

Theorizing policy approaches to equality and diversity

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Aim

To provide a summary of the conceptual and theoretical underpinning of equality and diversity policies.

Objectives

- To present the main theoretical approaches to equality and diversity.
- To identify the chronological shift from equality to diversity.
- To provide an analysis of similarities and differences between 'equal opportunities' and 'diversity management'.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to present a summary of the concepts and theories underpinning equality and diversity policies. As Webb (1997) pointed out, over the 1990s there were changes in the meanings attached to equality. Early policies were founded on a 'sameness' model and in the UK policies were firmly connected to the legislation enacted in the 1970s. 'Equal opportunities' (EO) became the most common label for organisational policies, even though, as we discuss later, it became a 'catch-all' for a range of distinctly different types of equality policy. The chapter offers a summary of the critiques of traditional equality concepts that set the scene for the emergence of the diversity concept. Diversity management (DM), as a policy approach, was founded on a 'difference' model and emerged in the mid to late 1990s in the UK. As Kaler (2001: 51) has pointed out, there are difficulties in determining the precise relationship of DM to the older concept of EO - whether diversity should be considered as a new and different concept or one that builds on the older concept. Does diversity pursue different ends by different means or do EO and DM overlap to the extent that diversity can be seen as pursuing the same ends by different means? Finally, the chapter considers the present state of theorizing on equality and diversity, together with future prospects. We believe that it is important to understand how traditional concepts of equality live on in contemporary DM policy and practice, even if the label and rhetoric have changed.

Thus, the chronological account presented below should be read as outlining dominant thinking on equality and diversity in the different periods, but in reality we will show that the theoretical approaches are interconnected.

Equality is undoubtedly a difficult area to theorize because of the wide variety of meanings attached to the concept. Is the concern with the principles of equality, the type of equality, the implementation of equality policies or the effectiveness of past and present equality initiatives? Salient questions include: what types of equality are organisational policies intended to achieve – for example, equality of treatment, equality of opportunity or equality of outcome? What types of discrimination are policies intended to overcome and in what ways? Does equality mean treating people the same, or differently? Should we be thinking of employees as neutral individuals who contribute the same abilities, and who should receive the same access to opportunities and rewards and be assessed in the same way, regardless of social group characteristics? Should we play down the differences between people or should we value the very existence of those differences? Should we look at differences between individuals, or does it still make sense to talk about group differences among women, black and minority ethnic (BME) workers, older workers, lesbian and gay workers or disabled workers? Do members of these groups face similar problems to each other and might they benefit from similar solutions? Or is everyone a unique individual with no special connection to others? For the purposes of our discussion, questions such as these are significant because they point to the lack of conceptual clarity that often surrounds organisational policies. But, it is important for organisational policies to be specific about what they are aiming to accomplish, otherwise there can be no means of evaluating what has been achieved.

THE EQUALITY AGENDA 1970s–1980s: LIBERAL AND RADICAL APPROACHES

A good starting point is to look in some detail at Jewson and Mason's (1986) influential article on the theory and practice of equality policies. They identify, compare and contrast liberal and radical approaches to equality policy-making.

The liberal approach

The liberal approach to equality essentially derives from political ideals of classic liberalism and liberal democracy (Jewson and Mason, 1986). It is based around a belief in the rights of the individual to universally applicable standards of justice and citizenship (Webb, 1997). Therefore, *'equality of opportunity exists when all individuals are enabled freely and equally to compete for social rewards'* (Jewson and Mason, 1986: 307). The model is predicated on a philosophy of 'sameness' – the idea that people should have access to and be assessed within the workplace as individuals, *regardless* of social group. The focus is on the individual, where people are required to deny or attempt to minimize differences and compete for jobs solely on the basis of individual merit (Liff and Wajcman, 1996; Kaler, 2001). Job selection on the basis of individual merit is seen as fair. Conceptions of merit typically include factors such as experience, educational qualifications, commitment and so on (Kaler, 2001: 53).

Policies based on the notion of the neutral individual are seen as the most efficient means of achieving a fair distribution of rewards and resources in the workplace. This standpoint has grounding in the philosophy of free market competition and thus can be linked to neoclassical theories of employment segregation (Chapter 3). Within neoclassical theory, unfair discrimination is not an inherent or intrinsic feature of capitalist labour markets, but is a distortion of an otherwise rational market. Notions of the free market are central to the liberal approach to equality and therefore, equality policy within the liberal approach is focused on what Jewson and Mason (1986) call 'positive action'. Positive action involves implementing measures to remove obstacles to the operation of the free labour market and to meritocratic competition. This should not be confused with 'affirmative action' which derives from the US and reflects a more radical approach (see Table 5.1). Affirmative action is more akin to what in the UK is called 'positive discrimination' (discussed later). Positive action might include initiatives such as advertising campaigns reassuring candidates that all applications will be judged solely on their merits, crèche facilities in the workplace (allowing parents – mostly mothers – to balance work and family), etc. It can also include equality training to teach recruiters how to use non-biased procedures and methods in recruitment and selection.

The liberal approach to equality influenced the campaign for anti-discrimination legislation in Britain in the 1970s, leading to the Sex Discrimination Act (1975), Race Relations Act (1976) and Equal Pay Act (1970). At this time, the emphasis was on encouraging employers to develop formal procedures for ensuring fair and meritocratic methods of selection for jobs, training and promotion. It was believed that this would lead to the development of a 'metaphorical level playing field' (Webb, 1997). Thus, the liberal approach to equality rests on bureaucratization and formalization of procedures so as to ensure that processes are formally fair within organisations – an approach also known as procedural justice.

5.2.2 The radical approach

In contrast to the liberal approach, the radical approach emphasizes the need for direct intervention in order to work towards not only equality of opportunity, but also equality of outcome. This means that the objective is not only to achieve fair procedures (as in the liberal approach), but also to achieve fair distribution of rewards. What is meant by fair distribution of rewards? If, for example, women or BME workers are under-represented in middle and senior management, this would be seen as unfair distribution of rewards, which should be tackled by the equality policy (by introducing, for example, targets or even quotas for under-represented groups). To emphasize, the focus of the radical approach is not on individuals, but on groups, recognizing that while discrimination affects individuals, it is at the group level that systemic discrimination can be identified. The idea that all people are equal regardless of social group membership should be reflected in the even distribution of rewards in the workplace. The absence of fair distribution is read as evidence of unfair discrimination. The ideal of the radical approach is a situation where every workforce is representative of all the social groups available to it (Kaler, 2001: 53). This stands in contrast to the liberal approach where the principle of selection on merit alone does not require even group representativeness. The question posed by the radical approach is – what is merit? The radical approach

