

3. Organisational Size. Organisation size has been considered to be a significant predictor of the employment status of women (Konrad and Linnehan 1995; French 2001). We measured size as the number of employees, using four categories used by the Agency ranging from 100-500; 500-1000; 1000 to 3000, and 3000 or more and took the natural logarithm of the midpoint of each category for use in the analyses. Table 1 indicates the numbers of organisations according to size.

Table 1:  Construction Organisations by Size

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Less than 500 employees | 55 |
| More than 500 less than 1000 | 13 |
| More than 1000 less than 3000 | 11 |
| More  than 3000 | 4 |

Analyses

In order to determine any relationship between the dependent variable (DV) and the independent variables (IV) ordinary-least-square (OLS) regression analysis was used. Independent variables consisted of equal opportunity approach; action taken; priority and future actions. Dependent variables consisted of the specific numbers of women and men in specific job roles. Regression analyses reveal relationships among variables without implying causality. In this case the regression analysis identifies the relationship (if any) between EEO implementation and the position of women and men in construction organizations and allows the prediction of such occurrences.

Data Reliability and Validity

Social desirability bias (Fowler 1988) is a recognised threat to accuracy of information when there is pressure to present a socially desirable image of organisations. Public availability of the reports and the potential to be named in Parliament for a non compliant report may be seen as a pressure to present a socially desirable image. The legislation (EOWW Act) attempts to ensure accuracy of information by the mandatory requirement of the signatures of both the report writer (usually the HR manager) and the CEO on all reports submitted to the Agency (this information remains confidential). Further, each report is checked at the Agency, evaluated and the organisation contacted to verify information, to make recommendations and give feedback. Trained assessors review the contents of reports to first ensure compliance status under the Act, then evaluate the organisation’s analysis of equal opportunity issues and identify demonstrated links with the organisation’s current actions and future plans. Information is provided for those organisations that are not compliant under the Act, to assist them meet compliance standards (EOWA, 2006b).

The quantitative analysis of qualitative data can potentially prove a threat to accuracy and reliability as there is the possibility that the researcher may “force” cases into categories that reflect the biased views of the researcher rather than the substantive actions of the respondents (Crompton and Harris 1999). To address this issue we used a pre-determined model of equity management approaches to determine the categories into which the responses were to be divided and generated an appropriate coding scheme on this basis (Harris 2001). To address reliability, the coding process was separated from the process of data entry to allow for cross checking. In addition the researchers worked together on the coding process with one researcher checking a sample of the coding from the other (Krippendorff 1980). To address sampling validity we selected the data from an entire industry responsible for reporting their equal opportunity plans and where data were unavailable we cross checked available data with data from a different source (addressed further in the findings section following) (Krippendorff 1980; Harris 2001).

**Findings**

1. ***Strategies Used***

There was evidence of a range of different strategies undertaken within construction organisations to address the seven employment matters of the legislation (see Table 2). In the areas of ‘recruitment and selection’, ‘promotion and transfer’ and ‘training and development’, 42.7 per cent, 74.4% and 65.4% of organisations respectively reported no activities of any type to address any inequity of women in their organisations. Combined with the percentage of organisations that reported no specific activities in these areas (traditional approach) the result indicates more than half of all construction organisations report a less than a compliant level of strategies in the areas of recruitment, selection and training. Further, limited numbers of organisations (13.4%, 11.0% and 12.3% respectively) took an anti-discrimination approach to these employment matters which address access to opportunity. This involved the use of strategies that encouraged equal treatment of men and women in recruitment, promotion and development such as women on selection panels and equal numbers of men and women offered access to development opportunities. Few organisations took a proactive approach of any kind, either special consideration activities of equal opportunity or gender diversity equal programs embedded in organisational change in designing and delivering opportunity strategies specific to the disadvantage of women in gaining access to employment, opportunities for promotion or opportunities for training and development.

In the areas of ‘work organisation’ and ‘conditions of service’ a number of organisations offered no specific strategies for addressing inequity. In those organisations that did seek to proactively address inequity through equal employment opportunity or gender diversity strategies, approximately 70% took a proactive approach to developing equitable work patterns (hours and leave etc.) and only 35% to developing fairness in conditions of service (rewards and recognition etc.).

