

Chapter 6

The Case Studies: Technico, Pharmsco and Healthco

6.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, while the quantitative dimensions of women's employment status are important indicators of women's disadvantage in the paid workforce, these numbers by themselves are not particularly informative. They can not tell us anything about how the proposed beneficiaries of the legislation — women — have responded to the legislation and the affirmative action efforts of their organisations. In this context, addressing the question 'do women perceive there to be equal employment opportunities?' may be more informative. The importance of including women's perceptions of their employment opportunities in any evaluation of the effectiveness of affirmative action can be understood by reference to Thomas' well-known thesis that if actors 'define their situations as real, they are real in their consequences' (1951: 81). The meaning assigned to a situation, then, is an important factor influencing how an individual will respond to the situation. In the context of affirmative action, this suggests that how women perceive their employment opportunities may provide some means of assessing how effective efforts to improve employment opportunities for women have been.

Women's perceptions of their employment opportunities have been a significant omission from the discourse that has grown up around affirmative action (Moens, 1985; O'Donnell & Hall, 1988; Thornton, 1990; Burton, 1991; Poiner & Wills, 1991; Kramar, 1991; and Braithwaite, 1993). To rectify this omission, this study sought to explore women's perceptions of their employment opportunities and affirmative action. Identifying companies with affirmative action policies in place, and interviewing a sample of employees about their understanding of affirmative action, their experiences of the

company's policies and their perceptions of their employment opportunities — taking a qualitative approach — was one way to begin to develop an understanding of the impact of affirmative action in the workplace. Seeking confirmation of the information coming from the interviews through a survey of a larger sample of employees — a quantitative approach — was then used to further this understanding and to develop some notion of the magnitude of the effects reported.

Clearly it would be unwise to generalise the findings from such case studies to the entire work force, but they do provide an important step in developing a more comprehensive understanding of the processes organisations have put in place to translate the goal of equal opportunity into practice and the impact of affirmative action in the workplace. As well, the findings may suggest additional related research questions to pursue to further develop our understanding of affirmative action in practice.

In the following section, the process by which companies were identified for study is outlined. Each of the three case study companies are then described in terms of their industry context and other organisational features. As well, the affirmative action initiatives reportedly taken within the companies are described.

6.2 Identifying the 'good' performers

As discussed in Chapter 4, there are more than two thousand reports from private sector companies submitted to the Affirmative Action Agency each year. In identifying companies with which to work, I wanted to ensure they were companies with apparently well-developed affirmative action programs in place. I wanted to work with companies whose employees would have a rich source of experience in the affirmative action domain from which to comment. It was assumed that if employees were to be in any position to comment on their company's affirmative action program, such a program had to be in place.

Of the 2 311 reports submitted to the Agency in 1991/92, only 54 reporting units were considered to warrant the label 'Good Overall Example' (see section 4.8). These 54 reporting units appeared to offer the most promise of having a well-developed affirmative action program in place. As limited resources (both time and financial) made a study of the 54 companies out of the question, a further criterion applied to identify an appropriate sample for case studies, was to revisit the database I had developed from the public report to the Affirmative Action Agency (see section 4.8) to examine the employment profiles of those companies over the three year period 1990/91 to 1992/93. At a very simple level, one could argue that those companies with an increasing representation of women in employment generally, and in management positions particularly, could indicate a 'successful' affirmative action program was operating. This outcomes-based approach may be over-simplifying the issue, but it did provide a means of narrowing down the sample of appropriate companies to study.

Of the 54 companies with (according to the Affirmative Action Agency's standards) well-developed affirmative action programs in 1991/92, only 13 companies had an increasing representation of women in their work force in total, as well as in management positions. One of these companies was located in Western Australia and had to be ruled out because of the financial limitations of the study. The persons nominated on the public reports submitted to the Agency as responsible for the company's affirmative action program for the remaining 12 companies were contacted by mail in the first instance and then by a follow-up telephone call to outline the nature of the research I was proposing. The letter sent to the 12 companies indicated the research was concerned with developing an understanding of employees' perceptions of the affirmative action policies implemented in their company. From the follow-up telephone conversations, five of the companies indicated they were interested in finding out more about the research.

The seven companies not prepared to participate in the research did so for varying reasons. Four companies indicated they had been involved in so many surveys recently that they could not participate in another one. One of these companies indicated that the

focus groups they held internally were indicating that employees were feeling ‘fed up with being surveyed’ and that this was impacting on the response rate of their own six-monthly internal employee opinion surveys, which were the company’s first priority. The Personnel Manager of the fifth company indicated the company would not participate ‘because although affirmative action was important, it was not a high priority in our HRM strategy’. As well, ‘our employees are so stretched at the moment, we wouldn’t have a chance of getting approval for a sample of employees for interviews’.

The final two reporting units did not feel they were appropriate for study. One of the reporting units was in fact a subsidiary of a large company. This company had been through some major internal restructuring in 1993/94 so the ‘reporting unit’ was now so different from what it had been in 1990/91 to 1992/93, the Personnel Manager felt it would not represent a fair portrayal of employees’ experiences under the affirmative action programs of those three years. The final ‘reporting unit’ was a very large company which had many subsidiaries, but which submitted only one report to the Agency for the company as a whole. The Company Secretary indicated that the company structure was so complex, it would be very difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions from the research proposed. As well, he made a point which highlighted the inherent dangers of using changes in employee numbers as a reflection of the ‘effectiveness/ineffectiveness’ of affirmative action policies. The dynamic nature of business means many influences can be affecting employee numbers at any one time, not least of which is the impact of the recession as discussed in Chapter 4. In this instance, the Company Secretary attributed the increasing representation of women employees in the employment profile to the acquisition of a number of smaller companies in the food manufacturing industry (an industry in which women have tended to be fairly well represented, unlike the traditional industrial base of this company).

To the five companies indicating an initial interest in participating in the research, another letter was sent explaining the research in more detail and outlining the nature and level of their involvement. The two-stage process of consultation was explained as follows:

‘Stage 1: *Interviews with a random sample of employees (approximately 20)*

To develop a survey questionnaire that is meaningful for your employees, rather than one that has been based on theory alone, the first stage of the research will involve interviews with a random sample of employees. I will conduct these interviews using a general interview guide, but as the goal is to develop an understanding of what is important to employees, I will be encouraging employees to volunteer their own views on affirmative action within the company. The interviews should take about 30 to 40 minutes of the interviewees’ time. Interviewees’ responses will, of course, be confidential. In this initial stage, I will also be needing to spend some time with staff from the Human Resources area to ensure I am adequately capturing the types of policies implemented within your company.

Stage 2: *A questionnaire to be distributed among a larger sample of employees*

The interviews with the small sample of employees and staff in the Human Resources area will provide the basis for developing the survey investigating employees’ views on the affirmative action policies which will make up the second stage of the study. Using the insights gained from the interviews, I will develop a questionnaire that is grounded in your company’s environment — that is, one that will be relevant to employees and which frames questions in the language they use to talk about affirmative action. The questionnaire will be distributed among employees and will require them to respond to a series of questions. The questionnaire will probably take no more than 15 minutes for respondents to complete.

Staff from the Human Resources area will be consulted about the nature of the interviews and the format the ensuing questions will take.’

As an incentive to participate in the research, I indicated that reports on both stages of the research would be provided to the companies.

Of the five reporting units, four indicated considerable interest in participating in the research. I then met with the Affirmative Action Coordinators personally to discuss the process in more detail. The Personnel Manager of the fifth company indicated at this point the company would not be prepared to commit the staff time necessary to complete the interviews. As well, reference was made by the Personnel Manager to the fact the reporting unit was a subsidiary of a Japanese company, and that this exercise may highlight the affirmative action initiatives the company has made, which may not be seen as desirable in Japan.

Following the meetings with the four companies, three agreed to be involved in the study. The fourth company also indicated the time commitment for the interviewing was too great in a period when staff were already heavily committed with work responsibilities. The three companies agreeing to be involved did so on the proviso that the findings were confidential. There would be no indicators of who the companies were. Consequently, the companies have been identified under the pseudonyms of Technico, Pharmsco and Healthco in any further discussion.

The literature in the organisational behaviour and development fields (Huse, 1980; Crompton & Jones, 1988; Doz & Prahalad, 1988; Whipp *et al.*, 1988; Bouwen, 1993) suggests that the structural features of an organisation may be an important influence on employees experiences of initiatives taken within the organisation. For example, Huse (1980) argues that organisations which are flat with wide spans of control present greater coordination problems for interventions which need to be integrated at each level of the organisation eg Management By Objectives (MBO). In contrast, tall organisations, which tend to be centralised with more levels, have more difficulty getting involved in interventions that require participation by lower levels within the organisation. In many organisations, the balance between authority relationships, workflow and informal systems is extremely sensitive and important (Huse, 1980). It has also been argued that the gender configuration of an organisation, that is, the relative power held by men *vis-*

a-vis women can influence the impact of policies designed to address inequities in the workplace (Eberhardt & Fiske, 1994).

Understanding the structural features of an organisation and the manner in which organisational members interact, may add to the total picture of affirmative action within the companies. Turner and Pratkanis (1994a: 6) claim that the organisational context in which affirmative action is implemented can shape 'its ultimate effectiveness'. Key structural features of each of the companies are reviewed in the following sections.

6.3 Technico

Technico Australia is a subsidiary of a multi-national company specialising in the design and production of high technology products. It has been operating in Australia since 1963. As it manufactures products in Australia, it is classified under ASIC industry code 34 (Miscellaneous Manufacturing) by the Affirmative Action Agency. The international network of Technico companies employs over 70 000 employees in more than 100 countries. As Technico has more than 1000 employees it is classified as a Band 1 company by the Affirmative Action Agency.

In 1994, Technico Australia employed approximately 2 100 people, of whom 31 per cent were women (see Table 6.1). As the industry average for manufacturing is 26 per cent (ABS, 1993), Technico has an above-average representation of women.

The occupational profile of Technico is presented in Table 6.2. From this Table, it can be seen that women make up only 5 per cent of managers. What is not immediately apparent from Table 6.2 is there are no women managers among the 21 members of the executive and senior management ranks.

Technico is made up of three functional divisions, five customer divisions, five service units, six staff functions and four business areas. Although the main site in suburban Melbourne employs approximately 1500 people, the remainder are fairly geographically

Table 6.1 Technico employment profile, 1994

| | <i>Women</i> | <i>Men</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|------------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Permanent full time | 627 | 1354 | 1981 |
| Permanent part time | 9 | — | 9 |
| Casual (non-seasonal) | 5 | 3 | 8 |
| Casual (seasonal) | — | — | — |
| Temporary full time | 13 | 13 | 26 |
| Temporary part time | — | — | — |
| Persons under contract | 7 | 72 | 79 |
| Total | 661 | 1442 | 2103 |

Table 6.2 Technico occupational profile, 1994

| | <i>Women</i> | <i>Men</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|---------------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Managers | 7 | 141 | 148 |
| Professionals | 60 | 528 | 588 |
| Paraprofessionals | 41 | 414 | 455 |
| Trades | 28 | 133 | 161 |
| Clerks | 225 | 30 | 255 |
| Sales & Service | 13 | 41 | 54 |
| Plant & Machine Operators | 40 | 32 | 72 |
| Labourers | 247 | 123 | 370 |
| Total | 661 | 1442 | 2103 |

dispersed according to division, unit or function across four other sites in Melbourne and branch sales offices in all Australian capital cities.

In terms of hierarchical structure, Technico is not an overly 'tall' organisation (Robbins & Barnwell, 1989). There is an executive level, then senior management, middle management, line management and a supervisory level. The divisions and units display varying degrees of formalisation (Robbins & Barnwell, 1989). The manufacturing division, for instance, could be viewed as a moderately formal division. There are job descriptions detailing each position, standard operating procedures are in place and communication has traditionally been through formal channels. However, this tendency

for formalisation is tempered to some extent by the move to work-based teams that has occurred in recent years. The following excerpt from Technico's application for an Australian Quality Award in 1993 illustrates this change.

In the Manufacturing Division semi-autonomous groups have been introduced. Through training and experience team dynamics skills develop which allow the group to take more responsibility for the running of their areas. The leadership of each of these groups rotates between the members. The concept of semi-autonomous work teams working within multi-skilled, product focused lines, is being encouraged, developed and adopted in more and more areas.

In contrast, the Strategic Product Development Division could be described as having a very low level of formalisation. As a small division (only seven people) with a strategic focus, communication between colleagues is encouraged and decisions tend to be made in cooperative fashion. Job descriptions in this division and levels of hierarchy are virtually non-existent.

Technico espouses the importance of its human resources. Within its Corporate Policies and Guiding Principles is the company's 'People Policy':

Technico is to attract, employ and retain appropriately competent personnel, offer them opportunities to develop in pace with their own abilities and the company's needs and provide employment conditions, leadership and organisational structures which give mutual benefit.

In practice, this has meant that significant resources (7 per cent of gross wages) in Technico are devoted to both in-house training programs and external training. In-house training covers a variety of areas: leadership programs, programs addressing task and human relations skills designed for all employees, eg. interpersonal skills, coaching, project management, self-development and change management to name a few. The formal policy for external training is:

The company supports employees who successfully complete formal education outside of work hours. It provides financial support of up to \$1000 per year, 50% of the remaining costs and up to 4 hours leave per week plus study and examination leave.

The development of employees is linked to Technico's philosophy of encouraging employees' input into the constant improvement of Technico Quality (TQ). Employees' input is not only sought for production issues, but also on how they see their work

environment. The Human Resources staff regularly run Mini Employee Opinion Surveys (MEOS) to monitor employees' perceptions of the workplace. The results of these are distributed to all employees. As well, divisions, service units and staff functions are given a summary of responses for their areas, and actions for improvement are expected to be taken in areas where feedback indicates there may be problems.

Further to Technico's focus on training and development is the Career Development Centre which was opened in 1993. The aim of the Centre is to provide career and employment information to Technico employees to assist them with career planning and development. The Centre is open three days a week and contains reference material on the following areas: career choice, career planning, career transition, interview skills, resume writing, performance appraisal, internal training courses and current job opportunities within Technico. Access is also available to the internal training calendar and course catalogue, as well as the Job and Course (JAC) Explorer Software package to find out about jobs, courses at numerous institutions and prerequisite qualifications. As well as an adviser located on-site in the Centre, Technico has a Career Development Manager with whom employees can discuss detailed career options.

A further dimension to Technico's 'People Policy' is its 'Recognition' activities. To assist people across the company to receive and give recognition, a brochure has been developed which provides advice on 'how to recognise: special birthdays, service milestones, new employees, retirements, employees leaving the company and special personal events'. The financial costs of recognising events are allocated to the relevant cost centre and managers are advised to budget for them each year.

Technico has also invested considerable resources in ensuring the environment in which employees work is pleasant and healthy. Technico has a Health Centre at the main Melbourne site, with a smaller activity at another of the sites. All services of the Centre are free to employees. The Centre consists of a doctor, two occupational health nurses, a physiotherapist, a clinical psychologist and a physical fitness instructor. The Health Centre is seen as having two roles:

- * the traditional role of ensuring safety of work environment and provision of basic medical care; and
- * helping employees and their families to achieve better health and well-being through the adoption of a healthy lifestyle.