Table 5.1 Comparison of Equality and Diversity Approaches

Approach	Principle	Strategy	Method	Type of Equality
Liberal	Fair equal opportunity	Level playing field	Policy statement, equality proof recruitment and selection procedures	Equality of opportunity
	Positive action	Assistance to disadvantaged social groups	Monitoring, pre-entry training, in-service training, special courses, elevate equality within management	Equality of opportunity
	Strong positive action	Give positive preference to certain groups	Family friendly policies, improve access for disabled, make harassment a disciplinary offence	Moving towards equality of outcome
Radical	Positive discrimination (or more radical forms of positive action)	Proportional equal representation	Preferential selection, quotas	Equality of outcome
Diversity	Maximize individual potential	Use employee diversity to add value	Vision statement, organisation audit, business-related objectives, communication and accountability, change culture	Equality means profit aligned with organisational objectives

Source: Based on Miller, 1996: 205, 206.

does not see ability or talent as neutral, but claims that notions of ability and talent contain and conceal a series of value judgements and stereotypes. Negative value judgements and stereotypes are attached to 'minorities' by dominant groups, so that minorities are less likely to be seen as appointable on merit. Discrimination is not, therefore, simply a distortion of the free labour market but is a socially constructed feature of the market process. Whilst the aim of the radical approach is to achieve equality of outcome for all on the same terms, it contains elements of a 'difference' perspective. The radical approach recognizes the existence of differential treatment based on social group membership and the way that some groups are socially constructed as possessing fewer talents and abilities than others.

The policies associated with the radical approach include 'positive discrimination', where employment practices are explicitly geared towards obtaining a fair distribution of disadvantaged groups in the workplace (Jewson and Mason, 1986). For example, where BME people were under-represented, they would be given preferential treatment in recruitment and selection until a fair distribution had been achieved. Whilst the liberal approach emphasizes the need to formalize procedures, the radical approach emphasizes the need to politicize the processes of decision making. Theoretically, policies could involve the imposition of quotas. However, radical measures are largely outlawed in Britain (see Chapter 6), although there are *elements* of the radical approach within the legislation and within organisational equality policies and practices (Liff and Wacjman, 1996; Miller, 1996).

5.2.2 Linking liberal and radical approaches

In practice, there are elements of a 'difference' or radical approach within the largely 'sameness' or liberal approach of the British equality legislation. For example, the concept of indirect discrimination is where a condition is applied equally to all, but a larger proportion of people from one social group find it more difficult to comply with it than people from another social group (see more detailed discussion in Chapter 6). Liff and Wajeman (1996) argued that the legal definition of indirect discrimination was used to remove the age restrictions for promotion to the more senior Civil Service grades. The age restriction was established as disadvantaging (indirectly discriminating against) women who had been out of employment due to family responsibilities and when they returned found they were too old for promotion. Age criteria – specifically requiring 'maturity' – could also be seen as indirectly discriminatory on grounds of ethnicity, as the BME population is comparatively youthful.

Work-life-balance policies designed to enable women to combine work and family responsibilities could be seen theoretically as an example of either the liberal or radical approaches. On the one hand, work-life-balance policies 'level the playing field' in the way that the liberal approach requires; on the other hand, such policies could be read as an example of the direct intervention to influence equality outcomes that the radical approach requires.

Thus, it seems that some elements of contemporary policy and legislation would seem to breach the liberal view that all people should receive the same treatment, regardless of social group membership. However, whilst social group-based differences *should* be irrelevant in terms of the meritocratic free labour market, it is quite clearly recognized by the law that sometimes policy measures might be needed to ensure that everyone can truly participate on the same terms. Thus, while legislation and organisational policies largely reflect the liberal approach, elements of the radical approach and acknowledgement of 'difference' have emerged. In Liff and Wajeman's (1996: 82) words, '*organisations which are proactive on equality issues have stretched and re-interpreted the equal treatment model in a number of ways*'.

This mix of radical and liberal approaches within equality policies is symptomatic of the ambiguous nature of traditional conceptualizations of equality. In their study, Jewson and Mason (1986) found that individuals and groups frequently invoked various aspects of both conceptions, depending on the circumstances and their needs. This was often due to confusion and misunderstandings surrounding the policy and practice of equality. In addition, Jewson and Mason also found more conscious and deliberate attempts to mislead and mystify opponents and outsiders. Similarly, Cockburn (1989) found that people interpreted workplace equality policies differently, depending on what they expected and desired from them. Cockburn identified various interest groups – the shareholder who has a strong personal commitment to equality; the executive team who sees a business case for equality; the lawyers who want equality initiatives in order to avoid legal claims of discrimination; the personnel managers who see equality as part of wider management trends; and line managers who are only concerned with equality if it does not conflict with maintaining work discipline and cost budgeting (Greene and Kirton, 2009). In essence, equality policies are part of the wider, complex and multi-faceted nature of workplace relations within the social structures and systems of wider society.

Key learning points

- There is a variety of meanings and approaches attached to the concept of equality. Key approaches identified include liberal and radical.
- Equality approaches can be based on 'sameness' or on 'difference'.
- Free market theory underpins the liberal approach based on 'sameness'. It is predicated on the premise that people should have access to opportunities at the workplace as individuals, regardless of social group membership. Policies within this approach emphasize the formalization of procedures and 'positive action' measures to ensure that the 'rules of the game' are fair.
- The radical approach attempts to ensure equality of outcome as well as equality of opportunity. It recognizes that discrimination is a socially constructed part of the market process. Policies emphasize direct intervention in order to work towards achieving a fair distribution of rewards in the workplace.
- Equality legislation in Britain mainly reflects the liberal 'sameness' approach, although elements of a radical 'difference' approach are evident. The legislation establishes the concept of indirect discrimination.

A critique of liberal and radical equality approaches

There can be no doubt that the dominant liberal approach to equality has achieved a degree of success in tackling inequalities, discrimination and disadvantage. With regard to gender inequality, for example, Webb (1997) pointed to the rising number of women in the workforce, the increasing number of women in the professions and the growth in the numbers of women achieving some degree of economic independence. Chapter 2 identified the main changes in the UK labour market with regard to different social groups, some of which have been positive from an equality perspective. However, there are also criticisms of the liberal approach and it has its weaknesses, focused as it is on procedural justice and equality of opportunity rather than equality of outcome.

One longstanding criticism is that equality legislation and policies might appear strong, but are in fact weak in practice. Collinson et al. (1990) and Cockburn (1991) provided multiple examples of where legislation was being ignored in everyday organisational practices and where discrimination continued unabated. Explanations for this gap between the rhetoric and reality of equality policies include the lack of political will underlying the legislation (as evidenced by the limited resources of the equality bodies such as the former Equal Opportunities Commission and the former Commission for Racial Equality); the institutional weakness of personnel or human resources managers in organisations (the people largely responsible for implementing equality policy); and the lack of support from senior management for equality initiatives (Webb, 1997).