Table 2: Organisations’ Strategic Approach to EEO in Employment Matters by Percentage

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Approach Type | R&S | Promote  Transfer | Training Develop | Work Organisation | Conditions of Service | Sexual Harassment | Pregnancy & Breastfeeding |
| Nil – No strategies | 1.2% | 3.7% | 1.2% | 1.2% | 1.2% | 1.2% | 1.2% |
| Traditional – Doing nothing | 42.7% | 74.4% | 65.4% | 29.3% | 64.6% | 3.7% | 7.3% |
| Anti-discrimination | 13.4% | 11% | 12.3% | 0% | 17.1% | 89.0% | 25.6% |
| EEO – Special Consideration for different groups | 18.3% | 1.2% | 7.4% | 12.2% | 1.2% | 2.4% | 11.0% |
| Managing Diversity –Equality Policies | 0% | 0% | 0% | 52.4% | 12.2% | 1.2% | 53.7% |
| Combination Strategies without EEO | 1.2% | 3.7% | 1.2% | 3.7% | 1.2% | 0% | 0% |
| Combination with EEO | 23.2% | 6.1% | 12.3% | 1.2% | 2.4% | 2.4% | 1.2% |

In the area of addressing harassment, the majority of organisations took a compliance based approach in ensuring equal treatment through training of all staff, regardless of gender or organisational role. While some were not compliant, these were in the minority. This is not surprising given the strength of provisions in the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*. The Act defines and prohibits discrimination and harassment on the basis of sex and outlines extensive provisions for obtaining justice. Further, the tribunals and courts emphasise the importance of appropriate policies and practices and are supporting zero tolerance through judgments awarding increased amounts in damages (Jenero and Galligano 2003). A small number of organisations have taken compliance to new levels and identified an extension of their harassment policies to include protections for other groups, and have identified issues of vilification and bullying throughout their policies and procedures.

Compliance was also an important consideration in addressing the issues of pregnancy and breastfeeding. Many organisations had policies specific to meeting the requirements of the legislation but a small number had extended these to include further issues including adoption and in vitro-fertilisation requirements, while others ensured the policies in these areas were also available for the father.

1. ***Correlation of EEO Approach and Numbers of Men and Women***

The data was examined using multiple regression analyses in order to ascertain any relationship between the EEO strategies used and the numbers of men and women in management. A multiple regression controlling for size was performed with numbers of women in management as the DV and the EEO approach undertaken by the organisations across the seven employment matters as the IVs. A second multiple regression analysis, controlling for size, was performed with numbers of men in management as the DV and the EEO undertaken by the organisations across the seven employment matters as the IVs (see Table 3).

Table 3: Multiple Regression results for EEO Approach and Numbers of Women and Men in Management in Construction

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | R² adjusted | R² | F | *Df* | *B* | *ß* |
| **Women in Management** | ***.696*** | ***.699*** | ***23.349*** | ***8,80*** |  |  |
| Recruitment and Selection |  |  |  |  | ***.109*** | ***.110*** |
| Promotion and Transfer |  |  |  |  | ***-.048*** | ***.468*** |
| Training and Development |  |  |  |  | ***-.112*** | ***.123*** |
| Work Organisation |  |  |  |  | ***.026*** | ***.695*** |
| Conditions of Service |  |  |  |  | ***.034*** | ***.601*** |
| Addressing Sexual Harassment |  |  |  |  | ***.029*** | ***.449*** |
| Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Policies |  |  |  |  | ***.030*** | ***.657*** |
| **Men in Management** | ***.869*** | ***.882*** | ***67.582*** | ***8,80*** |  |  |
| Recruitment and Selection |  |  |  |  | ***.025*** | ***.561*** |
| Promotion and Transfer |  |  |  |  | ***.028*** | ***.516*** |
| Training and Development |  |  |  |  | ***.025*** | ***.590*** |
| Work Organisation |  |  |  |  | ***-.044*** | ***.306*** |
| Conditions of Service |  |  |  |  | ***.037*** | ***.381*** |
| Addressing Sexual Harassment |  |  |  |  | ***.037*** | ***.380*** |
| Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Policies |  |  |  |  | ***.055*** | ***.206*** |

\*\* p = < .01; \* p = <.05

The model shows no relationship between the strategies taken in implementing EEO and the number women in management or the number of men in management in construction. Further multiple regression analyses were run, also controlling for size, with the number of women and the number of men in supervision and operations as the DVs and the EEO strategies undertaken by the organisations across the seven employment matters as the IVs. Results were similar, with one difference. Activities undertaken in the name of Promotion and Transfer correlate to the increased numbers of men employed in supervision and operations (see Table 4).