Associated with this latter role is Technico's fully-equipped gymnasium, yoga classes that are held regularly at two locations and a subsidised canteen which serves healthy, fresh and attractively presented food. To someone who is used to the canteen facilities within universities, the gourmet facilities available to Technico staff were startling! In fact, Technico is seen as a leader in this field in Australia as a recent excerpt from one of Australia's leading business magazines attests:

(Technico) has implemented initiatives designed to provide a total health environment. All staff are confidentially screened for cardio-vascular disease and cancer, with regular follow-ups. Healthy food is provided in the canteen at cheaper rates than less nutritional food, and staff are offered gymnasium facilities, yoga and weight-reduction classes. Staff who undertake a program to quit smoking have to pay for cigarette substitutes, but if they are successful after six months, the company reimburses them.¹

With respect to the affirmative action initiatives within Technico, their public reports to the Affirmative Action Agency indicate the following steps have been taken:

Women's Development Workgroup — a volunteer network of 15 women (who represent most areas, occupational groups and work shifts) which assists in designing and implementing many of Technico's affirmative action initiatives.

Women's Forums — these began in 1991 to address issues of particular relevance to women. These forums were held on the premises during work hours approximately three times a year and were 'designed to give women the necessary confidence to pursue career aspirations'. In 1994, these forums were renamed 'People Forums' and were extended to men as well.

Child Care Centre — A 60 place child care centre jointly funded by Technico, the local council and the Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs was opened in 1992. The Centre is located adjacent to Technico's main site in suburban Melbourne and Technico has leased 20 of the 60 places for ten years.

Inter-Company Network — female representatives from Technico are part of an inter-company network which meets on a regular basis to discuss, develop and support affirmative action initiatives. An activity of the network in 1994 was a one-day workshop on mentoring. Women from all the companies involved in the network were invited to attend.

¹ To protect the identity of Technico, I cannot provide the citation details for the quote.

Career Paths — A competency-based career structure was introduced in 1992/93 for all clerical and administrative employees. As well, the Performance Appraisal process and Career Development Plans have been extended to clerical staff.

Management Development Program — This is a training activity designed 'to encourage women to participate in the workplace at all levels'. Although open to both women and men, there has been a concerted effort to involve women and there is a requirement that at least 50 per cent of participants must be women.

Training Programs — All Leadership and Management Development Programs in Technico contain a segment on Technico's EEO and Affirmative Action policies and management's role in implementing them.

Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Policy — Information packages for managers were distributed at information sessions and a brochure outlining the policy was distributed to all employees in 1993.

Performance Appraisal — As part of their efforts to ensure merit underpins rewards, the performance appraisal process was changed in 1993 to encourage equal emphasis on the importance of key objectives, critical job behaviours and shared values.

Articles concerning the affirmative action initiatives appear regularly in Technico's monthly in-house magazine. In particular, the Women's Development Work Group try to keep employees up to date on the latest developments affecting women, including Technico winning one of the Affirmative Action Agency's annual awards.

Technico was involved in award restructuring for workers in the manufacturing area in 1992. As part of the new award, guidelines were developed to promote career opportunities for all employees on the basis of training and skills acquisition. This focus on training and skills acquisition meant that traditional biases against women inherent in the previous awards were, in theory, removed.

The recession had an effect on Technico's recruitment processes in 1992 and 1993. Following a 'freeze' on external recruitment, most recruitment has been internal. Technico has had a policy of internally advertising all positions for a number of years, but this was the only form of recruitment for many positions in 1992 and 1993. While this 'freeze' had some effect on Technico's efforts of recruiting at specific universities and offering vacation positions to tertiary students, it did not affect Technico's support of Women in Engineering activities at various universities throughout Victoria.

A feature that did stand out when I was interviewing employees was the number who were able to refer to other family members working within Technico. A number of interviewees felt this familial atmosphere was a positive aspect of the Technico environment. When I asked staff from the Human Resources Administration area about this I was told that although there was no 'favouritism' shown, employees were not discouraged from informing family members of positions going within Technico.

In 1991, Technico's official affirmative action policy was replaced by the following Equal Employment Opportunity Policy:

The fundamental aim of Technico's EEO policy is the genuine application of the merit principle and the elimination of discrimination in the workplace. This should ensure that all employees are given equal opportunity as their right and that decisions affecting them will be made by equitable and open processes.

Adopting this approach requires that policies concerning selection and promotion, access to career development and training opportunities, and conditions of employment be consistently applied and without regard to employees' gender, age, race or other irrelevant characteristics.

The company endorses the following three principles as underlying its EEO policy:

1. Economic Efficiency

EEO ensures a greater utilisation of the company's personnel in an efficient and equitable manner. Accessing all the available talent should maximise the chance of successfully matching people to jobs.

2. Freedom of Choice

Each employee should have the freedom to choose his or her occupation limited only by individual ability and the availability of particular jobs.

3. Social Justice

Each employee has the right to compete for jobs in a non-discriminatory environment in which their ability to do the job is the only relevant consideration. All employees have a corresponding right to best equip themselves to compete for jobs.

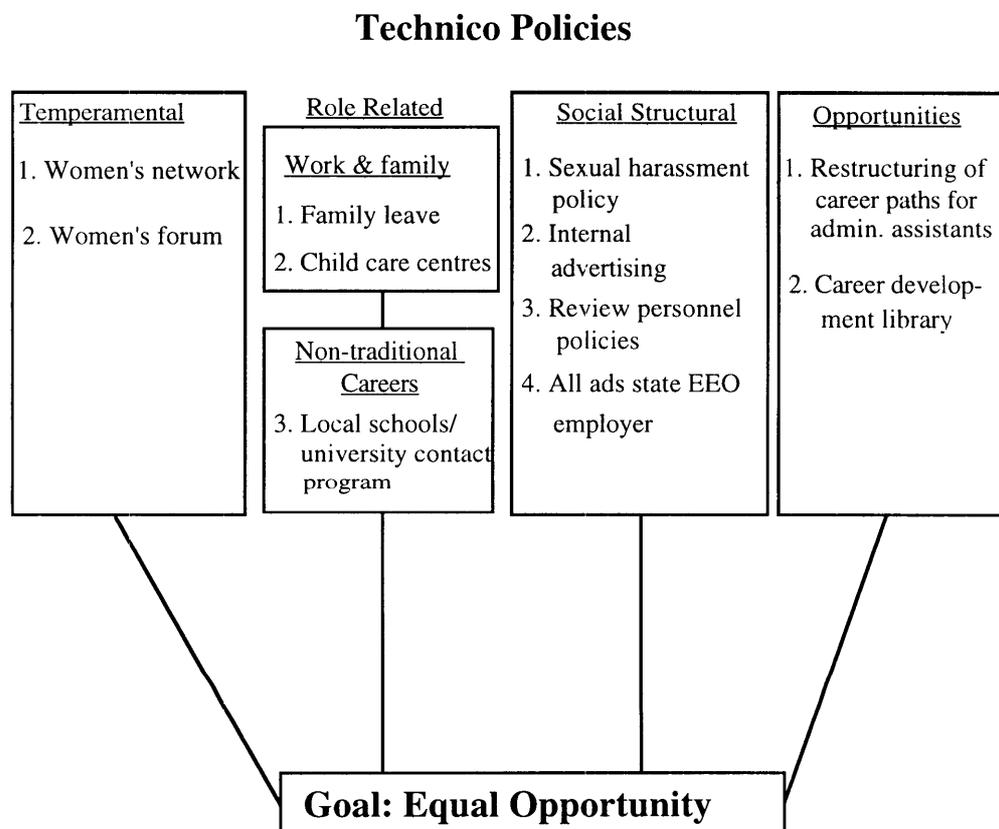
It is within this framework that Technico supports the notion of Affirmative Action by implementing programs designed to achieve equal employment opportunity for women. Affirmative Action and EEO programs are the responsibility of the Director of Human Resources and their day to day operations are co-ordinated by the Career Development Adviser.

This policy incorporates the Affirmative Action Policy dated 31 December 1986 and reflects the company's continued commitment to optimising the talents and skills of all its employees.

Technico seems to have taken a broad response to the affirmative action legislation. The policies listed above include ones from the 'temperamental', 'work & family', 'non-

traditional', 'social structural' and 'opportunities' categories. There has been a move away from the 'temperamental' policies in 1994, as women-only forums were extended to men. In Figure 6.1, Technico's affirmative action policies are presented according to the schema outlined in section 4.7.

Figure 6.1: Technico's affirmative action policies



6.4 Pharmsco

Pharmsco is a division of a multi-national company (Internat) involved in the manufacture and sales of human health products. It has been classified under ASIC industry code 27 (Manufacturing — Chemical) by the Affirmative Action Agency. When this study was carried out, Internat Australia was made up of nine business groups in Australia, in which various divisions are located. Although each division has the responsibility of developing its own affirmative action program, there is some direction given by the corporate arm of Internat Australia and there is regular, but limited, communication between divisions on their affirmative action activities. Pharmsco's report to the Affirmative Action Agency stood out, not only because it had implemented a range of policies but also because, unlike other divisions in Internat, the proportion of women in Pharmsco generally and in management particularly, had been increasing. In 1994, Pharmsco had just over 200 employees, with women making up 37 per cent of total employees. See Table 6.3 for the employment profile of Pharmsco. As Internat Australia had approximately 10 000 employees at the time the affirmative action legislation was enacted, Pharmsco was placed in the Band 1 category for reporting purposes (as categorisation is based on the size of the parent company).

Table 6.3 Pharmsco employment profile, 1994

| | <i>Women</i> | <i>Men</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|------------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Permanent full time | 72 | 122 | 194 |
| Permanent part time | 2 | | 2 |
| Casual (non-seasonal) | — | — | — |
| Casual (seasonal) | — | — | — |
| Temporary full time | 1 | | 1 |
| Temporary part time | — | — | — |
| Persons under contract | — | 4 | 4 |
| Total | 75 | 126 | 201 |

In Table 6.4, the occupational profile of Pharmsco is shown. Women represent 26 per cent of Managers and 40 per cent of the Professionals. Women also make up 57 per cent

of the Paraprofessionals. Women’s share of these occupations in Pharmsco is higher than for other divisions of Internat, reflecting the greater inroads women have made into the pharmaceutical industry relative to the more traditional male dominated industrial bases of the other divisions.

Table 6.4 Pharmsco occupational profile, 1994

| | <i>Women</i> | <i>Men</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|---------------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Managers | 6 | 17 | 23 |
| Professionals | 18 | 27 | 45 |
| Paraprofessionals | 15 | 11 | 26 |
| Trades | – | 9 | 9 |
| Clerks | 15 | 5 | 20 |
| Sales & Service | 6 | 24 | 30 |
| Plant & Machine Operators | 9 | 22 | 31 |
| Labourers | 6 | 11 | 17 |
| Total | 75 | 126 | 201 |

Pharmsco employees are located in three sites, as well as sales staff operating in all states. The three main sites consist of offices in Internat Australia’s headquarters in Melbourne, where there are approximately 50 staff, another site in suburban Melbourne where 27 people work and a manufacturing plant in suburban Sydney (shared with another division of Internat Australia) where there are 65 employees². The remaining staff are involved with sales and work from home offices throughout Australia.

The management structure of Pharmsco is fairly complex as it is made up of four layers. There is the Divisional Manager (just prior to the study a woman had been appointed to this position for the first time) then there are four Group Managers responsible for functions common to all divisions within the business group to which Pharmsco belongs (that is, Information Technology, Personnel, Financial Controller and International Training). Following this is a level of management covering both functional and product

² To ensure confidentiality is maintained, when referring to this plant in later discussion I locate it in Lidcombe. This is not the location of the real site.

responsibilities. Below this is another layer of management which tends to be product and location oriented. As well, above the Division Manager is Internat Australia's Managing Director and Board of Directors. A point to note is that senior management is made up of 17 divisional and group heads, two of whom are women. These two appointments were both made within the previous year of the study. There are no women, however, on Internat Australia's Board of Directors.

Pharmsco appears to be a relatively formalised division (Robbins and Barnwell, 1989). Communication through formal channels is encouraged and clear guidelines for each position are available. Formal policies exist at the company and divisional level with respect to most aspects of employment. Given the size of Internat Australia (10 000 employees), it is hardly surprising that there tends to be an air of bureaucracy to Pharmsco. That Pharmsco appeared more bureaucratic than the other two companies was something that struck me as I was interviewing employees. Formal procedures and policies were referred to by interviewees far more frequently than in either of the other companies.

Another feature of Pharmsco that stood out as I was conducting the interviews at the three sites was the prevalence of posters summarising company policies, strategically placed for employees to see. For instance, beside the lifts and in all the tea and coffee areas in the main Melbourne site, and in similar positions in the other offices, the company's EEO and Harassment Policy was clearly visible. The poster outlining the policy reads:

There shall be no discrimination or harassment relating to race, colour, sex, sexual preference, age, physical or mental disability, marital status, family responsibilities, pregnancy, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin.

Entry into the Company, selection for specific jobs and career progression will be determined by personal merit, competency and potential to effectively perform the job.

"We believe our attitude on Equal Opportunity and Harassment is fair and good for the Company.

I ask all employees to maintain our continuing commitment to an atmosphere of *mutual respect*."

Managing Director

Internat Australia has a Vision and Values booklet which presents a summary of Internat's goals in catchy phrases. These catchy phrases are also displayed on posters around the Internat offices. There are four components to the 'Vision' and seven 'Values' making up the booklet. As with Technico, employees' welfare features prominently in these.

'Employees achieving results in a challenging and rewarding work environment'

is part of the 'Vision' and to:

'Appoint leaders who create an environment which encourages our people to perform to their potential,

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

Actively develop networks and teams both within and across the company and with our customers and suppliers'

are the 'Values' relating to employees.

Further to the importance placed on the human resource was the release of a booklet outlining Internat Australia's Managing Diversity policy in 1993. In the booklet, the tasks Internat Australia has set itself in this area are defined as to:

- provide opportunities for all employees with an insistence that managers respect and manage diversity in all its forms;
- have policies that reflect the changing nature of society;
- provide a work environment free of harassment;
- develop flexible work patterns that meet business and family needs;
- recognise family needs; and
- recognise the importance of child care.

The rationale given for the Managing Diversity policy is, in part, explained by the following excerpt from the Managing Diversity booklet:

Internat Australia recognises that some employees are not reaching their full potential. This is, in part, indicated by a higher turnover rate of females than males. Talented young women are also leaving Internat Australia at a significant rate. They are not necessarily leaving to have children, but to take up better career options elsewhere....

By providing opportunities for all our employees irrespective of race, sex or other cultural differences, Internat Australia plans to harness human attributes to the company's business purposes for mutual benefit.

Merit — rather than outmoded cultural preferences and prejudices — will prevail in the workplace.

The company will create a work environment which contains or reduces stresses that are irrelevant to job performance.

Internat Australia already provides mentors to graduates and other more experienced employees as part of their development. The systematic expansion of this system to high-potential employees, particularly women, allows the mentor to share some of the supervisor's challenge of finding the best path for an employee. The mentor can also help employees who feel cut off from sources of information and established networks by acting as an advocate for them.

