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Erica French Glenda Strachan

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Women at work! Evaluating equal employment policies and outcomes in construction

Employment policies and outcomes in construction

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Erica French

Department of Management, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia, and

Glenda Strachan

Employment Relations and Human Resources, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine equal employment policies in Australia's male-dominated construction industry and categorise the types of activities undertaken against an equal employment typology to identify links to outcomes for women in the form of increased participation and management.

Design/methodology/approach – To explore the issue of low representation of women in construction through the content analysis of 83 construction organisations' equal employment opportunity (EEO) reports.

Findings – This industry is not engaging with equal employment issues and the numbers of women working in the industry and/or management are based on individual decision rather than an institutional commitment to equality in diversity.

Research limitations/implications – Australian legislation mandates organisational reporting of relevant data and offers public access to this information offering a unique data set.

Practical implications – An ageing population means that the predominately older male workforce is leaving construction in greater numbers with fewer potential replacements making new labour markets a vital consideration.

Social implications – Legislation and organisational policies designed to promote EEO for women have existed in numerous countries for decades. One objective of this legislation was to reduce male domination in senior positions and industries/occupations where women were under-represented. Despite this, few women are employed in construction in operational or management roles worldwide.

Originality/value – This study offers a comprehensive analysis of a male-dominated industry in one jurisdiction rather than a few selected cases and uses a broader rigorous typology for analysis that acknowledges both equal and different treatment options.

Keywords Equal opportunities, Construction, Australia, Women workers, Diversity typologies, Low representation

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

One of the major goals of legislation and policies designed to promote equality in employment has been the reduction in occupational segregation by sex, which is the propensity for women and men to work in different occupations (Blackburn *et al.*, 2002). Occupational segregation is an important issue as it is linked to the disadvantage women experience in pay, opportunity and benefits. As a result, national and international goals continue to focus on equitable participation across industries, occupations and job levels, as well as differences in equitable conditions of work between women and men, especially issues of equal pay. In different countries the implementation of a range of legislative approaches is mandated or enforced to different degrees (Bell, 2007; Kirton



and Greene, 2005; Jain *et al.*, 2003; Wirth, 2001). The heterogeneity of a broad range of equity and diversity management ideologies is supported by an equally broad variety of policies and organisational practices, and as a result organisations today operate and choose their equality and diversity management approach from this jumble. Yet despite legislation, policies and research in many countries for more than 40 years the issue remains.

The question of whether organisations can themselves achieve full structural integration of women to accurately reflect the external labour market remains unresolved, and there is no agreement on the means for achieving a gender-balanced organisation. This study examines two linked research questions:

- RQ1.* What are the equal employment approaches implemented within organisations designed to manage equality in diversity in one male-dominated industry?
- RQ2.* Are any approaches related to increased numbers of women within the industry, in non-traditional areas of work, or in management?

This study is significant because we examine one industry as an industry vertical, namely the construction industry, as it is the most male-dominated of all industries worldwide. Our study focuses on the range and types of equal employment policies designed to promote gender equality using reports from 83 construction firms in Australia, analysed through the lens of a rigorous typology of organisational equal employment approaches. The outcomes are examined in relation to the numbers of women within the industry; in management and in traditional and non-traditional roles within the industry and their significance lies in the limitations of equal employment policies in predicting increasing numbers of women across any of these areas in construction.

Gender segregation

Occupational segregation is endemic across all regions; all economic levels; in all political systems; all religious, social and cultural environments; and is the most enduring aspect of labour markets around the world (Davidson and Burke, 2011; Anker, 1997). It is more prevalent, however, in wealthy industrial countries (Blackburn *et al.*, 2002). Vertical segregation (women holding lower status and less pay in organisations) measures the component of inequality, while horizontal segregation is orthogonal to the vertical segregation and measures the extent of difference within occupations (Blackburn *et al.*, 2002, p. 514). In countries examined by Blackburn *et al.* (2002), namely the UK, the USA and Greece, the horizontal component of job segregation (access to different jobs or industries) is greater but both are deemed important and need explanation. The concerns of occupational segregation include equity matters such as pay differentials between women and men and the negative effects of how men view women and how women view themselves (Anker, 1997). These factors and their consequences (including mortality, morbidity, poverty and income inequality) are not the only reasons that segregation is disturbing. Occupational segregation is a major source of labour market rigidity and economic inefficiency due to a waste of human resources. In explaining job segregation's persistence Acker (2006) identifies "inequality regimes" which are "loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender and racial inequalities within particular organizations" (Acker, 2009, p. 201). These underpin the systemic disparities in organisational outcomes that include (but are not limited to) opportunities of job security, pay and promotion. Organisations are repeatedly recognised as

gendered constructs exhibiting sustained work segregation, income and status inequality, as well as cultural and individual images of gender and these are perpetuated through their processes, practices and pressures (Broadbridge and Hearn, 2008; Acker, 1990).

