EEO and Managerialism in New Zealand Local Government: Empirical Results of a Collision Course?

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Abstract

In this study perceptions of EEO held by employees of a medium-sized local authority were measured from 1994-1998. A significant increase in support for EEO occurred in the first two years of the study. However this rise did not translate into a significant change in the proportion of women in management/supervisory positions within the organisation, although ample opportunity for change existed. The results may be interpreted through the lens of a collision between the democratic values of EEO and the elitist values of managerialism. The collision appears to have submerged the EEO discourse to remove labour market discrimination, and gender discrimination in particular, into a new discourse of diversity. We suggest that the diversity discourse is a mechanism for once more marginalising the issues of social justice which are the basis of any EEO agenda.
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Introduction

More than a decade has passed since Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and good employer obligations were enshrined in legislation governing the management of human resources in central and local government in New Zealand. EEO is ‘now firmly embedded in the organisational structures and culture of the public service’ according to Boston, et al (1996, p.257). As part of the process of implementing a comprehensive EEO policy, the Local Government Act 1989 requires all local authorities to have an EEO programme designed to secure the impartial appointment of Maori, women, minority ethnic groups and people with disabilities. The expected outcome of this move was an increase in the number of employees from the under-represented groups (State Services Commission (SSC), 1995). Although EEO legislation encompasses a number of different groups, in this paper, due to limited data, we focus on a discussion of women. We also acknowledge that ‘women’ is not a unitary experience and we use the term for purposes of simplicity only (Webb, 1997).

To date, little empirical research has been undertaken to support the Boston et al (1996) claim. This paper reports on the situation in one medium-sized urban local authority from data collected in a longitudinal study of organisational change. We did find EEO embedded in the organisational structure within the supervisory and managerial levels of the organisational culture as suggested by Boston et al (1996). At the same time, the expected outcome of an increased representation of women decision-makers (SSC, 1995) has not proven to be the case at The Council (un-named due to confidentiality agreements).

The paper begins with an overview of the initial reasons for developing an EEO policy. This is followed by a discussion of the underlying assumptions of three EEO models; liberal, radical and transformational. The history of EEO government policy in New Zealand is followed by a discussion of the Walsh and Dickson (1993) assessment of early implementation attempts within central
government departments. The analysis of the data from one local authority is then presented in the light of the inevitable collision between the democratising concerns of EEO and the elitist values of managerialism. The paper concludes with the suggestion that the shift from an EEO discourse to a discourse of managing diversity is the latest method of continuing systemic inequality in local government organisations while silencing concerns about employment discrimination.

**Why an EEO policy?**

‘The discourse of EEO represents the major and critical attempt to address issues of inequality in employment ...’ (Jones, 1995, p. 97). EEO, broadly defined, is concerned with changing for the better the work experiences of members of disadvantaged groups (Webb & Liff, 1988). EEO is concerned with both equity and equality. Although Humphries & Grice (1995, p. 206) define ‘equity’ as ‘fair’, and ‘equality’ as ‘same’, in this paper the distinctive nature of each word is relinquished for brevity, as we find that most often the two meanings are intertwined.

EEO has as its stated aim the promotion of social justice by preventing employment discrimination based on ‘gender, ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation or family circumstances’ (SSC, 1995, p. 18). Discrimination can occur on a number of levels. Direct discrimination is usually overt and occurs at an individual level when, for example, someone is excluded for consideration for a job because of their gender. Newspaper advertisements for a ‘Girl Friday’ explicitly excludes male applicants. This type of discrimination is addressed by anti-discrimination legislation in New Zealand such as the Human Rights Act 1993 and the personal grievance provisions of the Employment Contracts Act 1991. Indirect discrimination occurs at an organisational level when policies and practices disadvantage certain groups of employees. Breakfast and late night meetings disadvantage women with family responsibilities, but continue to be a decision-making forum in many organisations (Harfield & Clark, 1994).