As part of its efforts to concentrate on individual development, Internat Australia has developed an Employee Development Process (EDP) which has been adopted within Pharmsco. The EDP stresses the need to remove barriers to individual performance, particularly those based on management's failure to recognise and take advantage of different attributes and strengths of employees. All employees are expected to discuss the EDP with their manager on an annual basis.

Another dimension of the Managing Diversity policy which Pharmsco has taken seriously is that of creating a work environment free of harassment. Almost all employees within Pharmsco have attended training sessions on what harassment is, that it is unacceptable and what to do as an employee to 'speak up' about harassment. Harassment Contact Persons have been nominated and their names widely publicised in the training sessions.

Internat's Managing Diversity Policy also includes reference to developing more flexible work patterns that meet business and family needs.

We must respond to the changing nature of families. In the past talented employees have been forced to make a choice between work and domestic arrangements. This policy will address the need for businesses and employees to work together in making choices which will be of benefit to both parties.

A Flexible Work Arrangement Policy is outlined in the Managing Diversity book which indicates arrangements should be made between each manager and employee to accommodate, 'commensurate with business needs', family needs such as child and elder

care, personal time for pressing personal business, flexible work hours, time off after periods of unusually heavy work demand and occasional work at home. As well, formal arrangements such as job sharing and permanent part-time work are also flagged as options in response to meeting the needs of the job and individual circumstances.

Pharmsco does not appear to have adopted these recommendations as fully as they did the sexual harassment guidelines. Officially there is scope for employees within Pharmsco to come to some arrangement with their manager about flexible work hours to deal with private business if necessary, but job sharing and permanent part-time work are still not common (as seen in Table 6.3).

Within the manufacturing area (Lidcombe), there has been some adaptation of work practices to reflect a more flexible approach as part of the restructuring of the manufacturing area two years earlier. When asked whether flexible work hours were available to employees, the manager of the manufacturing plant responded that there had been some move towards more flexible work arrangements with the advent of work teams within the manufacturing area:

We're operating production processes and we're operating on teams and a team can't work unless all the team is there at the one time. It's a bit like playing football. It's no good going along and saying 'oh the full back is going to turn up at half time and the full forward is going to turn up at quarter time. The rest of us will be there and we'll carry on until they come'. It won't work like that. The whole team has got to be there at the starting time and the whole team has got to be there before the game. Having said that, we are working staggered shifts, variable, flexible hours and we have a concept where, when all the work is done, people can go home. So they're not here for a time — they're here to do a job. They're paid an annual salary, they're not paid an hourly rate, so the quicker they get it done or the less work there is to do, home they go.

Training and development of employees is also a value espoused by Pharmsco.

According to their report to the Affirmative Action Agency,

there is a strong commitment to on-going training and personal development of all employees within Pharmsco. Statistical data on training is reported to management on a quarterly basis. In addition, a training data base is maintained as well as details on a myriad of training programs available both internally and externally.

Employees of Pharmsco are able to tap into many of the training programs offered within Internat Australia, which means they have access to a greater variety of courses than would be found in most companies with only 250 employees.

In relation to Pharmsco's reported activities concerning affirmative action, the following activities were detailed in their 1992/93 report to the Affirmative Action Agency:

Revision of Induction Program — the induction program was expanded to include a session on affirmative action in which Internat's EEO policy is detailed, and statistical data and key initiatives undertaken by Internat are reported.

Personal Development for Women Workshops — Workshops held on a regular basis addressing issues of importance for women. All new female employees are encouraged to attend a workshop.

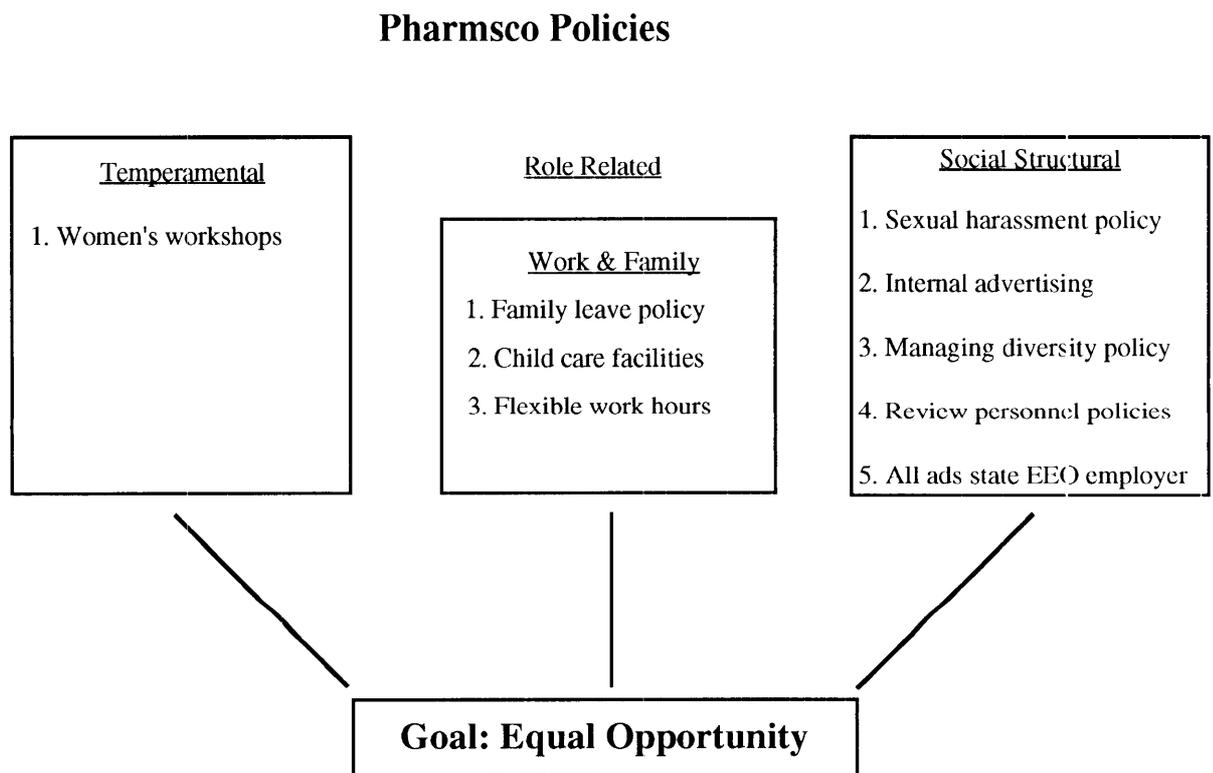
Young Achievers' Award — designed to encourage individuals (under 30 years of age) to make a presentation to Senior Management on their contribution to the business and their five year career plan. Individuals are scored on a number of criteria and awarded an overseas business trip, which includes a major training component. In 1994 the program had been held twice and on both occasions had been won by a woman.

Recruitment Policy Reviewed — all vacancies now have to be advertised internally and placed on the internal Corporate recruitment data bank, with the aim of encouraging retention of employees, especially women.

Child Care Assistance — Internat Australia has leased a number of places in a child care centre located to the Melbourne offices. Pharmsco employees can apply for the leased places that are available, as can any Internat employees in the Melbourne offices. Recognising that this is of only limited value to many of Pharmsco employees, a range of child care options are being examined and assessed. At the time of the interviews, a feasibility study of providing on-site child care at the Lidcombe plant was being investigated.

Pharmsco’s affirmative action policies appear to represent policies from the ‘temperamental’, ‘work & family’ and ‘social structural’ categories. Pharmsco’s affirmative action policies are depicted in Figure 6.2³ according to the schema outlined in section 4.7.

Figure 6.2: Pharmsco’s affirmative action policies



6.5 Healthco

Healthco is an international, research-intensive health products company supplying products to both the domestic and export markets. As it is involved with the manufacture of and distribution of human and animal health care products in Australia it is classified under the same ASIC industry as Pharmsco (Manufacturing — Chemical) by the Affirmative Action Agency. Healthco’s parent company is located in the United States, but approximately half of Healthco’s nearly 40 000 employees world-wide work outside

³ Pharmsco did not have any ‘non-traditional’ or ‘opportunities’ policies.

of the United States. As Healthco had less than 500 employees in 1986 when the affirmative action legislation was enacted, it was classified as Band 3 for reporting purposes by the Affirmative Action Agency. Healthco in Australia employed approximately 520 people in July 1994 when the interviews were conducted, with women making up 52 per cent of total employees. See Table 6.5 for Healthco's employment profile at the time of the interviews.

Table 6.5 Healthco employment profile, 1994

| | <i>Women</i> | <i>Men</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|------------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Permanent full time | 250 | 244 | 494 |
| Permanent part time | 4 | — | — |
| Casual (non-seasonal) | — | — | — |
| Casual (seasonal) | — | — | — |
| Temporary full time | 16 | 3 | 19 |
| Temporary part time | — | — | — |
| Persons under contract | — | — | — |
| Total | 270 | 247 | 517 |

Clearly, part-time employment is not a common practice in Healthco. Although claims are made in Healthco's reports to the Affirmative Action Agency that efforts are made to encourage flexible working arrangements, this had not been translated into practice. In Table 6.6 the occupational profile of Healthco is presented.

Table 6.6 Healthco occupational profile, 1994

| | <i>Women</i> | <i>Men</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|--------------------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Directors | 2 | 12 | 14 |
| Managers | 18 | 59 | 77 |
| Professionals (includes Sales) | 118 | 97 | 215 |
| Paraprofessionals | 7 | 7 | 14 |
| Trades | 0 | 20 | 20 |
| Clerks | 58 | 10 | 68 |
| Plant & Machine Operators | 67 | 42 | 109 |
| Total | 270 | 247 | 517 |

While women represent only 14 per cent of Directors and 23 per cent of Managers, they represent 56 per cent of the Professionals. Women's strong representation in this category is largely due to their prevalence in Sales positions in Healthco. Women now make up approximately 70 per cent of the sales force for the human health products. They are less well-represented, however, in the sales force for the animal health products.

The vast majority of employees work on-site in Healthco's manufacturing plant and offices in suburban Sydney. Sales staff tend to be located throughout Sydney and interstate. As well, at the time of the interviews, one of the divisions did have a research facility located about 20 kilometres from the main Sydney site, but a decision had been taken to close that site from early 1995. Geographically, staff were relatively centralised.

There are six divisions in Healthco in Sydney, each of which is associated with either human or animal health products. A fairly flat hierarchical structure characterises Healthco in Australia. There are basically two levels of management; directors and managers. There are fourteen directors, including the Managing Director of Healthco Australia. The Directorates are organised on functional and divisional lines. Seven of the directors are responsible for functional areas (that is, Finance and Administration, Sales and Marketing, Economics and Public Affairs, Business Development, Medical, Medical Adviser and Special Projects), while the other six are responsible for divisions. The 77 managers report to directors. The average span of control in the company is fairly small. Given the relatively flat structure of Healthco, efforts have been made to change the mentality that 'success equals moving up the ladder'. As there aren't many positions directly above most employees and Healthco has a fairly low turnover of staff, horizontal movement has been encouraged, particularly in career development discussions. This change was specifically raised by the Human Resource Development Manager.

Once you create an understanding that to be successful doesn't mean you have to be a manager, that is a tremendous weight off a lot of people, you know. There are folks that don't have to put their hand up any more to be a manager. They can put their hand up to be a better marketer or a better human resource trainer.

Healthco could be viewed as a moderately formalised organisation (Robbins and Barnwell, 1989). Although there are detailed job descriptions available for positions and standard operating procedures are in place, particularly in the manufacturing division, employees are expected to take responsibility for their own careers and are encouraged to initiate ways of improving their performance. Career discussions with one's line manager have been a feature of Healthco for a number of years, and it is through these discussions that employees are supposedly encouraged to be 'self-managing'. According to the Human Resource Development Manager, 'the sort of long term vision for people is that they are self-managed'.

As with the previous two companies, a feature that stood out as I reviewed the in-house documents and newsletters I had access to in Healthco was the value the company publicly attached to its human resources. For instance, Healthco has been consistently named as one of 'America's Most Admired Corporations' by Fortune magazine. One of the eight key attributes for Fortune's rating of companies is 'the ability to attract, develop and keep talented people'. Other key attributes of the rating system include financial soundness, innovativeness, quality of products or services, use of corporate assets, quality of management, value as a long term investment and community and environmental responsibility.

That Healthco's human resources are valued is apparent from the credit given to Healthco's people in achieving this rating. The following excerpts are from an open-letter distributed to employees from the Chairman and CEO after Healthco was once again named in Fortune's list in 1993.

Dear Colleagues

Congratulations on a job well done!

Healthco has just been named one of "America's Most Admired Corporations" in Fortune magazine's corporate reputations survey...

You get all the credit for this distinction, because — more than anything else — it reflects the talent, skill and hard work of Healthco people around the world. You have established and sustained Healthco's reputation for excellence, and you should take great pride in this achievement.

...Healthco's reputation is more than a source of Company pride. It is a valuable asset that supports our corporate strategy.

For example, scoring consistently high in "ability to Attract, Develop and Keep Talented People" in the Fortune survey supports our recruiting efforts. And continuing to attract the best people is the key to our future success.

An initiative of Healthco in the United States which reinforces its commitment to its people has been the establishment of a Diversity Oversight Committee 'to create and maintain an environment that enables all employees to reach their full potential in pursuit of the company's objectives' (in-house publication, May 1994). In making these efforts more widely known, a presentation by R. Roosevelt Thomas (founder and president of the American Institute for Managing Diversity) to the Healthco's Diversity Oversight Committee was adapted for an article for the company's international in-house publication. The following excerpt is from that article:

How can managing diversity affect a company's bottom line?

Roosevelt Thomas: That depends on the nature of the company's operations, but in general, managing diversity helps you to attract the best candidates from a diverse pool. Bright people want to work in an environment that works for everyone. Managing diverse employees is a necessary first step toward employing competitive business tools such as total quality, self-managing teams, and participatory management. When an organisation manages its total work force well, the organisation is more effective in an increasingly diverse business environment. It is competent and comfortable among customers, competitors, stockholders, government agencies and vendors. Well-managed companies are more able to be truly global.

A program which seems to have emerged from the move to self-management and the importance placed on the contribution Healthco's people can make to the business in Australia is one called 'Sharing Responsibility for Success'. In highlighting this initiative of Healthco Australia, an article in Healthco's international in-house magazine explains it in the following terms.

...Friendly, open, frank, egalitarian and willing to take risks. That's the spirit of the Australian. It fits, then, that Healthco Australia has launched a program that harnesses the natural instincts of its people to better the business.

The program, called Sharing Responsibility for Success, asks all employees to take responsibility for Healthco Australia.

'We're trying to find ways people can have more freedom to do things within their area of responsibility and to be more conscious of the need to accept accountability for what they do', says the Managing Director.

‘Everyone has a stake in Healthco’s success’, says the Human Resources Manager. ‘We’re one of the few sites that has all divisions. We’re trying to pull them all together for the better of Healthco.’