One of the extremes of occupational segregation by gender is seen in the construction industry. In the UK, which is an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) country, 16 per cent of women are employed within the industry but two-thirds of these are employed in clerical roles (Fielden *et al.*, 2001). In Nigeria (a non-OECD country) Adeyemi *et al.* (2006) identify that the construction industry is the core of Nigeria's economy and responsible for 70 per cent of the fixed capital formation with more than three million workers, of which few are women. In Australia the construction industry is the fourth largest contributor to gross domestic product (GDP), accounting for 7 per cent of GDP with 10 per cent of the Australian workforce, making it Australia's fourth largest industry. However, only 11 per cent of construction industry workers are women, indicating a high degree of horizontal segregation. In addition, most women are in support roles (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2010), indicating a high degree of vertical segregation. Across all industries in Australia a high degree of vertical segregation is obvious with only 15 per cent of managers and < 3 per cent of chief executive officers (CEOs) being women (EOWA, 2012).

The rationales for the lack of women in construction are plentiful. A number of studies, undertaken predominately in the UK, indicate that the male culture and its image and reputation in construction is a primary reason for women's under-representation (Cartwright and Gale, 1995; Dainty *et al.*, 2001; Fielden *et al.*, 2001, 2010; Worrall *et al.*, 2010) with resulting biased decisions by male employers. Lingard and Francis (2005) challenge the construction industry's long hours and weekend work as preventing the attraction and retention of a talented workforce with the need for a better than "one size fits all" diversity policy for both men and women. Smith (2013) recognises the culture of gender segregation in manual trades as the result of specific ideas about gender and masculinity and that these ideas are maintained within the character of the work itself. This supports Agapiou's (2002) findings that men believe women involved in the structural aspects of building work would compromise their femininity and that women were better suited to lighter and cleaner trades. Despite a slight cultural shift recognised by Agapiou (2002) male construction employers continue resisting women based largely on folklore, fears and fallacy rather than any real negative evidence. Indeed "men who have had experience of working with women find they are capable, they fit in well with male colleagues and they contribute to a quality outcome" (Agapiou, 2002, p. 704).

Fielden *et al.* (2001) identified the poor image and reputation of the construction industry as the primary barrier, with word-of-mouth recruitment, limited terms and conditions of employment, lack of training and male networks offering further hurdles for women with only minimal short-term improvements appearing ten years later rather than a substantial change the Employment Service figures would appear to indicate (Fielden *et al.*, 2010).

Ellison (2001) found the very low representation of women within senior management groups has meant biased decision-making by a male-dominated core. Using the findings from 2,000 surveys of female and male surveyors, Ellison found that, despite men and women having equal education qualifications, women remain under-promoted in comparison with men, yet women are not physiologically or rationally disinclined to invest time, money or effort into the advancement of their careers in this sector. Men gain promotion more rapidly than women, particularly during the first ten years of their

careers. Through interviews of both women and men in the industry, (Dainty *et al.* (2001) found human resource management (HRM) practices maintain current workplace environments valued by men to support their careers and men resist changes to the construction culture. In contrast, women's priorities were to create a change in workplace culture to facilitate their equal participation, particularly through access to greater flexibility of work practice. While women do not participate equally in the construction industry worldwide (those who do, work predominately in service roles) there are women making inroads into construction. Those who do remain in the industry often occupy special niches to avoid the male culture (Gale, 1994) or develop bespoke long-term careers for individuality and to avoid any resistance through the male-dominated culture (Dainty *et al.*, 2001) and many choose to down-play the fact that they are female (Agapiou, 2002). Kyriakidou (2012) found women seemed to come to terms with male-dominated organisations suggesting women subordinate their gender identity in order to be successful (i.e. behave in ways similar to male engineers) in different ways. Some choose the engineering identity as the pre-eminent identity while others choose female as the dominant identity and some refuse to make a choice.

Equal employment typologies

The rise in equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation and increasing calls for equality in diversity have encouraged the expansion of organisational policy and practice over the past decades to encompass a range of policy approaches. The use of a combination of various equal opportunity structures and policies are increasingly reported. Liff (1999) noted organisations gaining awards for good practice in Britain are those implementing side-by-side policies to show positive action with those presenting a more radical challenge for organisational culture and practice, and multiple implementations of different equity management strategies are increasingly recommended (Sheridan, 1995; Liff, 1999; Dickens, 2000; French, 2001; French *et al.*, 2010; Strachan *et al.*, 2010). While the implementation of equal employment policies has been argued to have improved the employment status of women around the globe (Thornton, 1990; Cockburn, 1991; Still, 1993; Konrad and Linnehan, 1995; Sheridan, 1995; French, 2001; French and Maconachie, 2004), empirical studies of the effectiveness of – or links between – such policies and diversity policies and the improvement of the representation of women or ethnic minorities are limited. Verbeek (2012, p. 653) and French and Strachan (2007, 2009) note that the links are weak, with the increasing numbers of women in non-traditional work areas and in management rarely linked to equal employment policy or practice.

