

Chapter 11

Implementing EEO at Ericsson

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Ericsson Australia is a subsidiary company of the Swedish multinational Ericsson Group. With its major plant at Broadmeadows, the company employs 2500 people in Australia. This includes a substantial research facility employing about 500 design engineers.

Human Resource Strategy

Ericsson's aim is not simply to compete in the telecommunications industry, but to be the leader in the international market. Supporting this aim are three basic values which underpin the way Ericsson goes about its business. These are professionalism, respect and perseverance; they are reflected in the human resource strategy which emphasises the company as an excellent employer.

Ericsson recognises the importance of its employees in achieving its aims, and as such seeks to maintain a work atmosphere that actively encourages creativity, initiative and innovation, as well as one that fosters personal development and provides safe, secure and satisfying employment for all employees. In a nutshell Ericsson is committed to training and retaining its employees as it sees them as its most valuable resource. It is within this framework that the affirmative action policy and consequent programs were developed.

In 1986, the then managing director, Lars Estberger, issued a formal policy on the company's approach to affirmative action. It emphasised fairness and equity for all employees as well as discrimination free policies and procedures. Senior management was, and still is, committed to optimising the skills and talents available, both internally and externally, and recognises the importance of discrimination free policies in achieving this.

Since then an approach to implementing this policy has slowly unfolded and is based on three broad goals. First, the company wants to raise the level of awareness. This involves the education of all staff on the principles of EEO and their rights and obligations as an employee of an organisation that endorses equity and merit. Second, the company seeks equity of opportunity, by ensuring the elimination of all discriminatory work practices and policies. It also encourages employees to adopt attitudes and behaviours that are consistent with an equity based culture. Third, the company has encouraged women to

participate in the workforce at all levels, particularly at the professional and management levels.

Essentially the strategy involves developing specifically targeted action programs for current employees (female employees, all employees and managers) and for prospective employees (secondary students and post secondary students). By dealing with these two groups in ways that are relevant to each, Ericsson's intent is to develop a holistic approach to change that is well integrated with other human resource activities.

Current Employees

1. Female Employees

Empowering women at Ericsson is one of the company's major objectives. During last year regular women's forums were established and are now held bi-monthly. Forums are held during work hours and all women are encouraged to attend. Topical external speakers, information exchange, and an opportunity for networking are the basic agenda.

Two other activities have stemmed from the forums. A women's development work-group has been set up consisting of 10 volunteers whose task is to actively participate in finding solutions to the problems women face in the workplace. This group has the expressed sanction of the managing director. Also, monthly networking lunches have been designed for women who do not wish to participate in the forums or who may not have heard of company initiatives in affirmative action. As there are over 60 ethnic groups represented in the workforce there is a need to personalise the message for people where cultural or language barriers may hinder participation.

2. Male and Female Employees

In an attempt to deal with the growing number of women in the workforce coupled with the slowly changing role of men and women in regards to family responsibilities, Ericsson has decided to participate in the construction of a childcare facility. The company's commitment to this venture was confirmed following an analysis of employees' childcare needs.

Experimentation is occurring with new internal recruitment procedures designed to maximise the chance of obtaining the right person for the job. The

focus is on a structured approach that minimises the potential for discrimination and thus more adequately complies with the merit principle in appointments.

Career counselling is available to all employees and is widely publicised through the company newsletter and the women's forums. To date women have tended to be over represented in the client base. Closely linked to this service is the 'Mentoring in the Workplace' program which is proving very popular amongst women. Employee education is fostered through regular articles in the company newsletter as well as through our induction program for new employees.

3. Managers

Training modules on the legal responsibilities of managers and the underlying principles of EEO, discrimination, and harassment legislation have been developed for some management development programs. They will be included in all programs next year. Modules on the career development needs of staff are also being progressively introduced into management development programs in such a way that managers are asked to question their stereotypical views of appropriate careers for men and women.

Prospective Employees

1. Post Secondary Students

Ericsson has tied its recruitment strategy to affirmative action by offering vacation work (8 weeks minimum) to 10 female engineering students from Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) and Melbourne University across all years. Each successful student will have the opportunity to work during vacations for the remainder of their course. Those who prove themselves will be offered permanent appointment at the completion of their course as part of our graduate recruitment program.

2. Secondary School Students

Ericsson contributes financially to the women in engineering projects operating at RMIT and Melbourne University. These projects are designed to encourage school girls to consider a career in engineering as a viable option. Female engineers from Ericsson participate in the project activities. The Northern Interactive Education Co-ordinated Area Program (NIECAP) receives financial assistance from Ericsson to run the annual computer science and maths camps for girls. And, Ericsson is also participating in – and partially funding – an innovative teacher release program where a teacher on release from the Ministry of Education is preparing curriculum materials on technology subjects for use in the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). The aim here is to make technology more accessible to the student.

Over the next 12 months Ericsson hopes to consolidate programs designed to increase the participation of women in the workforce, complete the planning and then construct a childcare facility in cooperation with the community, implement a self development program open to all employees. Further goals are the introduction of EEO modules in management development programs, assessment of the feasibility of implementing a women's management development program and completing the review of the internal recruitment procedures.

Conclusion

Ericsson recognises that its continuing success in the marketplace is dependent on the efforts of its employees. Productivity improvements and market gains are only achieved through the combined individual input of employees. As such, Ericsson is determined to attract and retain highly skilled and motivated people who are competent and challenged by operating in a constantly changing marketplace.

With the changing patterns of family and work it is now common for both parents to be in the workforce. This has resulted in a substantial increase in the skills and experience available to employers as more women join the workforce. However, if employers wish to tap this resource they must consciously remove direct and indirect forms of discrimination which often preclude women from utilising their skills.

Coupled with this is the decline in birth rates which effectively reduces the potential labour pool. In this scenario women represent a relatively untapped resource that is only now achieving any prominence. Married women make up the fastest growing section of the labour market and by the year 2000 there will be almost equal numbers of men and women aged between 20 and 44 years in the workplace.

The long term viability of many companies will depend at least in part on their ability to attract a quality workforce. Employers with well developed affirmative action strategies will enjoy a strong competitive edge.