Structural discrimination occurs when various aspects of work practices and the social system combine to disadvantage specific groups. For example, the concept of a male ‘breadwinner’ with financial responsibility for his wife and children is an historical view of the family as an economic unit
The breadwinner wage, sufficient money to enable a male unskilled worker to support a wife and three children, was first established in Australia in 1907 (Harris, 1999, p. 172). The concept is based on the assumption of specialised locations of labour, which have grown in the twentieth century to mean gendered types of labour (Harris, 1999). Thus, breadwinners as paid public labours, and homemakers as unpaid domestic labourers, have been for much of the twentieth century, the accepted societal metaphors (Waring, 1996). Evidence of the societal acceptance of these metaphors is found in government policy. For example, there is little political support for a publicly-funded childcare system for working families. Employment practices are also predicated upon the gendered beliefs underlying these metaphors. Union awards include limiting working times of female workers and setting lower rates of pay for women, as women who work are still considered to be primarily homemakers who do not need to work because the ‘breadwinner’ will provide (James & Saville-Smith, 1994).

Even with dramatic changes in the locations and meanings of work in the 1990s, Harris (1999) reports a continuation of structural discrimination within which women work. Attempts to change this structural discrimination began in New Zealand as early as 1960 with the introduction of the Government Services Equal Pay Act 1960, followed by the Equal Pay Act 1972. However, the Arbitration Court of the time ruled that equal pay was only to be accorded with equal work. Almost 20 years later, a second attempt to legislate equal pay, this time overtly for equal work, was short-lived. A Labour government passed the Employment Equity Act 1990 early in the year, and a National (conservative) government had repealed it by the end of the year (Sayers, 1992, p. 144). That the Act was passed indicates some understanding of the need to remove structural discrimination; on the other hand, that the Act was repealed indicates that the gendered expectations continued to be accepted.

The accepted gendered distinctions of when, how, where and for how much employees work is the basis of employment disadvantage for women. Historically, some women have had the economic responsibility for themselves and their families even though the ideal remains a male primary income provider in a family unit (James & Saville-Smith, 1994). The metaphors of homemaker and
breadwinner are necessary to encapsulate the roles of players in an idyllic stable family during a lifetime of predicable transitions. However, the idyllic family model does not take into account death, divorces, war, international depression, long-term illness, domestic violence or other economic, social or personal upheavals which leave women with financial responsibility for themselves and their families. In addition, the practices which restrict entry of women into professions or prevent equal pay, remain the rule rather than the exception. For instance, a study of academic women with permanent positions at the University of Canterbury in 1994 found that over half of the women were the sole or primary sources of income for themselves, for their immediate, or their extended families. However, in spite of having this financial responsibility, most of the women were located at the lower end of the pay scales (Harfield & Clark, 1994).

Models of EEO
In an effort to address this inequity, the government developed an EEO policy in New Zealand based on a belief in social justice (SSC, 1995). However, during the development process, two strong positions were evident. Much of the early debate centred around two models of EEO, liberal and radical, with differing views of the nature of individual and the role of the state (Jewson & Mason, 1986).

The liberal EEO model is grounded in classical liberalism. The two basic tenets are a free and competitive labour market, and appointment and promotion based on merit. Merit is considered an individual attribute which is said to be able to be judged objectively. In an attempt to ensure fair competition, explicit procedures and criteria are developed, not by the state through legislation, but by experts in ‘human resources’ (Webb, 1997). Human resources managers within organisations are responsible for ensuring that equality of opportunity is available to all individuals. Thus, a fair outcome is expected and the state has no part in the process in a society composed of individuals who have equal access to the labour market.

The radical EEO model, in contrast, questions the possibility of merit being objectively defined. The argument is that merit is socially constructed by those who exclude; therefore the group rather than
the individual is the unit of analysis. Powerful groups within society set the criteria which is neither value-neutral nor fair. Because skills, abilities and knowledge are not equally available to individuals, a radical model of EEO places less emphasis on procedures, and more emphasis on labour market outcomes. Radical scholars (eg. Cockburn, 1989; Webb & Liff, 1988) argue that human resources procedures cannot be relied on to produce equitable outcomes. The solution lies in politicising the decision-making process to promote the interests of disadvantaged groups against inherent and historical bias. In addition, scholars argue that acknowledgement must be made that the state is an important player in any practice which will ensure equitable employment outcomes for all groups in society (Waring, 1996).