A number of equality and diversity typologies have been developed to understand variations in policy and practice. In an analysis of three primary frameworks, namely those of Kirton and Greene (2005), Wrench (2007) and Glazer (2000), Verbeek (2012) undertook a frame-critical analysis to evaluate goals, instruments, effectiveness, context and unintended consequences of the three frameworks to identify two policy types: the “good practice typology” and the “bad idea typology”. The “good practice typology” aims at equal results, fights structural discrimination through positive actions and uses target figures and ethnic monitoring. The “bad idea frame” advocates against numerical goals, encouraging equal treatment rather than equal results, primarily to avoid any negative consequences including societal controversy and resentment against discriminated groups. Differences between these models include ethical underpinnings and context, but their similarities include a lack of supporting evidence with only limited case studies informing the typology model.

The typology used in this study (French, 2001) differs markedly from those assessed by Verbeek (2012). First, it was developed from the analysis of almost 2,000 organisational cases using factor analysis to identify like factors of equal employment, cluster analysis to categorise organisational usage by type and multiple analysis of the covariance between what organisations do to encourage equality and the roles of women within those organisations to identify any links between policy use and increasing numbers of women. First, this typology overcomes Verbeek's (2012) critique that most researchers use limited numbers of case studies to support their typology claims. Second, the model has developed over time (French and Strachan, 2007, 2009) and has a longitudinal history of application across more than 500 organisations over the past ten years, addressing Verbeek's (2012) call for a broader and deeper evidence base in the field of equal employment policies. Further, the context of this typology is not limited to one or other treatments of individuals and/or groups, but acknowledges the debates in the Australian social and business markets that include arguments for both equal and different treatment. Unlike the "Verbeek Three", which all favour the principle of "equal treatment for all", this typology acknowledges a range of treatments including different but fair treatment supporting a Jefferson quote that suggests "there is nothing more unequal than the equal treatment of unequal people". It also recognises the findings of Konrad and Linnehan (1995), who note that identity conscious structures which recognise gender and colour within policies (rather than identity blind structures) are positively associated with some measures of increased employment of women and people of colour. An unintended consequence of this typology is that it supports the argument that both equal treatment and different treatment may be appropriate and argues the real issue becomes "when and where" to enact these policies. Table I mirrors Verbeek's (2012) evaluative table, identifying two primary elements of the typology, namely goals and instruments.

In addition to using a rigorous typology this study uses a unique set of data gathered from organisations under the Australian Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act (1999), and analyses policy approaches against outcomes for women. Over 2,000 organisations with more than 100 employees are required by law to report on a regular (usually annual) basis and most reports are available to the public[1]. The importance of this data is that it enables us to pay "attention to organizations as units where gender [...] is enacted" (Robinson *et al.*, 2005, p. 7). These reports contain employment data by sex and employment type which are linked to each individual organisation, and provide information on organisational policies related to issues of equal opportunity in the workplace. The data allows us to link HRM policies with employment outcomes for women in organisations. There are similarities and differences with the American Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) data analysed by Robinson *et al.* (2005). In the Australian data only the sex of the employee (not the ethnic origin or other characteristics) is known but this is tied to job category and attached to the organisation. In addition, relevant employment policies are provided for each organisation. Therefore, like the American equal employment opportunity (EEO)-1 Survey, this Australian data presents "true workplace data and consistent indicators across workplaces" (Robinson *et al.*, 2005, p. 13). Also like the EEO-1 data, the Australian reports "have the advantage of providing organizational detail" though not to the level of specific workplaces in the case of larger and multiple workplace organisations (Robinson *et al.*, 2005, p. 13). However, "EEO-1 data do not include any attributes of employees or specific organisational practices such as personnel policies" (Robinson *et al.*, 2005, p. 14), while the Australian Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA or "the Agency" now called the Workplace Gender Equality Agency) data does provide this. This paper answers the call

