

Chapter 8

Employees' Perceptions of Affirmative Action:

The Quantitative Approach

...I hadn't heard the term affirmative action before so I wasn't sure what it meant.

(Male, late 30s, Pharmsco)

8.1 Introduction

The interviews conducted in the case study companies and described and discussed in Chapter 7 provided some information about employees' understanding of affirmative action in general and the practice of it within their companies. As well, the interviews made it possible to probe employees' perceptions of their employment opportunities. Understanding these perceptions is important as they provide some insight into how employees view their work environment and what might be driving their behaviour.

The next stage of the study, the quantitative survey research, was based on the issues which emerged from the interviews. In this stage of the study, I sought to quantify the extent to which the views expressed in the interviews were supported by employees more generally. In the following sections, some of the problems in developing the questionnaires are detailed and the responses to the surveys are presented. Common themes emerging from the interviews and surveys across the companies are explored in the final section of the chapter.

8.2 Questionnaires

The questionnaires developed for each of the case study organisations were based on the issues raised by employees in the interviews. As can be seen from the interview summaries presented in section 7.6, there were issues common across the three

organisations. Initially, these common issues were used to develop questionnaires which contained a number of core questions common to the three companies, with some additional questions included in each relating to issues which had been raised by interviewees but which were specific to the company. As I was working with staff from the Human Resources or Personnel units in each case, and approval from senior management had to be obtained to proceed, the questionnaires had to be modified in each company because of concerns each had with the initial form of the questionnaire. For instance, because the Women's Workshops in Pharmsco had now been extended to include men, the Human Resources staff insisted a question relating to these be omitted. It was not possible, then, to ascertain Pharmsco employees' views of this 'temperamental' policy.

These modifications meant that the number of questions in which the wording was identical were reduced. These amendments did limit the extent to which inter-company comparisons can be made, but this was unavoidable as approval to go ahead with the survey was dependent on the Human Resources/Personnel staff agreeing with the form of the questions.

8.2.1 Healthco's withdrawal from study

It was at this point of consultation about the final form of the questionnaire that a serious problem occurred with the Healthco survey. Having circulated the initial report I had submitted on the Healthco interviews, the contact person in the Human Resources area with whom I had been dealing (the person nominated on the report to the Affirmative Action Agency as the affirmative action coordinator) liaised with other staff from the Human Resources area about the form of the questionnaire. Following their suggestions, amendments were made to the questionnaire. Final approval for the survey had to be granted by the Managing Director of Healthco Australia. He referred the questionnaire to the Board of Directors for comment. Their response was one of concern that an 'affirmative action' survey should be distributed to employees. They argued that as 'affirmative action' had connotations of positive discrimination in favour

of women, the term had been deliberately avoided in all communications to employees within Healthco. Instead 'equal employment opportunity' was the term favoured within Healthco. As such, in their eyes it would be 'creating trouble' to survey employees about their perceptions of affirmative action.

In response, I offered to amend the survey to omit any reference to 'affirmative action' and to focus on employees' perceptions of their employment opportunities. They did not, however, wish to progress with the survey at that time. As the process within Healthco for seeking approval for the survey had been so drawn out (more than 6 months), by the time the final decision was made not to proceed with the survey (18 January 1995), there was insufficient time for me to pursue another company as a case study. The quantitative component of this study is thus confined to Technico and Pharmsco.

8.2.2 The final form of the Technico and Pharmsco questionnaires

In the final form of the questionnaires, there were 34 questions common to both Technico and Pharmsco. There were an additional 12 questions included in the Technico survey and six questions in the Pharmsco survey.

Both of the questionnaires involved a series of statements for which respondents were allowed five possible responses: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree. The degree of differentiation within scales has generated considerable debate (Moser & Kalton, 1971). Important considerations in the selection of the number of scale points for measurement are the degree to which individuals can differentiate attitudes and the loss of information when scale points are limited. Moser and Kalton (1971: 359) warn 'if the scale is divided too finely the respondents will be unable to place themselves, and if too coarsely the scale will not differentiate between them'. As a result, scales of between five and seven responses are most frequently employed. The choice of an odd number of points in the scale (in this case 5 points) allowed respondents the option of a neutral category, rather than forcing them to agree or

disagree with a statement for which they may have had no opinion. To ensure respondents considered each item carefully, rather than responding automatically to all items in the same way, the items were expressed in various forms to force reverse order of the scale.

Although the response rates from Technico and Pharmsco (42 and 53 per cent respectively) were relatively healthy for a mail out survey (Foddy, 1993), response selectivity bias is a problem which cannot be overlooked. As Singleton *et al.* (1993: 265)note

Certain groups of persons, such as those with little writing ability and those not interested in the topic, would be less likely to respond to a mailed questionnaire than a personal interview request.

Clearly then, there are limitations to generalising findings of the survey respondents to all employees of the companies.

The responses to the questionnaires are discussed in the following sections. A point to note here is that my initial discussions of the responses to both surveys are concerned with describing the general trends emerging from the responses; in particular, are there differences in how women and men perceive affirmative action, their work environments and their employment opportunities? As the sample sizes in both companies were not sufficiently large, I felt reporting of significance testing across all the statements could have clouded the general picture emerging from the survey responses. Where trends did appear, the statistical significance of these are discussed in the latter sections of the chapter.

8.3 Technico responses

While there were more than 2 000 employees within Technico at the time of the survey, it was agreed with the Human Resources staff that a sample of 500 employees (approximately 25 per cent) would be sent a questionnaire through the internal mail. Employees received a covering letter explaining the purpose of the survey, instructions

to complete the questionnaire, assurances of the confidentiality of responses and a reply-paid envelope addressed to the University of New England, making it clear that the responses were not being mailed to Pharmsco.

There were 209 questionnaires returned which represents an overall return rate of 42 per cent (114 women and 95 men responded to the questionnaire). Table 8.1 shows the numbers of women and men responding across age groups.

Table 8.1: Gender and Age Distribution of Technico Respondents¹

Age	Women	Men	Total
<25	15	5	20
25–34	53	37	90
35–44	31	29	60
45–54	14	19	33
55+	1	5	6
Total	114	95	209

The largest category for both women and men respondents was in the age group 25–34 years old. In Table 8.2 the responses to the survey questions are presented by gender. The most significant features of the responses are discussed in the following sections. See Appendix 7a for a breakdown of levels of agreement with the statements by age and gender.

Women's opportunities

There were four statements which sought to gauge respondents' views on women's participation in the workplace. The first two statements concerned how respondents viewed women's opportunities in the workplace generally and in Technico specifically. The responses indicated there was some discrepancy between men's and women's perceptions of women's opportunities. More men (61 per cent) than women (28 per

¹ It would have been useful to compare the age distribution of respondents against the age distribution of the company as a whole, to see if the respondents were representative of the company. However, as the only employment figures I had access to were from the public reports the company submitted to the Affirmative Action Agency, and the age distribution of employees is not included in these, I was unable to do so.

Table 8.2: Technico Responses by Gender (percent)

	<u>Women (N=114)</u>			<u>Men (N=95)</u>		
	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
<i>Women's Opportunities</i>						
1. In the workplace generally, women have the same opportunities as men.	28	13	59	61	8	31
2. In Technico, women have the same opportunities as men.	38	20	42	82	6	12
6. Women can't put in as much time and effort to paid work as men can.	18	8	75	19	9	72
8. Women should have access to the same jobs as men do.	91	4	5	92	1	7
<i>Affirmative Action</i>						
3. Affirmative action is a term that has no meaning for me.	23	27	50	7	22	71
4. Affirmative action involves setting quotas for how many women should be employed in particular jobs.	18	29	53	25	18	57
5. Affirmative action seeks to eliminate discrimination against women and to promote equal opportunity for women at work.	78	18	4	77	11	13
10. Technico has an affirmative action program in place.	65	28	7	81	19	0
11. Technico has an Affirmative Action Consultative Committee.	34	62	4	33	65	2
12. I have seen articles in the in-house newsletter, <i>The Communicator</i> , about Technico's affirmative action policies.	43	42	15	66	24	9
<i>Knowledge of Specific Affirmative Action Policies</i>						
13. I know about Technico's maternity leave policy.	74	13	13	68	9	22
14. I approve of Technico's maternity leave policy.	52	31	18	54	41	5
15. I know about Technico's paternity leave policy.	50	21	29	43	23	34
16. I approve of Technico's paternity leave policy.	48	47	4	32	58	11
17. I know about Technico's sexual harassment policy.	87	4	9	95	2	3
18. I approve of Technico's sexual harassment policy.	81	16	4	72	22	6
23. The internal training programs I have attended have included reference to the affirmative action legislation.	25	32	44	26	34	40
44. I approve of the People's (Women's) Forums.	73	22	5	60	24	16
45. I think the People's (Women's) Forums are discriminatory against men.	22	27	51	33	42	25

