

Employment equity survey

Andrew Levy and Associates conducted a survey on employment equity practices within companies. Seventy-one companies employing approximately 130 000 employees responded to the questionnaire. Of these companies, 78% were unionised and 22% were non-unionised.

Findings

- 63% of companies had an existing affirmative action policy.
- 57% of companies introduced a policy between 1982 and 1996.
- The main reasons for the introduction of a policy were:
 - a proactive initiative by the company
 - impending legislative requirements
 - company policy.
- In only 8% of the cases was the policy introduced as a result of union pressure.
- 56% of companies undertook specific communication or training in the form of workshops or briefing sessions.
- The main responsibility for the drafting of the policy fell to the HR/IR department with joint committees (including unions) only accounting for 12% of the total.
- More employees (5%) were promoted after the introduction of a policy than before (2%).
- There were more women in managerial

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positions (15%) than any other category of designated persons with the disabled only accounting for 0,5% of the total number of employees.

- The majority of the workforce was supportive of the process (60%) and in only 6% of cases was there resistance.
- 31% of companies experienced problems in the implementation of the policy. Problems ranged from resistance to the process, turnover of promoted staff and difficulties in getting the right calibre of person.
- 74% of companies had not experienced any unique advantages since the introduction of the policy. Where advantages were experienced, these ranged from:
 - a sense of togetherness
 - diversity of thinking
 - more buy-in and support of the process by those previously disadvantaged
 - promotion without hassles
 - boosted morale of designated persons.
- The average rate of staff turnover since the introduction of a policy was 8% - with a range of between zero and 25%.
- 47% of companies said that the policy had resulted in increased costs to the

organisation that related mainly to increased training needs and higher wage and administration costs.

- Responsibility for implementing the plan ranged from the HR department to high level steering committees.

Advice

Most companies stressed that it was important to communicate openly and honestly when embarking on a policy. All the stakeholders should be involved and consulted to ensure that the process would not be derailed. They recommended implementing the programme sooner rather than later and to have a clear vision and plan in place. Other comments were that companies should:

- get management and staff commitment and buy-in to the process;
- use qualified facilitators or consultants;
- introduce programmes aimed at addressing the fears and expectations of employees affected;
- create a high level steering committee;
- get trade union and shopsteward involvement from the start of process;
- do not underestimate racial prejudices;
- create trust through participation;
- invest time and energy in communication;
- be realistic about goals;
- plan what will go into the policy concerning content and time-frames;
- work on a systematic programme to inform all employees;
- take a firm stand on transformation;
- be strict in the application of policy guidelines;
- win the trust of target groups and be transparent;
- do not window-dress.

Implementation problems

Whereas some companies did not foresee problems in implementing a policy apart

from the additional training and development effort, the majority voiced specific reservations such as:

- Some employees would feel it was not enough, while others would think it was too much.
- There would be unrealistic expectations from designated groups and fears from existing managers.
- There would be difficulty in acquiring the necessary skills.
- There would not be enough time available for management to devote to training.
- Unions would resist the process and not reach consensus on proposed targets and time frames.
- The management structure was too rigid to undertake the exercise successfully.

General comments

Some general comments regarding employment equity programmes included:

- It was met with suspicion and resistance from white males.
- There were difficulties in recruiting because of a shortage of skilled human resources.
- There was high staff turnover after training and development.
- Management was apathetic to the process and not willing to take risks with designated persons.
- A perception existed that current staff would be retrenched to make way for designated employees.
- Disinterest from the union and a suspicion of management's sincerity.
- Difficulty in creating upward mobility among a mainly unskilled workforce. ★

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