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| Goals | Instruments |
|--|--|
| <p>Type 1 – no reporting: no comments on employment equity, equal treatment or equal results and no recognition of individual difference or disparity. No issues identified or no strategies outlined at all on any employment matters</p> | <p>No policy instruments. The organisation supports the current situation, with or without acknowledgement of any discrimination or disadvantage in that situation</p> |
| <p>Type 2 – traditional approach: the traditional (or classical) classification refutes discrimination plays any role in workplace disparity between different employees (or groups) and supports the different treatment of individuals in the workplace based upon their individual choices. This approach advocates against the specific implementation of equity measures, instead calling on women and minority groups to make different educational and lifestyle choices in order to create change (French, 2001)</p> | <p>No policy instruments, merely an objective to refute discrimination as a contributory factor in workplace disparity. Acknowledgement of individual difference in choices In this study comments such as, “recruitment and selection is always based on the best match between the prospective candidate to the skills and competencies set out in the job description”; “women are mainly employed in clerical positions”; and “when vacancies arise they are advertised externally and internally to ascertain the best person for the position”</p> |
| <p>Type 3 – anti-discrimination approach: the anti-discrimination classification acknowledges the importance of the removal of discriminatory practices and processes in order to offer equal treatment based on human rights principles. This approach fulfils the requirements of anti-discrimination legislation such as the Sex Discrimination Act, 1984. Activity is limited to equal treatment and/or equal outcomes for men and women (French, 2001; Konrad and Linnehan, 1995)</p> | <p>Equal treatment policies and practices evidenced across some or all the human management practices fulfilling a strategy of equal treatment In this study comments such as “no [job] advertisement is gender biased”; “all staff have attended seminars on harassment and are aware of the responsibilities and their rights under the policy”; and “7 of the 9 women on maternity leave have returned to work either in their previous position or a part time position for an agreed period of time”. Also reported comments such as “Our policy is to treat men and women equally” were included into this category</p> |
| <p>Type 4 – equal employment opportunity (EEO) approach: the EEO classification acknowledges the importance of the removal of discriminatory practices as well as the adoption of special measures which are identity conscious and designed to assist members of disadvantaged groups – in this case women. This follows the usage of the term “affirmative action” based on recognition and acceptance of the fact that it is not sufficient to make specific acts of discrimination unlawful. “Further steps are needed to relieve the effects of past discrimination, to eliminate present discrimination and to ensure that future discrimination does not occur” (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 1984, p. 8). Supports Konrad and Linnehan’s (1995) findings which identified gender conscious treatments as having different outcomes for women in organisations</p> | <p>Identity conscious policies and practices (or different treatment) of specific groups based on differences in outcomes that may be historical, organisational or social in nature as well as identity blind (equal treatment) to address potential discrimination fulfilling a different treatment strategy for different groups In this study reports on specific strategies such as apprentice or graduate programmes for the recruitment of women were classified as EEO in nature. Examples include “we attempt to ensure that there is a female employee on the interviewing panel to ensure that all applicants are given a fair go”; and “a mentoring process has been established, including coaching with study and career guidance and advice for a number of female employees”</p> |

Table I.
Typology of organisational policies designed to promote gender equity

(continued)

| Goals | Instruments |
|---|--|
| Type 5 – gender diversity approach: the gender diversity classification acknowledges the potential for bias and discrimination against women within organisational structures and supports the neutral treatment of all individuals based on organisational requirements as a means of addressing any discrimination. While there is debate about exactly what constitutes policies and programmes variously labelled “diversity” and “managing diversity” (Bacchi, 2000; Kirton and Greene, 2005), we have used the term “gender diversity” to incorporate elements of organisational/structural change. In order to classify policies as gender diversity, organisations needed to include elements of culture change within the organisation | Diverse policies and practices based on organisational requirements and differences between employees ensuring neutral treatment of groups and of individuals, encouraging greater flexibility and inclusivity with equal access to benefits and burdens of organisations and addressing culture change In this study reports on policies and practices, such as leave opportunities that were the same for both genders, were classified as diverse in nature. Examples included: “the processes established for consideration of individual needs in relation to work organisation and rostering have operated effectively this year with management, and unions combining efforts to ensure that problems and grievances were effectively resolved”; “workplace flexibility is considered by balancing employee needs particularly those related to family with the organisation needs”; “every effort is made to provide employees with a means to balance work and family responsibilities including providing job sharing, flexible working hours, carer’s leave and recognising the need to minimise overtime”; and “we continue to provide remote access to the company’s computer systems so that staff with family responsibilities can work from home” |

Note: Based on French (2001)

Table I.

“to develop better comparative organizational data that allow us to view class-gender-ethnic dynamics and outcomes across and within workplaces” (Robinson *et al.*, 2005, p. 7).

