Diversity management in small companies: city council case study

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ABSTRACT

Diversity management is an emerging field within human resource management. However, most of the literature and consulting in the management of diversity in a workforce is focused on and applied in large organizations. In contrast, the aims of this consulting project were to research and assess policies and practices that a small Australian city council (TCC) can implement to meet its legal obligations and capitalize on the diversity of the community. Qualitative data was obtained through depth interviews with sixteen of the twenty-eight managers, and a workforce survey yielded quantitative data. The results revealed that TCC has not met legislative requirements and managers' awareness of diversity management principles was not satisfactory. An analysis of questionnaire responses suggests that TCC has achieved a majority fit with the characteristics of the local community, except in the areas of women and young workers. The recommendations are to review of the corporate mission and HR policies, improve the link between policy and diversity principles and to formulate an EEO management plan. Moreover, it is important for the council to collect the necessary workforce statistics for comparison and evaluation purposes.

INTRODUCTION

In 1996, the Toowoomba City Council developed an EEO policy that has now come under review by the council's People Development department. During 2000, the council wished to determine whether they had achieved the status of an equal opportunity employer, how they could demonstrate this, and any policy changes necessary to capitalise upon the diversity of the Toowoomba community. Diversity management is an emerging field within human resource management. However, most of the literature and consulting in the management of diversity in a workforce is focused on and applied in large organizations. In contrast, the aims of this consulting project were to research and assess policies and practices that a small Australian city council (TCC) can implement to meet its legal obligations and capitalize on the diversity of the community

The research question for this study was formulated as

> What policies and practices can be introduced to assist a small city council such as Toowoomba City Council to meet and surpass its legal obligations in order to capitalise upon the diversity of the Toowoomba community?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section the issues involved in achieving diversity within an organization are identified, a definition of diversity is provided, the business case for the introduction of diversity initiatives is presented, legislative requirements are noted and the use of strategic policy formulation to surpass such legal requirements and capitalise fully on the benefits of a diverse workforce are discussed. The Toowoomba City Council workforce profile is compared to demographic information from the greater community.

Definition

Part of the difficulty in arriving at a comprehensive definition of diversity arises from the fact that it is a concept that has traditionally been used in both broad and narrow contexts (Kramar 2001). A broad view of diversity implicates the prevailing organisational culture, and an appreciation of difference whereas a narrow definition of diversity focus on eliminating discriminatory practices based on personal characteristics. A number of benefits have been attributed to organisations that value individual difference. A broad definition of diversity can be seen as more appropriate whereas narrow definitions appear to be of similar orientation as Affirmative Action (AA) and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) initiatives.

Various distinctions have been made between EEO, AA, and diversity. EEO has been defined as "giving people a fair chance to succeed without discrimination based on unrelated job factors such as age, race, sex, or nationality"(Stone 1998, p.824). Its primary focus is, therefore, on direct discrimination, and integrating disadvantaged groups into an existing structure and culture. AA refers to "programs that require firms to make special efforts to recruit, hire, and promote women and members of minority groups"(Stone 1998, p.818). As such, it takes an active approach to achieving equity in the workplace, and involves an accommodation of difference rather than the assimilatory approach consistent with EEO. According to Stone (1998), diversity management involves going beyond an accommodation of individual difference, to a situation whereby organisational culture is reformed to value and respect it. Moreover, as a broad concept, diversity is able to address a wider section of the working population than the more specific EEO and AA targets. Another important distinction is that while EEO and AA are covered in legislative requirements, ensuring a truly diverse workforce requires management initiation (Stone 1998). While EEO and AA may have been important stages in the evolution of diversity management (Vines 1999), they are only narrow aspects of its current existence.

While the individual characteristics of the diverse workforce do not define diversity management, they provide an insight into the depth and complexity involved. According to Cox (1991; 1993, cited in Erwee and Innes 1998, p.2):

> The primary dimensions of diversity are age, ethnicity, gender, physical ability, race and the secondary dimensions of diversity are geographic location, income, marital status, military experience, parental status, religious beliefs, work experience, class, hierarchy as applied to an individual.

For the purposes of this research, diversity will be defined as a broad concept which requires fundamental change to all aspects of an organisation, to ensure that different perspectives and characteristics of the workforce are valued, and their contribution appreciated. While it involves EEO and AA responsibilities, its managerial impetus ensures that the legal and moral issues involved in such legislation are transcended, and strategic business objectives enhanced.

The Business Case for Diversity

The benefits of effective diversity management involve higher productivity (Wolf 1998), better creativity and innovation (Wolf 1998; Smith 1998), better understanding of customers, improved recruitment opportunities (Agocs& Burr 2000; Cox 1993), lower costs (Cox, 1993), more positive morale (Kramar 2001), and higher employee retention (Teicher & Spearitt 1996; Wolf 1998). Diverse workforces, by improving communication, teamwork, and employee utilization, lead to higher productivity and more innovative and creative solutions arise as a broader range of perspectives and experiences are incorporated and considered (Wolf 1998; Smith 1998). The importance of having a diverse workforce is intensified by global trends toward globalisation. Diversity awareness allows for a better understanding of these global customers' needs, and provides access to greater labor pools (Agocs & Bur, 2000). Access to wider employment pools allow for recruitment of optimum human resources, and it can also minimise recruitment and training costs (Cox,1993). Leading Australian companies, including NRMA and Pacific Dunlop, have communicated an association between ineffective diversity management and such problems as poor morale, high absenteeism, and turnover (Kramar 2001). Improved employee retention for organisations which embrace diversity management (Teicher & Spearitt 1996) also support a case for diversity which goes beyond moral and legal issues, and makes good business sense.

However, criticisms of diversity management have also been presented for example that diversity programmes are simply a means of "concealing enduring patterns of discrimination and prejudice" (Prasad & Mills 1997, p.14). Diverse work groups may experience greater communication difficulty and decision complexity than homogenous groups. However, the same authors state that this indicates an absence of effective diversity management, rather than a fundamental flaw of workplace diversity (Cox 1993; Smith 1998). Another criticism of diversity theory is that while such initiatives are justified by economic rationale, there is currently very limited research available to either support or refute these arguments (Kersten 2000). However, in the Australian context, a number of organisations including Mobil (Wolf 1998) have demonstrated the potential benefits of diversity initiatives. Despite these benefits, diversity initiatives in Australia remain largely driven by legislative requirements (Erwee & Innes, 1998).

Legislative Framework

Toowoomba City Council (TCC) is subject to State and Federal legislation (Srivastava, Deklin, & Singh 1996). On a federal level, the most important legislation regarding fair end equitable employment practices are the Disability and Discrimination Act 1992, and the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999. Together, this legislation detail discriminatory behaviour in recruitment, training, promotion, dismissal, and remuneration. Its primary purpose is to prevent discrimination on the basis of sex, marital status, pregnancy, or potential pregnancy.