Another criticism concerns the belief at the heart of the liberal approach that fair procedures lead to fair outcomes (Jewson and Mason, 1986). Many researchers and writers have argued that procedural formalization is by no means a guarantee of fairness in practice (Richards, 2001; Webb, 1997; Liff, 1996; Cockburn, 1991). Webb (1997) highlighted the ways that procedures could be evaded, especially with many managers

having substantial managerial discretion over how they make decisions and how they implement equality initiatives. Also, in most organisations, monitoring of the ongoing processes of equality policies is patchy at best (Dickens, 1994; Richards, 2001). A reliance on procedures and increased bureaucratization also seems at odds with the trends towards deregulation and flexibility, and such an approach has come to be seen as unfair and restrictive within the laissez-faire economy (Rees, 1998). Moreover, Jewson and Mason's (1986) research showed that many aspects of work life are very difficult to bureaucratize. They pointed to the numerous informal norms and codes of behaviour that exist no matter how formalized an organisation is.

In particular, many writers (Webb, 1997; Cockburn, 1991) have focused on the fact that the liberal approach to equality assumes that acceptability and suitability criteria for jobs could be separated. An equality policy might require that procedures are followed to ensure that candidates are chosen on the basis of their suitability and merit for the job, but in reality, the labour supply is gendered, racialized, aged and sexualized from the start, making the holy grail of rational, unbiased decision making impossible to achieve. For example, prevalent stereotypes attached to groups of workers mean that some 'types' of people might be judged more acceptable than others. As Webb pointed out with regard to gender, '*aspects of masculinity and femininity become established as indicators of suitability*' (1997: 161). A belief that a woman would not be 'acceptable' as a top manager due to her supposed inability to put in long hours at work means that this gender stereotype becomes a measure of suitability for her appointment, regardless of her skills and qualifications (Chapter 3).

As discussed, British equality legislation generally focuses on procedures, not outcomes, and therefore it can be characterised as an attempt to treat the symptoms of disadvantage and discrimination rather than the causes (Rees, 1998). The focus on individuals within the dominant 'sameness' model is also a weakness, suggesting that people should be treated as neutral individuals without recognizing the impact of culturally reproduced and socially constructed group membership. Jewson and Mason (1986) similarly pointed out that the liberal approach ignores or cannot accommodate the structural sources of social capacities and skills. The traditional liberal approach leaves the prejudices and stereotypes unchallenged and so is seen as ineffective in leading to change, but instead is accused of reproducing the inequalities of the broader context (Rees, 1998). The position of women in the workforce serves as an example. Rees (1998) emphasized the importance of the fact that within the traditional, liberal equality approach, there is little acknowledgement of the way that household arrangements impact on participation in the workplace. Thus, she argues '*granting equal access to men and women will only benefit certain women: those whose cultural capital, experiences, family circumstances and share of domestic responsibilities are similar to those of [white] men as a group*' (Rees, 1998: 29). All in all, equality of access is an illusion while the white, male, full-time worker, with few domestic responsibilities, is seen as the norm and as the standard by which skills and abilities are measured.

The radical approach also has its critics. While on the one hand it recognizes the fact that formal procedures do not necessarily lead to fair outcomes, its attempt to intervene to change the status quo carries its own dangers. Cockburn (1989, 1991) identified how initiatives aiming to enhance the position of workers from disadvantaged social groups are often seen negatively as meaning 'special treatment'. The women and BME workers

in Cockburn's research disliked the idea of what they saw as favouritism because they feared a backlash by dominant groups. Rees (1998) discussed the furore over the Labour Party's 1996 all-women shortlists for nominated candidates in certain parliamentary seats. This was a radical interventionist measure designed to redress the gender imbalance in Members of Parliament. The policy met opposition from both men and women because it was felt by some to be unfair or to be 'reverse discrimination'.

Perhaps more significantly, however, initiatives to improve the position of particular groups are not always felt to lead to any overall change in the nature of the organisation (Cockburn, 1989). As Cockburn argued, both liberal and radical approaches seek *'to give disadvantaged groups a boost up the ladder, while leaving the structure of that ladder and the disadvantage it entails just as before'* (1989: 217). While the rhetoric of equality policies is changed, the reality is more static.

The lack of transformation could mean that the radical approach will continue to be seen as unfair and as unnecessary or as unwanted 'special treatment' (Liff, 1996). Being critical of both liberal and radical approaches to equality for their lack of success in achieving organisational transformation, Cockburn developed the concept of 'short' and 'long' equality agendas (1991, 1989). The 'short' agenda is similar to the traditional liberal approach emphasizing the need to treat the symptoms of discrimination and disadvantage, or to develop special policies to protect or enhance the position of disadvantaged social groups. The 'long' agenda seeks to change the unequal systems and structures of organisations, alter the nature and distribution of power and thus transform the organisation. The long agenda requires organisational actors to be fully committed to a transformative aim of equality policies (Richards, 2001: 19).

Liberal and radical approaches have both been criticized for being too simplistic, underestimating the complexity of organisations. The reality is that employee interests are heterogeneous, meaning that it is difficult to conceive of an equality policy that would meet the needs of all and be felt fair by all. For example, there are different interests among women, between the young and old, and between those with children and without. Different ethnic groups have different interests relating to cultural background and religious affiliation. The liberal, 'sameness' approach has been criticized for failing to advance the position of disadvantaged groups and for failing to change unequal systems, structures and hierarchies. Workers are expected to assimilate and to dilute or deny their differences in order to meet the expectation of the norm, usually that of a white, non-disabled, heterosexual, man, aged 25–40 years. Meanwhile the radical approach is deemed to rest on the implementation of change strategies that are themselves felt unfair. A possible move away from traditional approaches is seen in concepts of diversity or 'difference'.

Key learning points

- Liberal and radical approaches to equality have been criticized for failing to deliver equality of outcome. Critics highlight continuing inequalities, discrimination and disadvantage and the fact that suitability criteria continue to be judged against the dominant white, male norm.
- Policies associated with the radical approach can be criticized as involving 'special treatment'.
- Equality policies based on the concept of 'sameness' are criticized for benefiting only a minority of workers from disadvantaged groups who can most easily meet the dominant norm. This is

because a 'sameness' approach does not transform organisational culture, but perpetuates unfair structures and systems within organisations and wider society.

- Both liberal and radical approaches to equality tend to follow a 'short agenda' rather than a 'long agenda'. The latter would seek to change unequal systems and structures and transform organisational cultures.

Activity 5.1

Police consider quotas to boost force diversity

Senior police officers are discussing whether to introduce quotas for black and Asian recruits in a last-ditch attempt to make forces more representative, it was revealed today. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) is to consider whether it should press for a change in the law to allow "affirmative action" to recruit minorities. However, the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) dismissed the idea as a "smokescreen" and said more attention should be paid to why more people of ethnic minorities are not applying to become officers. Home Office figures last month revealed that the proportion of ethnic minority police in England and Wales reached 3.7% in 2005/06 – below a 4% target forces were supposed to reach 2 years earlier.