Table 8.2: Technico Responses by Gender (percent) (contd)

	<u>Women (N=114)</u>			<u>Men (N=95)</u>		
	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
46. I think the Career Development Library and service in Technico are a good idea.	72	27	1	75	23	2
47. I have used the Career Development Library.	34	16	50	15	13	73
<i>Flexibility</i>						
19. Companies should provide assistance with child care for employees.	85	6	9	65	23	12
20. Companies should provide flexible working hours to help people who have family responsibilities where practical.	93	5	2	98	1	1
22. The company culture allows for flexible work arrangements some days because of family responsibilities.	65	19	16	72	15	14
<i>Equal Opportunities</i>						
21. In Technico, we are encouraged to speak out and say what we don't like about the workplace.	53	22	25	58	16	26
25. In my experience, the internal advertising of positions has been a fair process.	38	23	39	64	15	21
26. Technico is open to women filling positions based on their proven ability.	55	23	22	86	8	5
28. In Technico, people are judged purely on their skills and experience, regardless of whether they are female or male.	36	33	31	58	19	23
29. In Technico, there is still a feeling that top positions should be held by men.	63	22	15	39	33	28
30. In Technico, people generally support equal opportunity for women.	60	28	12	88	8	3
31. I think the recruitment processes in Technico are fair for women and men.	52	24	25	79	12	9
32. I think the promotion procedures in Technico are fair for women and men.	28	39	33	67	22	11
33. In Technico, women and men have equal access to training across all divisions.	68	19	12	80	11	9
34. I am satisfied with the performance appraisal process.	40	25	34	38	25	37
35. In Technico, women have to work harder than men at the same level.	44	25	31	6	13	81
36. Most senior managers in Technico are committed to equal employment opportunity.	41	32	26	51	41	8
37. My family situation has been raised when discussing further opportunities in the company.	29	23	48	18	20	62

Table 8.2: Technico Responses by Gender (percent) (contd)

	<u>Women (N=114)</u>			<u>Men (N=95)</u>		
	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
40. I have discussions with my manager about my career development.	64	9	27	67	13	20
41. I feel my discussions with my manager about my career development are useful.	54	21	25	56	21	23
38. There are a number of women in senior management positions in Technico.	29	22	49	29	21	49
39. Women in senior management positions in Technico are there on their merits.	51	39	10	48	42	9
9. In Technico, women working in traditionally male areas are readily accepted.	45	29	26	78	11	12
27. In Technico, women now have greater opportunity to advance than men.	11	33	56	23	29	47
24. Maternity leave makes it very difficult to manage positions.	36	35	29	43	37	
42. I would like to be in senior management one day.	45	28	27	65	23	12
43. It is realistic for me to think I will one day be in senior management in Technico.	36	27	37	55	29	16

cent) agreed with the statement 'in the workplace generally, women have the same opportunities as men'. Men younger than 35 years old agreed most frequently with this statement (74 per cent). Women's responses were consistent across age groups.

When asked about Technico specifically, more men (82 per cent) than women (38 per cent) agreed with the statement that women have the same opportunities as men. Men older than 35 years agreed most frequently with this statement (85 per cent) while, once again, for women the levels of agreement were consistent across age groups. The men in Technico have, it seems, a more positive view of the opportunities available to women in the workplace generally, and in Technico specifically, than the women in Technico.

There had been some concern expressed by a small number of Technico interviewees that women were not as reliable as men in the workplace, because of their greater family responsibilities, which made them unable to devote as much time and effort to paid work as their male counterparts. To ascertain if these sentiments were common among employees — as stereotypic perceptions such as these can influence opportunities available to individuals (Burton, 1989) — the statement 'women can't put in as much time and effort into paid work as men do' was included in the Technico questionnaire. A similar percentage of women and men (18 and 19 per cent respectively) agreed with this view. The women's responses were consistent across age groups. There was, however, a noticeable difference in the responses of men older than 35 years and those younger than 35 years. Twenty eight per cent of the male respondents older than 35 years agreed with this statement, but only 7 per cent of men younger than 35 years did. As men older than 35 years are more likely to be in supervisory and management positions, these perceptions could impact on women's opportunities. If women are not seen to be able to put in as much time to their work as their male counterparts, their promotional opportunities may be limited.

The responses from women and men to the statement 'women should have access to the same jobs as men do' were very similar. Ninety one per cent of women agreed with

this statement and 92 per cent of men did. Responses were consistent across age groups. A cautionary note in interpreting this high level of agreement is that it is not possible to adequately measure the difference between true endorsement of this principle and mere acquiescence to it. As Taylor (1991: 180) points out, the distinction is particularly difficult when 'the principle is so prevalent that it confronts people as a fact — a given'. Not openly condoning discriminatory views has become more prevalent with the growing awareness of the anti-discrimination legislation.

Understanding of affirmative action

The next six statements concerned respondents' understanding of affirmative action. Findings from the Macquarie University studies (Macquarie University, 1991; 1992, and 1993) indicated that knowledge of specific aspects of the affirmative action legislation was quite low. The earlier discussions with interviewees had indicated that the term affirmative action appeared to be poorly understood within Technico. Twenty three per cent of women and seven per cent of men agreed with the statement 'affirmative action is a term that has no meaning for me'. A further 27 per cent of women and 22 per cent of men were undecided. In total 50 per cent of women respondents and nearly 30 per cent of men respondents indicated some problems in understanding what affirmative action means.

When faced with the incorrect statement 'affirmative action involves setting quotas for how many women should be employed in particular jobs', 47 per cent of women and 43 per cent of men either agreed or were undecided. Men older than 35 were the group most likely to agree with this statement (28 per cent). That there was some confusion among employees as to what affirmative action represents had been evident from interviewees' responses (see Chapter 7) too.

One of the statements from the Macquarie studies was included in this section ('affirmative action seeks to eliminate discrimination against women and to promote equal opportunity for women at work') to see if there were similarities between the

findings from the Macquarie studies (where only two thirds of respondents agreed with the statement) and this study concerning respondents' understanding of affirmative action. A similar percentage of women and men agreed with the statement (78 and 77 per cent respectively). With more than one third of respondents indicating some confusion about affirmative action, as indicated by the interviews and the responses to the previous two statements, this relatively high level of agreement needs to be considered cautiously. The statement 'affirmative action seeks to eliminate discrimination against women and to promote equal opportunity for women at work' could be argued to be somewhat of a 'motherhood' statement, and so agreement does not necessarily indicate a real understanding of what affirmative action stands for.

While 81 per cent of male respondents were aware that Technico had an affirmative action program in place, only 65 per cent of female respondents were aware of this. Men 35 years and older demonstrated the highest levels of awareness of the company's affirmative action program (89 per cent) with women older than 35 (72 per cent) indicating the next highest levels of awareness.

In Technico's public reports to the Affirmative Action Agency, reference has been made to its Affirmative Action Consultative Committee as a means of communicating to staff the affirmative action initiatives implemented. Consistent with the findings from the interviews of Technico employees, there appeared to be a very low level of awareness among respondents of the existence of an Affirmative Action Consultative Committee. Approximately one third of respondents (34 per cent of women and 33 per cent of men) indicated they were aware of this committee.

Another mode of communication Technico reported using to inform employees of affirmative action policies is its in-house magazine. More men (66 per cent) indicated they were aware of articles concerning affirmative action policies in the Technico in-house magazine than women (43 per cent). Once again, women and men older than 35 years indicated higher levels of awareness than the younger respondents.

Knowledge of specific affirmative action policies

The next eleven statements related to employees' awareness of specific affirmative action initiatives that Technico had reported to the Affirmative Action Agency and their agreement/disagreement with the policies. As indicated in Figure 6.1, Technico had implemented a range of affirmative action policies from each of the categories — 'temperamental', 'work & family', 'non-traditional', 'social structural' and 'opportunities'.

The first policies employees were asked about related to Technico's family leave policy (a 'work & family' policy). Seventy four per cent of women and 68 per cent of men indicated they were familiar with Technico's maternity leave policy. Perhaps not surprisingly, awareness of the maternity leave policy was highest among women younger than 35 years (81 per cent). Awareness levels among men were consistent across age groups. More men (54 per cent) than women (42 per cent) approved of the maternity leave policy. As women are the ones directly affected by the policy, that one fifth of women respondents didn't approve of the policy suggests an issue which may need to be explored further within Technico. Exactly what they don't approve of is not evident from the survey responses and clearly needs further research.