The most pertinent articles of state legislation for city councils are the Anti-Discrimination Act 1991, the Equal Employment in Public Employment Act 1992, and the Local Government Regulation 1994. The Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 identifies personal attributes such as sex, marital status, age, race, and impairment (Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 s7(1)) and details behaviours that are classified as discriminatory in relation to these characteristics. The Equal Opportunity in Public Employment Act identifies target groups for whom equal opportunity should be promoted, and discrimination against eliminated. These target groups are Aboriginies or Torres Strait Islanders, people of Non-English Speaking Background, women and people with a physical, sensory, intellectual or psychiatric disability (s17, (310). Employer actions in recruitment, selection, promotion, and transfer must be in accordance with the principle of merit. The Local Government Regulation 1994 identifies a number of benefits associated with equal opportunity employment and notes elements which are necessary in local government equal employment management plans. A local government must must issue policy statements and keep employees informed; nominate persons with an EEO responsibility, consult with trade unions and

employees, collect statistics, review policies and practices, set objectives and implement strategy and assess implementation (Local Government Regulation 1994 s16).

The literature suggests that the greatest impetus for diversity management initiatives should come from internal policy documents. Indeed, the benefits attributed to diversity management will not be achieved by compliance with legislative requirements. As such, corporate policy plays an important role in capitalising upon diversity in the workforce.

Strategy and Policy

According to Prasad and Mills (1997) the impetus for managing diversity is entirely voluntaristic. However, the legislative requirements in Australia do not meet the definitive characteristics of diversity. Because of the voluntaristic nature of diversity management, the emphasis should not simply be on compliance with relevant legislation, but should see an extension of these principles. "It therefore places the onus of achieving workplace diversity squarely on the shoulders of management in different organisations"(Prasad & Mills 1997, p.8).

Strategic planning and management methods are heavily implicated in organisations setting objectives above and beyond legislative requirements. Stone defines strategic planning as "the determination of overall organisational purposes and goals and how they are achieved"(1998, p.837). According to Dessler, Griffiths, Lloyd-Walker, and Williams (1999) three primary levels of strategy are typically formulated. In the case of TCC, the three major levels are the Corporate Plan, Operational Plan, and various Business Plans. The TCC Corporate Plan 2000-2004 serves to identify the corporate mission, and strategic objectives of the council for this period. The objective which pertains to the employment relationship, including diversity management, aims to "develop an organisation that operates on best management and leadership principles"(TCC Corporate Plan 2000-2004). Of the six strategies linked to achieving this objective, none directly address diversity issues or awareness. This can be contrasted with the way in which the Brisbane City Council (BCC), a leader in Australian diversity initiatives, has addressed the issue. One of the strategies for achieving their employment and career development objective is "to ensure council is attracting, retaining, and developing employees with the diversity of skills, talents, and experiences needed for future business success" (BCC Corporate Plan 1999-2003). Clearly the latter policy exhibits greater clarity and purpose in communicating the importance of diversity in strategic decision-making. Because such corporate policy provides the basis for subordinate

policy documents, it is important for the ideals of workplace diversity and equity to receive specific attention.

The Toowoomba City Council Operational Plan 2000-2001 establishes an important link between corporate strategy and organisational performance. For each corporate plan strategy, the operational plan details actions, performance measures, and branch responsibility. In relation to the strategies devised for achieving the corporate agenda, branch responsibility has been attributed to the People Development department. From this demarcation of responsibility emerge the various business plans across the organisation. Included in such business plans is the People Development Plan which encompasses specific policy on recruitment, selection, training, development, and, perhaps most importantly to this study, the EEO policy. While it is currently undergoing redevelopment, the current policy, the Equal Employment Opportunity Policy 1996, is simply a reinforcement of legislative requirements. Again this can be contrasted with equivalent policy from BCC, their Workplace Equity and Diversity Framework 1999-2003. This policy document is a departure from traditional EEO thinking, providing business arguments for diversity, performance measures, targets, and detailed strategy for achieving equity and diversity. BCC has demonstrated a commitment to achieving the voluntaristic management of diversity as purported in the literature. While TCC's previous policy can be seen as a more traditional approach, it has the opportunity to remedy this through a redesign of corporate objectives, and careful consideration of subordinate documents. Moreover, it can be seen that a systematic approach to diversity management including all aspects of organisational functioning, from policy formulation to programme evaluation, is necessary to achieve true workforce diversity.

Achieving Diversity Management

Smith (1998) has developed a seven-stage process detailing the steps necessary for successfully implementing such a diversity programme. The first stage represents the commitment of an organisation's leaders, their personal involvement, communication, and raising awareness throughout the organisation. Stage two involves the development of a diversity council to ensure that the organisation's strategic objectives align with diversity management principles (Pollar 1998), communicating the business case for diversity, and ensuring leadership, focus, and continuity. Stage three involves an analysis of the organisational climate by means of cultural audits and the development of a workforce profile (Kramar 2001; Pollar 1998; Smith 1998). The workforce profile provides concrete data on the current diversity climate and mix, and identifies areas which require attention. Stage four, data analysis, involves the analysis of this

organisational climate information, benchmarking, and a consequent refinement of strategy with reference to specific actions, measurement criteria, and communication plans. Stage five involves utilising the information gathered in previous stages to identify appropriate interventions such as "education in diversity; changes in culture and management systems such as recruitment, orientation, performance appraisal, compensation and benefits; promotion and training; and development opportunities"(Smith 1998, p.78). Interventions as formal mentoring, active employment targeting, and family friendly practices have been recommended (Prasad & Mills 1997). Stage six assesses the effectiveness of this implementation phase on a personal, environmental, and organisational level. The final stage (stage seven), maintenance and measurement, can be viewed as perhaps the most important phase, from both a diversity and business perspective. From a diversity management perspective, this stage determines whether cultural and workforce profile objectives have been achieved, and what improvements are required in future initiatives. From a business perspective, this is the stage that quantifies such productivity, growth, and profitability measures as retention statistics, cost structures, and employee morale (Smith 1998)

Workforce Profile

Workforce profiling is both a legislative requirement, and also purported throughout the literature as a powerful diversity management tool (Pollar 1998; Smith 1998). For the purposes of this research, workplace demographic information will be compared with community statistics on gender, age group, birthplace, and occupation of Toowoomba City's working labor force.