Ministers have set a final 7% target for 2009. An Acpo spokeswoman said "At a conservative estimate, it would take 23 years to reach that target with current legislation. Chief constables are going to start a debate on whether we need to change the law to enable us to reach those employment targets." In all, there were 5236 black and Asian officers in the 43 police forces in England and Wales at the end of March last year, excluding the National Crime Squad and the National Criminal Intelligence Service, which have since been disbanded. The Acpo spokeswoman said a report being presented to the association's council meeting this morning by the Cheshire chief constable, Peter Fahy, would float the idea of introducing quotas and allowing forces to use affirmative action to meet them. It would also seek to boost the number of women in the police, who are currently "grossly under-represented", the Acpo spokeswoman said.

Affirmative action describes the process of prioritizing minorities once they have passed initial selection procedures. It differs from "positive discrimination" which means hiring minorities, regardless of whether they are qualified for a job. Acpo will not make a decision today on whether to lobby for a change in the law. But chief constables are thought to be keen to begin a wider debate on the move, in consultation with bodies such as the CRE. A spokeswoman for the CRE said it would not support the move. "The CRE doesn't support positive discrimination and affirmative action," she said. "These forms of 'reverse discrimination' could actually increase community tensions, rather than ease them." In many areas forces are struggling to recruit people from diverse backgrounds because of people's negative perceptions and experiences. This is the real problem that needs to be

addressed." She added "The police ought to stop hiding behind the smokescreen of 'affirmative action' and start looking at the real reasons why ethnic minorities are not applying to become police officers."

(Source: www.guardian.co.uk, 19 April 2007)

Questions

1. Consider whether introducing quotas would be considered a liberal or radical equality approach. Explain your categorization.
2. Why would there be controversy around such an initiative and how does this fit into the critique of equality approaches?
3. Why might such an initiative be deemed necessary in order to combat organisational inequalities? You might refer back to the discussion in Chapter 3 on employment segregation.

THE EQUALITY AGENDA 1990s: DIVERSITY APPROACHES

It is self-evident that organisational policies are influenced by wider economic, political and ideological trends. Thus, a shift in thought about equality also accompanied the late 1980s and 1990s trend towards deregulation, flexibility, new managerialism and human resource management (Webb, 1997; also see Chapter 10). There was also a shift in feminist consciousness led by an increasing backlash to feminism and feminists (Cockburn, 1989, 1991; Webb, 1997). At the same time there was a growing belief in the need to downplay the innate 'sameness' of gendered groups and to move away from the idea that women's interests would best be served by challenging men (as a group). Further, as discussed in Chapter 3, the black feminist critique of western feminism focused on the way that it denied the differences among women. These developments in feminist thinking helped to engender a shift in thought towards a 'difference' approach to conceptualizing inequalities, discrimination and disadvantage.

There are a variety of ways in which 'difference' or diversity approaches have been understood. The management and organisation literature finds diversity variously presented as (i) an evolutionary step from equality (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development; Kandola and Fullerton, 1994, 1998); (ii) a sophistication of the equality approach (Rubin in Overell, 1996); (iii) a repackaging of equality (Ford, 1996); (iv) more negatively as a sanitized, politically unthreatening and market-oriented notion (Webb, 1997); (v) a 'comfort zone', allowing employers to avoid actively fighting discrimination (Ouseley in Overell, 1996). Kandola and Fullerton (1994) provided a summary of the development of the diversity concept in the US, locating it to 1987 when an influential report – *Workforce 2000* – by Johnston and Packer highlighted the implications of the increasing diversity of the American workforce. *Workforce 2000* predicted that by 2000, white male employees would comprise a minority of new entrants to the workforce. This prompted widespread discussion in the media, business and academic forums of the greater need for organisations to recognize the importance of managing a diverse or multi-cultural workforce. Kandola and Fullerton began their discussion of the diversity

approach with the statement: '*managing diversity* [diversity management] *means different things to different people*' (1998: 6). Reflecting this there are many different definitions, but Kandola and Fullerton's captures the main principles and aims of diversity approaches:

'The basic concept of managing diversity [diversity management] accepts that the workforce consists of a diverse population of people. The diversity consists of visible and non-visible differences which will include factors such as sex, age, background, race, disability and work style. It is founded on the premise that harnessing these differences will create a productive environment in which everybody feels valued, where their talents are being fully utilised and in which organisational goals are met'

Kandola and Fullerton, 1998: 8

Compared with the state of the field when the first edition of our book was published in 2000, there are now a number of detailed expositions of diversity approaches. The contemporary literature discusses the ways in which diversity differs from traditional 'equality' approaches and evaluations of its strengths and weaknesses are offered (for example, Cornelius, 2002; Kirton, 2008; Noon and Ogbonna, 2001; Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000; Liff, 1999, 1997). Most writers agree on the essential dimensions of the diversity approach.

First, at the heart of diversity approaches lies the premise that difference should be positively recognized, nurtured and rewarded rather than denied or diluted (Liff, 1996). There is a move away from the idea that everyone should assimilate in order to meet an organisational norm. The employer is expected to be committed to creating a workplace that facilitates the inclusion of all, enabling everyone to contribute in their own way to the organisation (Webb, 1997). Thus, rather than difference being viewed negatively, there should be recognition of the inherent strengths of employee diversity based on cultural background, gender or age, or differential experience. It is expected that work organisations will gain from employee diversity. The focus moves away from a rights-based agenda focused on discrimination and disadvantage. In this way the equality agenda is rendered less controversial and less sensitive to backlash from dominant or 'advantaged' groups and individuals (Sinclair, 2000).

Second, difference is viewed as being *individually* based. Diversity approaches would thus have an individualistic policy focus (Liff and Wajcman, 1996), moving away from standardized procedures to eliminate discrimination and positive action to redress historical disadvantage of particular social groups. Therefore, diversity approaches involve a broader range of people than the social groups usually covered in 'EO' policies, moving beyond the equality strands (race/ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion and disability) towards individual differences. Of particular note is the inclusion of individual 'non-visible' differences and personal characteristics such as 'work style' (Kandola and Fullerton, 1998).

Third, a diversity approach aims to meet organisational goals. In this sense it is a business-driven approach, rather than one underpinned by broader notions of social justice (i.e. as in equality approaches) (Kaler, 2001). Indeed Noon and Ogbonna (2001) argue that this is the key analytical differentiation between 'EO' and 'DM'. While 'EO' policies may utilize business rationales to achieve moral/social justice ends, diversity policies can be seen to have an exclusive focus on business case (Kaler, 2001: 59). The



diversity approach appeals to critics of traditional equality approaches, who have argued that the moral cause of 'equality' has little purchase in the competitive world of business. Thus, employee diversity is valued as a direct contribution to the success of an organisation.