Table 4: Multiple Regression results for EEO Strategies and Numbers of Women and Men in Supervision and Operations in Construction

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | R² adjusted | R² | F | *Df* | *B* | *ß* |
| **Women in Supervision and Operations** | ***.716*** | ***.745*** | ***26.242*** | ***8,80*** |  |  |
| Recruitment and Selection |  |  |  |  | ***.023*** | ***.715*** |
| Promotion and Transfer |  |  |  |  | ***-.107*** | ***0.94*** |
| Training and Development |  |  |  |  | ***-.094*** | ***.172*** |
| Work Organisation |  |  |  |  | ***.099*** | ***.122*** |
| Conditions of Service |  |  |  |  | ***.076*** | ***.227*** |
| Addressing Sexual Harassment |  |  |  |  | ***-.004*** | ***.947*** |
| Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Policies |  |  |  |  | ***-.021*** | ***.739*** |
| **Men in Supervision and Operations** | ***.985*** | ***.986*** | ***657.407*** | ***8,80*** |  |  |
| Recruitment and Selection |  |  |  |  | ***.018*** | ***.218*** |
| Promotion and Transfer |  |  |  |  | ***-.050*** | ***.001*** |
| Training and Development |  |  |  |  | ***-.028*** | ***.075*** |
| Work Organisation |  |  |  |  | ***-.001*** | ***.952*** |
| Conditions of Service |  |  |  |  | ***-.007*** | ***.604*** |
| Addressing Sexual Harassment |  |  |  |  | ***-.004*** | ***.789*** |
| Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Policies |  |  |  |  | ***-.014*** | ***.360*** |

\*\* p = < .01; \* p = <.05

A third series of multiple regressions was undertaken, controlling for size, with numbers of women and numbers of men in Clerical and Sales positions as the DV and the strategies undertaken by the organisations across the seven employment matters as the IVs. Results show that strategies undertaken in Promotion and Transfer correlate to the increased number of women in clerical and sales position in the construction industry. Results also show that strategies undertaken to encourage equity in Recruitment and Selection; Promotion and Transfer; and Training and development correlated to increased numbers of men in clerical and sales positions (see Table 5).

Table 5: Multiple Regression results for EEO Strategies and Numbers of Women and Men in Clerical and Sales Positions in Construction

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | R² adjusted | R² | F | *Df* | *B* | *ß* |
| **Women Clerical and Sales** | ***.712*** | ***.741*** | ***25.760*** | ***8,80*** |  |  |
| Recruitment and Selection |  |  |  |  | ***-.040*** | ***.537*** |
| Promotion and Transfer |  |  |  |  | ***.235*** | ***.000*** |
| Training and Development |  |  |  |  | ***.086*** | ***.219*** |
| Work Organisation |  |  |  |  | ***-.030*** | ***.641*** |
| Conditions of Service |  |  |  |  | ***.023*** | ***.710*** |
| Addressing Sexual Harassment |  |  |  |  | ***-019*** | ***.761*** |
| Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Policies |  |  |  |  | ***.028*** | ***.668*** |
| **Men in Clerical and Sales** | ***.279*** | ***.352*** | ***.4879*** | ***8,80*** |  |  |
| Recruitment and Selection |  |  |  |  | ***-.205*** | ***.047*** |
| Promotion and Transfer |  |  |  |  | ***.308*** | ***.003*** |
| Training and Development |  |  |  |  | ***.271*** | ***.015*** |
| Work Organisation |  |  |  |  | ***-.029*** | ***.774*** |
| Conditions of Service |  |  |  |  | ***-.082*** | ***.411*** |
| Addressing Sexual Harassment |  |  |  |  | ***.003*** | ***.976*** |
| Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Policies |  |  |  |  | ***.043*** | ***.678*** |