These two world-views (Jewson & Mason, 1986) lead to different kinds of implementation policies for EEO. A liberal solution to discriminatory employment access, opportunity, condition and outcome (Miller, 1997) is to create fair procedures and employment practices for individuals by individuals, emphasising fair practices for recruitment, selection, appraisal and promotion. For example, it is assumed that individuals will benefit if EEO awareness programmes are provided, or standardised recruitment procedures are developed by human resources managers within organisations.

On the other hand, rather than leaving the changes to human resources managers, radical implementation of EEO includes manipulation of employment practices for positive discrimination as part of government legislation. A good example of a radical implementation of EEO is the Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986 instituted by the Australian government. The Act replaces the ‘voluntary’ EEO scheme in which employers failed to ‘devote sufficient resources’ or to take ‘adequate action’ to overcome a perceived need for a specific group (Kramer, 1993). The early attempts at equity reform were found wanting, and thus the state instituted a politicalised agenda with clearly defined outcomes for an historically disadvantaged group.
Both the liberal and the radical EEO models (Jewson & Mason, 1986) have been criticised by those who argue that neither model addresses the nature of the way work is structured in organisations. Cockburn (1989, p. 217) argues that the radical model ‘seeks to give disadvantaged groups a boost up the ladder, while leaving the structure of that ladder and the disadvantages it entails just as before’. At the same time, the liberal approach to equity assumes that equity means equal to the ‘white man’ status of work; fulltime, permanent, and unbroken careers (Webb & Liff, 1988). A more systemic view suggested by some feminist scholars (eg. James & Saville-Smith, 1994; Waring, 1996) is that work is located within a capitalist and patriarchal structure which is predicated upon the view that women are both inferior to men and have specific and special roles which should be located in the domestic rather than the public sphere. They argue that individuals or groups will not find social justice within a programme aimed at access to paid employment, but must begin by changing societal gender power-relations (Waring, 1996).

This transformational model (Cockburn, 1989) focuses on outcomes rather than access and is considered to be a long-term rather than a short-term project in which change is the responsibility of the state. Evidence for the necessity of a long-term view continues to be readily available. Thirty-eight years after the legislation for equal pay was introduced into New Zealand, women in general, continue to earn less than do men, and merit is no indicator of equity. Studies show that in 1998 women graduates in New Zealand earned higher grades overall than did their male counterparts; however men in all categories began their first employment after graduation at higher salaries than did women (Rowarth, 1999).

**EEO Public Policy in New Zealand**

Walsh and Dickson (1993, p. 4) write that government officials rather than politicians were ‘central to the promotion of The EEO agenda’ in New Zealand. In response to the lack of progress on limiting employment discrimination during the 1970s, a coalition of ‘supportive managers and trade union officials’ navigated some EEO provisions into the public sector during the 1980s. The State Services Commission (SSC, 1995, p.19), the central employing authority of all government employees, recognised that ‘the under-representation of women, Maori, Pacific Island people and
people with disabilities’ in the public sector was a problem. The solution to the problem was the proposal that all government departments adopt an EEO Policy. Gradually awareness of the issue became institutionalised as resources were made available. Legitimacy came during 1986 with the establishment of an EEO Unit within the SSC. The Unit was designed to be responsible for educating, monitoring and reporting on EEO achievements.

The continued legitimation for EEO was guaranteed as it become an integral part of legislation, beginning with the State-Owned Enterprises Act 1986. This Act required all SOEs to be a ‘good employer’. However the Act did not spell out what constituted a good employer (Humphries & Grice, 1995) and it contained no monitoring or reporting component in the Act. In 1988 the Working Group on Equal Employment Opportunities and Equal Pay recommended a systematic programme of social reform which identified discriminatory ‘barriers’ in employment. The Group also called for direct action which would eliminate the causes that perpetuated ‘inequality in employment of any person or group of persons’ (WG, 1988, p. 7). This request was actioned through the State Sector Act 1988 which went further than did the SOE Act and required all state sector employers to have an EEO programme designed to secure the impartial appointment of Maori, women, minority ethnic groups and people with disabilities (SSC, 1995). Thus, actions to prevent and eliminate discrimination at the individual, group or systems level are located within central government EEO policy which has been enshrined in a number of statuary acts over time.