A number of important aspects of diversity management have emerged namely that there is a strong business case for workforce diversity and that there exists a complex set of legislative requirements involving workplace equity and diversity. Furthermore, corporate strategy and policy have been identified as the primary means by which such legislative requirements can be surpassed. Finally, the necessary community statistics have been presented to accommodate comparison with TCC workforce profile information. As such, the concept of diversity management is a complex combination of legislative requirements, policy direction, community comparison, and structured interventions. The research question and objectives formulated for use in conjunction with the Toowoomba City Council workforce have been designed to reflect this. In order to answer the research question, four research objectives have also been posited:

   1. To determine whether the strategic policies and managerial practices comply with EEO legislative requirements.

2. To identify if the TCC EEO policy and diversity management at TCC are linked to the overall Corporate Strategic Plan.

3. To determine to what extent TCC workforce profile reflects the diversity of the Toowoomba community.

4. To identify interventions that can be introduced to increase diversity awareness and practices within the TCC.

METHOD

Due to the fact that the research objectives of this study require an assessment of numerical (eg. Workforce profile) and non-numerical data (eg. Diversity awareness), a combination of quantitative and qualitative research techniques is necessary (Hussey & Hussey 1997). The advantages of using quantitative techniques include objectivity and reliability. However, quantitative research has also been criticised due to the difficulty encountered in applying such research to complex situations and human relationships or factors that cannot be measured in numerical terms (Flick 1998). Qualitative research allows for greater flexibility, deeper understanding and has a high degree of validity (Flick 1998; Taylor & Bogdan 1998). Research objectives one, two, and four will be assessed using qualitative research and a variety of secondary data sources due to the attitudinal and perceptual complexity of issues involved. Due to its numerical focus, research objective three will employ quantitative data collection.

Data Collection Methods

A depth interview was formulated to obtain the necessary qualitative information. Depth interviews involve the use of probing questions to identify trends in cognition and perception (Burns & Bush 1998). The interview involves an assessment of legislation and policy familiarity and practices, and an analysis of diversity management and awareness. At the request of TCC, these interviews were conducted with senior and middle management throughout the organisation. These consisted of twenty-three (23) questions, and required between forty-five and ninety minutes to complete. Two members of the research team were present for each interview, one to interview, the other to record and observe. Each session was also recorded to cassette tape following interviewee consent. Informed consent was ensured by the voluntary participation of participants. Each interviewee was also provided with a verbal brief on the study and its objectives prior to commencement, and was free to terminate the interview at any time

Quantitative data was gathered using a workforce demographics survey. The survey was divided into three primary sections. Part A accounts for employment details, part B addresses demographic information, and part C uses a series of three Likert scales (strongly agree to strongly disagree) to obtain employee attitudes about employment opportunities. These surveys were distributed to all members of the organisation via the internal mailing system. Once completed, these were placed in sealed boxes provided to each section. To ensure anonymity, entries for the incentive, a thirty dollar liquor voucher, were placed in a separate box. Two deficiencies were noted in the survey namely that question A2 is redundant as the answer could have simply been extrapolated from the response to A1. Also, the employment opportunities scales showed limited application.

Initially, the interview schedule was adopted from a questionnaire designed for a study of diversity within Education Victoria (Erwee, 1997). This initial schedule was pre-tested with Human Resource Practices students from the University of Southern Queensland, and the design was deemed inappropriate for the current research. As such, the interview was redesigned, with a greater emphasis on research objectives. This revised schedule was again pre-tested with the Public Relations Officer of TCC. The only alterations arising from this test were minor wording and semantic issues. The demographic questionnaire was organised according to Australian Bureau of Statistics format. This was necessary to facilitate relevant comparison between the internal demographics of TCC and the external community profile.

Sampling

Toowoomba City Council employs eight-hundred and fourteen (814) staff in four primary divisions; Corporate Services, Engineering Services, Community and Environmental Services, and Planning Services.

Different sampling methods were used for the qualitative and quantitative measures. The depth interview was conducted with eleven of the twenty eight (11 of 28) branch managers selected by TCC to participate. These were chosen from each of the four (4) primary divisions; Corporate Services, Engineering Services, Community and Environmental Services, and Planning Services. The director of each of these divisions, and the Chief Executive Officer were also interviewed. As such, a total of sixteen (16) depth interviews were conducted. This is natural, or convenience, sampling, and occurs where researchers have limited control over sample composition and it is an acceptable representation (39%) of the sample frame (Hussey & Hussey 1997).

In order to get an accurate representation of the TCC workforce profile and to maximize the response rate, the survey was accompanied by a letter of support from TCC management. The responses to both interviews and the questionnaire have been held confidential and anonymous However, of the eight-hundred and fourteen (814) employees of the TCC, only three-hundred and nineteen (319) replied (39% of the population).

The secondary data sources were population demographics information, legislation, and policy documents. The community profile is an important part of assessing how well the diversity of the local community has been capitalised upon by an organization and demographic information has been obtained from the 1996 census (Australian Bureau of Statistics publications, 1996). The legislative sources were the Sex Discrimination Act 1984, the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999, the Disability and Discrimination Act 1992, the Anti-Discrimination Act 1991, and the Local Government Regulation 1994. Policy information was gained from the TCC Corporate Plan 2000-2004, Operational Plan 2000-2001, and various business plans, including the Equal Employment Opportunity Policy 1996. For the purpose of comparative data, the BCC Corporate Plan 1999-2003, and Diversity and Equity Framework 1999-2003 were also consulted.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data has been analysed in terms of specific research objectives. Responses will be categorized as such, and emerging trends and patterns discussed. Quantitative data has been processed with the assistance of the statistical software package, SPSS. This program produces meaningful statistics from the input of raw data. Such information will form the basis of the workforce profile and will be compared to community representation of key groups.

RESULTS

Results in this section have been presented according to objective. Each table represents a specific aspect of the relevant objective, and is necessary to reach a definitive conclusion. Top management and middle management responses have been separated for comparison purposes.

Abbreviations used: TM = Top Management MM = Middle Management
        EOE = Equal Opportunity Employer

Objective 1: Determine whether the strategic policies and managerial practices comply with EEO legislative requirements

In order to satisfy objective one, the knowledge and understanding held by TCC regarding legislation and policy issues had to be assessed, the way and extent to which it is implemented and used determined, and the attitude of managers toward whether TCC has established the status of equal opportunity employer identified (see Table 4 derived from interview questions 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7).

Table 4 Top Management understanding & knowledge of EEO Legislation

Themes	Key Comments by Top Management
TCC is an Equal Opportunity Employer Important part of TCC profile	3/5 Strongly Agree; 2/5 Agree -Is about providing opportunities for people across a range of different skill levels, beliefs, abilities, religious backgrounds, not discriminating -Obviously we are aware of legislative responsibilities. Equal opportunity should go beyond the limited target groups -All job ads are indicate that TCC is an Equal opportunity Employer
Familiarity with EEO and Anti-Discrimination Legislation	4/5 Familiar to Very Familiar ; 1/5 Unfamiliar -Aware enough that if an issue arose would go and see what legislation or People Development says -Have large responsibility to organisation ie. EEO officer

Table 4 indicates that top management at TCC views the organisation as an EOE and deems this an important part of their external profile. Furthermore, while four of the five senior managers suggest that they are familiar with the relevant legislation, they also attribute a great deal of such responsibility to the People Development Department.