A much lower level of awareness of the paternity leave policy is evident among respondents. Only 50 per cent of women and 43 per cent of men agreed they were aware of Technico's paternity leave policy. Men younger than 35 years old indicated higher levels of awareness (50 per cent) than men older than 35 years (38 per cent). While 54 per cent of men had approved of the maternity leave policy, only 32 per cent approved of the paternity leave policy. Once again, the reasons for the low levels of approval clearly need to be explored further. The low level of awareness of the paternity leave policy could reflect a perception among both women and men that issues surrounding family responsibilities are still very much the woman's domain (Poiner and Wills, 1991). It may be that paternity leave policies may be ineffective in a

basically unchanged society where women are still perceived to be the primary care givers for children. As well, the lower level of awareness of the paternity leave policy may reflect the relative length of time the various leaves had been available. Maternity leave has been available for a significantly longer period of time than paternity leave.

With respect to Technico's sexual harassment policy (a 'social structural' policy), 87 per cent of women and 95 per cent of men were aware of the policy, and 81 per cent of women and 72 per cent of men approved of it. Males over 35 years demonstrated a higher level of awareness (98 per cent) and approval (77 per cent) of the policy than males younger than 35 years (90 and 64 per cent respectively). A similar pattern was evident from the women's responses. Women older than 35 years indicated a higher level of awareness (93 per cent) and approval (89 per cent) than women younger than 35 years (82 and 75 per cent respectively).

The statement 'the internal training programs I have attended have included reference to the affirmative action legislation' generated similar responses from women and men. Consistent with comments from interviewees, only one quarter of respondents (25 per cent of women and 26 per cent of men) could recall they had been exposed to the affirmative action legislation in training programs. Although men's responses were consistent across ages, it seems more women older than 35 years could recall reference to the affirmative action legislation in training programs (37 per cent) than younger women (16 per cent).

The next two statements concerned employees' awareness and approval of the Women's Forums (a 'temperamental' policy). As mentioned in Chapter 6, not long before my interviews with a sample of employees were conducted, this initiative had been broadened to include both women and men. One of the reasons for this was that an increasing perception by the Human Resources staff that male employees were disgruntled because they weren't included in the Forums. With respect to the statement 'I approve of the Women's Forums', 73 per cent of women agreed and 60 per cent of men agreed. Responses were consistent across age groups for women and men. One of

the concerns expressed by some interviewees was that they saw the Forums as discriminatory against men. To determine how widespread this concern was, the statement 'I think the Women's Forums are discriminatory against men' was included. Twenty two per cent of women and 33 per cent of men agreed with this statement. Men younger than 35 years old, in particular, indicated they felt the Forums were discriminatory. There was, apparently, some resistance to this 'temperamental' policy.

The Career Development Library was another initiative Technico had implemented (an 'opportunities' policy). There were similar levels of agreement among women and men that the Career Development Library and Service were a good idea (72 and 75 per cent respectively). A higher proportion of women (34 per cent) than men (15 per cent) indicated they had used the service.

Flexibility

The following three statements concerned employees 'in principle' agreement or disagreement with efforts to assist employees deal with family and work responsibilities ('work & family' policies) and whether or not they saw their work environment offering such flexibility. Whereas 85 per cent of women agreed with the statement 'companies should provide assistance with child care for employees', 65 per cent of men agreed. Women's responses were consistent across age groups, but men younger than 35 years indicated a higher level of agreement with this statement (76 per cent) than men 35 years and over (57 per cent). With respect to the statement 'companies should provide flexible work arrangements to help people who have family responsibilities where practical', 93 per cent of women and 98 per cent of men agreed. It seems flexible work arrangements are generally perceived by employees to be more within the realms of the company's responsibilities than assistance with child care.

When asked specifically whether they felt the company culture allowed for flexible work arrangements some days because of family responsibilities, 65 per cent of women

agreed while 72 per cent of men agreed. It seems the reality of their work environment is somewhat different from their ideal.

Perceptions of opportunities

The remainder of the statements concerned employees' perceptions of opportunities in their workplace. It was with these statements that women's and men's views tended to diverge most noticeably. One of the processes that Technico has initiated to improve employment opportunities for all employees was to internally advertise all positions (a 'social structural' policy). From the interviews with the sample of employees, it seemed employees' perceptions of this process were somewhat mixed, and the survey responses also indicated varying perceptions of the fairness of the internal advertising process. Only 38 per cent of women agreed with the statement 'I think the internal advertising of positions is a fair process', while 64 per cent of men did. Responses were consistent across age groups.

More men (86 per cent) agreed with the statement 'Technico is open to women filling positions based on proven ability' than women (55 per cent). Men it seems have a more positive perception of the selection processes than women do. This difference in perceptions is reinforced by the responses to the statement 'in Technico, people are judged purely on their skills and experience, regardless of whether they are female or male'. Whereas 58 per cent of men agreed with this statement, only 36 per cent of women did so. Men 35 years and older agreed most often with this statement (60 per cent) while women younger than 35 years agreed least often (31 per cent).

With respect to the statement 'in Technico there is still a feeling that top positions should be held by men', the responses from women and men also varied. Sixty three per cent of women agreed with this statement, while 39 per cent of men did so. Women older than 35 years agreed most frequently with this statement (65 per cent).

In terms of their perceptions of their colleagues' support for equal opportunity for women, once again men and women had differing perceptions of the work

environment. Eighty eight per cent of men agreed that 'in Technico, people generally support equal opportunity for women', while 60 per cent of women did. Women's responses were very similar across age groups. Men younger than 35 years agreed more frequently (98 per cent) than men older than 35 years (81 per cent).

According to the reports submitted to the Affirmative Action Agency, the recruitment processes within Technico have been reviewed since the affirmative action legislation was implemented. There are, however, clear differences in the way men and women perceive the recruitment processes. Men agree more frequently with the statement 'I think the recruitment processes in Technico are fair' (79 per cent) than women (52 per cent). Women's and men's responses were consistent across age groups.

Women's perceptions of the promotion processes within Technico are also less rosy than their male counterparts. While two thirds of the men think the promotion processes are fair (67 per cent) less than one third of women (28 per cent) do. This discrepancy in perceptions reinforces the differences between women's and men's perceptions recorded earlier concerning the opportunities for women in the workplace generally, and Technico specifically, and the feeling that top positions in Technico should be held by men.

A theme to emerge from the interviews with Technico employees was that training was readily available to both women and men. Responses to the questionnaire indicated there was not such widespread support of this view as the interviews suggested. Sixty eight per cent of women and 80 per cent of men agreed that women and men have equal access to training. Once again, men younger than 35 indicated the highest levels of agreement (86 per cent).

That the performance appraisal process had been extended to clerical workers (who are predominantly women) was an initiative Technico had referred to in its report to the Affirmative Action Agency as improving the prospects for women's career paths (an 'opportunities' policy). With respect to the statement 'I am satisfied with the

performance appraisal process', 40 per cent of women and 38 per cent of men agreed. Responses across age and gender to both these statements were very similar. This initiative is clearly one which needs to be reviewed further to identify the reasons for the dissatisfaction with the performance appraisal process.

'In Technico women have to work harder than men at the same level' was another statement where women's and men's perceptions diverged. Whereas 44 per cent of women agreed with this statement, only 6 per cent of men agreed. Women 35 years and older agreed most frequently with this statement (48 per cent) while men's responses were consistent across the age groups.

Perceptions of senior management's commitment to equal employment opportunity did not vastly differ between women and men; neither group indicated an overwhelming perception of senior management as committed to equal employment opportunity. While 41 per cent of women felt senior management was committed to equal employment opportunity, 51 per cent of men did. Men younger than 35 years had the most positive perception of senior management's commitment to equal employment opportunity (60 per cent).

The responses to the statement 'my family situation has been raised when discussing further career opportunities in Technico' indicated women agreed more frequently (29 per cent) than men did (18 per cent). Levels of agreement were higher for women younger than 35 years (34 per cent) than women and men older than 35 years (22 per cent).

In further probing of the issue of career discussions, women's and men's perceptions tended to be very similar. Sixty four per cent of women and 67 per cent of men agreed they had career discussions with their managers, while 54 per cent of women and 56 per cent of men agreed they felt these discussions were useful.

The next two questions concerned women in senior management in Technico. Comments from interviewees had suggested that employees did not feel there were very

many women in senior management positions, and these comments were supported by the responses to the statement 'there are a number of women in senior management positions in Technico'. Only 29 per cent of women and men agreed with this statement. With respect to the statement 'women in senior management in Technico are there on their merits' slightly more women (51 per cent) than men (48 per cent) agreed. The low levels of agreement with the previous statement impacted on the responses to this question. In indicating 'disagree' or 'don't know' to this statement a number of respondents wrote that, because of the small number of women in senior management, they were unable to make a judgment.

Women's and men's perceptions of how well women have been accepted within traditional male areas in Technico also diverge. Whereas 78 per cent of men feel women have been readily accepted, only 45 per cent of women think they have.

