Analysis of the Concepts of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Workplace

Equal opportunities approach means that all workers are treated equally, fairly and without prejudice to their differences, this approach is intended to prevent unjustified discrimination (Management Mania 2019). The UK strives to promote equality in the workplace through guidance and legislation. Through the years there have been different statutory bodies that dealt with specific aspects of discrimination.

The Equal Opportunities Commission was established to tackle the issue of sex discrimination. The Disability Rights Commission focused on issues related to disability discrimination and the Commission for Racial Equality dealt with race discrimination. In October 2007 these three commissions were merged into the new body called the Equality and Human Rights Commission. In addition to taking on the responsibilities of the three existing commissions, the EHRC also acquired new responsibilities in order to provide the same level of protection to all other minority groups. The primary aim of the newly formed Equality and Human Rights Commission is to promote and protect everyone's right to equal opportunities in the workplace as laid down in the Equality Act 2010.

The equal opportunities approach influences actions and behaviours in the workplace through legislation with formalised procedures and policies. Policies in the workplace promote an equal opportunities approach allowing employees and potential employees to exist and compete on equal terms with respect to race, gender, disability, religion etc. In other words, equal opportunities approach assumes that discrimination stems from unequal treatment of individuals. An equal opportunities policy is a formal manifesto that sets out an organisation's commitment to fairness. It also lays down guidelines on how it will deal with issues that contravene these guidelines (EOC 2020).

ACAS (2020) identify the main points that should be covered in a policy:

- the organisation's commitment to provide equality for all its staff and job applicants – and that pledge should stem from the head of the organisation such as the boardroom, chairman or chief executive
- its aim to encourage, value and manage diversity in the workforce
- its goal to attain a diverse workforce which is representative of the
- areas it is drawn from and the customers it serves
- that the organisation will seek to provide a workplace where all employees can give their best, where discrimination, bullying, harassment and victimisation will not be tolerated, and decisions are based on merit (apart from limited exceptions allowed under the Equality Act).
- that breaches of the policy will be regarded as misconduct, and dealt with through the organisation's disciplinary procedure.

The EOC (2020) identify numerous reasons why an equal opportunities policy is important for any organisation:

Commitment, through investing time in development of a policy it shows an eagerness unbecoming an equal, diverse and inclusive organisation, It demonstrates that you are aware of the law and of issues such as discrimination and harassment and that they will not be tolerated within the organisation.

Staff awareness, some staff may unintentionally discriminate against, humiliate or ignore minority or disadvantaged groups. This may not be intentional but it is against the law. Having a policy that sets out the facts and makes it clear what behaviour is unacceptable should raise awareness amongst staff. This should be accompanied by staff training, meaning that staff are aware of any discriminatory behaviour either as a victim or perpetrator.

Reduce workplace conflict, knowing the boundaries of behaviour in the workplace should reduce incidences and men that any that arise can e dealt with swiftly. This is especially true when a lack of understanding is present that can be addressed through the policy/training.

Boosts morale and increases worker retention, unfair treatment and conflicts can taint the workplace in the absence of a written equal opportunities policy. This can result in worker dissatisfaction and a higher turnover resulting from voluntary resignations from employees who are disillusioned by unfair employment policies. Knowing that the company is an advocate of fair treatment can boost employee morale and decrease (employee) turnover, resulting in a win-win for you and your workers. When employee morale is high and turnover is low, organisations often see measurable positive differences in productivity and profitability.

Attracts applicants who align with this concept, the aim of any recruitment strategy is to identify the right person for the job irrespective of age, sex, race, ethnicity, disability and other factors that have no bearing on an individual’s ability to perform their job. Employers who openly declare their commitment to fairness in their vacancy advertisement are more likely to attract a more diverse pool of qualified applicants who are confident that fair consideration will be given to them irrespective of non-job-related factors.

Every worker has a right to:

- Fair practices and behaviour in the workplace
- Fair allocations of workloads
- Equal access to benefits and conditions
- A workplace that is free from unlawful discrimination, harassment or bullying at work
- Competitive merit-based selection processes for recruitment and promotion
- Fair processes to deal with work-related complaints and grievances (ACAS 2020)

Laws and policies help to protect workers in the workplace and support employees in providing an environment where equality, diversity and inclusion are embedded. However it is important for organisations to consider their organisation in the context of these concepts, this should include reflecting on any unconscious biases, using inclusive language, checking social media activity (and the demographic of followers), educating business leaders (ensuring a top-down approach), create cultural events, seek inclusion feedback and ensure that organisational values also include information on how equality, diversity and inclusion are part of the it. It also involves identifying and addressing any barriers to inclusion. In the NHS there is the ‘Freedom to Speak up’ (FTSU) guidance which states:

“All executive directors have a responsibility for creating a safe culture and an environment in which workers are able to highlight problems and make suggestions for improvement. FTSU is a fundamental part of that. They also understand that an organisational or department culture of bullying and harassment or one that is not welcoming of new ideas or different perspectives may prevent workers from speaking up which could put patients at risk, affect many aspects of their staff’s working lives, and reduce the likelihood that improvements of all kinds can be made.” (NHS Improvement 2019).

In summary applying equal opportunity policies in the workplace will support the concepts of equality, diversity and inclusion through fair treatment, prevention of discrimination and adoption of a culture that is based on diversity and inclusiveness. Having an equal opportunities policy can impact on behaviour in the workplace through raising workers awareness, reducing conflict through lack of awareness by training staff and boosting morale which ultimately should increase retention of staff. Individuals are protected through the laws and policies however, not being aware or understanding them fully may put individuals at risk. Equally employers should protect their organisation through having a policy and ensuring the adhere to legislation. Going beyond this involves reflecting on the organisation and identifying and challenging obstacles to being a truly equal, diverse and inclusive organisation. In the NHS the philosophy of freedom to speak up supports this.