Table 5 Middle Management understanding & knowledge of EEO Legislation

Themes	*Key Comments by Middle Management*
TCC is an Equal Opportunity Employer External profile	3/11 = Agree 7/11 = Strongly Agree 1/11 = Neutral -TCC strives to be an EEE but is not sure if they are succeeding -Has recruitment, advancement, special programmes seeking to assist special needs groups -Ethnic minority eg. Chinese are not represented well -Few women in TCC management
Familiarity with EEO and Anti-Discrimination Legislation	10/11 Familiar to very familiar; 1/11 has not read it -If I had any problems with it, I would seek assistance -Has been made available to us -Not an issue as need rarely arise to use

Table 5 suggests that most middle managers feel that TCC is an Equal Opportunity Employer, and that this is a significant element of the council's profile in the community. However, it is also suggested that not all groups are represented as well as they should be. Again, most middle managers indicate familiarity with the legislation, but also communicate a reliance on People Development for specifics.

Table 6 Interpretation & Compliance to Legislation & Policy (Top Management)

Themes	*Key Comments by Top Management*
Compliance Legislation and policy - importance - consultation	5/5 Yes it is definitely important -All activities are governed by Local Government Regulation -Work processes and procedures based on legislation and policy -Consider it important but need to use it rarely arises -I leave it up to the HR people to ensure procedures are correct -Have equitable grievance procedures set up – it is whether employees know that these procedures are available to them
Interpretation Individual management style/interest Accountability Training and development opportunities	 -Fortnightly meetings and numerous formal discussions, work requirements -All employees are responsible for their jobs -Depends on individual managers and their skills -Accountability could be addressed by having a performance development and review process -Empowerment of staff, promote coaching/leadership culture - 5/5 Agree that TCC has fairly extensive training resources which enable adequate training programmes and
Recruitment, selection & promotion	Whether applicants are internal or external Whether applicant suit the required criteria Merit ; Personality

Table 6 indicates that while senior management at TCC view EEO legislation as an important part of the employment relationship, they rarely refer to it. It also shows consensus between senior management that training and development opportunities are available to all employees. Furthermore, it suggests that while policy is communicated, the way individual managers apply it varies between departments, and that more accountability is perhaps necessary for such diversity issues. Contribution to workforce diversity however does not feature on the list of factors that affect recruitment, selection and promotion within this group of people. The factors affecting recruitment, selection and promotion have been the internal promotion policy, the suitability of the applicant (merit), and the personality of the applicant in terms of fit with organisational culture.

Table 7 examines such compliance and interpretation of legislation and policy amongst branch managers, and what factors are involved in recruitment, selection, and promotion.

Table 7 Interpretation & Compliance to Legislation & Policy (Middle Management)

Themes	*Key Comments by Middle Management*

Compliance
 	
    Legislation and policy are important
 	
    Common-sense
	7/11 - Yes 2/11 - No 2/11 – Non-Committal
	-Have grievance procedures as part of the EBA
	-Matter of appointing the right people and using the right people based on abilities and not on their religion
	-Refers to it in matters of recruitment and selection
	-Should be second nature; -Need rarely arises
	-Attitude is more important than legislation

Interpretation
    Use of employees
 	
    Lack of evaluation
 	
    Training and development opportunities
	-Value all employees' contributions
	-Use team based environments
	-There is a fine line between effectively utilizing and exploiting
	-Use bench marking – reliance on team leaders to ensure this
	-Review process is lacking
	-Lack of appraisals, haven't done them for some time
	-Do not have indicators, only know if they let me know
	-All eleven managers indicated that TCC provides adequate training and development opportunities for employees.

     Recruitment, selection & promotion	*Recruitment* -Merit; Personality; -Ability as a team player; -Cultural fit *Selection* - Merit *Promotion* -Account for who was selected and why; -Fairness -Internal staff considered first

From Table 7 it appears that middle managers perceive familiarity with EEO legislative requirements and TCC policy. Moreover, many of them feel that such principles are simply common sense. However, such statements as 'attitude is more important than legislation' indicate that perhaps familiarity is not as high as indicated. Again, it was suggested that general training and development opportunities within the council were available to all employees, and that a greater emphasis on appraisal is necessary, both in terms of diversity indicators and performance. Consistent with the views of senior management, principles of merit, cultural fit, and personality have been implicated in recruitment and selection processes. Furthermore, the policy of promoting from within has again been identified.

Objective 2: Identify if the TCC EEO policy and diversity management at TCC are linked to overall Corporate Strategic Plan

Objective two is examined in terms of the current link between strategic planning and diversity management at the council, and perceptions of how important such a link is to the organisation. Table 8 determines whether all executives identify a clear link between the Corporate Plan and diversity management policy, and the importance of such a link. Questions used to obtain this information are questions 8, 9 and 10 in the interview schedule.

Table 8 TCC EEO Policy/Diversity Management – Link – TCC Corporate Plans (Top Management)

Themes	Key Comments By Top Management
Corporate Mission	-Not necessary to expand. Transparency of operations covers necessary scrutiny on legislation and policy -Corporate plan is a broad document – says enough –can put more detail in operational plans

Results from table 8 indicate that generally top management deems that the corporate plan places enough emphasis on the importance of EEO in the workplace.

Table 9 TCC EEO Policy/Diversity Management – Link – TCC Corporate Plans (Middle Management)

Themes	Key Comments By Middle Management
Corporate Mission	7/11 Indicate there is emphasis in the statement 4/11 Indicate negative connotations about emphasis
Emphasis insufficient	-Follows the true EEO policy, covers it pretty well -Mission has a weight in there toward local government council accountability and government processes
Perception of need	-Needs more pro-female policies -Not enough said in the statement – though the TCC has made practical efforts towards a more affirmative action -I don't see the need for specifics at the Corporate level
Staff do not understand/apply the mission	-Do not think staff in TCC considers it in administering the organisation-needs leadership to encourage goals -Don't know if the Corporate Plan is understood

Table 9 demonstrates the response of middle management to the importance of linking the corporate plan to diversity management principles. In contrast to senior management, middle management appears divided over whether the current corporate mission places sufficient emphasis on diversity management in the council. Another interesting difference is that a number of these branch managers do not recognise a need for such a link, and do not apply or understand the council's corporate mission.

Objective 3: To determine to what extent the TCC workforce profile reflects the diversity of the Toowoomba community

The workforce demographic questionnaire included gender, age group, percentage born in Australia, and country of origin for those born outside Australia. This information has been categorised according to ABS standards, and are presented in the form of bar charts. Of the three-hundred and fifteen valid responses to gender, two-hundred and twelve (66.6%) were male, and one-hundred and six (33.3%) were female – see figure 1.