However, in a review of the EEO Management Plans of nine government departments for the period 1988-91, Walsh and Dickson (1993) found that EEO was established in the New Zealand public sector ‘tentatively and unevenly’. They assessed the implementation of EEO using the liberal/radical models and found that the initial liberal agenda appeared to give way, in some part, to the radical agenda (Jewson & Mason, 1986). The changing of human resources practices to make hiring practices more readily perceived as based on merit was most evident in the earlier reports. Application of an ‘individualised approach implicit in the economic and labour reforms’ within the government sector was obvious in this response (Humphries & Grice, 1995, p. 223).
The more radical EEO agenda of targeting specific groups and politicising decision-making processes in the later reports was also a ‘visible trend’. The targeting of specific groups such as women and Maori (Jones, 1995) is evident in the State Sector Act 1988. However, it appears that access and outcomes are not easily separated in the implementation process. Walsh & Dickson (1993) found situation specific factors impeding implementation of an EEO policy, for example, few women being available for promotion due to an historical gender imbalance, or the lack of willing candidates for government scholarship programmes. These and other department specific impediments ensured that the EEO policy had not become observable practice.

Ultimately, however, Walsh and Dickson (1993) claim that the major barrier to EEO implementation in New Zealand government departments was the ‘competing’ philosophical influence of managerialism in the public sector.

Managerialism and Public Sector Reform

The 1980s was a decade of reform in New Zealand. All reforms were aimed at changing the economy from one based on the welfare state doctrine to a market economy based on monetarist economic policies (Kelsey, 1996). The key to the changes was a program of fundamental restructuring of the public sector including large scale corporatisation and privatisation of hitherto public industries. The rationale for massive restructuring was the need to reduce the national deficit by disciplining government spending, devolving government functions to a regional or local level, and making all aspects of the economy, whether in the private or the public sector, pay the true cost of consuming resources (Bush, 1995).

The competitive market organisation became the model for public organisations. The shift to commercial methods of operation was suppose to lead to improved organisational performance. Efficiency became the governing ideal of the public sector in the belief that more efficient use of resources would lead to more effective delivery of goods and services to the consuming public (Easton, 1997).
Administration in the public sector also required change as commercialised organisations were formed; public administrators became public managers. ‘Managerialism’ is defined by Metcalfe (1993, p. 1) as ‘a worldwide movement to upgrade public administration by using management concepts, tools and techniques, many of which were originally developed in business’. Large scale change of policies, practices, procedures and philosophy was required. In Reinventing Government, Osborne & Gaebler (1992) list values and practices of the old and the new government administration styles. Table 1 lists some of the linked pairs suggested by Osborne & Gaebler in their articulation of the argument for a change from a civil servant ethos to a managerial ethos within government organisations.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison of some attributes in local government</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>OLD</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>provides services</td>
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<tr>
<td>serving people</td>
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<tr>
<td>unitary</td>
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<tr>
<td>rule-driven</td>
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<tr>
<td>focus on inputs</td>
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<tr>
<td>process orientation</td>
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<tr>
<td>policy for organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>spend money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>policy driven change</td>
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<tr>
<td>centralised structure</td>
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<td>administrative hierarchy</td>
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Accountability and efficiency were the twin aims of the New Zealand government reforms (Kelsey, 1996). It could be argued that the ideal of accountability is located within a humanist view of organisational behaviour, while the belief in efficiency is the basis of an optimising self-interest view of behaviour (Gregory, 1995). Thus, opposing perspectives were bound to be in a tension as reforming policies incorporated the values of a democratising accountability processes and the ideals
of self-interested efficiency. It could be further argued that EEO is a product of the democratic ideals of accountability, while the view of limited resources, which is the basis of a philosophy of efficiency, is the foundation of managerialism.