Finally, the diversity approach is presented as not only concerned with numerical representation of different 'types' of employees, but as an attempt to change the culture of organisations. This element of diversity meets one of the major criticisms of the dominant liberal equality approach seen as too focused on procedures to stimulate culture change. It has become widely accepted that organisational cultures need to change significantly so that employee differences are viewed as positive. Rees (1998) saw diversity approaches as facilitating more 'mainstreaming' of equality (i.e. equality issues being included in every part of strategy and policy, rather than simply having dedicated equality policies). Mainstreaming requires a shift in organisational culture in the same way as demanded by diversity approaches. Rees (1998) saw the mainstreaming project as seeking to '*transform organisations and create a culture of diversity in which people of a much broader range of characteristics and background may confidently flourish*' (Rees, 1998: 27). The objective of culture transformation also has echoes of Cockburn's (1991, 1989) 'long agenda', where the aim is to bring about greater equality by changing cultures, systems and structures.

There are different conceptualizations of diversity that impact on equality and diversity policy and practice. Kandola and Fullerton's approach (1994, 1998), which they call 'Managing the Mosaic', highlights the business case for employee diversity, particularly due to demographic shifts in the labour market. This moves away from the traditional, rights-based agenda of 'EO'. Gagnon and Cornelius (2002) outline a 'capabilities' approach to diversity, where diversity policies revolve around identifying the choices that people have, facilitating those choices, and providing the organisational environment in which individuals can make the fullest use of their individual set of capabilities. For them, embracing diversity involves ensuring that individuals feel that their treatment is fair, requiring changes in organisation cultures, structures and communications to allow people at all levels to have a voice in the development of policies.

Liff's (1997) typology of DM approaches, despite being over a decade old, retains its usefulness as an analytical framework. This differentiates between four sets of underlying policy principles and aims that recognize to different degrees the legacy and imprint of traditional EO-type approaches that most organisations are still likely to be working with today. The framework also fits well with debates about sameness and difference approaches to equality discussed earlier. The two caveats are first that in practice, organisations' policy aims might be multi-dimensional and complex and therefore, might not fit neatly into any of the approaches that Liff identifies; second that the diversity debate and policy and practice have moved on in the decade since Liff wrote her paper (Greene and Kirton, 2009).

The first approach Liff (1997) identifies is *dissolving differences*. Here, differences between people are not seen as based on social group membership (such as gender or race), but are individual based. It follows that initiatives would seek to respond to individual rather than group needs, for example individual career management policies. If someone has training needs, this should be addressed regardless of whether they are a man or a woman, or black or white. The point is for people to see themselves



as individuals, rather than identify with similar others based on social group characteristics. Further, monitoring the workforce by characteristics such as gender, race and ethnicity would be seen to offer little of value or might even be counter-productive to a dissolving differences approach. Essentially, this approach ignores or downplays the wider social causes of inequality, including unequal access to training and education and does not see inequality as patterned by social group membership. This approach has echoes of EO insofar as the underlying aim is to treat people the same, regardless of social group characteristics. The second approach is *valuing differences*. Here, Liff (1997) refers to social group-based rather than individual differences, with policy recognition of the way in which gender or race, for example, can contribute to patterns of under-representation and inequality. Positive action initiatives would be included – such as, for example, provision of training for employees from under-represented groups to help them succeed in the organisation and to help overcome past group disadvantage. There would also be some adaptation of organisational policies in order to recognize different holidays and diets, for example. The third approach is *accommodating differences*, where there is a commitment to creating policies that open up opportunities (such as flexible working patterns) to under-represented groups. This approach might be found where the most compelling business case for diversity relates to the changing demographic composition of the labour market, for example, a need to recruit more women. This approach is very similar to the liberal equality approach and whilst it goes some way to recognizing both individual and socially based differences, it does not question the fundamental social or organisational structures of inequality. The final approach is *utilizing differences* where social group-based differences are recognized and provide the basis for different treatment. This approach is not concerned with social justice, rather employee differences will be put to use for the benefit of the organisation. This might be described as a ‘special contribution’ perspective which argues that different people (women, BME people, etc.) might be able to contribute to organisations in different ways with their different values, experiences, ways of thinking etc. (Billing and Sundin, 2006). Liff suggests that policy initiatives designed to tap gender-based differences might include different career tracks for ‘career’ and ‘family’ women.

In many respects, as suggested by Liff’s typology, there is some similarity between equality and diversity approaches, and a glance at a practitioner guide for DM such as Kandola and Fullerton (1994) demonstrates that many of the measures involved within a diversity approach would not be alien to a traditional equality approach (see also Liff, 1999; Kirton, 2002; Gagnon and Cornelius, 2002). However, DM is often presented as significantly different from ‘EO’, the implications of which form part of the discussion in the next section.

Key learning points

- Diversity is a ‘difference’ approach that seeks to recognize, value and utilize differences between individuals rather than dilute or deny differences.
- Four main characteristics differentiate diversity from equality approaches: (i) differences are viewed positively; (ii) differences attached to group membership are downplayed; (iii) the

business case rather than the social justice case is predominant; and (iv) there must be a transformation in organisational cultures.

A critique of diversity approaches

One of the most significant criticisms of the diversity approach is that just like equality approaches, it seems to promise more than it can deliver. Indeed Kandola and Fullerton (1998), for all their positive proclamation of the diversity approach, recognized that the long list of 'benefits' are debatable and concluded that much more research was needed to establish whether their model was successful (1998: 52). Even more than a decade later, there is still no solid evidence that diversity policies are any more successful than traditional 'equal opportunity' ones (Greene and Kirton, 2009). There are, however, suggestions that diversity policies can deliver organisational benefits if initiatives are formulated in ways that are sensitive to the existing culture and practices and if some of the potential dilemmas and challenges are dealt with (Cornelius et al., 2000; Sinclair, 2000; Maxwell et al., 2001).

What is distinctive about a diversity approach?

Part of the problem lies in the difficulties in differentiating DM from EO in practice. Whilst many organisations now claim to have adopted a diversity approach, there is a lack of evidence of the success of such an approach and it is not always clear that the 'new approach' is anything more than just a name change (Greene and Kirton, 2009). Webb (1997) found that while her case study firm proclaimed a diversity approach, the policies actually introduced offered no challenge to the structure and culture of the organisation in the way that DM is meant to do. In fact, as opposed to the rhetoric of difference, the policies in reality tended to reflect a 'sameness' approach. Similar points were made by Liff (1999) in her research at British Telecom (BT), where she found that the bulk of policies could be categorized as a 'valuing diversity' approach (fitting closely with the traditional liberal equality approach). Dean (2009) and Greene and Kirton (2009) found only limited evidence of inclusion of a broader range of employee differences (a key element of the diversity approach) in both private and public sector diversity policies. The evidence begs the question – is diversity in practice no more than a name change? Also, if this is the case, what benefits does the name change bring both for organisations and for employees? Or does, as some commentators argue, diversity represent a distinctively different approach in practice (Kandola and Fullerton, 1998: 11)? If so, what are these differences and what are the consequences in equality terms? Critical authors argue that there are a number of serious problems with the diversity approach that are often glossed over in the management and practitioner literature.