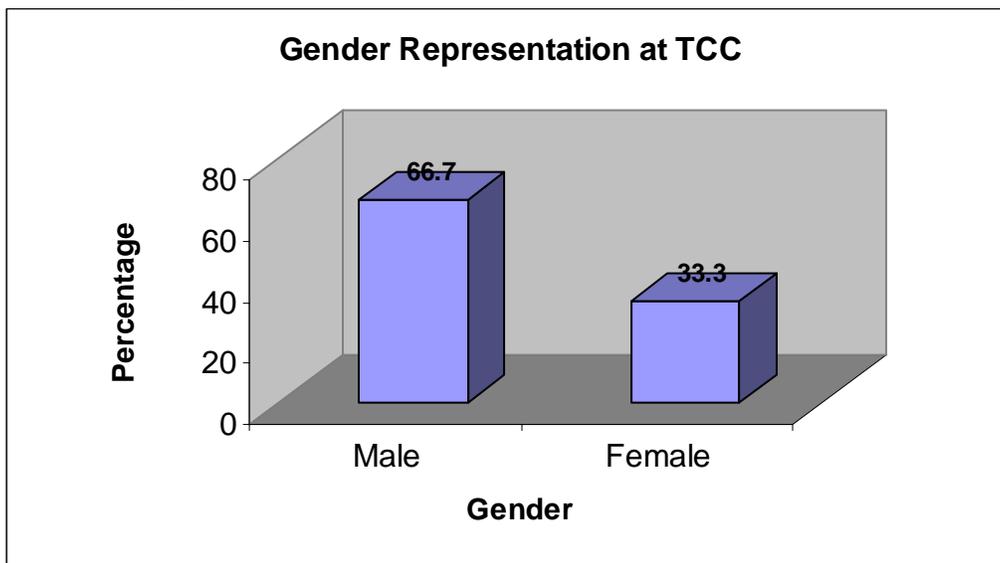*Figure 1 Gender representation at TCC*

Figure 2 indicates that of the responses to age, seventeen (5.4%) were between fifteen and nineteen years of age, thirty (9.4%) were between twenty and twenty-four years of age, seventy-eight (24.5%) were between twenty-five and thirty-four years of age, one-hundred and three (32.4%) were between thirty-five and forty-four years of age, sixty-six (20.8%) were between forty-five and fifty-four years of age, twenty-three (7.2%) were between fifty-five and sixty-four years of age, and one (0.3%) employee of TCC is sixty-five years or older.

Figure 2 Age Distribution at TCC

Workforce by Age Group

Percentage (y-axis): 0, 10, 20, 30, 40

Age Group (x-axis): 15-19, 20-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, Over 65
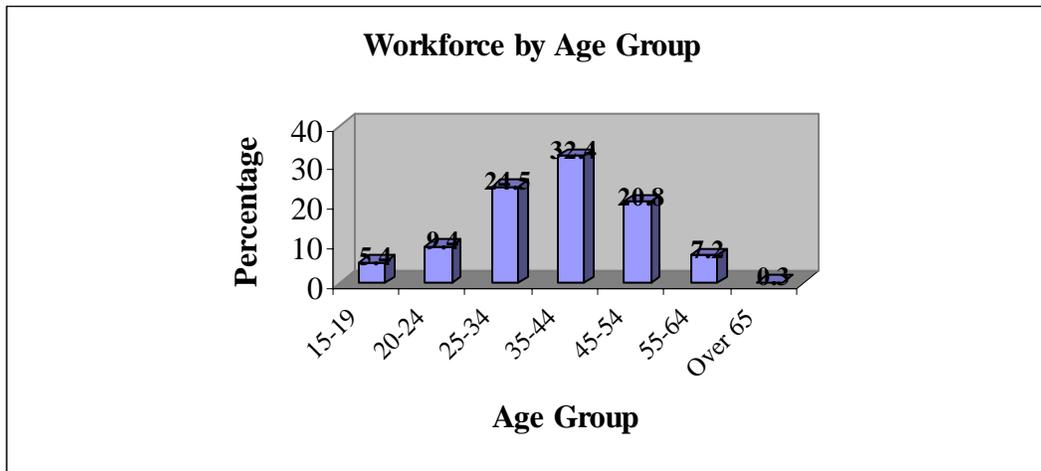
Values: 5.4, 9.4, 24.5, 32.4, 20.8, 7.2, 0.3

Figure 3 represents the percentage of the TCC workforce born in Australia, as opposed to those born overseas. Of the three-hundred and sixteen valid responses, ninety two percent indicated that they were born in Australia, and eight percent indicated that they were born overseas.

Figure 3 TCC Workforce by Birthplace

Workforce by Place of Birth

Percentage (y-axis): 0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100

Place of Birth (x-axis): Australia, Overseas
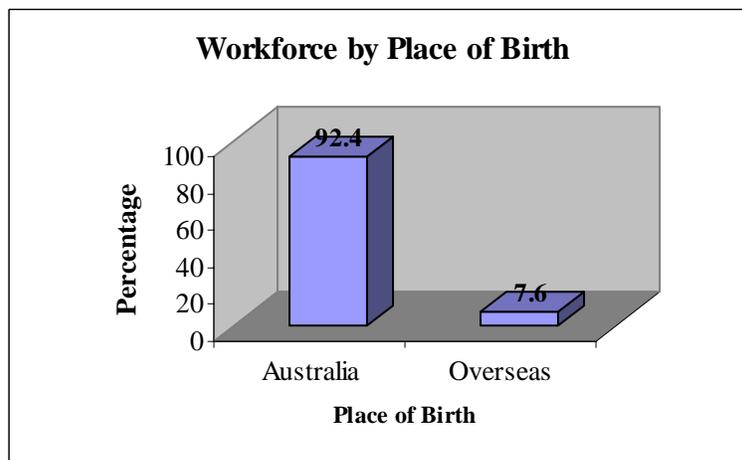
Values: 92.4, 7.6

Figure 4 details the country of origin for those born outside of Australia. Of the twenty-five valid responses, twenty four percent were born in Oceania (new Zealand and the Pacific Islands), four percent was born in America, forty-eight percent were born in Europe, eight percent were born in Asia, and four (16%) were born in Africa.