In the interviews, a few men expressed the view that women 'now had it better than men' in terms of career opportunities in Technico. They appeared to be somewhat resistant to affirmative action initiatives because they saw them to be to their disadvantage. This sentiment was echoed to some extent in the responses from the survey. While 23 per cent of men agreed with the statement 'in Technico, women now have greater opportunities to advance than men', only 11 per cent of women did so.

The next statement concerned employees' perceptions of a family leave policy in practice. A view that was sometimes spontaneously mentioned by male interviewees when talking about the maternity leave policy was that maternity leave made it difficult to manage positions. From a management perspective, they were unimpressed with the disruption to the work environment caused by women taking maternity leave. From the responses to the questionnaire, it seems women agreed more frequently (36 per cent) with the statement 'maternity leave makes it very difficult to manage positions' than men (20 per cent).

It has been argued, particularly in the popular press, that women do not aspire to senior management positions and that is why there are not more women in these positions (McIntyre, 1994). As well, comments made by some of the interviewees within Technico alluded to a similar perception — that is, ‘there aren’t more women in senior management because they don’t want to be there’. At a very simple level, an effort was made to address this by including the final two statements concerning employees’ career aspirations and their perceptions of their opportunities within Technico.

With respect to the statement ‘I would like to be in senior management one day’ 45 per cent of women agreed while 65 per cent of men did. Men’s responses across age groups were consistent, but for women there was a noticeable difference between the levels of agreement of women younger than 35 years (57 per cent) and those older than 35 years (26 per cent). Similarly, although more men agreed with the statement ‘it is realistic for me to think I will one day be in senior management in Technico’ (55 per cent) than women (36 per cent), younger women had a more optimistic view (47 per cent agreed) than older women (20 per cent). Younger women’s levels of agreement were, in fact, more similar to men’s.

8.4 Pharmsco responses

As there were 201 employees within Pharmsco at the time of the survey, all employees were sent a copy of the questionnaire through the internal mail. As with the Technico surveys, employees received a covering letter explaining the purpose of the survey, instructions to complete the questionnaire and assurances of the confidentiality of responses (once again, a reply-paid envelope addressed to the University of New England was included). In addition, a letter from the Personnel Development Manager for Pharmsco urging employees to respond was included.

There were 107 questionnaires returned which represents an overall return rate of 53 per cent (48 women and 59 men responded to the questionnaire). Table 8.3 shows the numbers of women and men responding across age groups. As with the Technico

responses, the largest category for women respondents was in the age group 25 to 34 years old, while for men the age distribution across the three categories spanning the ages from 25 to 54 years were fairly evenly distributed.

Table 8.3: Gender and Age Distribution of Pharmsco Respondents

Age	Women	Men	Total
<25	7	4	11
25–34	23	17	40
35–44	13	16	29
45–54	4	20	24
55+	1	2	3
Total	48	59	107

In Table 8.4 the responses to the survey questions are presented by gender. The most significant features of the responses are discussed in the following sections. See Appendix 7b for a breakdown of levels of agreement with the survey statements by age and gender.

Women's opportunities

As with the responses from Technico employees, there appeared to be some discrepancy in how women and men viewed women's opportunities. While two thirds of men (66 per cent) felt women and men had the same opportunities, less than half of the women respondents did (47 per cent). Men younger than 35 years old agreed most frequently with this statement (76 per cent), while women over 35 agreed least often (44 per cent).

When asked about Pharmsco specifically, more men than women agreed with the statement that women have the same opportunities as men. Ninety three per cent of the male respondents agreed with this statement, while only 68 per cent of female respondents agreed with the statement. These views tended to be fairly consistent across age groups. It seems that men and women have different perceptions about the

Table 8.4: Pharmsco Responses by Gender (in percent)

	<u>Women (N=48)</u>			<u>Men (N=59)</u>		
	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
<i>Women's Opportunities</i>						
1. In the workplace generally, women have the same opportunities as men.	47	13	40	66	8	25
2. In Pharmsco, women have the same opportunities as men.	68	17	15	93	3	3
3. Women can do any job that men can do.	69	12	19	47	25	27
4. I am sometimes confused about how Internat sees the role of the family fitting in with women working.	46	31	23	27	27	46
<i>Understanding of Affirmative Action</i>						
5. Affirmative action is a term that has no meaning for me.	17	8	75	17	8	75
6. Affirmative action involves setting quotas for how many women should be employed in particular jobs.	10	38	52	22	27	51
7. Affirmative action seeks to eliminate discrimination against women and to promote equal opportunity for women at work.	77	23	0	76	15	8
8. Internat has an affirmative action program in place.	58	38	4	70	27	3
9. I have seen articles in Internat's magazine about affirmative action policies.	27	40	33	46	32	22
<i>Knowledge of Specific Affirmative Action Policies</i>						
10. I am aware of this company's maternity leave policy.	67	4	29	68	7	25
11. I believe this company's maternity leave is fair.	52	48	0	65	32	3
12. I am aware of this company's paternity leave policy.	25	15	60	37	10	53
13. I believe this company's paternity leave policy is fair.	23	67	10	31	64	5
14. I am aware of this company's equal opportunity and harassment policy.	94	6	0	93	5	2
15. I believe an equal opportunity and harassment policy is fair.	85	15	0	81	15	3
16. The internal training programs I have attended have included reference to the affirmative action legislation.	42	35	23	53	25	22
17. I am aware of Internat's Managing Diversity policy.	21	25	54	31	25	44
18. I believe the Managing Diversity policy is fair	15	75	10	25	75	0

Table 8.4: Pharmsco Responses by Gender (in percent) (contd)

	<i>Women</i>			<i>Men</i>		
	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
<i>Flexibility</i>						
19. Companies should provide assistance with child care for employees.	79	13	8	64	14	22
20. Companies should provide flexible work arrangements to help people who have family responsibilities.	96	4	0	64	14	22
21. Flexible work arrangements are available in Pharmsco for people with family responsibilities.	56	19	25	56	32	12
22. The Pharmsco culture allows for leaving early some days because of family responsibilities.	52	23	25	76	20	3
<i>Equal Opportunities</i>						
23. I think the internal advertising of positions is a fair process.	83	8	8	83	10	7
24. Pharmsco is open to women filling positions based on proven ability.	81	10	9	96	2	2
25. In Pharmsco, people are judged purely on their skills and experience, regardless of whether they are female or male.	52	35	13	75	15	10
26. In Pharmsco, there is still a feeling that top positions should be held by men.	40	19	42	8	12	80
27. In Pharmsco, people generally support equal opportunity for women.	88	10	2	90	8	2
28. I think the recruitment processes in Pharmsco are fair for women.	73	15	13	90	8	2
29. I think the promotion processes in Pharmsco are fair for women.	60	23	17	90	8	2
30. In Pharmsco, women and men have equal access to training.	90	4	6	95	5	0
31. I am satisfied that the performance appraisal process is equal for women and men.	85	6	8	90	8	2
32. In Pharmsco, women have to work harder than men at the same level.	21	21	58	5	8	86
33. Most senior managers in Pharmsco are committed to equal employment opportunity.	58	31	10	83	17	0
34. My family situation has been raised when discussing further opportunities in Pharmsco.	17	25	58	15	15	69

Table 8.4: Pharmsco Responses by Gender (in percent) (contd)

	<i>Women</i>			<i>Men</i>		
	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
35. Men and women are given the same opportunities to discuss their career and development opportunities with their manager.	77	17	6	90	10	0
36. A number of women are in senior management positions in Pharmsco.	73	6	21	85	7	8
37. Women in senior management in Pharmsco are there on their merits.	85	10	4	69	25	5
38. In Pharmsco, women working in traditionally male areas are readily accepted.	50	35	15	78	17	5
39. In Pharmsco, women now have greater opportunities to advance than men.	8	23	69	27	31	42
40. Maternity leave makes it very difficult to manage positions.	25	29	46	29	49	22

opportunities available to women in the workplace generally, and in Pharmsco specifically.

Women agreed more often and more strongly than men with the statement 'women can do any job that men can do'. While 69 per cent of women felt that women can do any job that men can do, only 47 per cent of men agreed with this statement. However, levels of agreement across age groups were not consistent among respondents. Respondents younger than 35 years tended to agree more frequently than respondents older than 35. Whereas 67 per cent of men younger than 35 agreed that women can do any job men can do, only 37 per cent of the men 35 years and over did. Similarly, 77 per cent of women younger than 35 agreed with the statement, but only 56 per cent of women older than 35 did.

The statement 'I am sometimes confused about how Pharmsco sees the role of the family fitting in with women working' was included in the survey as some of the women interviewed expressed concern about the difficulties of combining work and family in Pharmsco. With respect to this statement, more women (46 per cent) indicated agreement than men (27 per cent). Although the responses from men tended to be fairly uniform across the age groups, they tended to vary somewhat between the younger and older women. Half of the women younger than 35 years agreed with this statement, whereas 39 per cent of older women did. It seems younger women are less sure about how work and family will fit for them than are older women or men of any age group. Fewer male respondents, it seems, suffer the same concerns reconciling their work and family roles than the female respondents.

