

AFP STRATEGIES TO IMPLEMENT EQUITY AND DIVERSITY OBJECTIVES

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The issues facing women in policing have a great deal in common with those of women in other areas of public employment and in the private sector. Many of the themes are similar and similar strategies can be implemented to assist in overcoming the problems.

Statistics: women in the Australian Workforce

Women comprise about 43% of the Australian labour force, but they are still very poorly represented in management positions and over-represented in part time and casual positions. They have poor representation in State and Federal Parliaments, and in the private sector, the proportion of women senior managers has declined from 2.5% in 1984 to 1.3% in 1992.

Within the Australian Public Service, the statistics on women are similarly depressing. Women comprise about 47% of APS positions, but only 15% of Senior Executive Positions. It is estimated that it will take another 25-30 years for women to reach parity with men. Within State public services, only Victoria has more women at those levels with 17% of their senior executives. Amanda Sinclair, who recently interviewed Chief Executives of major Australian companies for her book *Trials at the Top*, commented that: "This prescription for patience and focus on entry level recruitment combined with 'the implication that women need only change themselves to succeed' (Blum and Smith 1988) has proved to be an enormously appealing explanation for the exclusion of women from the senior ranks of organisations..... However, there is little evidence to encourage this view. Statistics indicate that while there are now significant numbers of women in junior, middle and upper middle management positions who are equipped with the necessary training and experience, they are not moving into executive positions. This evidence justifies the shift adopted for this ...research - from explanations for women's absence focusing on the women themselves - to explanations which explore the system in which they find themselves, the executive culture.

"Our attention should then be turned to the way deeply embedded cultural practices, concepts of masculinity and femininity are played out in the executive context, predetermining managerial processes of selection, inclusion and reward."

Cultural change and the "boys' club"

Even if there are cultural differences between public and private sector employment, and within policing, the similarities are probably more important. In all fields women face variations of the "boys' club" which consistently finds ways of excluding women, for an infinite set of reasons.

What is heartening about the current situation is that an increasing number of male Chief Executives are stating publicly that the current situation is not satisfactory and are providing leadership for change.

Frank Blount, CEO of Telstra in his 1995 Deming Memorial lecture cited, as a key example of lack of leadership in the private sector, the fact that during the period of greatest expansion in education, when the number of females matriculating was considerably higher than males, and with women graduating in equal numbers at tertiary levels, the proportion of women managers declined.

His theme of the need for business to manage diversity for survival and productivity is also one of the key outcomes of Enterprising Nation, the 1995 report of the Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills. This Task Force states that a new paradigm of management is essential for Australia's future and characterises the 3 shift from a 1970 style "autocrat" through the current "communicator" (both predominantly Anglo-celt and male) to a 2010 "leader/enabler". Such future leaders are at least as likely to be female or from other ethnic backgrounds. They say:

"Major improvements in management skills can be effected simply by opening up equal opportunities for these under-utilised groups to attain the senior levels of corporate management."

They see some of the current impediments as:

- the merit principle is not being applied

- the culture of the bulk of Australian companies see the problems as women's problems and therefore solutions coming from them; male managers tend to be comfortable with the status quo

- work/family practices are in the main ad hoc and token

- required Chief Executive Officer commitment is absent.

Australian Public Service CEOs are also publicly espousing the need for more women at the top and pointing out that they are prepared to provide the leadership for change as time by itself will not make the necessary improvements. In 1995 the Department of Veterans' Affairs, under its then Secretary, Dr Allan Hawke, set a target of 50% of women at all levels up to the senior executive and an increase at that level. Dr Hawke saw this approach as "simply taking concrete action to meet the leadership challenges of the future."

He then said:

"The question for me is not why have such a target but how are we going to achieve it?"

"For the public service as well as for the private sector, the major barriers are cultural but we will not change anything if we do not examine the practices and behaviours that contribute to that culture and consider innovative ways of increasing flexibility and career prospects.....Talking about change is not enough. Change requires action and there is a number of areas where action should be focused."

Successful EEO Strategies

To be successful an equal employment opportunity program must: have the commitment of the CEO

- be specific to that organisation

- have the necessity for participation and accountability of all managers in the organisation.

There are several vital areas where efforts must be concentrated, aimed primarily at achieving cultural change. Amanda Sinclair states:

“...the first step is to understand how the executive culture currently functions. ...being an executive is also about being a man. Being an executive offers a means for men to build an identity that is endorsed in the Australian culture as a tough and self-reliant leader.”

“Achieving change ... requires questioning and dismantling the maladaptive aspects, the outer layers of culture such as the rites and rituals (work at the golf course or going to the football) the definitions of ability and merit (Burton 1991), which demand, for example, the presence of a wife and portability of family. These outer layer cultural practices have far outlived their usefulness and exclude many talented men as well as women.”

The key areas for action are: locking in managers to take responsibility and be accountable for outcomes

Incorporating relevant E&D outcomes in organisational, regional and individual performance measurement is important as is finding ways of ensuring that the executive group/national management team take responsibility for organisational outcomes, examination of how merit operates within the organisation.