Figure 4 Overseas Born by Country
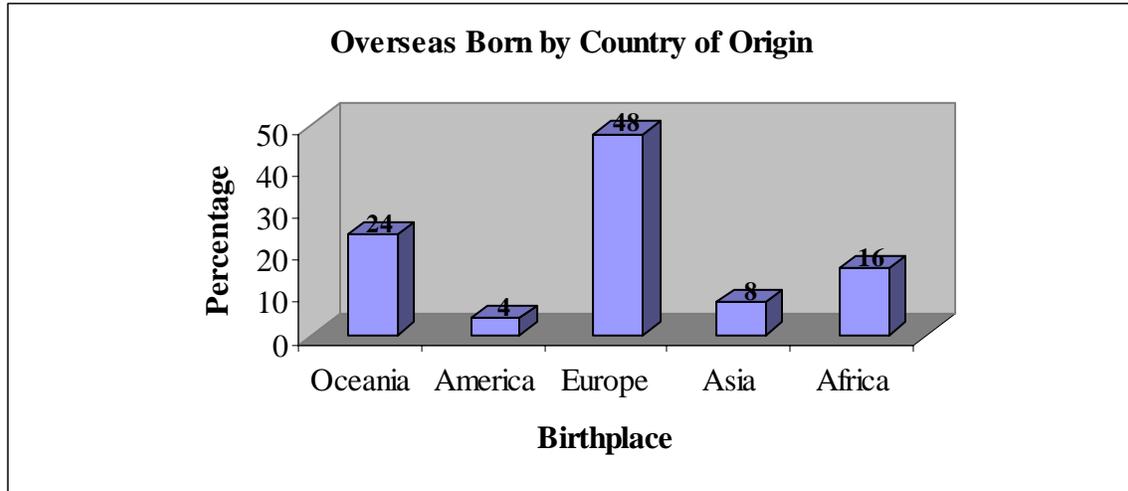
Objective 4: To identify interventions that can be introduced to increase diversity awareness and practices within the TCC

The current level of awareness has been assessed, the perceived importance of such diversity awareness clarified, any difficulties attributed to diversity awareness examined, and potential interventions identified. Finally, attitudes towards the implementation of a diversity management programme must be gauged, and suggested diversity management interventions detailed.

Table 10 Diversity awareness among senior management of TCC

Themes	Key Comments By Top Management
Broad definition of diversity Reflective of community	-Everything, all-types, encompassing -In a word, 'range'. Diversity from across the whole section of the community -Wide divergence of activity and method of doing things -An organisation that truly reflected the community the gender, the race, the disability. Proportion of the minority and majority groups in the community were truly represented in the workplace
Diverse groups	-There are 3-4 Sri Lankans; 1 female engineer; a couple of females in draft/design office. Due to the physical nature of external work, there are fewer women. Parks and gardens have had women workers -Indian/Fijian auditor. Applications grouped in terms of aboriginal and women -Low ethnic mix in Toowoomba. Sri Lankan Engineer; Vietnamese Cultural Development officer; aboriginal background around TCC -We have very diverse workgroups, gender mixes, age variations, people from different countries, ATSI

In Table 10 senior management at the council provided broad definitions of diversity. It has also been identified that true workforce diversity is reflective of the greater community. The respondents also showed a high degree of awareness of the current diversity status of the organisation.

Table 11 Diversity awareness among Middle management of TCC

Themes	*Key Comments By Middle Management*
Definition of diversity according to characteristics Broad definition of diversity Valuing difference Reflective of community	-A diverse workforce. Different races, sexes, possibly people with disabilities; -Includes different ages, cultural backgrounds, different education levels, sexes, -Sensitive to minority culture, -- Recognising things that make us different, how we appear, how we believe, think, react. Every single individual is different from the other, diversity is also respecting that and tolerating that. -Recognising differences in cultures, disabilities, languages, personal styles etc. Acknowledge value in the difference and learning opportunities in particular for yourself. This in regard to employment as well as how we treat our community -Fundamentally, TCC should reflect the same diversity in employment as the community eg. If 20% are aboriginal, so should be TCC
Current commitment to diversity Current diversity in workforce	-We now have a staff integration officer. Works hard to ensure recruitment does support people from different backgrounds -Laborers and road-gangs may be diverse -Males, females and a range of ages 18-50 -We have Indians, Sri Lankans, and South African born -Different age groups, aboriginals, foreign people are in teams

Table 11 details the level of diversity awareness among middle management. A broad range of conceptual awareness was evident in the definitions of diversity presented by branch managers. While a number of narrow definitions based on characteristics were provided, a significant number of managers also recognised the broader implications for diversity. Moreover, many of these middle managers identified that the more important element of diversity was the appreciation of such difference. The importance of skills and workforce profiling were also implicated. Furthermore, these managers identified an increased commitment to diversity within TCC, but were not as aware of current workforce characteristics as their senior counterparts.

Table 12 Significance, importance, and benefits of diversity awareness

Themes	*Key Comments By Top Management*

Doesn't target all groups,	-Don't know that TCC targets specific groups, except certain groups eg. Physical disabilities, indigenous Australians -Has been a major shift in council which began with the last council three years ago. Began with positive actions to get those with disabilities and ATSI backgrounds. If TCC doesn't lead by example, how can we expect other employers do it.
Improved tolerance Increased flexibility/creativity Understanding of community/customers	-Increased level of tolerance among employees -Helps integrate particular needs, added flexibility, provides a range of ideas, gets "older people" to think outside their box -People with different experience may come up with different ways of doing things. Improvements in productivity through new ideas -Much better understanding of the community, awareness within the workforce that there are different ways of handling issues - we have to be aware of differences and to know where we can go for advice on such things. Helps with cross cultural material. Understanding differences in the workforce is good

Table 12 discusses the importance of diversity awareness according to senior management. TCC management has identified a number of advantages which can be attributed to diversity awareness. The most important benefits have been presented as an improved customer focus, flexible work options, a greater pool of human capital being available, improved cultural awareness, and improved productivity through more innovative approaches to work and problem solving. Despite this, they indicate that TCC is not committed to achieving targets, except in the case of ATSI and disabled employees.

Table 13 Disadvatages associated with diversity awareness

Themes	*Key Comments By Top Management*
Costly to establish Tension/communication issues Relinquished productivity	-Acquires more resources and effort to achieve diversity -Can be communication problems, normal in human relationships -If it's not an organisation that sits comfortably with diversity, then tensions will build up. Added responsibility for Managers, directors, and supervisors. They must lead the way -Long tenure types who cannot/won't fit into change, some workers cannot work with diverse types -If organisation is not friendly, tokenistic. Need training how to handle very racist people -Managers encouraging diversity may relinquish productivity performances. Attempting to integrate members of the community who do not normally integrate may increase disharmony

Table 13 reports management's perceptions of negative aspects of diversity awareness. The greatest disadvantages associated with diversity awareness, according to TCC management, are

that it is costly to establish, can necessitate productivity sacrifices, and it can create tension and communication issues if the environment is not conducive.

