

## Chapter 9

# EEO Overview Shows Need for Training Outcomes

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**E**ighteen months ago ICI embarked on a major overview of the way we were managing both affirmative action and equal employment opportunity. Many of the actions we have taken as a result of this overview involve training.

### What is ICI

ICI employs about 9000 staff in Australia. Major business groups include chemicals, plastics, explosives and paints. The company is involved in all facets of research, manufacturing, marketing and retailing of these product types. As a result of the size, geographic spread and business interests of the company, our staff profile is extremely heterogeneous and largely reflects a cross section of Australian society.

The company has a decentralised management style with each business group responsible for their day-to-day operations albeit under the control and influence of a small central corporate operation.

### Why Conduct an Overview

As a company we had a wide range of affirmative action and EEO initiatives in place. None of those objectives could be questioned in terms of their direction and none of the people involved in driving these initiatives could be questioned in terms of their enthusiasm and dedication to the cause.

However, whenever we looked at how our affirmative action and EEO programs were going, the examination largely came down to an examination of inputs. We were in danger of measuring our performance in these areas by listing the number of activities and initiatives underway at any point in time. We were not focusing enough on outputs.

Also, in many cases, these initiatives were being driven by a relatively small number of "champions" who had a passion for a particular subject. They were often not part of the business process but were seen by some as something one does outside of the business process. Champions suffer from burnout and companies have a responsibility to prevent this from happening.

And so even though by relative standards we were a long way down the affirmative action-EEO track, we began with a clean sheet of paper and examined how

we could build these processes into the business process.

We began by involving the most senior management, including the managing director.

We had the Council for Equal Opportunity in Employment conduct an audit of the affirmative action reports of the company for the previous three years and provide us with an objective report of how they viewed our performance in this area against the standards set by the Affirmative Action Agency and against the trends that they believed would develop over the next few years.

This report revealed that while we were meeting the requirements of the Affirmative Action Act, we needed to become more proactive if we wanted to maintain our position. It also confirmed our own belief that our current focus was on inputs more than outputs.

This report was discussed with the managing director and executive directors and it was agreed to establish a committee at the highest level of the company to formerly review our affirmative action program on a systematic basis and at the same time to institute formal internal mechanisms that clearly laid responsibility for the management of the program with the business groups.

It was agreed that the managing director would be a member of the corporate affirmative action committee and that this committee would be responsible for introducing three affirmative action initiatives each year within the company. These initiatives would be signed off by the executive directors of the company, would be mandatory for all business groups, and the results would be formally reported to them at an annual executive meeting.

Coincidentally with this initiative the general manager of each business team was given the responsibility of establishing three business affirmative action initiatives for their team, agreeing these with the corporate committee and once again, reporting on progress in a formal manner.

While this sounds like a very simple straightforward process, it has been the result of intensive education.

The education has been provided by a combination of the Council for Equal Opportunity in Employment and the human resource function. It has involved the managing director, executive directors, general managers, line managers and HR staff and has focused on making individuals aware of their roles and responsibilities in the area of affirmative action.

More importantly, it has resulted in a very systematic, formal, public approach to the management of affirmative action, which now is driven by the business, measured by the company and assisted by the champions.

## EEO

1. First comment – Confusion still exists around the difference between affirmative action and EEO in the minds of many managers and employees.

Having established a clear management process around affirmative action, it was decided to build on much of the good work that had been done in the past on the issue of EEO, but once again to introduce a management process to ensure that initiatives were part of the bigger picture. One of the major concerns about EEO initiatives is that they are often introduced into a hostile environment and founder as a result of this.

Companies must adopt an holistic approach to EEO based on cultural change programs.

The companies that ICI grew from, began operations in 1874 at Deer Park in Victoria. The company from which Dulux paints grew began the same year. Plants at Yarraville, Victoria, and Osborne, South Australia, commenced in 1936 (60 years ago). The Botany, New South Wales, plant was built in 1942 (over 50 years ago).

These plants and the people in them have developed cultures over many generations that reflect the culture of society at those times. Cultures develop over many years and while they must be changed, they do not change quickly.

One-off initiatives are not sustainable if put into a hostile environment. There are numerous analogies for this situation, but the simplest is the planting of a flower into barren soil. It tends not to grow, or at best it gets a start but withers and dies. And in the case of EEO, the second situation is often worse than the first because it allows the cynics to say, "I told you so", and makes it more difficult to have another go, almost impossible for the champions to maintain enthusiasm.

The situation is no different than companies attempting to go down the quality path. Quality champions emerge, quality initiatives are put in place, quality circles or corrective action teams are established, but unless the culture of the organisation is changed and nurtured, then the initiatives die and, unfortunately, there exists much anecdotal evidence of this process in Australian industry.

## Getting to the Hearts

So ICI has embarked on a process of culture change – trying to get inside the hearts and minds of 9000 people. We have begun to do this by launching a diversity program called Strength Through Diversity.

This program spells out the company's commitment to the management of a diverse workforce.