Walsh & Dickson (1993) argue that the lack of a ‘competing’ philosophy prior to 1988 allowed support for the idea of EEO to grow in New Zealand. While it would be difficult to say that managerialism was absent from the reform process until 1988, it is clear that until that time EEO policies were not perceived as a ‘threat’ to the continued growth of managerialism within the public sector. The claim that managerialism had gained a foothold is supported by research about senior public sector personnel. Gregory (1995) found two important and common factors concerning senior public servants; an educational background in commerce and entry into the senior ranks after 1988. Thus, he gives a plausible explanation for the appearance of a competing philosophy of an elitist managerialism after 1988.

It might be expected that the transformational EEO agenda of systemic change suggested by Cockburn (1989) could find favour at a time of great change, but the effect of the philosophy of managerialism in New Zealand government organisations was both fiscal restraint and rampant restructuring (Kelsey, 1996). Individual concern for job security during restructuring, and close scrutiny of budgets hampered, if not completely hindered, all attempts to find resources to implement EEO objectives according to Walsh & Dickson (1993). These factors helped to continue the marginalisation of the ideal of a humane and equitable workplace. Thus, the timing of the increased influence of managerialism made full implementation of an EEO policy very difficult.

**Research from one Local Government Authority**

As part of the ideological impetus for less government, devolution and rationalisation was accomplished with the Local Government Act 1989 (Boston, et al, 1996). The basic aim of all local government reform, including the 1989 reforms, has been to improve the way in which local government fulfils its role. The goal of improved efficiency was based partly on the public desire, not widely articulated, for the best possible provision of local public goods and the effective
management of local resources (Brooks, 1997). The main priority in achieving organisational efficiency was to separate the regulatory function from the delivery of services (Bush, 1995). The separation led to more council services being competitively tendered as councils considered different methods of service delivery including; their own staff, contractual arrangements with other councils, creating LATEs (separate self-sustaining business units), or contracting out.

These changes for efficiency were linked to changes instituted to provide a greater accountability to the ratepayers and other stakeholders (Bush, 1995). One example of this linkage is the preparation of the Annual Plan. All councils are required to prepare, through a process of consultation with the general public, via public meetings, information campaigns and community debates, a document which indicates the plans for future works on behalf of the citizens. While fiscal responsibility is expected, accountability is also expected during all parts of the process.

It has been argued that efficiency and accountability are part of a managerialist agenda to take the ‘politics’ out of governance, but, it might also be argued, that accountability is part of the democratising movement in the reform process (Miller, 1996). However, government policy is unlikely ever to be totally ruled by one ideology or philosophy. Policy formulation, legislation and implementation takes time and input from a variety of people with a variety of ideological positions (Boston, 1994). Thus, inherent in any legislative process, are built-in tensions, and in a gendered society such as New Zealand (James & Saville-Smith, 1994), it might be expected that legislation may also contain the residue of this unequal power-relationship. It could be assumed that the Local Government Act 1989 was designed and developed within this framework. It may be further argued that the values of an elitist managerialism (Alvesson & Willmott, 1996) and the values of a democratising EEO policy (SSC, 1995) have been in tension from the conception phrase of the local government legislation.

Or it may be that for those actually making the decisions on local government reform in New Zealand, EEO was not an issue. In the 336 page Proceedings from the New Local Government Conference, 1995, (McDermott, Forgie, & Howell, 1995) no mention of EEO is discernable. A
second example as evidence for the lack of interest in EEO is found in the well-respected book, *Local Government & Politics in New Zealand* (Bush, 1995) which contains over 300 pages of text. Only one mention of EEO, and indeed it is only a mention of EEO, is found in the text (pg. 209). Two other pages (96 and 211) are listed in the index as having some text on EEO. However, a look at those pages shows an absence of any discussion of EEO, the discussion is focused on ‘CEOs’. The lack of attention to detail may be used as a rationale for this ‘error’, or it may indeed be that for policy-makers and experts in the field of local government, EEO is not an issue which demands a good deal of attention.