In keeping with this philosophy are the substantial financial resources devoted to training and development of staff each year. Healthco spends on average approximately 8 per cent of gross salaries on training and development activities, and has done for many years. Training is done both internally and externally. As well, Healthco does provide support for employees undertaking further study (for instance, reimbursement of fees for successfully completed courses). In explaining Healthco’s investment in human resources, the Human Resources Development Manager made the following comments.

I think a lot of companies and a lot of training people just focus on skills and the purpose of skills training is to pump some more productivity out of the individual. Screw them a bit more and get some more blood out of them. We have a much longer term view than that and we also have a strong belief that if we invest in the individual as a person that they will return that investment. So a lot of work we’ve done, career development, other development programs, a big percentage of that is what some training companies would say is non-productive sort of training. You know, how do you measure the competence level of loyalty? What is the competence rating for trust?

Related to the value attached to Healthco’s employees, is the importance placed on the physical facilities available to Healthco staff. In 1993, a new administration block was opened to house 160 of Healthco’s employees. The office space allocated for each person is spacious and well-appointed. In the notes I took when conducting the interviews in this office space I made reference to ‘the feeling of affluence surrounding the work environment.’ The facilities for the manufacturing division are older but there are plans for improving those facilities. Currently, however, there is a significant difference in the work environments of those in the manufacturing division and the main administration block.

Other facilities which are available to all staff include tennis courts, a gymnasium which opened in May 1994 and comfortably appointed canteen facilities which also provide healthy, attractively presented food at greatly subsidised prices. To those sales staff not located on-site without access to the subsidised meals, a financial allowance is paid. These details may sound trivial, but they added to the impression that employees were

valued; they were not taken for granted, a sense I had of each of the case study companies.

With respect to the affirmative action policies in place in Healthco, the public reports to the Affirmative Action Agency indicated there were a number in place. Perhaps the best summary of the efforts Healthco have made in the affirmative action domain is seen in an open letter to employers from the Managing Director of Healthco Australia which appeared on the front page of Healthco Australia's in-house magazine in October 1992. The letter was submitted to the Affirmative Action Agency as part of Healthco's 1992/93 public report to support its claims in the affirmative action domain. The letter reads as follows:

EEO-ADDING VALUE to our Human Resource Management

A Message from (the Managing Director)

What is Equal Employment Opportunity?

Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) means, as the name indicates, treating individuals equally. It means looking at each person's background and qualifications fairly and without prejudice and to employ, develop and promote those people best able to meet job requirements. EEO is really inherent in the Healthco philosophy to 'treat employees as individuals'.

Activities

The concept of equal opportunity is not new to Healthco and has been part of our corporate philosophy for many years. This does not mean that in Healthco we can be satisfied with the status quo. On the contrary, the *Affirmative Action (Equal Opportunity for Women) Act, 1986* does in fact require us to objectively analyse our status and implement specific plans directed at making our future performance even better.

Here are some of the things we have done in the last 3 years

- We introduced an Orientation and Induction Program early in 1991, featuring elements of EEO. This program is attended by all new employees, irrespective of the position they hold.
- A survey on Employment Benefits was administered to employees, with the results indicating strong support for child-care and flexible working arrangements. In July 1992 the Department of Community Services allocated funds to establish a 30 place child-care centre in a joint venture with Healthco and (another company).
- The EEO Committee was formed, and was expanded this year to provide greater representation.

- The in-house Management Development Programs now include information for managers on their obligations regarding EEO and build managers skills in meeting these obligations.
- We carefully reviewed all company policies and procedures to ensure they totally reflect our commitment to EEO.
- Through the Career Development Program in Division 1 we have identified participants skills and strengths, with a view to enhancing their potential for growth and development.
- We have ensured that all employees have the ability (via the EEO committee or their supervisor) to input on EEO issues both formally and informally.
- We submitted our third AA report to the Affirmative Action Agency. We also have contact with the Agency on key issues.
- Continued promotion on merit.
- We introduced a new Application for Employment in July 1992.

In the future...

- The production of a maternity/paternity leave pamphlet to provide information to all employees who wish to access it.
- Ensure all managers have ready access to the revised version of the Personnel Policies and Procedures by placing them on the Local Area Network.
- Introduce policies on flexible working arrangements and child-care.
- Gather information on employees to ascertain English language skills to instigate a literacy program if appropriate.
- The new building will have ready access for disabled employees and/or visitors.

Healthco is an Equal Opportunity Employer

The Healthco philosophy is to 'attract, develop and retain the best people'. We do not discriminate against employees on the basis of marital status, sex, race, religion, age, political beliefs, parenthood or physical impairment.

Evaluation of individuals based on their skills, experience and ability to perform will ensure Equal Opportunity in terms of recruitment, training opportunities and promotion.

In conclusion, I would like to record my personal support for, and commitment to EEO in our workplace. It is ethically correct, it is a key to effective human resource planning and development and put in simplest terms, makes good sense!

As a result of award restructuring and enterprise bargaining in 1992, skills-based career structures for employees in the production, engineering and warehousing areas were finalised. The focus of the agreements reached were career paths which provide

opportunities for personal development and skills training. The new career paths also eliminated the gender bias inherent in the previous awards. For example, women were previously unable to advance into certain positions because of restrictions relating to certain manual operations. These barriers to progression were not included in the new awards and women now (supposedly) have unrestricted access to positions and training. As well, there had been a restructuring of career paths for administrative assistants in 1993. A four stage Career Development Plan was developed which addresses the skill development and competencies of administrative assistants.

Human Resource and Public Affairs staff are associated with local schools through presentations of information to students with special emphasis on EEO to encourage female students to pursue careers in technology, engineering and computing and to expose students to the wide range of careers at Healthco. Healthco also participates in careers markets at universities to highlight the career opportunities to prospective graduates.

Healthco has recently developed a sexual harassment policy. At the time of the interviews the policy had not been distributed in pamphlet form to employees. According to one of the members of the EEO Consultative Committee:

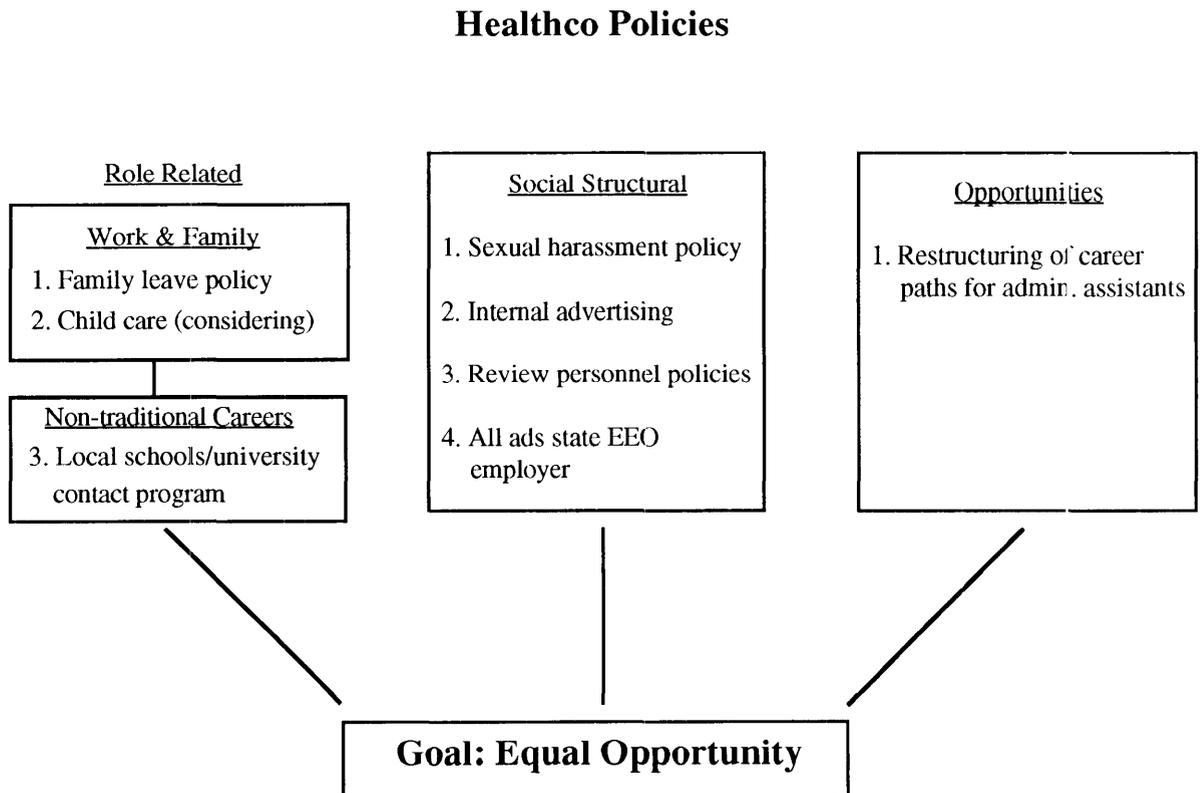
We've got a sexual harassment policy but we are looking at ways of publicising it a bit more without making it 'Oh God, we've got a lot of sexual harassment going on'. So we still have to get around to making a pamphlet about it.

What does stand out in this review of Healthco's efforts in the affirmative action domain is that they are not generally referred to as 'affirmative action'. The message being communicated concerns 'equal opportunity'. No specific reference is made to 'women' or efforts to improve 'women's employment opportunities'. In discussions I had with personnel from the Human Resources Administration area, this point was reinforced. The strategy taken was to develop initiatives to improve employment opportunities for all employees, rather than singling out women as such. The following comment by a member of EEO Consultative Committee highlights this approach:

The Women’s Investment Network were keen to come here and do a ‘this is who we are etc’ presentation, and we decided that was probably not the way to go because it was targeted very specifically at women and to the exclusion of men. We are trying to be egalitarian rather than taking a ‘this is for you’ and ‘this is for you’ approach.

The thrust of Healthco’s affirmative action initiatives appears to be ‘social structural’ in nature. Other than the mooted child care facilities and flexible working arrangements (neither of which were well–developed at the time of the interviews), the policies basically represent changes to the processes operating within Healthco. There are no policies in place which could be labelled ‘temperamental’. Healthco’s affirmative action policies are presented in Figure 6.3⁴.

Figure 6.3 Healthco’s affirmative action policies



⁴ Technico did not have any ‘temperamental’ policies.

6.6 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the case study organisations. In summary, there are many elements common across the three case studies, as well as some unique features. With respect to the type of affirmative action policies present in each of the case studies, there are also many elements common to each of the case studies. For instance, although not previously mentioned in the outline of the affirmative action policies, each of the three companies has a family leave policy in a brochure format which is readily available to all employees and all of the companies state they are an EEO employer in any job advertisements they run.

As well, there are some distinguishing features of the companies. Table 6.8 provides a summary of the affirmative action policies implemented in each of the companies. An interesting feature apparent from Table 6.8 is that none of the companies had an affirmative action statement as such. Rather, the policy statements they had circulated to employees were labelled as EEO policies. Another feature common to each of the case study organisations is their apparent commitment to human resources. This is not surprising given Braithwaite's (1993) finding that companies demonstrating a commitment to their human resources were more likely to make efforts to improve employment opportunities for women than those with a more ambivalent approach to their human resources (see section 3.7).

Consistent with the findings in Chapter 4 that 'social structural' and 'role related' policies were more commonly implemented by Australian companies in the 1990s than 'temperamental' policies, is the prevalence of 'social structural' and 'work & family' policies within the affirmative action programs of the case study organisations. One of the case studies, Healthco, had deliberately ruled out 'temperamental' policies from its program from the outset, and both Technico and Pharmsco had recently moved away from Women's Workshops (a 'temperamental' policy) to a more inclusive approach.

Table 6.8 Affirmative action policies by company

| | <i>Technico</i> | <i>Pharmsco</i> | <i>Healthco</i> |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Equal opportunity policy | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 2. Affirmative action statement | | | |
| 3. Sexual harassment policy | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 4. Family leave policy | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 5. Child care facilities – present | ✓ | ✓ | |
| – considering | | | ✓ |
| 6. Women's Network/Workshops | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 7. Internal advertising of positions | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 8. Local Schools/University contact program | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 9. Restructuring – administrative assistants | ✓ | | ✓ |
| of career paths – production workers | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 10. Managing diversity policy | | ✓ | |
| 11. Flexible work hours | | ✓ | |
| 12. Review of personnel policies (each of the areas specified in Step 6) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 13. Affirmative action consultative committee | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 14. All ads state company is an EEO employer | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 15. Career development library | ✓ | | |

‘Social structural’ policies in particular have been implemented. Each of the companies had reviewed its personnel policies to ensure they were not discriminatory. In this sense, the companies were clearly subscribing to the short agenda conception of equality referred to in Chapter 3 (Cockburn, 1989). ‘Work & family’ policies have been implemented, albeit in less vigorous manner. For instance, although each of the case study organisations reported efforts to investigate the possibility of flexible work arrangements to the Affirmative Action Agency, very little had been achieved in this area. In Technico and Pharmsco, ‘temperamental’ policies had been implemented at some

point, while within Healthco and Technico some 'non-traditional' and 'opportunities' policies had been implemented.

The affirmative action policies in place within each of the case study organisations, on the surface, appear to offer a great deal in terms of women's access to employment. In the next two chapters, how employees perceive these affirmative action policies and how they perceive their employment opportunities in the case study organisations will be explored in both quantitative and qualitative terms.

Chapter 7

Employees' Perceptions of Affirmative Action: The Qualitative Approach

These things are around — but it's like anything that's a policy or procedure, you can make a written statement about it but unless you 'walk the talk' it just gets filed on the shelf regardless of whether it's affirmative action, occupational health and safety or anything else.

(Male, early 30s, Healthco)

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, excerpts from the interviews conducted with a sample of employees from Technico, Pharmsco and Healthco are presented. In the interviews reported in this chapter, I sought to ascertain interviewees' understanding of affirmative action, their experiences of the company's affirmative action policies in particular, and other human resource policies generally, and their perceptions of their employment opportunities. It is the perceptions of employees which I am seeking to include in any discussion of the effectiveness of affirmative action policies. My aim is to convey all the themes emerging from the interviews, rather than quantifying all the views put forth. As such, I have tried to let the interviewees' comments 'drive' the chapter. Of course, how I am presenting the interviewees' comments does reflect my interpretation of the interviews, but that is unavoidable. The issues that emerged from the interviews helped shape the types of questions posed in the survey phase of the research — which is discussed in Chapter 8.

7.2 The interviewing process

The interviews were based on an interview guide (see Appendix 5). My aim in designing a set of basic questions to ask in the interviews was to build up an understanding of employees' different conceptions of affirmative action (Marton, 1994;

Ballantyne *et al.*, 1994), the environment in which they worked and their employment opportunities. The rationale behind this approach is that people act on their interpretation of the situation in which they find themselves (Thomas, 1951), 'rather than on the objective, matter-of-fact characteristics of the situation' (Ballantyne *et al.*, 1994: 28).

The style of interview I sought to establish is what Massarik (1981: 202) calls the 'rapport interview'.

While the interaction is quite well-bounded, some positive interpersonal 'vibrations' are in evidence. A significant measure of mutual trust exists and, though the interview objectives are quite focused and delimited, small-talk, casual by-play and interpersonal activity not centred exclusively on interview content prevails.