Problems with the business case

The crucial area of debate has been whether the business and social justice cases are competing rationales (Noon and Ogbonna, 2001). This of course is linked to the question of whether diversity is a new *approach* or simply a new *label*. It might be argued that the business case has traditionally been an important element of equality approaches. Some commentators go further and talk about the social justice and

business cases coinciding. The argument here is that social justice aims can lead to organisational benefits – for example, the marketing potential and enhancement of reputation that come with being (perceived as) an ethical business, or the benefits from being seen as an ‘employer of choice’ (Gagnon and Cornelius, 2002; Liff and Dickens, 2000; Dickens, 2000; Dickens, 1999). There are obvious pragmatic issues here and arguably social justice arguments will probably be most persuasive when they are combined with the business case (Dickens, 2000: 144).

However, some authors highlight the dangers of the business case (Noon and Ogbonna, 2001; Kaler, 2001; Greene and Kirton, 2009; Kirton, 2008; Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000; Dickens, 1997; Webb, 1997). The problem is whether the social justice aim of achieving fair representation can be met solely by the business case (Kaler, 2001: 59). Dickens (1997) emphasized the dangers for equality policies of the business case, stating that it is always contingent on factors such as the profitability of the firm or nature of the product market. What happens in times of economic downturn? What happens if a return on investment cannot be proven? What happens if the nature of the firm and its markets simply mean that employee diversity does not add value? More fundamentally, where is the moral imperative underpinning ethical business practice and corporate social responsibility? As Kaler comments, *‘Under certain pressing conditions, there will always be much to lose from being ethical and much to gain from being unethical’* (2001: 60 from Chryssides and Kaler, 1993). There are too many cases when it could be argued that it will not pay to pursue diversity. If organisations are only going to introduce diversity policies if they have a business end, surely we can think of many instances when the customer, supplier or employer preference may be for a homogenous workforce (Kaler, 2001: 62). Finally, is it morally right for diversity to be promoted simply on business case terms or, as discussed below, could this be seen as the exploitation of difference?

5.3.1.3 The exploitation of difference?

Jones (2004) sees diversity as a ‘discourse of exploitation’ rather than the new paradigm for equality policy-making. It has been argued that emphasising employee differences might be used to reassert inferiority and justify exclusion (Webb, 1997). Webb used a quote from Cockburn (1991) stating that there is little room for difference *not* to be constructed as something inferior, *‘...the dominant group know you are different and continue to treat you as different, but if you yourself specify your difference, your claim to equality will be null’* (1991: 219). Thus, a diversity approach may give ammunition to those who believe that being ‘different’ to the dominant norm disqualifies ‘outsiders’ from full inclusion and allows differences to be used in a way which is detrimental to equality (Liff, 1996). Individuals from ‘minority’ groups are thus vulnerable to becoming ‘ghettoized’ and exploited for the purposes of organisational gains – the ‘utilizing diversity’ approach.

The ‘utilizing diversity’ approach might also serve to reinforce stereotyping, which, as discussed in Chapter 3, can contribute to the perpetuation of disadvantage (see also Kaler, 2001: 63). As Liff (1996) stated, people may talk about the value of women’s skills, such as ‘caring attitudes’, but in reality such ‘feminine’ skills continue to be undervalued in terms of pay and status. Thus, discourses of difference can often be used to support the ‘normalcy’ of employment segregation and pay gaps. An opposing argument is that employers should be able to articulate that people from different cultures, backgrounds

and genders have different inherent aptitudes and skills, for example, the idea that '*women do well in social services and education*' or that '*Asians, having an aptitude for math, excel at engineering*' or, '*that blacks [sic] have some advantage in achieving success in basketball*' (Chen, 1992: 33). However, the counter-claim is that these alleged differences are no more than a reflection of dominant stereotypes with little basis in reality. This reliance on stereotypes and myths of difference tends to go unrecognized by 'utilizing and valuing diversity' approaches. According to this critique, the diversity approach does little to transform attitudes and cultures to make organisations more inclusive.

Neglecting the realities of unfair discrimination and disadvantage

As discussed above, the diversity approach emphasizes employee differences and their value to organisations. Celebratory rhetoric and metaphors are often used in diversity statements, making the policies sound far more positive than EO policies with their emphasis on discrimination. However, Kirton (2008) argues that the rhetoric of diversity could be used to conceal organisational 'non-action' on discrimination and inequalities and to convey the impression that 'there's no problem here'. If everyone is different and has different needs, aspirations etc. why does it matter if there are different outcomes? Kirton (2008) goes on to argue that when this kind of neoliberal thinking underpins policy and practice, unequal outcomes can easily be presented as simply different. Thus, the diversity approach can be used to deny the existence of injustice, inequalities and discrimination and to deny the need to challenge these things.

Another factor that could potentially lead to policy neglect of disadvantage is the fact that despite the difference rhetoric within the diversity approach, a 'difference' approach is not necessarily taken in practice. Paradoxically, it could even be argued that a 'sameness' approach is implicit in Liff's (1996) 'dissolving differences' diversity approach, with its requirement that everyone is treated the same, regardless of group characteristics. As we argued in reference to the liberal equality approach, 'same treatment' does not necessarily lead to equal outcomes. Elements of a 'sameness' approach, which could lead to the neglect of disadvantage, can also be identified within the model of DM espoused by Kandola and Fullerton (1998). Their model positions all differences on the same or similar terms; none are seen as more salient than others in leading to disadvantage in the workplace. For example, individual personality characteristics such as 'workstyle' are seen as being as significant as, and independent of, gender or ethnicity. We argue that while we need to recognize the transient nature of some forms of disadvantage (for example disability – Woodhams and Danieli 2000, or age – Oswick and Rosenthal 2001), and the fact that individuals within a social group do not all share the same forms of disadvantage all the time, certain identities affect life chances more than others. We argue, for example, that race and gender are particularly salient in the structuring of opportunities and of disadvantage. Whilst we acknowledge that categorizing individuals in reference to their social group characteristics may be constraining in some respects, social group membership needs to be recognized as a fundamental contributing factor to patterns of inequality and disadvantage.

Even Kandola and Fullerton (1998: 103) acknowledge that some of the work conducted in the name of diversity could enhance rather than reduce the effects of stereotypes, potentially reinforcing inequalities. As a necessary requirement of diversity

policies therefore, Ford (1996) suggested that there is a need to ensure that all human resources processes in organisations are intrinsically fair and based on individual ability. However, the question to ask is, against what criteria is something judged fair and who develops the criteria for evaluating individual ability? Further, who decides what the norms or benchmarks are against which someone is judged to be the same or different? Liff and Wacjman (1996) took up this point, arguing that these questions signal a weakness in the dichotomy which opposes 'sameness' and 'difference' when, in fact, the terms are only relative to each other. In reality, what tends to happen in organisations is that fairness and ability, 'sameness' and 'difference' continue to be judged by those most powerful (typically white males) against the same dominant norm (white males).