Method

Secondary data gathered from information provided by all construction organisations ($n = 90$) reporting in one year to the Australian Government on their equity management practices were analysed through content analysis using the typology described. In 2011-2012, 90 construction organisations submitted EEO progress reports to the Agency. Errors and omissions in seven left us with 83 viable reports. Each progress report becomes a public document and must detail the workplace profile of men and women and their job roles, the equal employment issues specific across seven employment matters (named below), and the organisational policies and strategies for addressing these issues as well as priorities of actions taken and future plans[2]. For this study appropriate reports were downloaded from the Agency’s Online Searchable Database of Reports in May 2012 (EOWA, 2012).

Measures

- (1) Employment profile: employment details of men and women in specific job roles were aggregated to four main categories: management (including senior executives, management, supervisory staff and professional staff), operations (including maintenance, technicians, trades and miscellaneous personnel), sales and clerical staff.

- (2) Equality and diversity approaches: the seven employment matters reported on are: recruitment and selection, promotion and transfer, training and development, work organisation, conditions of employment, addressing sexual harassment and pregnancy and breastfeeding policies. Information on each of the seven employment matters was classified according to the equal opportunity approach taken by the organisation.
- (3) Organisation size: organisation size has been considered to be a significant predictor of the employment status of women (Konrad and Linnehan, 1995; French, 2001). Using four categories used by the Agency, we measured size as the number of employees ranging from 100 to 500, 500 to 1,000, 1,000 to 3,000 and 3,000 or more, and took the natural logarithm of the midpoint of each category for use in the analyses. Table II indicates the numbers of organisations according to size.

In order to determine any relationship between the dependent variable (DV) and the independent variables (IVs) ordinary least square regression analysis was used. IVs consisted of the approach taken, action taken, priority and future actions. The DVs consisted of the specific numbers of women and men in specific job roles. Regression analyses reveal relationships among variables without implying causality. In this case the regression analysis identifies the relationship (if any) between policy implementation and the position of women and men in construction organisations and allows the prediction of such occurrences.

Public availability of the reports and the potential to be named in Parliament for a non-compliant report may be seen as a pressure to present a socially desirable image through individual reports. Social desirability bias (Fowler, 1988) is a recognised threat to accuracy of information when there is pressure to present a socially desirable image of organisations. The legislation (the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace (EOWW) Act, 1999) attempts to ensure accuracy of information through the mandatory requirement of the signatures of both the report writer (usually the HR manager) and the CEO on all reports submitted to the Agency. Further, each report is checked at the Agency, evaluated and the organisation contacted to verify information, make recommendations and give feedback. Trained assessors review report contents to first ensure compliance status under the Act, then evaluate the organisation's analysis of equal employment issues and identify demonstrated links with the organisation's current actions and future plans. Information is provided for those organisations not compliant under the Act to assist them to meet compliance standards (French and Strachan, 2007).

Quantitative analysis of qualitative data can potentially prove a threat to accuracy and reliability as there is the possibility that the researcher may "force" cases into categories that reflect the biased views of the researcher rather than the substantive actions of the respondents (Crompton and Harris, 1999). To address this issue we used

Table II.
Construction
organisations by size

| Size category | No. of organisations |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| < 500 employees | 55 |
| > 500 < 1,000 | 13 |
| > 1,000 < 3,000 | 11 |
| > 3,000 | 4 |

the pre-determined typology of approaches to determine the categories into which the responses were to be divided and generated an appropriate coding scheme on this basis (Harris, 2001). To address reliability the coding process was separated from the process of data entry to allow for cross-checking. In addition the researchers worked together on the coding process, with one researcher checking a sample of the coding from the other (Krippendorff, 1980). To address sampling validity we selected the data from an entire industry responsible for reporting their equal opportunity plans and where data were unavailable we cross-checked available data with data from a different source (addressed further in Findings section) (Krippendorff, 1980; Harris, 2001).

Findings

There was evidence of a range of different policies and practices taken to address the seven employment matters (see Table III). In the traditional approach category in “recruitment and selection”, “promotion and transfer” and “training and development”, 42.7, 74.4 and 65.4 per cent of organisations, respectively, reported no activities of any type to address any perceived disparity or inequality of women in their organisations. Combined with the percentage of organisations that reported nothing in these areas the result indicates more than half of all construction organisations report a less than compliant level of activities in the areas of recruitment and selection, training and development and promotion and transfer. Limited numbers of organisations (13.4, 11.0 and 12.3 per cent, respectively) took an equal treatment approach to these employment matters which address discrimination and encourage equal access to opportunity. This involved the use of practices that