Understanding of affirmative action

The next five statements concerned respondents' understanding of affirmative action. The interviews had suggested that there was a mixed level of understanding of exactly what affirmative action is, and this was reinforced by the survey responses. Seventeen per cent of women and men indicated that the term affirmative action had no meaning

for them, while eight per cent of women and men were undecided about the term. Only six per cent of women older than 35 years agreed with the statement 'affirmative action is a term that has no meaning for me', whereas 23 per cent of women younger than 35 disagreed affirmative action was a term that had no meaning for them. Younger women, it seems, are less aware about affirmative action than older women. In total, it seems approximately one quarter of respondents were unsure about what affirmative action means.

When faced with the incorrect statement 'affirmative action involves setting quotas for how many women should be employed in particular jobs', 48 per cent of women and 49 per cent of men either agreed or were undecided. Men younger than 35 were the group most likely to agree with this statement (29 per cent). That there was a misunderstanding among employees as to what affirmative action represents was also evident from the interviewees' responses. As well, one respondent even included with his completed questionnaire an article concerning affirmative action from an American magazine. He had highlighted, for my information, the statement that:

Equal opportunity clearly does not mean equal opportunity but preferences for some at the expense of others.

(Yates, 1994: 353)

Faced with the more accurate statement 'affirmative action seeks to eliminate discrimination against women and to promote equal opportunity for women at work', a similar percentage of women and men (77 and 76 per cent respectively) agreed with the statement. A similar caveat to that expressed in the Technico discussion holds for interpreting these responses. The statement could be seen as a 'motherhood' one and may not be a good indication of respondents understanding of affirmative action. Even so, nearly one quarter of respondents either disagreed with this statement or were undecided. As the affirmative action legislation has been in place for over eight years, this apparent lack of understanding by a quarter of respondents could suggest that more work in conveying the essence of what affirmative action seeks to achieve may be necessary.

While 70 per cent of male respondents were aware that Internat² had an affirmative action program in place, only 58 per cent of female respondents were aware of this. Women 35 years and older were more aware of the company's affirmative action program (78 per cent) than women younger than 35 (47 per cent). This tends to suggest that affirmative action is an issue generating greater awareness among older women than younger women in Pharmsco — a point which is consistent with the earlier finding that affirmative action was a term that was not understood by only 6 per cent of women 35 years and older.

More men (46 per cent) indicated they were aware of articles concerning affirmative action policies in the Internat magazine than women (27 per cent). Generally, however, levels of awareness of articles in the Internat magazine concerning affirmative action were fairly low. Seventy three per cent of women and 54 per cent of men indicated they either had not seen such articles or were unaware if they had. These levels of awareness were much lower than that within Technico, suggesting either that Technico's in-house magazine may be more widely read than Internat's or that there may be more articles concerning affirmative action initiatives appearing in Technico's magazine than in Internat's. Men 35 years and older indicated a much greater level of awareness of articles concerning affirmative action in Internat's magazine (58 per cent) than men younger than 35 years (24 per cent). Similarly, women older than 35 years were more aware of such articles (39 per cent) than younger women (20 per cent). Given Pharmsco has indicated to the Affirmative Action Agency that Internat's in-house magazine is one of the modes of communicating the affirmative action policies to employees, this low level of employee awareness of affirmative action within their company could suggest articles appearing in in-house magazines may not be the most appropriate means of conveying information.

² Staff from the Personnel Department instructed me to refer to the affirmative action program as Internat's rather than Pharmsco's.

Knowledge of specific affirmative action policies

The next nine statements related to employees' awareness of specific affirmative action policies and respondents' agreement/disagreement with the policies. The outstanding feature of the responses to these statements was the extremely high level of awareness among employees about Pharmsco's equal opportunity and harassment policy (a 'social structural' policy). Ninety four per cent of women and 93 per cent of men agreed they were aware of the company's policy, and a similar percentage agreed they felt the policy was fair (85 per cent of women and 81 per cent of men). Awareness and approval of this policy were consistent across gender and age groups. As mentioned in Chapter 7, Pharmsco had run a series of workshops for all employees to convey the equal opportunity and harassment policy, and the policy was clearly visible over many sites within the offices. The other policies — maternity leave, paternity leave and Managing Diversity — apparently attracted much lower levels of awareness. Each of these policies was less well known to both women and men and all were conveyed to employees in a written, rather than workshop, form. In the case of the family leave policies, a pamphlet was available to employees, and for the Managing Diversity policy, a booklet had been prepared.

Another feature of the responses to these statements was the higher level of awareness among both women and men of the maternity leave policy compared with the paternity leave policy (both 'work & family' policies). While approximately two thirds of female and male respondents were aware of the maternity leave policy (67 per cent and 68 per cent respectively), only 25 per cent of women and 37 per cent of men were aware of the paternity leave policy. Men 35 years and over indicated greater awareness of the paternity leave policy (50 per cent) than men younger than 35 years (14 per cent). Similarly, women younger than 35 years old were less aware of the paternity leave policy (20 per cent) than women 35 years and older (33 per cent).

While 52 per cent of women agreed that the maternity policy was fair, 65 per cent of men felt it was. Because of the lower levels of awareness of the paternity leave policy, almost two thirds of respondents were unable to comment on whether or not they thought the paternity leave policy was fair. As with the Technico responses, the low level of awareness of the paternity leave policy could reflect a perception among both women and men that issues surrounding family responsibilities are still very much the woman's domain or be a reflection of the relative length of time each of the leaves had been available. Even higher percentages of respondents were undecided about the fairness of the Managing Diversity policy because of their lack of knowledge of it.

With respect to the responses to the statement, 'the internal training programs I have attended have included reference to the affirmative action legislation', only 42 per cent of women and 53 per cent of men agreed. As with the awareness of articles concerning affirmative action in the in-house magazine, men older than 35 years indicated the highest levels of awareness. This could be a reflection of their greater exposure to management training.

Flexibility

The next four statements concerned employees 'in principle' agreement or disagreement with efforts to assist employees deal with family and work responsibilities ('work & family' policies) and whether or not they saw their work environment offering such flexibility. Whereas 79 per cent of women agreed with the statement 'companies should provide assistance with child care for employees', 64 per cent of men agreed with the statement. A similar pattern emerged with responses to the statement 'companies should provide flexible work arrangements to help people who have family responsibilities'. Ninety six per cent of women and 81 per cent of men agreed with this statement. Men 35 years and older indicated the lowest levels of agreement with this statement (79 per cent). As with the Technico responses, it seems flexible work arrangements are generally perceived by employees to be more within the realms of the company's responsibilities than assistance with child care.

When asked specifically whether they felt flexible work arrangements are available in Pharmsco for those with family responsibilities, the same percentage of women and men (56 per cent) indicated they felt this was so. Perceptions of the acceptability of leaving early some days because of family responsibilities differs between women and men. While only 52 per cent of women agreed with the statement 'the Pharmsco culture allows for leaving early some days because of family responsibilities', 76 per cent of men did so. The responses were fairly consistent across age groups. This suggests that women may be more constrained by the Pharmsco culture than men in terms of the hours they are at work.

Perceptions of opportunities

The remainder of the statements concerned employees' perceptions of opportunities in their workplace. As with Technico, one of the processes that Pharmsco have initiated to improve employment opportunities for employees is to internally advertise all positions (a 'social structural' policy). From the interviews with the sample of employees, it seemed employees' perceptions of this process were somewhat mixed. The survey responses, however, tend to convey a more favourable impression of internal advertising than the interviews. Eighty three per cent of women and men agreed with the statement 'I think the internal advertising of positions is a fair process'.

More men (96 per cent) agreed with the statement 'Pharmsco is open to women filling positions based on proven ability' than women (81 per cent). These figures would seem to suggest that employees feel that merit determines employment prospects. The picture is not that clear, however, when one examines responses to the statement 'in Pharmsco, people are judged purely on their skills and experience, regardless of whether they are female or male'. Although 75 per cent of men agreed with this statement, only 52 per cent of women did so. Men 35 years and older agreed most often with this statement (82 per cent) while women younger than 35 years agreed least often (47 per cent).

With respect to the statement 'in Pharmsco there is still a feeling that top positions should be held by men', the responses from women and men were quite disparate. Forty per cent of women agreed with this statement, while only eight per cent of men did so. None of the male respondents older than 35 years agreed with this statement. Eighty per cent of men disagreed with this statement while only 42 per cent of women disagreed. Men (particularly older ones) apparently perceive Pharmsco as more open to women in senior management than women do.