(Massarik, 1981: 202)

I wanted the interviewees to feel relaxed in the interview and comfortable in expressing their own views in their own terms. Interviewees were assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

I did not rigidly adhere to a set order in asking these questions; rather, I followed the lead of the interviewee. In some cases I did not have to ask a particular question as the interviewee had addressed the question in their response to another question. As well, I adapted the wording of the questions to suit the language the interviewees were using. Clearly a question such as 'what is your perception of the company relative to other companies regarding the climate for women in the workplace?' is a bit formal to elicit a natural response from many interviewees, so I would ask the question in a way that I felt suited their method of expression. In this sense the interviews were, deliberately, not highly structured (Singleton *et al.*, 1993).

Totally structured work puts blinkers on the field worker and can impose a reality on a phenomenon which is totally meaningless to the actors involved. Nonetheless, a certain amount of structure is essential to a successful research enterprise. Totally unstructured work may produce a flood of serendipity but only a trickle of relevance to established theory and real public policy dilemmas.

(Fisse & Braithwaite, 1983)

The interviews generally ran between 35 minutes and an hour, although one did run to an hour and a half.

To help contextualise women's perceptions of their employment opportunities and the affirmative action policies in place in their organisation, I felt it was important to also find out how the men in the organisation perceived women's employment opportunities. By including men in the interviewing process, I did not intend to take a 'male as the norm' (Marshall, 1986; Gallos, 1986; Tavis, 1993) standard. Rather, I wanted to place women's experiences in the context of others in the organisation. It seems that how men in the organisation respond to affirmative action initiatives could very well impact on the environment in which women work. A number of authors have documented men's resistance to affirmative action initiatives and how this impacts on the practice of affirmative action through charges of reverse discrimination and women being held to higher standards of performance (Cockburn, 1991; Taylor, 1991; Ellis & Sonnenfeld, 1994).

The data emerging from the interviews were analysed using an approach described by Marshall (1981; 1986) as 'immersion'. According to Marshall (1986: 116), immersion

involves trying to appreciate the inherent patterns rather than impose preconceived ideas on the data. The researcher becomes an interpreter rather than a manipulator, concerned with capturing other people's meanings rather than testing hypotheses.

In practice, this meant the interviews were transcribed, and the transcripts were analysed through a process of content analysis for the common themes at various levels. Reading through the transcripts and sorting and categorising the interviewees' responses, similarities and differences gradually emerged for particular individuals, groups within the companies and the sample as a whole.

Although I tended to focus on the common themes in developing the questionnaire to go out to the larger sample, there were quite noticeable differences within the sample, which I have tried to reflect in my discussion of the qualitative interviews. Marshall (1986: 116) maintains that:

doing so is particularly important in an exploratory study such as this. It not only gives the full flavour of the data, but suggests issues which may be revealed as more significant, even dominant for a larger sample, or one in a different situation.

The questions which elicited the strongest responses from interviewees listed and the patterns emerging from their responses are summarised for each of the companies in the following sections. It must be kept in mind, however, that sample size was small in each case and these views may not reflect those of the wider population in the company¹.

7.3 The Technico Interviews

As at 1 February 1994, there were 2 232 employees at Technico. A random sample of employees were sought for interviews to discuss their understanding of the affirmative action policies within Technico. Of the 22 employees interviewed, 13 were women and 9 were men. Interviewees came from a range of occupational levels across seven Divisions. To ensure a cross-section of Technico employees were interviewed, 15 interviewees were from the main site in suburban Melbourne, while the remaining seven were from an off-site office in central Melbourne.

Women are disadvantaged in the workplace generally

Of the 22 interviewees, 16 felt women did not have the same opportunities in the workplace as men. In contrast to the interviewees at Healthco, a greater proportion of the men interviewed (89 per cent) felt women were disadvantaged relative to men, than women interviewees did (62 per cent).

I think that there is definitely a 'glass ceiling'....I think you've got a lot of cultural, ingrained, hereditary things where women have been passed over in the past. I think it still happens in general.

(Male, early 50s)

I still think it's a lot harder for a woman to get into management placement. Attitudes are only slowly changing.

(Female, mid 40s)

¹ These summaries are abridged versions of the initial reports provided to each of the companies following the interview stage of the study.

Of the six interviewees who felt women were not disadvantaged or they didn't know, four were women. One of the women who claimed women were not disadvantaged in the workplace argued that women, in her view, were actually better off than men.

I think it's probably not fair, because it's probably discrimination against males, but I think companies are thinking we have to have more women in management positions to be considered as being an equal opportunity employer, so they are probably giving females more chances than males.

(Female, mid 20s)

Women are disadvantaged in Technico specifically

The responses to this question indicated a perception, by both women and men, of Technico as a more equitable environment than the workplace generally.

There are a lot of things women can do out there in Technico. I feel if I had a desire to keep going on there would opportunity for me to go on.

(Female, mid 30s)

I think women get a fair go in Technico. From my experience, I think they have the same opportunities as men do.

(Female, mid 30s)

Others, however, were less convinced that women and men had the same opportunities within Technico.

All we have got to do is to look at the figures...There is no equal representation in Technico. Sure there's management at the top with...maybe 160 fellows and one or two women. We don't have any male receptionists and we don't have any female Directors, so it isn't a matter of perception. It's just a case of looking.

(Female, early 50s)

If you look at all our Executive Management, they're all males. You look at the Senior Managers below them, and they're all male. I think there is about four females sitting in the next rung. So they (Senior Management) are still hesitant to make the plunge.

(Female, mid 40s)

Another interviewee cited the example of a woman she knows in management who, she feels, has not been given the same opportunities as her male counterparts.

...I feel that she's not got what she deserved. You know, some managers are more equal than others and she's not one of the one's that equal. And she is so competent. If she says she'll do something tomorrow at ten o'clock, she does it and she does it right and she follows up. I mean she does everything right, but she's not doing the 'right' thing. And you think well the 'right' things must be that she go out and play golf or something.

(Female, early 50s)

What do you understand by the term affirmative action?

The term 'affirmative action' appeared to be fairly poorly understood by the Technico interviewees. Of the 22 interviewees, only a third were able to provide a reasonable explanation of the term. The other two thirds said they didn't know what the term meant, or their explanation of it indicated their impression of affirmative action was not consistent with that specified in the affirmative action legislation. For instance, one respondent said she didn't know what the term meant and, referring to the request to participate in the interview, said

When it was mentioned to me, I was thinking about it, what is affirmative action? When you ask people what is the company doing for equal opportunity for women in the work force they can relate to it better. The words affirmative action do not mean anything to Technico employees, especially the lower levels of them.

(NESB¹ Female, mid 40s)

Only one of the respondents referred to the fact that affirmative action was included in the supervisory courses Technico ran, but even so, she couldn't remember what it was.

In all the leadership courses and supervisory courses you do have some form of affirmative action ...I don't even remember what it is about.

(Female, mid 30s)

A number of respondents in Technico indicated they felt very uncomfortable with the term 'affirmative action'.

I don't think affirmative action is a good word to start with. I think it sounds like discrimination against males and I don't think that should be. I don't know what the right word is but every time you talk about affirmative action here in industry, the men will straight away say 'everyone's on a special exercise to promote women'. It's really a stark negative with that word.

(Female, mid 40s)

I don't like the term affirmative action, because to me it seems aggressive.

(Male, mid 20s)

When asked if they could nominate any actions Technico had taken to improve employment opportunities for women, 16 of the 22 interviewees (73 per cent) nominated at least one of the following initiatives:

- Women's Forums
- Women's Development Work Group

¹ Non-English Speaking Background (NESB)

- Child Care Centre
- Sexual Harassment Pamphlet
- Inter-company Network (including the recent Mentoring Program)
- Efforts to attract female apprentices

The initiative most frequently nominated by interviewees was the Women's Forums. Although there was general support for the Women's Forums, five of the respondents (23 per cent) felt that the forums were discriminating against men.

I think it's biased. I don't think it's fair that they should have a women's forum and not a men's forum. I really feel they're left out and there's no reason why they can't do exactly the same thing... Why should we be more privileged than what they are? And that's what it seems to be.

(Female, mid 30s)

Why don't we have a men's forum? A lot of guys have turned around and said to me 'Why are they looking after the females more than us?' or 'Why don't they listen to us too?' But there's a big push now isn't there, to make sure that we lift up the females. But are we forgetting the males? I don't know.

(Male, mid 40s)

I don't like the concept of women forming a group and behaving as a group. I don't mind them meeting. I'm sure women have issues they want to discuss, and I don't have a problem with that. But I don't like this big deal 'the Women's Forum'. I guess I find it a bit too much, a bit overboard or something.

(Male, mid 30s)

The value of the Women's Forums to one woman was evident in her decision to make a career change.

After the Fabian Dattner one I thought about what I wanted to do and it gave me a push on to do something further. I was employed at Technico 10 years as a process operator and now I am a training coordinator.

(Female, mid 30s)

The other affirmative action initiatives by Technico were mentioned less frequently, but were generally supported. The Technico Child Care Centre was supported by all interviewees. The comments made concerning the Centre indicated that most respondents saw it as an initiative which would assist women in participating in the paid work force. Few respondents saw it as a benefit to men with young children.

I think the Child Care Centre is a good idea because not all women want to stay at home and look after children. They want to come to work and if the company can provide something for them, that's good. I've also been reading that women

don't have as much time off work because they know their children are close by and well cared for.

(Female, late 20s)

Related to this point is that in discussions about the family leave policies operating in Technico, there seemed to be general understanding of the maternity leave policies, but a fairly poor understanding of the paternity/family leave policies.

My understanding of the leave policy is that the woman is entitled to 12 months leave without pay to have the child and can return within that 12 months period. That's negotiable. As far as I understand, the husband is not allowed any time off but I think it's generally accepted that when the baby is born, that he'll normally take some annual leave off.

(Male, mid 30s)

Issues surrounding family responsibilities, it seems, are still seen to be very much the woman's responsibility by the interviewees.

A further point to note concerning the Child Care Centre was that some of the interviewees located in the Melbourne city offices did express concern that equivalent assistance with child care was not available to them. One interviewee raised the question of access to child care facilities in the city.

Now the next question is, is the company going to subsidise child care here to the same percentage as whatever they subsidise it at the main site? And the answer is I'd have to fight. I'd probably get it because I'd keep kicking doors until somebody said, 'Oh, for God's sake get rid of this person' and do it. But the younger women here wouldn't do that. They'd say, 'Oh well, that's just the penalty'.

(Female, early 50s)

A number of people mentioned the Sexual Harassment Pamphlet. This policy had been made available to all employees by distributing the pamphlets to public sites in each of the Divisions. The efficacy of distributing a policy in this manner was, however, questioned by some interviewees.

Certainly none of the people I work with took one, because I made a habit of showing it and putting it in their in-tray and things like that. And their reaction was, 'What's this?' So I take it that they didn't see it.

(Male, late 20s)

This comment may point to a problem with the manner in which Technico's policies are conveyed to employees. The distribution of policies through pamphlet form may not actually be an effective means of 'communicating' policies to employees.

Has Technico been active in improving employment opportunities for women?

The vast majority of employees felt that Technico had been actively trying to improve women's employment opportunities. Only one interviewee claimed that Technico hadn't been active, and he based his argument on the poor representation of women in senior management.

I'd have to say no by the number of women in the executive management forum. You know, there aren't too many there.

(Male, late 20s)

A number of interviewees who felt that Technico had been active in the affirmative action domain pointed to other workplaces as evidence of Technico's activity.

Technico does a lot of things like child care, women's forums etc. that, where friends of mine work, they just don't have.

(Female, early 20s)

One interviewee who agreed that Technico had been active, pointed to the legislative requirements as the driving force.

Well they had to be. It was the law. And they did what was necessary. A few good hearted or energetic women took things on board and started doing things themselves. But they weren't given an awful lot of help. If it was legislation, then Technico did it. If it was somebody's initiative then 'okay, but you don't let it get in the way of us doing whatever we are doing'. Technico's support for those things was probably better than some other companies. We didn't do it well, but we did it a lot better than a lot of other companies.

(Female, early 50s)

Is there a Consultative Committee for affirmative action? Are employees consulted about affirmative action?

There was a very low level of awareness among interviewees of the existence of an affirmative action consultative committee. With respect to consultation, very few employees were able to point to consultation relating to affirmative action specifically,

although a number of respondents countered this by claiming that Technico generally took a consultative approach to employment issues.

I think Technico is a company that consults employees about personnel policies. They like to get feedback from people in production on the things that they do.
(Female, mid 20s)

One respondent mentioned questionnaires distributed at the Women's Forums as evidence of consultation. Others, however, who had reported attending the Forums did not cite this as 'consultation', suggesting that 'consultation' without direct dialogue may not be perceived by many employees as 'consultation'.

Management is committed to the concept of equal employment opportunity

Perceptions of management commitment to equal opportunities were varied. Nine out of the 22 interviewees (41 per cent) felt that management was committed to ensuring there were equal employment opportunities within Technico. The remaining 13 (59 per cent) either felt that management was not really committed to ensuring equality of opportunity, or did not feel they had sufficient evidence to judge either way.

I don't think they've got time for it frankly. And as I've become more senior in my role, I've understood why. There's just so much to do and dragging at you for immediate things and then to worry about the future of the company, I think it takes somewhat of a back seat.
(Male, mid 40s)

Although others wondered at the motives of management in supporting initiatives to improve women's employment opportunities, they did recognise efforts had been made.

I know I'm saying they've done a lot for women over the past 18 months, and slowly women are creeping into those managerial positions, but you sort of wonder what their reasons for doing it are. You could be cynical and say because they get good publicity out of it.
(Female, early 30s)

Yes, they came up with a Women's Development Work Group. In a typical engineering and male way they decided that they'd go for prizes and things, and they won a prize — an affirmative action prize. Very nice, thank you very much. But you know there's not an awful lot behind it. There's certainly been an effort on some people's part but the general effort doesn't have the heart in it because it's too hard and it doesn't sell our product.² If our main customer came over here and said, 'We're not going to buy any more of your product till you've got some

² To maintain confidentiality, I have omitted the actual details of the product and the customer which were named by the interviewee.

representation in your management of females, because they make up forty percent of your work force therefore you should have forty percent of management or at least we give you the benefit of the doubt, let's make it thirty', then Technico would tip everything upside down and get those women — and they do have that thirty percent of women — into management. They're there. Trained MBAs, PhDs, whatever, experience, whatever you want. They're there. And they would put them there and say (to our main customer), 'Okay we've done that. Now let's have the order.' But if there's not that sort of push then it's not going to happen except slowly in a trickle down effect over the next two hundred years. I'm cynical aren't I?

(Female, early 50s)

I don't think the Managing Director gets up one morning and says 'Do this with the women'. I think there would be people somewhere who would be looking at what's going on in the politics of the world and what's going on in Australia and saying 'this seems to be what everybody's doing now, we should show some interest in that and do the same sort of thing'.