| Approach type | R&S (%) | Promote transfer (%) | T&D (%) | Work organisation (%) | Conditions of service (%) | Sexual harassment (%) | Pregnancy and breastfeeding (%) |
|---|---------|----------------------|---------|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Nil – no strategies | 1.2 | 3.7 | 1.2 | 1.2 | 1.2 | 1.2 | 1.2 |
| Traditional – no instruments | 42.7 | 74.4 | 65.4 | 29.3 | 64.6 | 3.7 | 7.3 |
| Anti-discrimination equal treatment universal | 13.4 | 11 | 12.3 | 0 | 17.1 | 89.0 | 25.6 |
| EEO – equal treatment universally and special consideration policies for different groups | 18.3 | 1.2 | 7.4 | 12.2 | 1.2 | 2.4 | 11.0 |
| Gender diversity neutral treatment through equal access to increasing flexibility options | 0 | 0 | 0 | 52.4 | 12.2 | 1.2 | 53.7 |
| Combination strategies without special consideration | 1.2 | 3.7 | 1.2 | 3.7 | 1.2 | 0 | 0 |
| Combination with special consideration | 23.2 | 6.1 | 12.3 | 1.2 | 2.4 | 2.4 | 1.2 |

Notes: R&S, recruitment and selection; T&D, training and development

Table III.
Organisations’
approaches to
equality in diversity
by percentage

encouraged the equal treatment of men and women in recruitment, promotion and development, such as women on selection panels and equal numbers of men and women offered access to development opportunities. A limited number of organisations took a proactive approach of some kind – either special consideration activities specifically for women, or neutral treatment programmes embedded in organisational flexibility and change in designing and delivering opportunity strategies specific to the disadvantage of either or both men and women.

In the areas of “work organisation” and “conditions of service” a number of organisations offered no specific strategies for addressing inequity. In those organisations that did seek to proactively address inequality through EEO, special measures or gender diversity strategies, approximately 70 per cent took action to develop equitable work patterns, while only 35 per cent took action to develop fairness in conditions of service.

In the area of addressing harassment, the majority of organisations took a compliance-based approach in ensuring equal treatment through training of all staff, regardless of gender or organisational role. While some were not compliant, these were in the minority. This is not surprising given the strength of provisions in the Sex Discrimination Act 1984, which defines and prohibits discrimination and harassment on the basis of sex and outlines extensive provisions for obtaining justice. Further, the tribunals and courts emphasise the importance of appropriate policies and practices and are supporting zero tolerance through judgments awarding increased amounts in damages (Hor, 2012; Jenero and Galligano, 2003). A small number of organisations have taken compliance to new levels and identified an extension of their harassment policies to include protections for other groups, and have identified issues of vilification and bullying throughout their policies and procedures.

Compliance was also an important consideration in addressing the issues of pregnancy and breastfeeding. Many organisations had policies specific to meeting the requirements of the legislation but a small number had extended these to include further issues including adoption and *in vitro* fertilisation requirements, while others ensured the policies in these areas were also available for either parent.

Of particular note in this study was the combining of various approaches by some organisations and we have, for the first time, categorised these into two combination approaches: namely those with special consideration measures and those without.

Correlation of the EEO approach and numbers of men and women

The data were examined using multiple regression analyses in order to ascertain any relationship between the policies and practices used and the numbers of men and women in the industry and in management. The only correlation for increasing numbers of women within the industry was a positive relationship with organisational size. A multiple regression controlling for size was performed with numbers of women in management as the DV and the approach undertaken by the organisations across the seven employment matters as the IVs. A second multiple regression analysis, controlling for size, was performed with numbers of men in management as the DV and the EEO undertaken by the organisations across the seven employment matters as the IVs. The model shows no relationship between the approach taken in implementing equality and diversity and the number of women in management or the number of men in management (see Table IV).

Further multiple regression analyses were run, also controlling for size, with the number of women and the number of men in supervision and in operations as the DVs and the policies and practices undertaken by the organisations across the seven employment matters as the IVs (see Table V). Results were similar, with one difference:

Table IV.
Multiple regression
results for EEO
approach and
numbers of women
and men in
management

| | R^2 adjusted | R^2 | F | df | B | β |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|-------|--------|------|--------|---------|
| <i>Women in management</i> | 0.696 | 0.699 | 23.349 | 8,80 | | |
| Recruitment and selection | | | | | 0.109 | 0.110 |
| Promotion and transfer | | | | | -0.048 | 0.468 |
| Training and development | | | | | -0.112 | 0.123 |
| Work organisation | | | | | 0.026 | 0.695 |
| Conditions of service | | | | | 0.034 | 0.601 |
| Addressing sexual harassment | | | | | 0.029 | 0.449 |
| Pregnancy and breastfeeding policies | | | | | 0.030 | 0.657 |
| <i>Men in management</i> | 0.869 | 0.882 | 67.582 | 8,80 | | |
| Recruitment and selection | | | | | 0.025 | 0.561 |
| Promotion and transfer | | | | | 0.028 | 0.516 |
| Training and development | | | | | 0.025 | 0.590 |
| Work organisation | | | | | -0.044 | 0.306 |
| Conditions of service | | | | | 0.037 | 0.381 |
| Addressing sexual harassment | | | | | 0.037 | 0.380 |
| Pregnancy and breastfeeding policies | | | | | 0.055 | 0.206 |