In terms of their perceptions of their colleagues' support for equal opportunity for women, men and women had very similar responses. Clearly, there was a perception that within Pharmsco, people generally support equal opportunity for women (88 per cent of women and 90 per cent of men agreed).

According to the reports submitted to the Affirmative Action Agency, the recruitment processes within Pharmsco have undergone review (a 'social structural' policy) since the affirmative action legislation was implemented. While men agree more often (90 per cent) with the statement 'I think the recruitment processes in Pharmsco are fair' than women (73 per cent), these relatively high levels of agreement would suggest that recruitment processes are generally perceived by both women and men to be fair. However, women's perceptions of the promotion processes within Pharmsco are more pessimistic. While 90 per cent of men think the recruitment and promotion processes are fair, only 60 per cent of women perceive that the promotion processes are fair. This discrepancy in perceptions reinforces the differences between women's and men's views recorded earlier concerning the opportunities for women in the workplace generally, and Pharmsco specifically, and the feeling that top positions in Pharmsco should be held by men.

A theme to emerge from the interviews with Pharmsco employees was that training was readily available to both women and men. Responses to the questionnaire supported this view. Ninety per cent of women and 95 per cent of men agreed that women and men have equal access to training. There was a similar level of agreement with the

statement 'I am satisfied that the performance appraisal process is equal for women and men'. Eighty five per cent of women and 90 per cent of men agreed this was so. Responses across age and gender to both these statements were very similar.

'In Pharmsco women have to work harder than men at the same level' was another statement where women's and men's perceptions tended to diverge. Although only 53 per cent of women disagreed with this statement, 86 per cent of men disagreed. Forty two per cent of women either agreed with or were undecided about this statement. Women 35 years and older agreed most frequently (28 per cent) with this sentiment.

Perceptions of senior management's commitment to equal employment opportunity also differs between women and men. While 83 per cent of men feel senior management is committed to equal employment opportunity, only 58 per cent of women do. One third of women respondents were undecided. Men older than 35 years agreed most frequently with this statement (89 per cent).

The responses to the statement 'my family situation has been raised when discussing further career opportunities in Pharmsco' were very similar for women and men across all age categories. A similar percentage of women and men (17 per cent and 15 per cent respectively) indicated their family situation had been raised in the context of career discussions. In probing further with the issue of career discussion, women's and men's perceptions began to diverge somewhat. Fewer women (77 per cent) than men (90 per cent) felt women were given the same opportunities as men to discuss their career and development opportunities with their manager. Women 35 years and over agreed least often (67 per cent) with this statement.

The next two questions concerned women in senior management in Pharmsco. While there was general agreement that there were a number of women in senior management in Pharmsco, more men (85 per cent) than women (73 per cent) felt this was so. With respect to the statement 'women in senior management in Pharmsco are there on their merits' more women (85 per cent) than men (69 per cent) agreed. A point to note,

however, is that only about 5 per cent of women and men actually disagreed with the statement, the rest were undecided.

Women's and men's perceptions of how well women have been accepted within traditional male areas in Pharmsco also diverge. Whereas 78 per cent of men felt women have been readily accepted, only 50 per cent of women think they have. Women younger than 35 years indicated the lowest levels of agreement (43 per cent) with the statement 'in Pharmsco, women working in traditional male areas are readily accepted'.

In the interviews, a few men expressed the view that women 'now had it better than men' in terms of career opportunities in Pharmsco. This sentiment was echoed to some extent in the responses from the survey. While 27 per cent of men agreed with the statement 'in Pharmsco, women now have greater opportunities to advance than men', only eight per cent of women did so. Two thirds of women respondents disagreed with this statement, but only 41 per cent of men did so.

The final question concerned employees' perceptions of a family leave policy in practice. As with the Technico interviewees, a view that was sometimes spontaneously mentioned by male interviewees, when talking about the maternity leave policy, was that maternity leave made it difficult to manage positions. From a management perspective, they were unimpressed with the disruption to the work environment caused by women taking maternity leave. This view was supported by 29 per cent of male respondents and 25 per cent of female respondents. There was a bigger difference in the levels of disagreement with the statement 'maternity leave makes it very difficult to manage positions' (46 per cent of women disagreed while only 22 per cent of men disagreed).

There was some suggestion in the theoretical literature that the beneficiaries of affirmative action policies would be women in professional and managerial positions and that it would do little for low paid workers in general (O'Donnell and Hall, 1983;

Poiner and Wills, 1991). A similar sentiment was expressed by some interviewees. That is, that women in the manufacturing area of Pharmsco are really no better off than they ever were, despite the affirmative action policies put in place.

I was unable to collect information on the respondents' occupational positions, as the Personnel staff claimed respondents may be concerned that this information could identify them and so confidentiality could be seen to be breached. This meant I could not test this directly. Instead, to determine whether women in professional roles held a more optimistic view of their employment opportunities relative to men than women in the manufacturing area, I compared the responses from women from Lidcombe (Pharmsco's manufacturing plant) and the women respondents located elsewhere.

There were 13 of the 40 statements in which there were differences between the responses of women from Lidcombe and those from other locations. Their levels of agreement with the 13 statements are presented in Table 8.5

From the comparison of the responses of women from Pharmsco's manufacturing plant and those of women from other locations of Pharmsco, it seems that women within the manufacturing area actually have a more positive view of the equity of employment opportunities than women located elsewhere. It seems women in the manufacturing area of Pharmsco agree more frequently with statements concerning the fairness of processes and less frequently with statements which imply women are disadvantaged within Pharmsco.

Another feature of the responses from women in the manufacturing area is the relatively high level of agreement (71 per cent) they demonstrate with the statement 'flexible work arrangements are available in Pharmsco for people with family responsibilities' relative to women in other locations (50 per cent). It seems that women in the manufacturing area feel they have greater access to flexible work arrangements than women in the other locations. This could reflect the recent award restructuring moves to work teams within the manufacturing area which, according to the manager of the

Lidcombe plant, has allowed greater flexibility in work arrangements at the team level. Although the restructuring of the manufacturing plant into teams was not specifically an affirmative action initiative, one of the by-products of it seems to be a feeling of greater flexibility within the workplace for women.

Table 8.5: Women from Lidcombe vs those from other locations — levels of agreement (per cent)

	Lidcombe	Other
1. In the workplace generally women have the same opportunities as men.	64	41
5. Affirmative action is a term that has no meaning for me.	29	12
9. I have seen articles in Internat's magazine about Internat's affirmative action policies.	43	21
10. I am aware of Internat's maternity leave policy.	93	56
21. Flexible work arrangements are available in Pharmsco for people with family responsibilities	71	50
24. Pharmsco is open to women filling positions based on their proven ability.	100	74
25. In Pharmsco, people are judged purely on their skills and experience, regardless of whether they are female or male.	71	44
26. In Pharmsco, there is a still a feeling that top positions should be held by men.	29	44
28. I think the recruitment processes in Pharmsco are fair.	86	68
29. I think the promotion processes in Pharmsco are fair.	86	50
35. Men and women are given the same opportunities to discuss their career and development opportunities with their manager.	93	71
36. A number of women are in senior management positions in Pharmsco.	86	68
40. Maternity leave makes it very difficult to manage positions,	7	32

8.5 Discussion

One of the key questions driving this research was how the proposed beneficiaries of the affirmative action legislation perceived their employment opportunities. It was thought that women in companies which had apparently well-developed affirmative action programs in place — programs which included a range of affirmative action policies — would be in the best position to comment on affirmative action, because

they would have direct experience of affirmative action policies. The question I was seeking to answer was 'do women perceive there to be equal employment opportunities?' The interviews and questionnaires suggest there is a mixed view. As noted in Chapter 5, it could not be expected that all women's perceptions would be same. The women in these organisations are not homogeneous, and so it is not surprising their perceptions would differ. More than half of the women in the two companies surveyed indicated they did not believe that women have the same opportunities as men in the workplace generally. Although they see their own companies in a somewhat more favourable light, a third of women still perceive there to be inequalities between men and women in their work environment. Men, too, had differing perceptions of the extent to which women were discriminated against but their perceptions on the whole were generally less inclined to a picture of discrimination and more to a view that women and men have the same opportunities in the employment sphere.

That men's and women's perceptions of women's opportunities differed was an area which I felt warranted further investigation. Were these apparent differences in perceptions statistically significant? There were approximately fifteen statements concerning the work environment in which women's and men's responses apparently differed (there was some overlap between the two companies in the statements in which gender differences were apparent). To determine whether these gender differences were statistically significant, χ^2 tests on the patterns of responses (that is, the numbers who agreed, were undecided or disagreed) were carried out (Siegel & Castellan, 1988). In Table 8.6, the levels of agreement with the statements for Technico respondents by gender are presented and in Table 8.7 the levels of agreement with the statements by gender for Pharmsco respondents are presented.