Be-that-as-it-may, the Local Government Act 1989 requires local councils to have an EEO programme designed to secure the impartial appointment of Maori, women, minority ethnic groups and people with disabilities. Although the Act is now 10 years old, little empirical research into EEO outcomes has taken place. This paper attempts to provide evidence from one local authority concerning the effectiveness of the legislation.

This study of evaluating EEO outcomes is possible because data are available from one medium-sized, urban, public sector organisation, which undertakes an annual employee survey (a self-reporting organisational climate survey composed of 76 rating scale questions which measures culture on 12 dimensions or categories). The Council survey is part of a larger programme of organisational change which is a popular method of instituting a fundamental attitudinal and behavioural change within an organisation (Brooks, 1997). A major part of the New Zealand structural reforms has been a prescribed culture change programme to enable the shift from a civil servant ethos to a public management ethos to take place within government organisations (Brooks & Harfield, 2000). The structural and culture change programmes are predicated upon ideals of merit and opportunity for advancement which are also the basis of EEO policy. Thus, it is expected that the implementation of the EEO policy of the Local Government Act will be reflected in the findings of this annual survey.

**Perceptions of EEO**
The survey was administered in October of each year, from 1994 to 1998. The number of employees remained constant, around 2000, and the reply rate of about 60% was also constant. Data reveal an increase in positive perception towards EEO between 1994 and 1996, with little change in subsequent years. Mean values for the organisation as a whole reveal an increase in the favourable perception of EEO from 4.20 in 1994 to 4.50 in 1996 (Table 2). However, a closer analysis of the data is quite revealing. Mean scores for men and women are quite different for the first two years, with women scoring higher than did men; but by 1998 the EEO score for men and women was almost identical. Men’s perceptions of EEO have increased more than have women’s over the five-year period.

Table 2. Mean EEO scores by gender, length of service and level in hierarchy

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<tr>
<td><strong>GENDER</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>4.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>4.47</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TIME IN CURRENT WORK TEAM</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>&lt; 1 year</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – 3 years</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>4.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt; 3 years</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>4.45</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LEVEL IN HIERARCHY</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Director/Unit Manager</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>5.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Leader/Supervisor</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>4.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontline - Clerical</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>4.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontline - Other</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>4.22</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>OVERALL RESULTS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>4.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>1,277</td>
<td>1,223</td>
<td>1,092</td>
<td>937</td>
<td>1,108</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Analysis also reveals marked differences between staff in different levels of the organisational hierarchy. A more favourable the perception of EEO is evident moving up the organisational hierarchy: directors and unit managers are more positive than supervisors and team-leaders, who in turn are more positive than frontline operational staff. Differences in perception are also depend on length of service in the current work-team, with positive perceptions of EEO being inversely related to length of service.

**Change in gender mix of managers and supervisors 1994-1998**

We have observed that there was a significant increase in the mean EEO score over the period 1994-1998. The gender balance of the respondents of the survey remained similar over the period; about 45% were women and about 55% were men. In all years, men outnumbered women at director/unit manager level and team leader/supervisor level. However, one of the expected outcomes of a culture change programme with a strong EEO component is an increase in the number of women employed in non-traditional positions (Harfield & Clark, 1994). Did the number of women employed as at director/unit manager or team-leader/supervisor level in this organisation increase?