Another problem that limits the capacity of the diversity approach to tackle discrimination is that it is largely introspective, focusing more on the movement of people within organisations rather than the barriers existing in the wider labour market (Miller, 1996). It could be argued that the diversity approach implicitly presupposes that equality already exists within the organisation so that employee differences can be celebrated. As Thomas (1990) pointed out, you cannot 'manage diversity' unless you have a diverse workforce to begin with. There are without doubt more factors involved in the perpetuation of inequalities and disadvantage than direct discrimination at the entry point to organisations. Wider workplace culture, attitudes and values have an impact and these are very difficult to manage. The fact that line managers do not always 'buy into' the diversity approach remains a significant barrier (Greene and Kirton, 2009). Kandola and Fullerton commented that diversity policy is not about *'removing our prejudices. It is about recognising they exist and then questioning them before we act'* (1998: 13). This statement seems to imply that it is enough to recognize that prejudices exist. While it would be a difficult, if not impossible, task for an organisation to remove prejudices from all employees, it is necessary for organisations to attempt to prevent prejudices from influencing decision-making on staffing matters.

Finally, in de-emphasizing systemic inequalities and disadvantage, the diversity approach seems to miss the opportunity for bottom-up, employee-led challenge and action. If we think of people as members of social groups, people are not equally powerful in society. Highlighting the interests and differences of *individuals* may only serve to maintain the power of the dominant groups because the power structures remain taken-for-granted within an individualistic lens (Liff, 1996). An emphasis on individual differences weakens the ties that people can forge through recognition of common experiences, based for example, on being a woman or being disabled. These common experiences can foster the necessary collectivist orientation to encourage groups to push for action. However, where people perceive themselves simply as individuals, they are also likely to feel alone and isolated in their struggles (Cockburn, 1989). As Kandola and Fullerton (1998: 109) acknowledge, there may be dangers in ignoring what is *similar* to emphasize difference. For example, the diversity approach could be disempowering for individuals as dissolving collective identity can lead to dissolving collective strength. In Dickens' (1997) ideal model of equality practice, the role of trade unions, with their emphasis on collective action, is seen as a vital piece of the 'jigsaw' making up the campaign for equality in the workplace (see also Greene and Kirton, 2002).

Can an individualized business case be made?

Completing the circle of our discussion brings us back to the question of whether a diversity approach can advance the equality agenda. Reflecting many elements of the above discussion, a key question is, whether a business case can be made for valuing *individual* differences? The problem is that, in practice this appears to be very difficult. We have already established that in practice, many diversity policies look very similar to traditional equality policies with social groups still appearing significant, despite the rhetoric of individual difference. It is clear that in practice, organisations do not see a complete separation between equality and diversity approaches (Liff, 1999; Kirton, 2002: 7; Cornelius, 2002a; Greene and Kirton, 2002). Much of this overlap appears to occur because developing policy on the basis of individual differences is problematic in practice. Liff provided a good illustration of this with reference to policies at BT, where she highlighted the difficulties of having a policy that aimed to simultaneously *ignore* and *respond* to differences. There was little understanding within the organisation of the basis for deciding when it is appropriate to recognize differences and when to ignore them (1999: 73). Woodhams and Danieli (2000) clearly illustrate the difficulty of the business case for diversity in relation to disabled employees. Disability is perhaps the most obvious example of the deficiencies of the diversity approach. Paradoxically, disability is also the most obvious example of where individual differences are most salient because impairment is necessarily individual. Yet, in the case of disability, it would be hard to justify diversity policies in purely business case terms because the degree of individuality inevitably leads to increased costs in identifying and implementing policy measures. Therefore, the conclusion we must draw is that a diversity policy has to have at least a degree of focus on groups. Woodhams and Danieli's analysis is important in touching on the inherent contradiction within the rhetoric of diversity. This is that the business case for recognizing diversity is prioritized; however, if this is conceptualized solely as concerned with individual differences, identified and dealt with on an individual basis, then it becomes very difficult to make a viable business case.

3.4 HOW CAN EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY BE THEORIZED IN THE 2000s?

Based on the critiques above, we can see that neither an equality approach nor a diversity approach provides us with a perfect solution. The debate on sameness versus difference in relation to women is illustrative here:

'...the 'sameness' alternative is insufficiently critical of the status quo. The 'difference' option is critical...but seems to conjecture that women can exist in some sort of separate world. Seeing women as the same as men prevents us from challenging the model, against which women are being compared; seeing women as different prevents us from changing it'

Bacchi, 1990: 262, quoted in Webb, 1997

While the point above relates specifically to the case of gender, it can be utilized to highlight the weaknesses of the sameness and difference approaches more generally.

Working from within a sameness approach, equality policies often aim to make workers from disadvantaged groups fit the dominant norm, while a focus on 'differences' only seems to further reproduce the disadvantage faced by those groups. People may want to be treated neither the same nor differently at all times with respect to all aspects of their work lives (Liff and Wajcman, 1996). This returns to a point made earlier about the inseparability of 'sameness' and 'difference'. People possess what Liff and Wajcman call '*mobile subjectivities*' where people have both multiple differences and similarities. So for example, people may want to be treated the same for recruitment purposes, regardless of their ethnicity or gender, but may want their rights recognized to have flexible work arrangements to look after a dependent or to have special arrangements for religious worship, without suffering a long-term career detriment. People are the same and different simultaneously. The problem is that this debate does not provide any solution as to how policy could be constructed without falling foul of the criticisms noted in this chapter. It is difficult to identify how to develop policy that would take account of both sameness and difference and it is difficult to identify what policy measures would be appropriate in all the different circumstances.

One of the main issues is that neither the equality nor the diversity approach in practice is transformative enough. Rees (1998) stated that in practice, there can be short and long diversity agendas, just as with equality. Within the 'mainstreaming' approach that Rees advocated, there is a need for organisational cultures to be 'transformed', building upon the politics of difference. But this is clearly no easy task, especially when organisations face external pressures such as competition in the market or periods of recession. Thus, Rees concluded that in reality, many organisations simply 'tinker' with or 'tailor' existing initiatives and procedures which do not challenge the inherent inequalities within the structures, systems and cultures.