Notes: ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table V.
Multiple regression
results for EEO
strategies and
numbers of women
and men in
supervision and
operations

| | R^2 adjusted | R^2 | F | df | B | β |
|--|----------------|-------|---------|------|--------|---------|
| <i>Women in supervision and operations</i> | 0.716 | 0.745 | 26.242 | 8,80 | | |
| Recruitment and selection | | | | | 0.023 | 0.715 |
| Promotion and transfer | | | | | -0.107 | 0.94 |
| Training and development | | | | | -0.094 | 0.172 |
| Work organisation | | | | | 0.099 | 0.122 |
| Conditions of service | | | | | 0.076 | 0.227 |
| Addressing sexual harassment | | | | | -0.004 | 0.947 |
| Pregnancy and breastfeeding policies | | | | | -0.021 | 0.739 |
| <i>Men in supervision and operations</i> | 0.985 | 0.986 | 657.407 | 8,80 | | |
| Recruitment and selection | | | | | 0.018 | 0.218 |
| <i>Promotion and transfer</i> | | | | | -0.050 | 0.001 |
| Training and development | | | | | -0.028 | 0.075 |
| Work organisation | | | | | -0.001 | 0.952 |
| Conditions of service | | | | | -0.007 | 0.604 |
| Addressing sexual harassment | | | | | -0.004 | 0.789 |
| Pregnancy and breastfeeding policies | | | | | -0.014 | 0.360 |

Notes: ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

the policies and practices undertaken to encourage equality in “promotion and transfer” correlate to the increased numbers of men employed in supervision and operations.

A third series of multiple regressions was undertaken, controlling for size, with the number of women and number of men in clerical and sales positions as the DV and the policies and practices undertaken by the organisations across the seven employment matters as the IVs (see Table VI). Results show that the approach undertaken to encourage equality in “promotion and transfer” correlates to the increased number of women in clerical and sales positions in the construction industry. Results also show

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Table VI.
Multiple regression
results for EEO
strategies and
numbers of women
and men in clerical
and sales positions

| | R^2 adjusted | R^2 | F | df | B | β |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|-------|--------|------|--------|---------|
| <i>Women clerical and sales</i> | 0.712 | 0.741 | 25.760 | 8,80 | | |
| Recruitment and selection | | | | | -0.040 | 0.537 |
| <i>Promotion and transfer</i> | | | | | 0.235 | 0.000 |
| Training and development | | | | | 0.086 | 0.219 |
| Work organisation | | | | | -0.030 | 0.641 |
| Conditions of service | | | | | 0.023 | 0.710 |
| Addressing sexual harassment | | | | | -0.019 | 0.761 |
| Pregnancy and breastfeeding policies | | | | | 0.028 | 0.668 |
| <i>Men in clerical and sales</i> | 0.279 | 0.352 | 0.4879 | 8,80 | | |
| Recruitment and selection | | | | | -0.205 | 0.047 |
| <i>Promotion and transfer</i> | | | | | 0.308 | 0.003 |
| Training and development | | | | | 0.271 | 0.015 |
| Work organisation | | | | | -0.029 | 0.774 |
| Conditions of service | | | | | -0.082 | 0.411 |
| Addressing sexual harassment | | | | | 0.003 | 0.976 |
| Pregnancy and breastfeeding policies | | | | | 0.043 | 0.678 |

Notes: ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

that policies and practices undertaken to encourage equality in “recruitment and selection”, “promotion and transfer” and “training and development” correlated to increased numbers of men in clerical and sales positions.

Discussion

The findings presented suggest that equal employment policies in the construction industry in Australia are minimal in design; implementation and outcomes. Those implemented have a high predominance of equal treatment to fulfil legislative responsibilities, particularly related to overcoming discrimination and harassment, and the neutral treatment of both men and women through policies encouraging flexibility and inclusivity in the organisation of work. Few organisations offer different treatment for women as a group of employees to address past or present disadvantage. Of interest is the combining of different approaches not evidenced in previous research.

However, the current approaches appear to offer no or few links to changes in the status quo of the representation of women within the industry itself, in management or in non-traditional areas. The only link identified for the policy type implemented and the numbers of women employed was between policies for promotion and transfer and increased numbers of women in clerical and sales roles within the industry – a traditional role for women in this industry.