(Male, mid 30s)

Access to training

When asked about their access to training opportunities at both the professional and personal levels, there was an overwhelming response from both women and men that there was ample opportunity to develop through both internal and external training. Access to training was not related to affirmative action in any of the interviewees' responses.

I've participated in training courses on inter-personal skills, leadership courses, one-to-one instruction courses. Anything that is related to my job, that is available, I'm happy to attend. It's around if you are interested.

(Female, mid 40s)

Concern about the accessibility of training to employees in the production area was expressed by some interviewees. Although those working in office situations felt they can find out about courses that are available through the training booklet that is circulated annually, and can nominate for the courses relevant to them, some interviewees indicated they felt employees in the production area were somewhat disadvantaged. This distinction between training opportunities available to the 'white collar' as compared to the 'blue collar' workers would seem to support the claims by O'Donnell and Hall (1988) and Poiner and Wills (1991) that women not in professional positions will not benefit from the affirmative action initiatives within companies.

They don't even get the bloody training manual given to them, that's why. The training manual is circulated to the office staff and only to the foremen in the

production area. No one else gets the manual. They wouldn't even know what courses are available.

(Female, mid 40s)

Related to the reservations some people expressed about the accessibility of training to those in the production area, are the concerns about the usefulness of the Career Development and Resource Centre.

I think that generally the people I have referred there have found it difficult to follow through, to find the right books, to check what it means, do all that sort of stuff. So maybe it needs some more face to face help. Some have come back and said, 'I didn't find it very helpful'. I think it's partly because, often with any sort of counselling it's put back on the individual 'now you have to make the next step', which is to find out about this, find out about that and weigh it up and I think a lot of the people they are dealing with are not used to having to make those decisions about things they don't understand. They are very good at running their lives, but this is a new external type thing. I think this is something that can be improved on. But you are not going to ever get away from the fact that they are going to have to make the decision.

(Male, mid 30s)

Another issue which was raised in discussions concerning training opportunities was the variability of performance appraisal process. Interviewees all saw the discussion with one's line manager in the annual performance appraisal as a critical point for determining appropriate training opportunities. Many, however, were unconvinced of the value of the appraisal process in practice. A common comment was that some managers either did not spend the time or have the skills to effectively develop staff through the performance appraisal process.

Some of my bosses used to call me into their office at the time of the year and say 'We've got to do this, what can we write on here?' And we'd sit there and write something and it wasn't taken very seriously.

(Male, mid 30s)

Opportunities for transfer or promotion

When asked about their opportunities for transfers or promotions, the responses from the women and men were very similar. A similar proportion of women and men expressed a desire to progress further from where they are now, and a similar proportion expressed a desire to stay where they are. The younger women interviewed clearly felt their opportunities to advance were the same as their male peers. A common comment

was that if one wanted to move to a different area or expand one's duties it was very much up to the individual to take the initiative, to discuss their career plans with their line manager and to ensure they acquired the necessary training. There were some reservations, however, about this process. The following quote was from a woman currently enrolled in an MBA.

It's very difficult for me to see what sort of skills the company is going to need in 10 years time, to develop myself toward that and there's no proactive research to say to the people working for Technico that this is the type of person we are going to want in ten years time. Start developing yourself towards it. There's all the normal things - you're going to have to be more business oriented, more market oriented, but nothing is in the appraisal process or in your development plans, to say this is what you should be doing. These are the sorts of competencies you should be developing towards.

I think we've got a big lack at the moment of people who can step into a Director's job and I think that's through poor planning 10 years ago. They didn't identify the people that were in 10 years time going to be director-potential and develop their competencies so that in 10 years time, they'd be ready to step into it. That's the major area of concern I have.

(Female, mid 20s)

The internal advertising of positions was mentioned by some interviewees to support their claim that there were plenty of opportunities available for career development for women and men. Others, however, were less convinced about the equity of the internal advertising.

I don't think the process is correct because there have been situations where jobs have been advertised and they already know who will get the job. As well as getting people's hopes up, they've spent time updating their resume and organising references, so it's a waste of time and it also disappoints people because they think they've got a fair chance. So when that happens, I don't agree with it.

(Female, mid 20s)

Another issue that was raised by interviewees when discussing their opportunities for career progression was the perceived importance of coming from an engineering background for promotion into the senior ranks of management within Technico. Both women and men from non-engineering backgrounds expressed this concern.

The opportunities for promotion are fairly limited for me. I'm not fussed by that. There's plenty to do where I am, but in any sort of human resource role, particularly in an engineering company like this, the pyramid is quite narrow. It may be just about as high, but it's much narrower so there's very little room for movement. Realistically, there's not a great number of rungs to go. There is a couple of examples in the last few years where they haven't actually been

engineering...But traditionally, you definitely had to have an engineering background.

(Male, mid 30s)

With me not having a technical background within Technico, that makes (promotion) very awkward. It doesn't matter whether I'm male or female, being non-technical narrows the opportunities down enormously.

(Male, mid 40s)

The importance of an engineering background for career progression in Technico was a reason cited by many interviewees as to why women were not well represented in senior management positions.

It's just that there's not a lot of females coming through — or weren't a lot of females that had in this field, the training, the knowledge. To get into senior management, you need to have an engineering background. Most of the executives in Technico are past engineers .

(Male, early 50s)

Technico's standing relative to other companies

When asked about their perception of Technico relative to other companies with respect to women's employment opportunities, all of the interviewees felt Technico was above average as an employer. The women were all in agreement that they felt their opportunities within Technico were better than in other companies they knew about or for whom they had worked. Women in the production area particularly commented on the pleasant environment in which they work relative to production areas in other companies.

A number of employees made special reference to the facilities that were available to all employees as evidence of the commitment of Technico to their employees' welfare.

The environment is terrific...All the personal things that are offered to you inside the company, you couldn't get any better anywhere else.

(Female, mid 30s)

We have a visitor's day, an open day and you can bring people from other places and walk through the place and show them. Some of them are amazed. I've brought in some middle managers from the old State Bank and blokes who run other factories. They all say the canteen's great. We've got a gymnasium, a table tennis centre, all the education available. It's not just education technically, as I said they do mickey mouse courses, but they also do personality development, letter writing skills. So you can educate yourself. You're allowed to go to school four hours a week. They pay for you. They've got a good doctor, they've got a good physiotherapist. If you want someone to talk to, there's someone you can

always go and talk to. I had a problem with one of my kids, and I went to the doctor and cried on his shoulder for a while, and he was quite prepared to listen. Where else would you get that? If one of the girls has got a problem, they can go and see the Careers Development Manager. If anyone is giving them a hard time, which you do hear cases of it, they can talk to her.

(Male, early 50s)

As well, a number of interviewees made reference to the assistance they had received from Technico to further their education through external courses. This too, they felt, signified the value Technico attaches to their employees.

Too many other projects

A final point to note, because of the effect it may have on the credibility of particular affirmative action initiatives, is the number of interviewees who mentioned the concern they felt about the number of policies which were initiated in Technico, but not followed through.

'Shared Values' was another project that was put up and wasn't seen to be followed through. They come up with a lot of things and in a year or so you don't hear any more about it.

(Female, mid 40s)

We had a 'Shared Values' project which ran for about a year and you know, looking back, it was a complete waste of time. The project finished by a certain date and there hasn't been any follow-up. At least none that is apparent to me.

(Male, mid 20s)

There's just been too many improvement projects going on and not enough time to do any improvement in any decent way, let alone the basics of the core work. Nor can you go out and lecture people as sort of happened in the 'Keeping Your Word' project. Somebody told me there were 110 projects going at one point a couple of years ago. It's a bit hard to believe but even if you take 25 per cent of that, that's still more than 25 projects and that's still a lot. So one thing was piled on top of another.

(Male, mid 40s)

From the responses of those interviewed, Technico appears to be generally perceived as a reasonable employer in terms of opportunities available to all staff. The lack of women in senior management positions was, however, pointed to by some as evidence of the lack of opportunities for women to access key decision-making roles. It seems younger women, in general, had a more positive perception of Technico as an employer than older women.

Most interviewees were aware of at least some of the efforts Technico have made in recent years to improve employment opportunities for women, although they were unable to (or chose not to) label these as affirmative action initiatives. The Women's Forums and the Child Care Centre were the two most frequently cited initiatives. There appeared to be general support for the Child Care Centre, but some resistance to the Women's Forums.

7.4 The Pharmsco Interviews

At the time of the interviews there were approximately 230 people working within Pharmsco. A random sample of employees were sought for interviews to discuss their understanding of the affirmative action policies within their work environment. Of the 19 employees interviewed, 11 were women and eight were men. To ensure there was a cross-section of employees interviewed, interviewees came from a range of occupational levels across the various sites. The distribution of interviewees by location can be seen in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1: Locational distribution of Pharmsco interviewees

| Location | Number of interviewees |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Melbourne city | 9 |
| Melbourne suburbs | 3 |
| Sydney | 4 |
| Interstate (sales people) | 3 |

Women are disadvantaged in the workplace generally

Of the 19 interviewees, 13 felt women did not have the same opportunities in the workplace as men. As with Technico it seems a higher proportion of the men (75%) interviewed felt women were disadvantaged relative to men, than women interviewees did (54%).

Biologically women still have the children and I think they are compromised because primarily most women, at some stage, still want to have a family. And for the period of time they are out of the work force they are compromised. They

don't keep up, potentially, with their skill base. That's the perception, I should say, not the reality. A lot of employers aren't flexible enough with the way in which people can work.

(Male, early 30s)

I believe there are still inequities in pay, in opportunities for promotion, the glass ceiling syndrome. And in general terms from a manufacturing point of view I believe there are still areas where women are just not considered for employment because of the nature of the work that men traditionally do. So in general terms I believe that there is still quite a bit of discrimination against women.

(Female, late 30s)

Of the six interviewees who felt women were not disadvantaged or they didn't know, four were women.

Women are disadvantaged in Pharmsco specifically

As with Technico, the responses to this question indicated a perception, by both women and men, of Pharmsco as a more equitable environment than the workplace generally.

I've been here for 18 years. I've seen a lot of change. Particularly for the young ones who are building themselves up from the graduate area to the product area and then into bigger and better things — a manager, whatever. There are opportunities for women.

(Female, early 40s)

It seems to me that on the surface, in terms of promotions and opportunities, I've never, ever detected any difference between women and men.

(Male, early 30s)

I certainly think Pharmsco is a fair employer in that males or females get an equal crack at any job there is and there are certainly no prejudices against women in management positions.

(Male, late 30s)

Some attributed the relative equality within the Pharmsco to the nature of the pharmaceutical industry. Unlike the industries associated with other divisions in Internat, the pharmaceutical industry is not traditionally a male dominated industry.

If I was in mainstream Internat that might be a completely different ball game. I don't think being a woman makes any difference in Pharmsco. For example, Joan Smith³ has been to New Zealand and she's come back as general manager.

(Female, early 40s)

I believe in Pharmsco a woman has as much chance to get into senior management as a man. One of the things that Pharmsco has, is we have probably the highest proportion in the employment of females of all of Internat.

(Male, early 50s)

³ Joan Smith is a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality is maintained.

Two interviewees, however, were less convinced that women and men had the same opportunities within all areas of Pharmsco. Their concerns were framed by reference to women in the manufacturing arm of Pharmsco.

In general terms in the managerial areas and the administrative areas there are a lot more opportunities for women, but on the manufacturing side it's quite restricted. And I don't know that anyone has consciously done that. It's just the way it has evolved and no one has really challenged it to this point.

(Female, mid 40s)

These perceived differences would seem to support the claims by Poiner and Wills (1991) and O'Donnell and Hall (1988) that the only beneficiaries of affirmative action policies would be women with post-school qualifications entering management positions. Women in lower status positions would not be benefiting from such policies.

What do you understand by the term affirmative action?

Only 10 of the interviewees (53 per cent) were able to demonstrate a reasonable understanding of the term affirmative action as a means of removing discriminatory barriers facing women in the work force and promoting equal opportunity. The other nine interviewees (47 per cent) either said they didn't know what the term meant, or their explanation of it indicated their impression of affirmative action was not consistent with that specified in the affirmative action legislation.

I was going to ask you that at the start as I hadn't heard the term affirmative action used before so I wasn't sure what it meant.

(Male, late 30s)

I know there has been government legislation to say that you have got to have X% of women. That's my perception of affirmative action.

(Female, late 30s)

As with the Technico interviews, a number of respondents in Pharmsco indicated they felt very uncomfortable with the term 'affirmative action'.

Unfortunately, to me the term affirmative action has been ruined by the American experience, which means that 'in this organisation you will have to have three blacks, two Hispanics and five women, in a staff of thirty and I don't care whether they're the best person for the job, you'll have to have them.'

(Female, early 40s)

Interviewees had difficulty in operationalising the concept of affirmative action. Although they may understand that it seeks to achieve equal opportunity, how it is put into practice seems to be poorly understood.

Awareness of Equal Employment Opportunity and Harassment policy

With respect to interviewees' awareness of Pharmsco's Equal Employment Opportunity and Harassment policy, all of the interviewees from the Melbourne and Sydney offices were aware of the policy. Many interviewees mentioned the workshop on harassment they had to attend and all, except one, felt the workshop had been useful in helping to clarify what had previously been a very poorly understood concept; that is, sexual harassment.

I attended a meeting on that recently. It was good. Because there can be uncertainty about exactly what the laws and so forth are, I think it's good to hear exactly what are the rules and regulations. When is a compliment misconstrued — just a lot of uncertainty men might have, a lot of it was cleared up.

(Male, late 20s)

Pharmsco were very, very proactive in the sexual harassment area. They actually had all the employees educated very early. Some of the other groups are doing it more slowly.

(Female, late 30s)

In discussing the Equal Employment Opportunity and Harassment policy, a number mentioned that it was highly visible as it was displayed near the lifts and in tea/coffee rooms. This visibility was considered by many to be symbolic of the strong commitment in Pharmsco to equal opportunities and an harassment-free environment.

One interviewee indicated he used the policy in recruitment interviews.

I use it when we interview to employ. The first thing we do is let people know we have an equal opportunity policy and we strategically place this on the table when I interview. It's just a way to let people know what Pharmsco is about.

(Male, early 30s)

Three of the interviewees from the Sales area were not located within Pharmsco offices. Rather, they worked from home and their cars. Only one of the three indicated they had seen the policy, and that was because he had attended one of the harassment workshops conducted in New South Wales. These interviewees cited their lack of regular contact

with an office situation as a possible reason for their lack of awareness of such a policy. They indicated that although they thought such policies could well be visible in the state offices, because they were so infrequently in the office situation, they felt a little out of touch.

There's not much scope for seeing things that might be happening within Pharmsco because the only reason we go in to the Internat office in Queensland is to have a meeting. You don't go wandering around the office because it's not ours. And we don't even need to go to the warehouse now because all our stock is going to be sent direct to home so there's really no need to go into the warehouse.

(Female, late 40s)

The 'Vision and Values' and the 'Managing Diversity' booklets did not have nearly as high a level of awareness among interviewees as the EEO and Harassment policy. Although a number of interviewees indicated they had seen sections of the 'Vision and Values' booklet displayed in various sites around Internat, only two interviewees had heard of, or seen, the 'Managing Diversity' booklet. Whereas there was a general perception among interviewees that there was a real commitment within Pharmsco to an harassment-free environment, the sentiments expressed in the 'Vision and Values' and 'Managing Diversity' booklets were seen in a less favourable light.