| Table 3. Years in position and percentages of female (F) and male (M) respondents at Director/Unit Manager and Team-Leader/Supervisor level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M |
| **Director/Unit Manager** | | | | | | | |
| < 1 yr | 3 | 3 | - | 3 | - | 1 | - | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| 1-3 yrs | 2 | 10 | 5 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 4 |
| > 3 yrs | 4 | 21 | 2 | 22 | 3 | 20 | 5 | 16 | 4 | 14 |
| **total** | 9 | 34 | 7 | 30 | 4 | 24 | 6 | 24 | 6 | 20 |
| % | 20.9 | 79.1 | 18.9 | 81.1 | 14.3 | 85.7 | 20.0 | 80.0 | 30.0 | 70.0 |
| **Team Leader/Supervisor** | | | | | | | |
| < 1 yr | 4 | 14 | 12 | 20 | 21 | 19 | 2 | 3 | 13 | 12 |
Table 3 shows that in all years men outnumbered women at director/unit manager and team-leader/supervisor levels. The percentage of women directors/unit managers increased from 20.9% to 23.0%, and the percentage of women team-leaders/supervisors rose from 28.0% to 32.3%. However, increases of 2.1% and 3.1% are not statistically significant in light of the high staff turnover rate. Although the gender ratio of all staff remained constant over the years, staff turnover (the length of service in respondents’ current work-team) was quite high, with 12-19% of total respondents joining a new team each year. Thus, almost half the positions at unit director/manager, and more than half of the team-leader/supervisor positions became vacant. Obviously, if there had been few opportunities to appoint women to management positions, then this could explain why more women were not appointed. But this was not the case: there was ample opportunity.

From EEO to Managing Diversity

The problem remains as to how to explain the gap between the very small increase in the number of women in management/supervisory positions over a five year period and the increased support for EEO during that same period. The existence of the opportunity for women to move into managerial positions apparently had little effect as the actual increase of less than 5% is insignificant.

Despite the existence of the mandatory EEO policy; the appointment of an EEO Officer; five years of a formal culture change programme with one of its primary aims being that all employees feel more valued by the organisation (Brooks, 1997); and a measurable change in the climate for EEO, there has been no significant change in employment outcomes for women who would be managers/supervisors within The Council. Theoretically, this study lends support to criticisms of the
liberal model of EEO (Jewson & Mason, 1986). Supporters of the radical EEO model (Webb & Liff, 1988) would argue that the data provide further evidence of the failure of the liberal model, thus the need to increase the political power of women. However, it could be argued that a state intervention concerned with changing power-relations was met by the requirements for EEO in the Local Government Act. Yet, the effectiveness of either the liberal or the radical model must be questioned, based on the evidence from this research.

A transformational EEO model suggests changing the actual structure of the labour market; structures which were held in place by the ‘white man’ view of work (Cockburn, 1989). In the 1990s, managerialism advocates just such a change; casualisation, contracting-out and multi-careers have replaced full-time permanent life-time careers (Hiltrop, 1995). Thus it could be argued that work organisation has been changed and yet inequality remains. The transformational model has not ensured equality even though employment access, opportunity, and outcomes appear to be available to the women in The Council (Miller, 1996).

On the other hand, the findings may suggest that the framework for analysis is outdated. As Walsh and Dickson (1993) note, the liberal/radical dichotomy does not take into account the tension caused by the introduction of managerialism into the New Zealand public sector. As has been noted, a tension exists between the values of a democratising EEO and an elitist managerialism. Although it might be that the two philosophies are able to be accommodated, it is also as plausible that the proponents of each view were on a collision course in terms of power and resources allocation.

If there was a collision, it appears to have resulted in the elimination of the discourse of social justice. Jones (1995, p. 97) writes that the discourse of EEO in the 1990s has become ‘inseparable’ from the discourse of ‘human resource management’ which both derive their authority from a rhetoric of efficiency and rationality.’ Webb (1997, p. 166) argues that during the 1990s the discourse of managerialism has moved human resources debates from questions of eliminating discrimination to questions of ‘managing diversity’. The current use of ‘diversity’ to mean ‘fair employment’, she claims, is because of ‘the unpopularity of structuralist explanations of social exclusion.’
It may be, however, that the term ‘EEO’ itself is incompatible with the inherent elitism of managerialism (Alevsson & Willmott, 1996). Any critique of unequal power-relations appears to be unpalatable to managers who believe that ‘competition’ is the natural mechanism for adjustment in any kind of ‘market’ and that there is always equal access to any market. A discourse of labour market diversity implies inclusion for all groups and ready labour market access, opportunity, and outcomes, as individual ‘choice’ is the fundamental of any market discourse. In other words, ‘the management of diversity’ places the individual need above the necessity to redress historically disadvantaged groups (Miller, 1996, p. 202). Implicit or explicit assumptions of unequal power-relations (James & Saville-Smith, 1994), the basis of all employment exclusion analysis, are absent from any discussion of workplace diversity.