\*\* p = < .01; \* p = <.05

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Results indicate a range of equal employment opportunity implementation approaches utilised within the construction industry, a similar finding to that in the Finance and Transport industries (French and Strachan 2009 & 2007). Further, the results indicate that these approaches appear to differ in outcome. Relatively few constructions organisations implement proactive strategies in the areas of recruiting, promoting, and developing of women to address any identified inequities between women and men particularly the number of women in management and in other non-traditional roles. Kanter (1976), Sheridan (1998), and French and Maconachie (2004) referred to these areas as ‘social structural’ strategies related to the organisations’ structure used to address any systemic bias or discrimination against women. Only one of these social structural measures, promotion and transfer was positively associated with the increased numbers of women in one job area. However, this measure was also positively associated with the increased number of men across various job areas including operations, sales and in clerical positions). We note that the largest category of strategies involved in promotion and transfer was the traditional approach which included strategies of custom and tradition rather than equity. We also note that 75% of all construction organisations used custom and tradition in the promotion and transfer policy area. Indications are that the numbers of men and women promoted or transferred within the construction industry is less linked to equal employment opportunity than to individual organisational approaches involving custom and tradition.

Such a result further supports the importance of continuing the pressure for strategic proactivity in implementing EEO. Numerous organisations identified ‘equal treatment’ as the primary reason for their lack of any proactive strategies in recruitment, promotion and training for women. Yet without specific programs that acknowledge women’s historic systemic disadvantage in this industry, change is unlikely to occur. It would seem the old battle of ‘what is equity’ is still being waged at an operational level in the construction industry. Equal treatment has been widely recognised as insufficient to achieve equity of opportunity or equity of outcomes for women (Bacchi 1990; Poiner and Wills 1991: French and Maconachie 2004). Research has shown that equal treatment based on strategies that are blind to identity differences including race and sex are not conducive to change in many of the measures of advancement for women to address the disparity between men and women (see Konrad and Linnehan 1995; French 2001).

Results also indicate a significant proactivity in the implementation of some of the measures of equal opportunity, specifically ‘organisation of work’ and ‘pregnancy and breastfeeding policies’, where ‘organisation of work’ relates to the implementation of work and family policies. Kanter (1976), Sheridan (1998), and French and Maconachie (2004) recognise these areas as ‘role related’ strategies used to address the fair division of labour between men and women and to ensure women are not disadvantaged by their different and traditional role requirements in society. None of these role related measures were positively linked with increased numbers of women in the non-traditional areas of management and operations, or in the sales or clerical area. We interpret these findings to suggest that limiting the approach to equal employment opportunity implementation to merely work and family balance policies appears to maintain the current participation numbers of men and women. Such policies may allow women to move in and out of work as their family needs dictate, but without proactive strategies in the structural and support practices, further access to management or non-traditional areas of work appears limited.

While the cross sectional nature of this study diminishes our ability to make causal inferences this does not limit the value of the study as a preliminary work in EEO specific to the construction industry. This research presents a first step in gaining an understanding of the issues of women’s employment and whether current policies can enhance the involvement of women in the industry. Future investigation warrants in-depth research through interviews or survey that would address the application of an organisation’s reported implementation of EEO requirements as opposed to the perception of those requirements and whether such activities have any real impact. A prospective study should also examine the process of developing EEO strategy and reports at the organisational level to identify the strategic choices for policy and implementation. Little work has been done in this area and the cultural or political challenges experienced by those involved in the process.

The findings presented suggest that equal employment opportunity in the construction industry in Australia is implemented through an approach that encourages the equal treatment of men and women through the social structural measures including recruitment, promotion and training. Further, equal opportunity is also predominately implemented through equitable treatment of men and women in the role related measures namely work organisation and terms and conditions of employment, through proactive work and family balance strategies. However these current approaches offer no change in the status quo in the representation of women in management or in non-traditional areas. Overall, the results suggest that for substantive change to occur, implementation of equal employment opportunity measures needs to be more strategic and more proactive. This requires positive and equitable treatment in the structure of recruitment, selection and promotion processes, as well as proactive measures designed to support women in non-traditional areas. Work and family balance measures may be important in providing equal access; however without a wider platform of equal employment opportunity these strategies alone do not address the disparity or inequity of participation between men and women at work.

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