Table 14 Proposed diversity awareness interventions

Themes	Key Comments By Top Management
Communicate the benefits of diversity	-Reinforcing it by naming it as helping people to work together, tolerance, respect, quality etc. Help people get together irrespective of their position. People should be treated equally -Evaluations made regarding workforce diversity should be communicated, and have policies which reflect this
Supervisor knowledge	-Supervisor knowledge of the area is essential. Success depends upon stakeholder support. Regular reporting opportunities
Training to condition employees to diversity	-Helping the rest of the workforce accept those from other backgrounds, making them feel comfortable with having differences in background. If a new person with different background enters the group, they need particular training -Stress the advantages of diversity , so it is an education process
Need for communication to raise awareness	-Regularly communicate, need to be more proactive, more forceful with strategy; raise awareness/ideas in terms of diversity -Need regular communication. Not to the point where you are bombarding your organisation, but there are subtle ways

The proposed diversity awareness interventions detailed in table 14 have a definite focus on communicating the benefits of, and strategic importance of such awareness. Other important elements include improved supervisor knowledge of the subject, and diversity awareness training.

Table 15 Senior management's current attitudes toward diversity management

Themes	Key Comments By Top Management
Not actively targeting	-You have to make a decision about positive discrimination because if you are making recruitment decisions on the merit based system, you always get the person that best fits the criteria. What you end up with then is a mix in the workforce which has not consciously been chosen but when you go back and re-evaluate that mix you will find that groups there are not represented. Then you have to make a choice as to whether you alter the criteria to that which would make the mix of your work teams appropriate. Then you are facing issues of discrimination against those who are equally or better qualified to get the job

Current environment is very homogenous	-Diverse work teams get along no better or worse than homogenous teams. You should not employ a female over a more qualified male -Gender based teams are very limited -Only work on differences they can see, don't see a problem with women getting into management, but see a problem with literacy among all staff

Table 15 has identified the perception that current investment in staff, especially in training, demonstrates the fact that all staff at TCC are valued. It also suggests that TCC has serious reservations about the use of active targeting measures but that it is the responsibility of all managers to improve upon the current homogeneity of the TCC workforce. It is also stated that senior management do not understand the complexity involved in diversity management.

Table 16 identifies various strategies purported by TCC for the management of diversity (questions 5, 6, 8 and 9 of the diversity management and awareness interview schedule).

Table 16 Strategies for diversity management

Themes	Key Comments By Top Management
Current Practices Job sharing and flexible work hours	-Job share arrangements that have worked particularly well. -Flexible work hours - will cost TCC to go further, computer equipment etc. Most training is across the board, there are a number of opportunities related to women -Family friendly practices are too difficult within the hours of work. Through enterprise agreements, one can accrue recreational leave by working extra hours -Recreation leave, sick leave, bereavement leave, work from home. Workloads often make it impossible to use these flexible options
Communication and reinforcement	-Start with CEO and executive team. They hold regular meetings with branch heads, and then filtered down to various levels of people accepting their responsibilities. One upper person will be there to reinforce plans to two levels lower, to give support to the person in between
Development assistance	-Encourage professional and self-development study assistance programme; provide employees with time-off and monetary assistance.

Proposed Interventions	
Skill assessment	-Skill based assessment for employees to identify areas in which skills aren't strong enough to meet a particular need.
Workforce profiling	-Really need to look at what you have got within your workforce in comparison to what community representation is. Then looking at strategies for moving toward that without alienating current employees
Recruitment targeting	-Positive discrimination, can be some intervention to improve the mix. Lot of the older workforce appears to be vulnerable (mid 40-50s). More encouraging of women, integrating family life into their careers
	-To be closer to diversity, put performance against performance target eg. If a target of 20% of managers will be women by 2005 are set and not achieved, then why? Should have active intervention in encouraging other minority in higher positions
Training	-Training people on the ground as well as managers, have to target managers. Has to be in everyone's job description and duty statements.
Mentoring	-Leadership and empowerment training
	-Mentoring groups that are not well represented

According to table 16, TCC currently facilitates diversity through providing flexible work options and job sharing, communicating a commitment to diversity, and encouraging self-development of all employees. However, according to a number of managers, while there are currently flexible work options available, these are not practical due to work requirements.   Suggested improvements include skills assessment, diversity management training (especially for managers), formal mentoring for minority employees, and workforce profiling. Moreover, there appears to be division as to whether active targeting is appropriate.

DISCUSSION

The first element of this research (*Objective 1*) concerns how policies and practices employed by Toowoomba City Council meet the complex set of legislative requirements. The EEO policy 1996 has been derived directly from legislative requirements and it does not contravene legislation. However, this is not the only policy impacting upon employment equity as a number of important aspects of formal policy affect recruitment, selection, and promotion. These include reference to merit and personality in employment practices, a policy to fill positions from internal applicants wherever possible, and the extent to which TCC targets minority groups.

While there are no finite targeting requirements detailed in the legislation, the fact that legislation clearly prescribes the promotion of opportunities for such target groups implies a responsibility in

this area. TCC currently targets such groups as ATSI and those with a disability. While this is indeed a reflection of the council's commitment to equity in employment, such practices should be expanded to include all of those detailed as targets in the legislation, as well as those in which their current demographic composition is lacking.

One of the requirements of any EEO management plan is that an officer be appointed with specific EEO responsibilities and TCC has appointed a Staff Integration Officer. Legislation also has provisions for monitoring compliance with legislation and workforce statistics but there are no such procedures available for evaluating diversity issues at TCC. A number of middle managers have identified a deficiency in evaluative functions which contravenes employment based on merit as a requirement of the Local Government Regulation 1994. Also the fact that personality has been highlighted suggests a degree of subjectivity that could serve as a hindrance to equitable practices. Indeed, it is a departure from principles of merit and creates avenues for potential discrimination unless closely monitored. While the practice of recruiting for promotion from internal applicants is positive for personal career development, it could be an example of indirect discrimination. If a truly diverse workforce does not already exist, such a practice can ensure that minority and target groups are not represented in senior positions.

The results of the interview indicate that a significant proportion of middle management at TCC rarely refer to, and would be unable apply, legislative and policy requirements. One of the requirements of the local government regulation is to ensure that the workforce profile reflects community characteristics. Due to the lack of detailed employee information currently available to the council, it is difficult to suggest that such requirements have been adhered to. Conversely, training and development opportunities are available to all employees in a non-discriminatory manner, which is compliant with legislation. Despite this, it can be proposed that strategic policies and practices are not entirely compliant with legislative requirements.

To address *Objective 2*, managerial perceptions of the need for a strong link between diversity management and corporate policy must be ascertained, beliefs about the sufficiency of the current link must be gauged and the implications of comparative analysis with BCC policy must be identified. In terms of knowledge about the corporate mission, senior management and middle management were able identify the broad nature of this document, and its influence on the organisation through subordinate policy. Despite this interviewees were divided as to whether the current policy places enough emphasis on workplace diversity.   All senior managers and a

number of branch managers see the current statement as providing a strong enough link to diversity management. However, it has been suggested that the corporate plan is neither understood nor applied by many managers throughout the organisation. The fact that many managers are not aware of policy directions suggests that sufficient emphasis and communication have not been present. Furthermore, a number of middle managers have explicitly stated that the corporate mission is deficient in relation to diversity and employment practices and low female representation have been proposed as evidence of this.