Webb (1997, p. 163) claims that managing diversity is a sanitised ‘politically unthreatening and market-oriented notion of the accommodation of differences’. However, advocates (e.g., Laudicina, 1995) of diversity shift the discussion even further away from power-relations, by claiming that workplace diversity ‘adds value’ to organisations in terms of effectiveness and efficiency (Hilltrop, 1995). This economic argument eliminates questions of discrimination, social justice, or equality from the diversity discourse. Diversity presented as a ‘maximisation of individual potential’, when posited as ‘an alternative to equal opportunities’ only reflects the status quo according to Miller (1996, p. 210). The diversity discourse appears to be another way of keeping the managerial ladder firmly in place (Cockburn, 1989). Thus, it could be argued that the diversity discourse is the latest in a long line of practices which keeps the systems of employment inequality in place. The explanation of the gap between the very small increase in the number of women in management/supervisory positions and the increased support for EEO during that same period may indeed be the consequence of a collision of values, which in effect, results in maintaining the status quo.

Conclusion
The development of EEO over the last decade has been an identifiable feature of New Zealand public sector reform. In 1986 the State Services Commission established an EEO unit which has
been active in educating, monitoring and reporting on EEO initiatives. Reports are produced to detail EEO progress (SSC, 1995). For example, the number of women employed in the public service has increased from 37% in 1985, to 53% in 1994. Similarly, the number of women earning higher salaries (over $60,000) has more than doubled, from 9% in 1991, to 21% in 1994. It appears that employment access, opportunity, condition and outcomes for women in public organisations are indeed progressing (Miller, 1997).

However, not all statistics show growth. This paper has reported on the lack of progress concerning the expected increase in the number of women in non-traditional management positions resulting from the implementation of an EEO policy in one local government authority. Although Laudidina (1995) has argued that a culture change programme is the most effective way to implement EEO work practices, and Ellis (1990) suggests a three to five year time frame for such a change to become evident, the data from The Council are conclusive. A formal culture change programme (Brooks, 1997) has led to an increase in positive EEO perceptions, but this change has not resulted in an increased number of women in management positions even though there was ample opportunity. The results of this study suggest that neither a liberal or a radical model of EEO, based on ideals of social justice, has been effective. And although Boston et al (1996) suggest that EEO is firmly embedded in New Zealand public organisations, discriminatory employment practices dedicated to unequal power-relations also appear to be firmly embedded.

Were the women in this study caught in the inevitable collision between the democratising concerns of EEO and the elitist values of managerialism? We have suggested that the result of that collision is a new discourse of diversity which claims inclusion, but which appears to move away from any discussion of discriminatory practices. We have argued that altering the discourse of EEO from questions of personal, organisational or systemic discrimination to the necessity of positive economic outcomes assists in maintaining the gendered unequal power-relations prevalent in elite managerial systems (Alvesson & Willmott, 1996).
The findings of this study suggest that the employment prospects for women (Maori, minority ethnic groups and people with disabilities) could remain locked in an unequal power structure that is the inherent character of managerialism (Webb, 1997). A discourse of EEO which ‘represents the major and critical attempt to address issues of inequality in employment ...’(Jones, 1995) may be of little concern for our new public managers with elitist values. But even more distressing to the authors is that the very concepts of ‘equality’ and ‘equity’ are eliminated from any discussion of employment. In effect, shifting a discriminatory employment discourse to a discourse of diversity in the workplace with a focus on efficiency and effectiveness, returns issues of discriminatory employment practices and unequal power-relations to the realm of the unspoken. Silence (Calas & Smirchich, 1993) again becomes the norm, for what ‘rational’ being would argue against the need to embrace diversity in the workforce to ensure ‘efficiency’ and ‘effectiveness’ in public organisations?

References


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