It seems that the differences in women's and men's perceptions of their work environment, are statistically significant. The picture to emerge from Table 8.6 is that

women agree less often than men that equal opportunities prevail in the workplace generally, or in their own work environment specifically.

Table 8.6: Technico responses — significance testing by gender

	<i>Levels of agreement (%)</i>		χ^2 p^a
	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	
1. In the workplace generally, women have the same opportunities as men.	28	61	23.2 ***
2. In Technico, women have the same opportunities as men.	38	82	41.9 ***
25. In my experience, the internal advertising of positions has been a fair process.	38	64	14.7 ***
26. Technico is open to women filling positions based on their proven ability.	55	86	23.8 ***
27. In Technico, people are judged purely on their skills and experience regardless of whether they are female or male.	36	58	10.5 ***
28. In Technico, there is still a feeling that top positions should be held by men.	63	39	12.5 ***
29. In Technico, people generally support equal opportunity for women.	60	88	21.7 ***
30. I think the recruitment processes in Technico are fair for women and men.	52	79	16.8 ***
31. I think the promotion procedures in Technico are fair for women and men.	28	67	33.7 ***
34. In Technico, women have to work harder than men at the same level.	44	6	56.1 ***
36. My family situation has been raised when discussing further opportunities in the company.	29	18	4.7
41. In Technico, women working in traditionally male areas are readily accepted.	45	78	23.8 ***
42. In Technico, women now have greater opportunity to advance than men.	11	23	6.1 **
44. I would like to be in senior management one day.	45	65	10.8 ***
45. It is realistic for me to think I will one day be in senior management in Technico.	36	55	12.6 ***

a : $df=2$

* $p=0.1$

** $p=0.05$

*** $p=0.01$

Although women do perceive the Technico environment to be somewhat brighter than the workplace generally, their responses indicate they still feel there are barriers to the attainment of equal opportunities. Women's responses to the statements concerning personnel processes (for example, recruitment and promotion) and attitudes within Technico (for example, the acceptance of women on non-traditional areas) indicate that despite the formal process implemented within Technico to ensure there are no discriminatory barriers, in practice these barriers have not been completely removed.

The responses from Pharmsco employees (Table 8.7) also indicate significant differences in the perceptions of women and men of their work environments. Once again, women agree less often than men that equal opportunities prevail in the workplace generally, or in their own work environment specifically. Women co

perceive the Pharmsco environment to be somewhat brighter than the workplace generally, but their responses also indicate they still perceive barriers to the attainment of equal opportunities. As with the Technico responses, women's perceptions of the personnel processes (for example, recruitment and promotion) and attitudes within Pharmsco (for example, the acceptance of women on non-traditional areas) indicate that despite the formal process implemented within Pharmsco to ensure there are no discriminatory barriers, in the eyes of respondents these barriers have not been completely removed.

Table 8.7: Pharmsco responses — significance testing by gender

	<i>Levels of agreement (%)</i>		
	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	χ^2 <i>p</i> ^a
1. In the workplace generally, women have the same opportunities as men.	47	66	3.6 **
2. In Pharmsco, women have the same opportunities as men.	68	93	10.9 ***
4. I am sometimes confused about how Internat sees the role of the family fitting in with women working.	46	27	6.7 **
22. The Pharmsco culture allows for leaving early some days because of family responsibilities.	52	76	7.76 **
24. Pharmsco is open to women filling positions based on proven ability.	81	96	6.8 **
25. In Pharmsco, people are judged purely on their skills and experience, regardless of whether they are female or male.	52	75	6.6 **
26. In Pharmsco, there is still a feeling that top positions should be held by men.	40	8	18.4 ***
28. I think the recruitment processes in Pharmsco are fair for women.	73	90	6.5 **
29. I think the promotion processes in Pharmsco are fair for women.	60	90	13.7 ***
32. In Pharmsco, women have to work harder than men at the same level.	21	5	11.1 ***
33. Most senior managers in Pharmsco are committed to equal employment opportunity.	58	83	10.7 ***
36. A number of women are in senior management positions in Pharmsco.	73	85	4.6 *
37. Women in senior management in Pharmsco are there on their merits.	85	69	4.11 *
38. In Pharmsco, women working in traditionally male areas are readily accepted.	50	78	9.3 ***
39. In Pharmsco, women now have greater opportunities to advance than men.	8	27	8.96 **

a: df=2

* p=0.1

** p=0.05

*** p=0.01

A review of Tables 8.6 and 8.7 also suggests there are differences in employees' perceptions between these two companies. Pharmsco employees appear to have a more favourable perception of their environment and employment opportunities for women than do Technico employees. For significance testing of these differences to be valid, it could only be carried out on those statements which were worded identically in both

questionnaires. It was not possible to test for the significance of the differences between the companies where the wording of statements differed in any way between the questionnaires, because any differences may have been attributable to the choice of words, rather than differences in perceptions. There were 25 statements which were common to both questionnaires, and for which χ^2 tests for differences between the two groups could be conducted. The χ^2 tests carried out on the pattern of total responses (that is, the number who agreed, were uncertain or disagreed) across the two companies (Siegel & Castellan, 1988) are seen in Table 8.8

Table 8.8: Comparison of employees' responses — Technico vs Pharmsco

	Levels of agreement (%)		
	Technico	Pharmsco	χ^2 ^a
1. In the workplace generally, women have the same opportunities as men.	43	58	6.7 **
2. In _____, women have the same opportunities as men.	58	82	20.4 ***
5. Affirmative action is a term that has no meaning for me.	16	17	12.6 ***
6. Affirmative action involves setting quotas for how many women should be employed in particular jobs.	22	17	2.5
7. Affirmative action seeks to eliminate discrimination against women and to promote equal opportunity for women at work.	78	77	1.6
8. _____ has an affirmative action program in place.	72	64	2.3
9. I have seen articles in _____ magazine about affirmative action policies.	54	37	12.7 ***
10. I am aware of this company's maternity leave policy.	71	67	6.1 **
12. I am aware of this company's paternity leave policy.	47	32	18.7 ***
14. I am aware of this company's equal opportunity and harassment policy.	90	93	5.4 *
16. The internal training programs I have attended have included reference to the affirmative action legislation.	25	48	17.4 ***
19. Companies should provide assistance with child care for employees.	76	56	13.3 ***
24. _____ is open to women filling positions based on proven ability.	69	90	16.2 ***
25. In _____, people are judged purely on their skills and experience, regardless of whether they are female or male.	46	64	13.2 ***
26. In _____, there is still a feeling that top positions should be held by men.	52	22	54.0 ***
27. In _____, people generally support equal opportunity for women.	73	89	11.3 ***
28. I think the recruitment processes in _____ are fair for women.	64	82	11.8 ***
29. I think the promotion processes in _____ are fair for women.	46	77	27.4 ***
32. In _____, women have to work harder than men at the same level.	27	11	13.0 ***
33. Most senior managers in _____ are committed to equal employment opportunity.	47	72	43.7 ***
36. A number of women are in senior management positions in _____.	32	79	90.3 ***
37. Women in senior management in _____ are there on their merits.	50	77	43.3 ***
38. In _____, women working in traditionally male areas are readily accepted.	60	65	5.7 *
39. In _____, women now have greater opportunities to advance than men.	16	19	0.8

a: df=2

* p=0.10

** p=0.05

*** p=0.01

For 17 of these statements, there were significant differences between the patterns of responses from Technico and Pharmsco employees. Where the differences arise, these generally concern employees' perceptions of the fairness of processes within their work environment and their perceptions of the opportunities available to women, rather than their understanding of affirmative action. It seems Pharmsco employees generally have a more favourable view of the fairness of processes within their work environment and the opportunities available to women than do Technico employees.

Another area which warranted closer investigation was the impression I had gained from the interviews that women younger than 35 years of age were more optimistic about their employment opportunities than women older than 35 years. In the χ^2 testing for differences between younger and older women's patterns of responses, there were no significant differences to emerge from the Pharmsco responses. In Technico, there were 9 statements for which significant differences between younger and older women's patterns of responses were apparent. The women's levels of agreement by age for these statements can be seen in Table 8.9.

Table 8.9: Technico responses — significance testing by age

	Levels of agreement (%)			χ^2 p^a
	Women			
	<35 y.o.	>35 y.o.		
7. Affirmative action seeks to eliminate discrimination against women and to promote equal opportunity for women at work.	84	70	7.1	**
9. Technico has an Affirmative Action Consultative Committee.	25	48	6.9	**
10. I have seen articles in the in-house newsletter, <i>The Communicator</i> , about Technico's affirmative action policies.	35	54	8.1	**
11. I know about Technico's maternity leave policy.	81	63	11.0	***
17. The internal training programs I have attended have included reference to the affirmative action legislation.	16	37	7.1	**
36. My family situation has been raised when discussing further opportunities in the company.	34	22	8.9	**
40. Women in senior management positions in Technico are there on their merits.	46	59	6.9	**
44. I would like to be in senior management one day.	57	26	11.0	***
45. It is realistic for me to think I will one day be in senior management in Technico.	47	20	12.0	***

a: df=2
 * p=0.10
 ** p=0.05
 *** p=0.01

The differences apparent between younger and older women's responses do not point to a consistent pattern. Although significantly more younger women agreed with the statement 'affirmative action seeks to eliminate discrimination against women and to promote equal employment opportunity for women at work', significantly more older women indicated greater awareness of the affirmative action consultative committee, articles in the in-house magazine and affirmative action being referred to in internal training programs.