The literature suggests that policy should be used as a means of surpassing legal requirements (Prasad & Mills 1997). Furthermore, it highlights the importance of the corporate mission in determining the direction of policy, and thus organisational practices (Dessler et al. 1999). The corporate plan of the TCC does not exhibit the same commitment and, as such, the 1996 policy goes little further than reinforcing legislative requirements. However, TCC has the opportunity to remedy this through the current redesign of the Equal Employment Opportunity policy and through a review of the corporate plan and strategic objectives of the council. Moreover, the current link between diversity management principles and the corporate plan is insufficient given the importance of equitable employment practices to the council's external profile, and its espoused commitment to diversity.

For *Objective 3* the TCC workforce composition was compared with community demographics in order to ensure that such diversity is being capitalised upon. This comparison has revealed that the TCC workforce is largely comparable with that of the general community. In terms of age groups, TCC has a significantly lower proportion of workers between the ages of fifteen and nineteen. Where ten percent of the Toowoomba labour force is within this age group, just over half that proportion (5.3%) is present at TCC. The other significant difference in these tables is that while twenty-three percent of the community workforce is between the ages of thirty-five (35) and forty-four (44), the corresponding figure at TCC is over thirty-two percent (32.4%). However, other than these two age groups, the rest of the TCC workforce closely fits the Toowoomba profile in terms of age groups.

In terms of birthplace, those born in Australia make up the vast majority of both the Toowoomba labour force (90.9%) and that of the TCC (92.9%). Of those born overseas, the only significant differences are that TCC employs a higher proportion of Africans (16%) than are present in the Toowoomba community (4.1%), but is not as representative of the Asian contingent of the

Toowoomba labour force (8% as opposed to 18.7% in the community). The most striking difference, however, between the Toowoomba community and the TCC workforce profile is in gender distribution. While women make up almost a half of the Toowoomba labour force (45%), the female respondents to this research represent one third (33.3%) of the total number. As such, while TCC has achieved a majority fit in terms of cultural and age diversity, the representation of women is significantly lower than in the community and necessitates particular attention.

Objective 4 of the research dealt with interventions that can be introduced to increase diversity awareness and practices. At the senior management level, there is a sound knowledge of diversity according to narrow characteristics and an awareness of the benefits attributable to such diversity. However, diversity awareness among middle management is quite divergent, indicating that more diversity awareness training is necessary in this area. Moreover, many branch managers view the introduction of diversity management as an economic burden. Thus, not only is conceptual awareness lacking, in many cases the business case for diversity has not been communicated effectively. As such, it is essential for TCC to not only communicate a commitment to diversity awareness, but also to ensure that the advantages of such initiatives are understood, especially by management.

The establishment of a diversity council is pertinent in TCC to ensure that strategic objectives align with diversity management principles (Smith 1998), improve the ability of TCC to integrate diversity initiatives throughout the organisation, and serve to reinforce the commitment of organisational leaders. Currently, the Staff Integration Officer is the only employee with specific diversity management objectives.

Currently, the collection of necessary culture and workforce profile information is deficient at the council. As such, conducting a comprehensive cultural audit, and developing a comprehensive workforce profile should become important elements of diversity management at TCC. Furthermore this leads to the formation of strategic diversity objectives such as target figures, benchmarking to compare policy and practices with diversity leaders, and the development of criteria on which workplace diversity can be assessed. Interventions which are currently in practice include flexible work options, literacy programmes, and personal development assistance. However, many managers at TCC have suggested that the nature of work conducted makes these inaccessible for the majority of employees. As such, their effectiveness is limited unless they can be made available to a larger proportion of the organisation.

At TCC, there are a number of diversity interventions that could improve diversity management. These include active minority targeting, training and education for the organisation as a whole and management specific, changes to the performance appraisal to reflect diversity principles, mentoring programmes for minority groups, and improved communication from senior management on the importance of diversity to the external profile of TCC and the business case for effective diversity management.

The next stage of the process involves an assessment of how effectively interventions have been implemented. At this point, the diversity management task force must ensure that each of the proposed initiatives devised earlier have been introduced. The final stage of this process involves maintenance of the current programme, and measurement of its effectiveness. Indeed, this should be conducted in relation to changes to the organisational climate, again implicating the need for comprehensive workforce statistics and a cultural audit. Furthermore, changes to such performance indicators as performance appraisals, profit figures, productivity, and employee morale are important (Smith 1998). Such an assessment can be used to ensure the benefit of such diversity, as well as identifying any deficiencies in the programme for improvement in future interventions.

A number of limitations to this study have emerged. The first concerns ABS data on the Toowoomba demographic profile implying that the 1996 population statistics may not be completely accurate at this point in time and the unavailability of disability and ATSI statistics means that these important target groups cannot be discussed fully. The low response rate in terms of the workforce profile means that the findings may not be truly indicative of the organisation as a whole and as TCC does not have a Human Resource Information System (HRIS), there is no alternative avenue for obtaining the necessary workforce statistics. Finally, the scope of the research limits the depth and type of research conducted.

CONCLUSION

The first important finding in the context of TCC is that while existing EEO policy is primarily derived from the relevant legislation, the council has not entirely met its regulatory requirements. In terms of policy, it has been determined that the current link is not sufficient for an organisation promoting itself as an equal opportunity employer. Moreover, the current link has led to ineffective subordinate policy and organisational practices. While the response rate to the

questionnaire was not as high as anticipated, the information gathered suggests that the TCC workforce profile is indeed reflective of the greater community. The main areas of concern, however, were the representation of women, Asian, and younger employees. A number of recommendations, with implications for both policy and practice, have been posited to assist the Toowoomba City Council in meeting and surpassing its legal obligations in order to capitalise on the diversity of the Toowoomba community:

ENDNOTE

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Legislation

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Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999 (Cwlth)

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Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Qld)

Table 1 Toowoomba labour force by gender

Gender	Population	Percentage
Male	20021	55
Female	16556	45

Table 2 Toowoomba labour force by age group

Age Group	Population	Percentage
15-19	3813	10
20-24	5394	15
25-34	8480	23
35-44	8566	23
45-54	6972	19
55-64	2870	8
65+	482	1

Table 3 Toowoomba population by birthplace

Birthplace	Population	Percentage
Australia	72170	90.9
Oceania	1409	1.8
America	307	0.4
Europe	3754	4.7
Middle East	79	0.1
Asia	1350	1.7
Africa	294	0.4
Other	9	0.0