It promotes policies such as: family leave, child care, employee development and anti-harassment.

Putting out a glossy book is of no use to anyone. It must be followed up by programs to make policies come alive.

Our intention is to have a major drive each year on a major initiative.

In 1995 we introduced a major education process on anti-harassment in order to eradicate this sort of behaviour from the workplace.

This is a step towards changing the culture so that other equal opportunity initiatives have a chance for success.

An attempt to change barren soil into fertile soil.

## Anti-Harassment Training

The task was to train 9000 people in their rights and obligations under legislation, including anti-discrimination acts and common law, and company values around the issue of providing an harassment-free environment.

The company's stated vision is to be known as the best chemical company in Asia Pacific by having employees achieve results in a challenging and rewarding work environment.

The relevant company values include:

- Appoint leaders who create an environment which encourages our people to perform to their potential.

- Operate to the highest standards of ethical behaviour and honesty and with full regard for the safety and health of employees, customers and the environment.

- There is a great trend by many organisations (public and private) towards having a vision and values, but unless there is tangible evidence that the company is prepared to support the values then staff quickly become very cynical and you may be better off not having any publicised values.

- In introducing anti-harassment training, it was necessary to approach both the hearts and minds of senior management. If we truly believe that people are our best asset then it makes sense to provide these assets with the best possible chance of success. We have not been shy in spelling out to senior management the vicarious liability issues surrounding workplace harassment. One way to reduce the potential risk to the company is to ensure that the company has gone to "reasonable" lengths to ensure that such harassment does not occur.

## Delivery of Training

We used officers of the Council for Equal Opportunity in Employment to work with us in developing the training and had them deliver the training. Training

sessions were two hours duration.

The training:

- Mainly spelt out the legal aspects of anti-harassment. They were interactive, using case studies and anecdotes to get staff involved – all forms of harassment, not just sexual, were discussed.
- Was monitored by individual feedback forms and feedback was given to the presenter by the company and reviews held with the council in relation to the program.
- Cost about \$130.00 per person.
- Feedback indicated that various groups preferred particular presenters and changes were made to allow for this.
- Participation was non-negotiable and records are kept on personnel files of attendance.
- At outlying sites – mining et cetera, was conducted by audio tapes which were sent to all staff. Follow up by management to ensure tape was used and to discuss issues.

Training is absolutely useless unless support systems are in place to manage the fallout from the training. The training basically gave two messages:

1. The company would not tolerate any behaviour that caused discomfort to other employees.
2. The company encouraged the reporting of such behaviour, would investigate all complaints and would take action where it was found to be necessary.

## Contact Officers

To this end a network of harassment contact officers was established to provide employees with trained staff who could deal with a complaint.

Sixty contact officers were trained, they were chosen on the basis of personal attributes and geographical spread to ensure that all employees had reasonable access to them.

In fact, the first point of call was to be through a management chain, however, contact officers were there as a safety valve.

Contact officers were educated in and given procedural guidelines on how to deal with complaints.

One of the most important competencies of a contact officer is to recognise the limitations of their expertise and to know how to and when to refer matters on-wards or upwards.

One should not underestimate the difficulty of the role of the contact officers. They are often placed in extremely difficult situations and therefore need training, extremely clear procedures and support.

In order to provide support we have established a formal network which meets twice a year to receive further training and to review their positions and to discuss their experiences. All of this must, of course, honour the confidentiality of any complaints.

As extra support a hierarchy of contact officers has been established and corporate HR has a responsibility

in providing guidance to contact officers.

If you are to bring about true cultural change, then, you must support the program by taking appropriate action on issues raised. If you do not follow through then you destroy the process and people lose faith and you would have been better off not starting.

We have received a variety of complaints related to offensive jokes, offensive material being displayed in the workplace, racist remarks, physical intimacy, intimidation and bullying. We have uncovered situations that have existed for a period of time.

Complaints have ranged from being very minor and relatively easy to deal with, (often it is simply a case of making the perpetrator aware that his or her behaviour is causing discomfort to another party), to being quite serious and requiring major intervention on the part of the company in order to resolve the issue. It can lead to the company having to make decisions about terminating employment of staff if their behaviour cannot be tolerated and cannot be improved. We have shown that we are prepared to take this action.

This action indicates to all staff that the company is serious and is prepared to put its money where its mouth is.

## Summary

In summary there are five major messages:

1. Build affirmative action and EEO processes into business processes. They need to be formal, public and measurable.
2. Accountability for affirmative action and EEO processes and results must be given to business and line managers, (they must be included in annual objectives) – not the HR function.
3. Education concerning affirmative action and EEO must begin at the highest levels and cascade down. The motivation for this education comes from the implementation of points 1 and 2.
4. While you must ensure that initiatives are in place, more importantly you must measure the outcomes. Are the initiatives delivering the desired results?
5. Affirmative action and EEO initiatives will only work if they are part of an overall culture change program. Don't crucify the "champions" by forcing them to operate in a hostile environment.