Yes I've seen the Mission and Vision (sic) statements around the lifts and the coffee areas. For instance 'customers will be delighted and prefer to deal with Internat'. To me it's all glib TQM, 1990s style management stuff. To me it's just the sort of stuff you have up on the walls of a big corporate office but it doesn't mean anything.

(Male, early 30s)

We had a one hour meeting about (the Managing Diversity booklet) last year and at that stage it was still being finally worked. I haven't seen the final version. We had a printed copy. My manager basically flipped through it in an hour and 'We've done that. Let's get on with it. You'll hear more about it at some stage' and basically that was the end of that ...So the rhetoric doesn't always match what is occurring.

(Female, late 30s)

Awareness of affirmative action initiatives

When asked if they could nominate any actions Pharmsco had taken to improve employment opportunities for women, only six of the 19 interviewees (32 per cent) were able to nominate a policy. Of these, three mentioned the assistance with access to

the child care centre near the Internat offices in central Melbourne, two nominated the harassment workshops and one cited the flexible work arrangements he had observed when a woman in his department had returned to work after maternity leave.

Our divisional accountant has recently had a child, and she's come back to work on a part-time basis and does some work from home. I think she has a modem on her PC at home. So she's able to do some work at home. It obviously goes part way to making sure she isn't compromised in her career if that's important to her. So I think that's an example. I can't think of any other overt examples.

(Male, early 30s)

Others were not able to cite specific examples, but felt there must be some in place because of the number of women now moving into more senior roles.

I don't think it's as clear cut as 'this week we're having affirmative action' or 'we're introducing this program or so forth'. I can only look at evidence around me, in terms of women in management positions, what's happening in the area I'm working in and there doesn't seem to be any discrimination at all.

(Male, early 30s)

The level of awareness about the Personal Development Workshops for Women was mixed. Certainly awareness was highest amongst those working in the central offices, where 50 per cent of interviewees were aware of the workshops. Once again, the interviewees not located in offices in either Melbourne or Sydney did not seem to be aware of the policy. This was attributed to their lack of regular contact with an office environment. Communication with the sales force was seen to be the problem.

Among those who were aware of the Personal Development Workshops for women, reactions were quite positive. None, however, seemed to be aware that the workshops were now open to both women and men.

I think they are good. So many women get put down so much. Although I don't see it within the work environment I'm in, I'm sure within some of the more macho areas of Internat, like Plastico, I'm sure it's much harder for women in those situations. I think if they identify a particular need, and I think assertiveness training is a good example, that's fine.

(Male, late 30s)

I've heard of them. They've been very good, very helpful. There was one I did in being assertive — learning how to say no to people. It was all day. It was fantastic.

(Female, late 30s)

Has Pharmsco been active in improving employment opportunities for women?

More than half of the interviewees reported that Pharmsco had been actively promoting affirmative action. Of those not agreeing with this view, five felt they just didn't know and only two claimed that Pharmsco hadn't been active. A woman who didn't think Pharmsco had been particularly active argued that they should not be anyway, as it seems she perceived affirmative action as giving women an advantage over men.

I don't think we should be getting advantages over anybody else. I think we should all be treated as equals. I shouldn't be given any sort of favourite or extra attention because I'm female.

(Female, late 40s)

This indicates, once again, some misunderstanding about what affirmative action is.

Is there a Consultative Committee for affirmative action? Are employees consulted about affirmative action?

Although no respondents were able to report that consultation about affirmative action occurs in Pharmsco, a number of respondents reported that employees were generally consulted about matters affecting them.

We are consulted. It is a consultative approach that Pharmsco takes generally. There are issues I haven't been consulted on (1) because they can't talk to everybody and (2) I mightn't be the appropriate person to talk to. Generally speaking there is a consultative approach. Even if it is to the degree where a decision has been made and then is a case of how best do we manage this rather than 'this is the decision, like it or lump it'. That's not the way Pharmsco operates.

(Male, early 30s)

Management is committed to the concept of equal employment opportunity

There was generally a strong perception that management was committed to equal opportunities. To support this belief, many interviewees cited the high visibility of the Equal Employment Opportunity and Harassment Policy.

I have no doubt at all that it's expected of me that I will maintain a totally safe operating environment for my people here, that I will maintain a totally safe environment in terms of not polluting etc., and it's also expected of me that I will offer equal opportunity, not just to women, but to people of different races, creeds etc. I mean it's not a corny statement. I believe that is expected of me.

(Male, early 50s)

I'm not really keen on real macho chauvinist stuff and I haven't really detected anything that has upset me in the time I've been here or that I've thought was really sexist. So I've been quite happy about that and my perceptions of Pharmsco along those lines is that it is relatively proactive in trying to maintain that environment. I suppose I've thought that by seeing the EEO and Harassment Policy around and things like that the company is communicating that there is no mucking around here, which I think is good.

(Male, early 30s)

Others, however, suggested that altruism may not be the only motive driving senior management.

I think they are very, very, very committed, particularly if it looks as if someone is going to take them to court.

(Female, late 30s)

Another concern expressed by an interviewee about the Equal Employment Opportunity policy was that although the sentiments were admirable, in her view it was unlikely that any real effort had gone into translating the sentiments into practice.

I think at the top level, at this level up here in the clouds almost, it sounds good and makes them feel really comfortable and warm and fuzzy on the inside, and they're meeting all the requirements of good corporate citizenship, but they are not actually looking at the outcome. 'How are we going to put this in place? Are we actually going to put this in place? Are we just sort of fibbing?' I'm not saying that they are, but the questions 'How are we actually going to put it into place? What are the strategies?' just don't get asked.

(Female, late 30s)

Actually seeing women appointed to senior positions clearly affected a number of interviewees' perceptions of the commitment to EEO within Pharmsco. The appointments of a woman to head up the Corporate Advisory Group and another woman as the Divisional Manager for Advanced Sciences were mentioned by many as evidence of the commitment of management to equal opportunities for women and men.

Access to training

Responses to the questions concerning access to training indicated that most of the interviewees, both women and men, felt their access to training within Pharmsco was very good.

The training opportunities are excellent. You hear through Personnel about what's happening. There is an in-house training area. If there's something that

comes through there, they tend to let us know if there's something useful for the support staff.

(Female, early 40s)

Of the four who felt their training opportunities were somewhat limited, two attributed this to the budgetary constraints their section had been operating under over the previous two years.

With the cost cutting thing, to do any extra training or things like that, it's been 'No, forget it!'

(Female, early 40s)

Another issue which was raised in discussions concerning training opportunities was the variability of performance appraisal process. Interviewees all saw the discussion with one's line manager in the annual performance appraisal as a critical point for determining appropriate training opportunities. Many, however, were unconvinced of the value of the appraisal process in practice. A common comment was that some managers either did not spend the time or have the skills to effectively develop staff through the performance appraisal process.

I had a boss once who, when I came into his office to give him his mail one day, said 'Oh well, I've got to do that review. What do you think? I'm really happy, everything is going great'. So what could I say? With a boss with that sort of attitude, you are not going to be too inclined to say 'Can I make an appointment to see you about my performance review?'

(Female, late 30s)

I think the concept is excellent. In practice it's very difficult for a number of reasons. Most managers are not strong in HR skills because very few of us get that training on the way through. Certainly the company gives you training in different things but if you're talking about a science based area or an accounting based area or whatever, when you actually do your degrees or whatever, there is no HR content.

(Male, early 50s)

Opportunities for transfer or promotion

As in Technico, the responses from the women and men concerning their opportunities for transfers or promotions were very similar. The younger women interviewed clearly felt their opportunities to advance in professional roles were the same as their male peers. That responsibility for career development was seen to be the responsibility of the individual, was also reinforced by Pharmsco employees.

Pharmsco makes it pretty clear that it's up to you. So if you want to get somewhere, and you really push, you will get there. If you go and do outside study and get some more qualifications and then really push to get a job, if you want it bad enough, you'll probably get it'

(Female, late 30s)

Once again, the internal advertising of positions was mentioned by some interviewees to support the claim that there are equal opportunities available for women and men for career development. Others raised concerns about the equity of the internal advertising.

Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's not so good because it depends on the person advertising. Sometimes they already have a predetermined person for that job, so it's pointless advertising.

(Female, early 30s)

One interviewee raised her concern about the opportunities available for women within the manufacturing area. The gender segregation between the manufacturing area and the packing area is, she felt, indicative of the rhetoric about equality of opportunity not matching the reality. Although there had been a small number of men move into the traditional female area of packing, no women had penetrated the manufacturing area.

There are no women in the manufacturing areas. None at all. I was actually speaking to someone the other day about it because the men in the manufacturing areas are generally better paid because of their career structure, and traditionally the men have been hesitant to have women in the area because they cite the old manual handling scenario. So women have just been overlooked. The pay is \$20 per week more in manufacturing, plus it's far more varied and you are actually producing products as opposed to just packing them. You're at the beginning of the process as opposed to the end.

(Female, late 30s)

Pharmsco's standing relative to other companies

When asked about their perception of Pharmsco relative to other companies with respect to women's employment opportunities, all of the interviewees felt Pharmsco was a relatively strong employer. The comment was made, however, that representation of women in the pharmaceutical industry was generally higher than in other industries, so that Pharmsco was not unique within the industry in having women in senior management positions.

From the responses of those interviewed, Pharmsco appears to be generally perceived as a reasonable employer in terms of opportunities available to all staff. The recent appointments of two women into senior management positions were pointed to by some as evidence of the opportunities for women to access key decision-making roles. Younger women, in general, had a more positive perception of Pharmsco as an employer than older women. A concern that was raised in Pharmsco and which had also been mentioned in Technico was that although women in professional roles may be moving into more senior positions, women in the production area were still segregated into the lower paying domain of packing. There is still no evidence of the breaking down of the traditional male domain of manufacturing. These observations would seem to support O'Donnell and Hall (1988) and Poiner and Wills (1991) claims about the limited effectiveness of company-sponsored affirmative action policies in improving opportunities for all women.

There was a very high level of awareness among interviewees of the Equal Employment Opportunity and Harassment policy, but less was known about the policies expressed in the 'Vision and Values' and 'Managing Diversity' booklets. Workshops had been conducted detailing the EEO and Harassment policy which on-site employees were required to attend, whereas for the Managing Diversity policy, a booklet had been distributed. These various forms of delivery and the corresponding varying levels of awareness of the policies would suggest that delivery of policies may have an important effect on the degree to which the messages are absorbed by employees.

7.5 The Healthco Interviews

As mentioned in Chapter 6, there were 517 employees at Healthco when the interviews were conducted. A random sample of 43 employees (every twelfth person on the telephone list) was sought for interviews to discuss their understanding of the affirmative action policies within Healthco. Of the 43 employees identified, 25 were women and 18 were men. Of the 41 able to be contacted, 21 agreed to be interviewed

(14 women and 7 men); this represented a 56% and 39% response rate of the samples respectively. Interviewees came from a range of occupational levels across each of the Divisions. The distribution of interviewees across Divisions is seen in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2: Divisional distribution of Healthco interviewees

| | Number in sample | Number of respondents | % response rate |
|------------|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Division 1 | 24 | 15 | 63 |
| Division 2 | 11 | 2 | 18 |
| Division 3 | 4 | 2 | 50 |
| Division 4 | 2 | 1 | 50 |
| Division 5 | 1 | 1 | 100 |
| Division 6 | 1 | 0 | 0 |

The response rates varied across divisions. Divisions 1 and 2 are the largest divisions of Healthco in Sydney. Divisions 3 to 6 have relatively small numbers of employees in Australia. A noticeable feature was the very low response rate of employees from Division 2 which covers the manufacturing plant. It was not clear why this was the case. This may reflect the more structured nature of their work environments, making a 40 minute interview difficult to attend. Or it could reflect a general feeling that affirmative action is not relevant to those in the manufacturing area. The latter suggestion was confirmed to some extent by the comments from interviewees about the difference between 'manufacturing' and the rest of Healthco which are reported in the following sections.

Are women disadvantaged in the workplace generally?

There was a significant difference in the pattern of responses to this question between women and men. Women overwhelmingly agreed with this statement — 13 out of the 14 women.

Yes , I think they are. From the point of view that in life in general there are certain attitudes and roles that tend to be attributed to women and those sorts of attitudes don't necessarily stop when a person clocks into a work environment. So there are some disadvantages, depending on what type of role a woman is in.

(Female, early 30s)

Of the five interviewees who felt women were not disadvantaged or they didn't know, four were men. In fact, those men who claimed women were not disadvantaged in the workplace argued that women, in their view, were actually better off than men.

No, I don't think they are disadvantaged. If anything there is a bit of over-reaction from some people trying to make sure women do get more than their fair share.

(Male, late 30s)

If anything, I think it's gone too far the other way, that's my perception. That holds for most minority groups as well, especially in the government jobs. It seems to be fairly biased now in terms of minorities; they seem to have greater opportunities than the majority. As for women, I think pretty much the same way.

(Male, mid 30s)

Some of the men interviewed indicated a certain ambivalence about women with young children working.

I've no problems at all with women working. I'm sometimes confused about what individuals' goals are and how the role of the family fits in with women working. Sometimes I'm not sure whether people are sure what they want. They want to work and they want a family and to me, sometimes you have to do one thing or the other for some period of time. I have absolutely no objection to them working. I think it's a good thing. I think it's healthy. All I comment is that sometimes with individuals I wonder whether they really know what they want.

(Male, early 40s)

If men perceive women as having the same opportunities as men, then it may suggest that policies to improve employment opportunities for women could be seen by them as unnecessary.

Are women disadvantaged in Healthco specifically?

The women's responses to this question indicated a perception of Healthco as a more equitable environment than the workplace generally. When talking about the career opportunities available for women at Healthco, 10 interviewees qualified their comments with the observation that they saw important differences between the environments of Division 1 and Division 2. Although they felt there may be equal opportunities prevailing in Division 1, they felt that the traditional attitudes prevailing in Division 2 (the manufacturing area) and the nature of the work there, may disadvantage women.

There are probably going to be different opinions here and in the plant. Recognise that they are separate divisions and managed separately. I think there are two different cultures in Division 1 and Division 2. ...If you look at the opportunities Healthco gives its people, out of Division 1, they will offer people opportunities based on how well they do....In Division 2, I don't think there are any women at supervisory level or above. This may be cultural, or it may be management, or it may be historical, or it might have something to do with types of jobs, but I don't think there is a woman in a management position in Division 2 at all.

(Male, early 30s)

Employees from each of the three companies repeated O'Donnell and Hall's (1988) and Poiner and Wills' (1991) concern that women in the manufacturing divisions were not benefiting from the affirmative action initiatives within the companies.

What do you understand by the term affirmative action?

The notion of affirmative action appeared to be well understood. Of the 21 interviewees, 15 were able to provide a reasonable description of affirmative action. For instance,

It's a kind of policy, a program put in place to make sure people are given opportunities on their merits not on whether they are male or female.