With regard to how to achieve greater gender equality, Liff and Wajcman (1996) suggested that what was needed was the construction of a new norm of work based on women's needs and interests, so that women can be assessed in their own right and not as 'not men' or 'other'. It is not easy to define exactly what are 'women's interests'; indeed, the diversity of interests within social groups is a recurring theme in this book. However, it would certainly be helpful if the norm of work was not full-time, uninterrupted service, as this disproportionately disadvantages many women, especially those who work part-time or who have domestic responsibilities. The experience of Sweden is cited as demonstrating where an equality strategy sees typically female patterns of work as the norm. For example, the extensive parental leave provisions, available to both men and women in Sweden, challenge the male breadwinner stereotype that militates against men taking more domestic responsibility. Gardiner (1998) proposed that skills developed in domestic work should be revalued as important to the labour market, and that breaks from paid work could still be seen as periods of valuable skills development.

There are, however, obvious problems with moving to a new norm. The first is clearly that it would require considerable transformation in attitudes and power structures, and it is therefore a utopian conception. Having the *opportunity* to assume more domestic responsibility does not necessarily mean that men will *actually* take it. Therefore, for a new norm to establish itself, at least some of the challenge to the status quo has to come from the dominant group (in this case men); otherwise, 'differences' are likely to

remain identified with inferiority (Webb, 1997). Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, as Liff and Wajeman (1996) acknowledged, a fundamental criticism of the 'female norm' approach is that gender is privileged over other social divisions such as ethnicity, disability, sexuality or class. Any new norm would have to ensure that there was enough space for workers from other social groups too. However, as is highlighted throughout this book, the issue is not that other identities should be treated as equally significant as gender, but that a new norm has to recognize intersectionality.

An integration of approaches

The pragmatic solution would be to have a mixture of equality and diversity, sameness and difference approaches. However, Liff's (1999) comments above about the difficulties of achieving this need to be borne in mind here. There are dangers if the diversity approach is seen as something totally new that does not require the maintenance of the basic safeguards and protections contained within the liberal equality approach. If diversity is presented as an alternative to equality, then this threatens to sever the link between organisational strategies and the realities of labour market disadvantage (Miller, 1996). We would agree with Kaler (2001) and Liff (1999) that the safer option, with more prospects for greater equality, is to ensure that the traditional equality paradigm underpins the newer diversity approach. Recognizing individual differences within groups and people's different and changing needs over time becomes a 'bonus' if basic equality work is being done.

Key learning points

- There is still limited evidence as to the success of diversity policies. In addition, there are examples of where the 'difference' approach can be used to reassert the inferiority and justify the exclusion of disadvantaged groups.
 - There is still a lack of clarity about how to achieve equality in the workplace. Suggestions include recognizing that people are both similar and different simultaneously. Therefore, 'sameness' and 'difference' should not be placed in opposition. This leads to the need to maintain traditional equality approaches alongside more recent diversity approaches.
 - There are a variety of different conceptualizations of diversity, including 'mainstreaming', which seek to transform organisational cultures. Short and long diversity agendas can also be identified.
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Activity 5.2

Police halt jobs diversity scheme after discrimination claims

A pioneering campaign by Avon and Somerset police to increase the number of women and ethnic minority officers in its ranks has been withdrawn following advice that it may discriminate against white men. The scheme, launched last summer, was intended to "redress under-representation" of the area's "diverse communities" but resulted in complaints to the Commission for Racial Equality

and the Equal Opportunities Commission. Applications from 186 white males were rejected before the interview stage in favour of those from women and from non-white backgrounds.

"Positive action" - helping applicants prepare for recruitment procedures or advertising in ethnic minority publications - is permitted but positive discrimination is illegal. The chief constable, Colin Port, yesterday defended the "innovative" approach: "Last summer we tried to do something different. Through use of positive action and using the model of the Disability Discrimination Act we intended to recruit officers that more accurately reflect the diverse communities we serve. We considered this represented an untried and untested area. It was not and has never been our intention to discriminate against anyone who applies for a position with the Avon and Somerset constabulary.... We will think again about how we can continue to recruit from under-represented groups...until that balance has been redressed." The force added: "In order to redress the situation we have... offered to reconsider all of the applicants excluded."

Around 3.9% of Avon and Somerset's population of around 1.5 million is from a non-white background. Peter Fahy, chairman of the race and diversity committee of the Association of Chief Police Officers, said police forces were being damned for failing to recruit enough ethnic minority and women officers, and damned when they tried new ways of diversifying their workforce.

(Source: *The Guardian*, 8 March 2006)

Questions

1. Drawing on the chapter's discussion, consider why this scheme attracted such controversy.
2. Given that the scheme was legal, was the police department right to back down in the face of complaints?
3. Does the scheme fit within either an equality or diversity approach?

5.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has summarised the key conceptualizations of equality and diversity approaches and highlighted their strengths and weaknesses. What has emerged from the discussion is the lack of clarity about how to achieve equality - whether through 'sameness' or 'difference'. There is no clear and undisputed conceptualization of equality or diversity and no clear guidance as to the future direction of the equality project. It is of course always much easier to find weaknesses and criticisms than it is to construct new ways of doing things. Many of these problems will be discussed further in the following four chapters dealing with the translation of theoretical approaches into policy and practice within the law, trade unions, organisations and management thinking. The theoretical perspectives presented here will provide a useful background which can be used to help make sense of, and assess the success of, the various policy initiatives presented.

Activity 5.3

Understanding equality approaches

Undertake an internet search of the equality and diversity statements made on web sites by major work organisations in the UK and elsewhere. Try to include organisations from different sectors (e.g. retail, banking, local government) and of different sizes (large multi-national as well as medium-sized organisations). List the types of policies organisations have.

Questions

1. Do the policy *statements* seem to reflect the equality or diversity approach? Offer explanations for how you would categorize the statements.
2. Do the policy *initiatives* described seem to fit into either the equality or diversity approach?
3. Discuss the fit between the various policies and initiatives and the rationale organisations give for them.
4. Critically evaluate the potential that the diversity statements and the policies have for leading to 'transformation' in organisations.

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the differences and similarities among the liberal, radical and diversity approaches? What types of equality do they address?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each of the approaches?
3. How does such an analysis help us to conceptualize the direction that equality policies will or should take in the 21st century?
4. '*Managing diversity*' [diversity management] *is not anything new. It is simply another renaming exercise to enhance the image of existing 'equal opportunities' initiatives* (Hollinshead et al., 1999: 451). Discuss this statement.

FURTHER READING

Cockburn, C., 1989 and Jewson, N., Mason, D., 1986.

These two articles are widely cited as they provide critical analyses of traditional equality approaches and a starting point for theorizing in the contemporary period.

Konrad, A., Prasad, P. and Pringle, J., 2006.

A comprehensive volume of diversity research containing several theoretical contributions.

Liff, S., Wajeman, J., 1996.

An insightful analysis of the 'sameness' and 'difference' approaches to equality, identifying key strengths and weaknesses and providing a multi-dimensional model of diversity.

Noon, M., Ogbonna, E., 2001.

A useful collection of papers, which discuss the theoretical and policy debates around equality and diversity, and which present empirical research examining the experiences of different social groups.

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