Work done by Clare Burton on how the concept can be skewed through bias is useful in looking at how merit is interpreted in relation to recruitment and advancement. It is also important that all selections are undertaken by people who have been trained, with a full understanding that merit goes beyond cloning and how bias can permeate the process.

Looking at the particular developmental needs of women The Commonwealth Department of Finance has examined outcomes of promotions across the APS for women and pointed out that, although women apply less frequently for promotion, in proportion to men they are more successful. Taken with other evidence, this suggests to DOF that women do not market themselves enough. Targeting development and opening opportunities for women to those experiences which assist men to be seen as promotable is particularly important. Ensuring that all training and development includes integrated diversity segments

These elements must not be tacked on at the end, but be one of the core issues being covered. Management training is particularly important.

A package of flexible working practices that facilitate the combination of work and family responsibilities

These can include part time employment, job sharing “48/52” which is the taking of additional recreation leave without pay and having the loss of pay annualised, flexible rostering, career breaks; the essential point here is that flexibility is possible and that a positive approach is important. Note also that such flexibility assists men as well as women and people with responsibility for family members other than young children.

Ensuring that all personnel policies and practices are completely in line with E&D principles and desired outcomes

This includes the scope of pay and conditions matters, the operation of appeals and grievances processes and is integral with the way in which these are developed and implemented. For many organisations, enterprise bargaining is a vital process.

Australian Federal Police Initiatives

Within the Australian Federal Police, we have taken account of strategies that have worked elsewhere and also closely examined our own organisation. You will be aware that the AFP commissioned Carmel Niland to audit the EEO program and the culture in 1995 and the results were saddening although not surprising. The Commissioner, Mick Palmer, will be addressing more detail of this in his speech on day three of the Conference. We have taken account of Ms Niland's work, and also consulted with women's networks and across the total organisation in developing the new Equity and Diversity Program.

The consultation process was interesting. Most of the responses -which came from all regions around Australia - were supportive, but it was also clear that, as had been found by Carmel Niland, many men in the AFP consider that to do anything for women must, by definition, disadvantage men. And this was despite the fact that of the six outcome areas, only one focussed on the specific needs of the four target groups. The rest considered integrating equity and diversity into the operations of the AFP and should improve equal opportunity for many men, in particular those who have talents but are not part of the current stereotype. Certainly, culturally, we have some way still to go. If we do not change that culture, very little will change for women.

Before I look at the specifics of the Program's outcomes and strategies, I would also like to add that one of the desired effects is to assist in the implementation of the unified workforce within the AFP, which aims to achieve similar opportunities and conditions for sworn and unsworn officers.

There are six key outcomes of the Program:

1. Education and Awareness : all AFP employees demonstrate equity and diversity principles, sensitivity to cultural and individual differences and treat one another and clients with respect and dignity.

Strategies include ongoing communication, incorporation of E&D into all development, selecting and training equity and diversity contact officers and training for selection panel participants.

2. Management: full incorporation of equity and diversity principles and practices into all management policies, behaviours and change strategies.

Strategies include ensuring all such policies accord with (and promote) E&D, maintenance of an EEO data base, inclusion of action and performance outcomes into performance appraisal, E&D becoming an regular item on the National Management Team agenda.

3. Elimination of Harassment: Elimination of all forms of harassment within the AFP.

Strategies include awareness training and education, ensuring employees know that they can complain, informal resolution processes (with first responsibility resting with the manager of the relevant work area), equipping E&D contact officers to be first point of contact.

4. Balancing work, family and cultural responsibilities: Flexible balance of family and cultural responsibilities that meets the needs both of the AFP and its employees.

Strategies include further development of part time work, job sharing, flexible roster systems etc, education of employees and management, advice sources at regional levels for caring responsibilities, and inclusion of changed conditions into enterprise bargaining.

5. Emphasis on Target Group Career Needs: The AFP will monitor its progress in relation to the achievement of APS 2000 EEO targets which are:

women 20% of management positions ATSI 2% of all employees NESB 15% of all employees PWD 5% of all employees

and all target group members within the AFP will be enabled to pursue careers as effectively as other employees.

Strategies include networks of target group members, targeted development (designed to overcome identified disadvantage), management of maternity leave and career development, and specific strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, for people from non-English speaking backgrounds and for people with disabilities.

6. Regional Action Plans: The development, implementation and monitoring of Regional Action Plans designed to deliver the national outcomes at each regional level.

This aims to ensure that each Region focuses not only on the E&D Program, but takes responsibility for implementing it. An Action Plan takes a shorter term view, ie one to two years and focuses activity on local priorities. In addition, however, some elements of national strategies need to be put in place, such as ensuring that EEO data is obtained from new starters and that performance indicators are included in individual performance management agreements.

This Program is being finalised at present but several of the actions arising have already begun. It will take at least two years to put all the elements in place and probably longer to see any real improvement in the culture or the outcomes for women. In achieving change, AFP has one of the essential success factors, which is commitment from the top. The AFP Commissioner has made no secret of his support for women in the AFP, partly through the funding of this conference, but also for his ongoing leadership, his consistent awareness raising and his support for change.

References

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