(Male, late 30s)

Basically the way I understand affirmative action is that women are not discriminated against on the basis of their sex. That it's an equal playing field...so that whether you are male or female is irrelevant.

(Female, early 30s)

As with the Technico and Pharmsco interviews, some respondents had difficulty with the term.

I've always felt the term doesn't mean anything. Affirmative action is a non-term because it doesn't come into anything.

(Male, early 30s)

What did stand out in the discussion of affirmative action was when respondents were asked to nominate any affirmative action policies Healthco had implemented, only four respondents could do so. All four were women, and two of those were from the Human Resources Administration area. As with interviewees in the previous two companies, it seems respondents had difficulty in operationalising the concept of affirmative action.

I'm not really sure ... I don't really understand the programs and how they are implemented.

(Female, early 20s)

I probably couldn't nominate a specific affirmative action policy for you...Other than basically being aware that in today's environment one doesn't typecast people or jobs.

(Male, late 30s)

A number of interviewees alluded to memos that come from the Human Resources Administration area concerning employment matters which they acknowledged may contain some information about affirmative action, but as they are so 'technical', they are simply filed in a 'manual' and left unread.

There are probably guidelines I have in my office which have been circulated and I've just filed them.

(Male, mid 30s)

These things are around — but it's like anything that's a policy or procedure. You can make a written statement about it but unless you 'walk the talk' it just gets filed on the shelf regardless of whether its affirmative action, occupational health and safety or anything else.

(Male, early 30s)

These comments echo those made by employees in the previous two companies that the distribution of policies through pamphlet form may not actually be an effective means of 'communicating' policies to employees.

When asked to comment on nominated affirmative action policies, such as the restructuring of career paths for administrative assistants and a child care centre, a number of respondents commented that they did not see those policies as affirmative action.

Restructuring of career paths for administrative assistants:

That's tough. Because they all happen to be women and that's our society that men just don't seem to go for jobs as secretaries. So you can say it sounds like affirmative action ... but it came from the administrative assistants themselves. (An individual) put forward a proposal, put it to HR and to the Managing Director, got all the administrative assistants together and worked out a plan. I see that as empowerment and self-determination, because it came from them rather than the company.

(Male, early 30s)

Child care centre:

You describe that as an affirmative action policy, I never saw it as that. I saw that as an assistance to employees generally to help them in working for Healthco — to remove the barriers of getting to work, organising yourself, removing the worries behind balancing work and personal life.

(Male, early 30s)

Although she did not mention them specifically as affirmative action policies, one interviewee nominated the award restructuring in Division 2 and the move to working in teams as processes that have significantly improved the opportunities for women to develop within Division 2.

What we have is because we are responsible for equipment, we're responsible for our outputs, our efficiencies, and you work as a team, it's a lot easier to go into how things operate. I think they realise we can have a go sometimes and sometimes we can achieve what they thought we couldn't.

There was definitely an attitude, We were never allowed to pick up a screwdriver — a Philip's head or Alan keys. Now we can.

...The environment is changing, incorporating equal opportunity, but you don't notice it so much. Or you don't look at it as that until you think back 5 years ago and think 'gee, we wouldn't be doing that 5 years ago. We wouldn't have had this opportunity'.

(Female, early 40s)

Has Healthco been active in improving employment opportunities for women?

Only two interviewees felt Healthco had not been active in implementing affirmative action. Although ten stated that Healthco had been active, a number of interviewees tempered their responses with the observation that this was because of where they saw women in the company, not because they could specifically point to any affirmative action activities.

From what I can gather, they seem to have done a lot about affirmative action, but they haven't told me about it. I've always heard since I've started (it's only hearsay though) how good Healthco is with women's issues. I think they obviously do it, but I don't hear about it.

(Female, late 20s)

Another comment tempering respondents agreement with this statement was that Healthco seemed to be more active three years ago, when there was a specific individual in Human Resources Administration who was very proactive in promoting

affirmative action. As well, the differences between Division 1 and Division 2 were raised.

We have two divisions — Division 1 and Division 2 at the back. They are like two separate companies. They'll argue that they're not, but it's the way it is. Even the buildings are different. Everything is different. A lot more appears to go on down here (Division 1) and very little goes on up the back (Division 2).
(Male, mid 30s)

Is there a Consultative Committee for affirmative action? Are employees consulted about affirmative action?

The Consultative Committee for Affirmative Action appeared to have a fairly low profile. Sixteen out of the 21 interviewees either did not think there was a Committee, or just didn't know. Of those who were aware there was a Committee, most commented that it had not been very active in the past three years.

I don't know that they are very good at getting feedback from the field, but issues like this I can say a definite 'No'.
(Female late 20s)

Although there was little agreement with the statement that employees were consulted about affirmative action, some interviewees volunteered the information that they had read an occasional article on affirmative action in Healthco's in-house magazine. They did not consider this consultation, however, because it was not a two-way process.

One interviewee made the following comment:

It's certainly not been high profile. But should it be? That could potentially build up resentment, particularly in the Division 1 where the majority of staff in certain areas are women.
(Female, late 20s)

Management is committed to the concept of equal employment opportunity?

The strong perception of management being committed to equal opportunities was not only evident in responses to this question, but also in comments volunteered throughout the interviews. Eighteen of the 21 interviewees agreed with the statement and the other three claimed they couldn't make a judgement.

From the management I have dealt with and the way they have reacted, I would have to say yes. They are very sensitive to the issue and I think they, even if they

don't eagerly tread down that path, are very cautious from that point of view. So I can see some supportive moves from management.

(Female, early 30s)

In the absence of anyone saying otherwise, yes. I think that when people talk about other people going for jobs and the concept of whether it's a woman or a man going for it, never gets asked. I think it is an accepted fact that Healthco applies that principle. Nobody comes and says they are 'committed to this or that'. I just think it is accepted.

(Male, early 30s)

Access to training

When discussing their access to training opportunities at both the professional and personal levels, there was an overwhelming response from both women and men that there was ample opportunity to develop through both internal and external training. Access to training was not, however, related to affirmative action in any of the interviewees' responses.

There are a lot of personal development courses. I've gone on a lot of training courses in the past and they're not really related to affirmative action. It's mostly self-development and leadership training; handling difficult people, career tracks — there are some good courses through Fred Pryor. There are all sorts of personal development courses held out of house. The internal training and development group focuses more on medical sales and market training, and they've also done some team training, like the Excellence in Management program where they get the managers off-site.

(Female, early 30s)

You could work your business life, so long as everything got done, you could go to business courses every day of the year so long as you had the budget and everything got done. There's that much available.

(Male, early 30s)

Whether the budget is available appears to be a critical factor. Although interviewees from Division 1 felt there was no constraint on the training they could undergo, interviewees (both women and men) from the other divisions felt that, in tight years, the training budget would be the first area in which cost cutting would occur.

Opportunities for transfer or promotion

When asked about their opportunities for transfers or promotions, the responses from the women and men were very similar. A common comment was that if one wanted to

move to a different area or expand one's duties it was very much up to the individual to let their line manager know this in their career discussions.

There are all sort of opportunities for those that are in the same sort of situation (as me). It's just a matter of putting your hand up and saying 'I'd like a change', and you could go somewhere else in the world if you really wanted to do that.

(Male, early 30s)

I have quite regular, fairly open discussions with my manager. He knows that I am motivated by challenges, by growth and that I need to feel I am learning and developing. I'm not motivated by money and he knows that and has made a point of enhancing my job in different areas whenever I have said I feel I've got a handle on this, give me more.

(Female, early 30s)

As with the Technico and Pharmsco interviews, the internal advertising of positions was mentioned by a number of interviewees to support their claim that there were plenty of opportunities available for career development for women and men. A certain scepticism was expressed by others.

I think there are cases where a job has been posted and people already know who is getting the position, or in some cases it may not go up and somebody has already got the job — the key candidate. And people recognise that and think 'why is it being advertised?'

(Male, early 30s)

There was a ruling that all jobs up to a certain Hay Point level had to be placed on the noticeboard and there would be no restrictions on people applying for it. ...I think it's good, but you still have the political appointments where people go through the motions, and there were other people who were always destined for that position. That's life. I don't think there is much anybody can do about it. But generally speaking it's quite positive.

(Male, early 30s)

This suggests that although a formal policy may be in place to address a particular problem (in this case access to other positions in the organisation) in practice the policy may be circumvented.

People in the company are supportive of equal employment opportunities

In trying to illustrate her belief that there was a supportive atmosphere in Healthco, the following observation was made by a woman.

In advertising positions, they would never say that it was only male or females, you know. I would be absolutely confident that a handicapped person or Black person or a strict Muslim or Jew or whatever, could apply for a job in this company and would be judged on merit. Just the way the documents are put

together, they're very careful about — I mean, I know myself, I always write 'he' in my documents and my manager will always correct me to put 'he or she'. You know, these are little points, but...

(Female, mid 30s)

Although the majority of interviewees (15) felt that most people in Healthco would be supportive of efforts to achieve equal employment opportunities, some did say there were still a few men with very traditional ideas about women's roles, but that these men were definitely in the minority.

I think the younger ones would agree, but there's a couple there that I don't think would get excited over it. They are a bit chauvinistic. But there's only a couple. I'd say the majority would agree with it.

(Female, early 20s)

Most interviewees felt that their peers would support affirmative action efforts, although the actual strength of this support is not clear.

I don't think 100% of people go out of their way to say 'let me see how we can make sure we have 50% of people as women in our organisation'. I don't think that occurs but I equally don't believe that people aren't supportive. I don't think there are people out there saying this is a bad thing. I think people — if you are looking at all levels — just go about their business on a day-to-day basis and don't really think about it too much. If the opportunity arises and one of the candidates is a woman then I think it is accepted as part of day-to-day life and nobody fights it. If you say supportive is going out of their way, I don't think people do that either.

(Male, late 30s)

I don't think there's any resistance but I honestly feel that a lot of the time maybe a lot of us could be a little bit more proactive about what's happening and we're not. It seems you're not until it affects you directly and then you get involved and by that stage you're too late. But I think that a lot of people still feel that okay we know that at the moment we've got an affirmative action plan or program or whatever you want to call it, and to a certain degree, a certain extent it is implemented, but there's still a lot of areas where it falls off and a lot of people still feel may be dissatisfied in terms of (we're supposed to be) equal opportunity employment etc, but sometimes it doesn't seem like we are.

(Female, mid 20s)

Healthco's standing relative to other companies

When asked about their perception of Healthco relative to other companies with respect to women's employment opportunities, 20 out of the 21 interviewees felt Healthco was above average as an employer. The one dissenting opinion was from a man. The

women were all in agreement that they felt their opportunities within Healthco were better than in other companies they knew about or had worked for.

Compared to where I've worked before, it's really good. If you have a family, they are quite understanding. I've had no problem with them up to this stage.
(Female, early 20s)

Healthco are one of the greatest companies in the world, and I say this in all honesty, to work for. I have enjoyed it. It is the best job I have ever had, without any doubt at all. At Healthco, they really look after you. If you're good, and they want to keep you, they really look after you.

(Female, late 30s)

When I came here I thought 'what a wonderful company'. I worked for a lot of dreadful companies and I thought this was great and they seem to be moving ahead all the time. Trying to be at the forefront of whatever is going on. It's very progressive so I don't see any reason why they would have fallen down since I was last out on the market. So I'm staying here.

(Female, late 30s)

Although I didn't ask a specific question on Sharing Responsibility for Success (SRS), ten of the interviewees referred to this concept when trying to illustrate the environment which characterises Healthco and why 'affirmative action' as such may not have a high profile.

...the general philosophy of SRS — their word for empowerment. Fostering within the workplace a shared vision but also an understanding that the company accepts people's ideas and a lot of good ideas come from bottom up rather than top down.

(Male, early 30s)

I think our current initiative of Sharing Responsibility for Success (SRS) is trying to just make everybody — it doesn't matter who you are or where you work — responsible for the outcomes. Trying to get people more involved in their work, in their decisions, more accountable, enjoy their work more. So whilst that was certainly not set up as an affirmative action initiative, the spin-offs are very much where everyone gets an opportunity to input.

(Female, mid 40s)

From the responses of those interviewed, Healthco appears to be perceived as an exceptional employer in terms of equal opportunities across all staff. The issue that stood out most from the interviews is the difficulty interviewees had in operationalising the concept of affirmative action. Although Healthco has implemented a number of affirmative action policies over the years; for example, removing gender bias from employment conditions, ensuring training opportunities are available equally to both women and men, restructuring the career paths of administrative assistants, advertising

positions internally, and discussed others, such as the child care centre, most interviewees did not perceive these as affirmative action policies. When asked specifically about such actions they often said things like ‘this is just how Healthco does things’. They did not label them as affirmative action, nor did they seem aware that Healthco had a Committee responsible for developing affirmative action policies.

7.6 Summary

The interviews with employees sought to explore their understanding of affirmative action, their experiences of their company’s policies and their perceptions of their employment opportunities. This qualitative approach was an important step in enhancing our understanding of the impact of affirmative action in the workplace. Although each of the case study organisations was unique, there appeared to be clear similarities among the responses from interviewees in each of the organisations. In summary, these similarities are:

1. The term ‘affirmative action’ had mixed responses in each of the organisations. In Healthco, the term was generally well-understood, but in the other two organisations it was less well-understood. Even for those respondents who seemed to understand that affirmative action seeks to achieve equal opportunity, how that is put into practice seems to be poorly understood. Reservations about the term itself — that it was ‘discriminatory’ — were expressed by interviewees in all three organisations.
2. Few respondents could nominate specific affirmative action initiatives taken in their organisation. It seems that the affirmative action programs did not really have a high profile as such in the organisations. Although many of the affirmative action policies had been documented in pamphlet form and distributed to employees, very little awareness was expressed. When I named the affirmative action policies, however, almost all of the policies were generally thought to be a good idea by interviewees. The exceptions were the Women's Forums in Technico and the

Women's Workshops in Pharmsco. These initiatives were seen by some interviewees as violating 'equal opportunity' and giving women an advantage over men.

3. All interviewees felt their access to training for both personal and professional development was exemplary. There were no differences in the views put forth by women and men concerning their training opportunities. With respect to opportunities for transfer or promotion, women and men also seemed to have similar views.
4. There was a general perception that women were disadvantaged in the work force generally. However, most interviewees perceived women to be less disadvantaged in their organisation than in the work force generally. Most women felt their employment opportunities to be greater within their organisation than in other organisations.
5. Management was generally perceived to be committed to the principle of equal opportunity. In each of the organisations, however, at least one interviewee pointed to legislative requirements to explain this commitment, rather than it being spontaneously generated. Similarly, there was a perception by most interviewees that their colleagues were supportive of the principle of equal opportunity.
6. There was very little difference between the perceptions of younger women and men about their employment opportunities. Almost all of the younger interviewees pointed out that career advancement was very much up to the individual. Women over 35, however, tended to be less positive about career opportunities than younger women.
7. Some men in each of the organisations expressed concern about the limited time and effort women can put into their jobs, because of their family responsibilities.

These issues emerging from the interviews guided the range of questions included in the surveys distributed to the larger sample of employees in each of the case study organisations. These surveys are discussed in the following chapter.