

Managing Diversity and Equal Opportunities—Some Practical Implications

Carley Foster and Sue Newell

Background

Discrimination in employment is inevitable. For example, when we make choices about whom to offer a particular job to, we are discriminating against those whom we reject. However, some discrimination is considered to be unfair and, thus, morally unacceptable. Unfair discrimination in employment occurs when an individual is treated less favourably than someone else because of a particular characteristic (for example, being a woman rather than a man or being black rather than white) that is irrelevant to the ability to do a particular job. Unfair discrimination also occurs when a condition is applied equally but this condition favours one group and is not a necessary condition for job performance. Unfair discrimination, at least on the basis of gender, ethnic origin and disability, is illegal in the UK, and is enshrined in the equal opportunities legislation. Specifically, equal opportunities legislation is based on the principle of treating everyone equally, regardless of characteristics such as gender, ethnicity and disability, at least unless these can be shown to be relevant to the ability to do the job.

Despite nearly thirty years of equal employment opportunities legislation, however, unfair discrimination remains prevalent. So, pay differentials between male and female employees continue to exist (see, for example, Broadbridge, 1997; Grimshaw and Rubery, 2001) and some groups, particularly women and ethnic minorities, still remain under-represented in certain industries and at senior levels of organisations (Dickens, 2000: 141).

© *Business and Professional Ethics Journal* 2002. Correspondence may be sent to Carley Foster at Nottingham Business School, the Nottingham Trent University, Burton Street, Nottingham, NG1 4BU, UK; or via email: carley.foster@ntu.ac.uk and Sue Newell at Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, Surrey, TW20 0EX, UK; or via email: susan.newell@rhul.ac.uk