Effectiveness of policy approaches has become a driving question for policy development and implementation. Konrad and Linnehan (1995), in a study of more than 300 organisations, found the use of identity-conscious processes correlated with some measures of increasing numbers of women and minorities. Identity-conscious processes include any formalised policy, procedures, practices or programmes that involve categorising people on the basis of sex or ethnicity and focusing specifically on the experiences of that particular group: “Identity conscious structures [...] may be effective regardless of the motivation behind their implementation, because once they

are in place these structures alter power relations inside an organization” (Konrad and Linnehan, 1995, p. 88). However, identity-blind structures were not associated with any measures of increased employment of women or minorities. Similar findings were identified by French (2001), using a large study of almost 2,000 organisations, who noted more women managers and more women across three tiers of management were evident in organisations where positive actions through proactive identity-conscious programmes were utilised than in organisations that utilised either a traditional no-action approach, an equal treatment approach or a neutral treatment approach. Glazer (2000) notes organisations utilising an affirmation action model witnessed increases in minority participation rates, supporting Leonard’s (1985) findings using a very large data set of more than 4,000 organisations, that organisations with affirmative action goals correlated with greater subsequent achievements in this area. Verbeek and Groeneveld (2012) note that few large *n* effectiveness studies are available. Their own data set used more than 8,000 organisational reports. Their findings suggest that three specific diversity policies did not impact on ethnic minority participation rates. In total, two of these policies could be classified as proactive action – setting numerical targets and favouring target group members over others if they are equally qualified or meritorious. However, Verbeek and Groeneveld (2012) do identify the incompleteness of their diversity approaches in terms of goals and instruments. For example the act of assigning responsibility for diversity policy is a policy tool or instrument without a goal and setting target figures is a goal without a specific tool, suggesting these activities do need a strategic implementation.

Overall, the results continue to suggest that for substantive change to occur within the “inequality regimes”, particularly those established in male-dominated industries, the implementation of different measures and positive goals and actions may be needed. However, despite a range of studies over more than a decade which continue to demonstrate that positive action and different treatment encourage a substantive change in numbers the arguments against proactive action continue in the vein of a “controversy” that has researchers advising against their use (Glazer, 2000).

In the construction industry a majority of operatives are contractors and subcontractors rather than employees. This may be where there is a heavy gender bias but these employees are outside of any reporting requirements so our study does not capture this information. While the cross-sectional nature of this study does not reveal the specifics of policy development or changes within organisations it also diminishes our ability to make causal inferences. However, this does not limit the value of the study as on going work in equality and diversity management specific to the construction industry. Along with other studies in the female-dominated finance industry and the male-dominated transport industry (French and Strachan, 2007, 2009) this research establishes a significant understanding of industry differences and their similarities in the development and application of equal employment policies and their outcomes. The used typology, unlike others, is built on a solid statistical base of more than 1,900 organisations and assisted our investigation into the various implementations of treatment in the name of equality – not just equal treatment. It also adds weight to the argument that equal treatment is not achieving substantive change in the number of women or minorities in management or non-traditional areas. Future investigation warrants in-depth research through interviews of key organisational policy makers to address the reasoning behind the development, application and implementation of equal employment policies and the outcomes being sought; perhaps substantive change in numbers was never the intention.

Conclusion

We investigated the equal employment policies implemented within organisations designed to manage equality in diversity in one male-dominated industry. We found that the Australian construction industry is engaged in a range of approaches for implementing equal employment policies. However, these approaches are limited to the equal treatment approach to meeting the coercive requirements of legislation, particularly to address discrimination in relation to sexual harassment and the neutral (and equal) treatment of both men and women in the area of work organisation to encourage inclusivity through flexible work practices. In investigating outcomes of these policy approaches and practices we found no correlation between them and the numbers of women in the industry or in non-traditional work areas or management. Overall the implications for public policy is that while legislation may coerce organisations to conform to equal opportunity requirements the variations in application mean that the implementation is not predictive of substantive change to the horizontal or vertical integration of women.

Notes

1. Prior to 2008 reporting was required on an annual basis. From 2009 most organisations will only have to report every two years. A few organisations have applied for and been granted exemption from annual reporting on the basis of the high quality of their programs. The maximum number of years that an organisation can be waived from reporting is three. All reports are publicly available except for those organisations which have been waived from annual reporting and those that have achieved the status of "Employer of Choice for Women".
2. A copy of this document is available on the EOWA web site at www.eeo.gov.au/Research_And_Resources.asp

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About the authors

Dr Erica French is an Associate Professor at the Queensland University of Technology. She has developed a body of research on gender equity and diversity management related to organisational systems change and women at work. Dr Erica French is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: e.french@qut.edu.au

Glenda Strachan is a Professor at the Griffith University Queensland. She has developed a body of research on contemporary and historical workplace change, especially issues that relate to equity and diversity and women's working experiences.

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