With respect to the career aspiration statements 'I would like to be in senior management one day' and 'it is realistic for me think I will one day be in senior management in Technico', the impression that younger women's responses significantly differed from older women's was confirmed. Interestingly, although more younger women indicated they felt it was realistic for them to think they would one day be in senior management, there were no significant differences between their responses and those of older women about the fairness of the personnel processes operating within Technico. Clearly further work is needed before any conclusions can be made about why the career aspirations and perceptions of opportunities may differ between the younger and older women in Technico.

8.6 Summary

In this chapter, the 'quantitative' findings from the surveys were presented. These findings, however, were limited to the responses from Technico and PharmSCO employees only. Healthco withdrew from the study following the qualitative interviews. Having received the initial report from the interviews, Healthco's Board of Directors were not prepared to proceed with a survey of employees in which the term 'affirmative action' was used. The apparent pejorative connotations they associated with 'affirmative action' meant the term had deliberately been avoided in any communications with employees about the equal employment opportunity policy. The Directors felt it would be confusing for employees if such a term was now introduced

via a survey. Consequently, the qualitative findings for Healthco as reported in Chapter 7 could not be investigated in a quantitative manner.

After receiving their initial reports, Technico and Pharmsco proceeded with the surveys which sought to quantify employees' understanding of affirmative action, their experiences of their companies' affirmative action programs, and other human resource policies, and their perceptions of their employment opportunities. Of particular interest was the issue of women's perceptions of their employment opportunities — do they perceive their opportunities to be equal to men's?

The data drawn from the surveys in Technico and Pharmsco suggest the initial findings from the qualitative interviews need to be reviewed. Some of the initial impressions were confirmed. For others, however, the initial impressions were not supported by the survey responses.

As with the findings from the interviews, the survey findings indicated there are still a number of employees who are unsure about the meaning of affirmative action. This is perhaps not surprising given none of the companies label their programs as affirmative action as such. Instead they prefer to use the term equal employment opportunity in their communications to employees. Both companies indicated in their reports to the Affirmative Action Agency that they communicate their policies to employees in training sessions and via their in-house magazines. From employees' responses, however, these methods of communication appear to be relatively ineffective. As well, there were varying levels of awareness among employees about specific affirmative action policies. The harassment policies in both Technico and Pharmsco elicited much greater levels of awareness among respondents than did other policies. This is explored further in Chapter 9.

Again, as with the interviews, the responses from the surveys indicated that not all employees feel women and men have equal employment opportunities. Men tended to agree more frequently than women that both sexes have the same employment

opportunities in the workplace generally, and within their own companies in particular. Unlike the findings from the interviews, the responses to the statements concerning the recruitment and promotion practices within the companies indicate that women's and men's perceptions differ. Women are less convinced of the fairness of the processes than their male counterparts. Similarly, with respect to their perceptions of the receptiveness of their work environments to women moving into non-traditional areas, particularly management, women's perceptions are somewhat less favourable than men's.

There were also significant differences evident between the responses from Technico and Pharmsco employees. Pharmsco employees generally have a more favourable view of the fairness of processes within their work environment and the opportunities available to women than do Technico employees.

The interviews and surveys reported here provide some valuable information about how employees perceive their employment opportunities and the various affirmative action policies implemented in their organisations. In the final chapter, this information is considered along with the extant literature to identify possible strategies for improving the practice of affirmative action within organisations.

Chapter 9

The Practice of Affirmative Action: Beyond the Rhetoric

Empirically grounded research can be a powerful tool for change, especially in the emotionally charged areas such as equal opportunity....

(Schein, 1994: 51)

9.1 Introduction

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, there was a growing social movement calling for government action to improve employment opportunities for women (Kramar, 1991). In 1984, the *Sex Discrimination Act* was gazetted, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex, marital status or pregnancy (and later amended to include family responsibilities), in employment, education, accommodation and the provision of goods and services. Further legislative action took the form of a more active approach to removing the barriers limiting women's employment opportunities. As a result of the *Affirmative Action Act 1986*, private sector employers, community organisations, non-government schools, unions and group training schemes with more than 100 employees and higher education institutions are required to develop and report annually on their efforts to improve employment opportunities for women.

Whether or not the affirmative action legislation is an appropriate public policy response to redress the problem of unequal employment opportunities has generated considerable debate in Australia (Moens, 1985; Sawyer, 1987; O'Donnell & Hall, 1988; Thornton, 1990; Burton, 1991; Poiner & Wills, 1991; Kramar, 1991; Crowley *et al*, 1992; and Braithwaite, 1993). The first stage of the research reported in this thesis sought to extend the debate about affirmative action to include a more detailed description of the form compliance with the legislation has taken.

In any discussion of affirmative action it is essential to recognise that a diversity of policies make up affirmative action (Taylor–Carter *et al.*, 1995). An affirmative action program is not a homogeneous entity. To enhance our understanding of how affirmative action has been implemented by Australian organisations it seemed clear that a descriptive typology of affirmative action which adequately captured the types of affirmative action policies being practised in Australia in the early 1990s would have to be developed.

The sheer volume of the number of policies that had been reported to the Affirmative Action Agency meant it was not feasible to focus on all policies and all of their characteristics at once. Instead, by classifying policies according to salient underlying dimensions, the complex reality of affirmative action as practised in Australia could be reduced to a more meaningful set for analysis (Bailey, 1994). I used a descriptive model suggested by Kanter (1976) as the basis for developing a system for categorising affirmative action policies. Feedback from a sample of EEO practitioners suggested Kanter's three category framework did not adequately describe the variety of affirmative action policies reported in Australia in the 1990s. I extended Kanter's (1976) three categories to five categories. This elaborated framework for classifying affirmative action policies was used to develop a profile of affirmative action policies that 288 organisations reported they had implemented over the period 1990/91 to 1992/93. From this profile, it is possible to discern the types of affirmative action policies and their frequency these organisations have chosen to implement.

The second stage of my research concerned three organisations identified by the Affirmative Action Agency as 'good' performers in the affirmative action domain. In particular, I described how employees in these three organisations perceived the affirmative action policies operating in their organisations and, more generally, their perceptions of the environments in which they worked. This was seen as important as an individual's perceptions of their environment and affirmative action may influence their attitudes and behaviour with respect to affirmative action.

In this final chapter, the findings of these two stages of research are reviewed, each in light of the other, and the implications for the practice of affirmative action within organisations are reviewed. The insights gained from the research are used to explore strategies for enhancing the practice of affirmative action.

9.2 The practice of affirmative action

Historically women have taken a secondary role in the paid work force (Ryan & Conlon, 1975). In the 1970s and 1980s, there was a growing movement within Australia to rectify this problem and achieve a workplace characterised by equal employment opportunities. What equality of opportunity actually means has generated considerable debate. In describing the various conceptualisations of equality of opportunity, Cockburn (1989) notes the tendency to present it in a dichotomous manner (see for example, Jewson & Mason, 1986, 1987). While a dichotomous scheme may be a convenient means of highlighting critical differences between how individuals might conceptualise equality of opportunity, Cockburn (1989) argues that one cannot assume that the manner in which organisations address equal opportunities is, in practice, adequately described by such a dichotomy. In her view, of greater practical value is an approach to describing the equal opportunities movement as a continuum; an agenda of greater or shorter length. Her observations of British organisations with equal opportunity programs in place led her to conclude that organisations, or more correctly, those people making the decisions about the particular policies implemented and those affected by the policies, do not simply subscribe to one conceptualisation of equality of opportunity or the other. Rather, within organisations there is, according to Cockburn (1989), often a mixture of policies in place — from those which may be associated with a ‘formal’ approach to equality (a shorter agenda) to those which are associated with the ‘substantive’ approach to equality (a longer agenda).

To determine whether Cockburn’s scenario is relevant in the Australian context a review of the public reports submitted to the Affirmative Action Agency for 1991/92

was documented in Chapter 4. The first point to note from the review was there was only a relatively small proportion of companies which were apparently committed to the spirit of the affirmative action legislation. Consistent with Braithwaite's (1992) findings, only 12 per cent of the companies which submitted a report to the Agency for 1991/1992 appeared to demonstrate a real commitment to implementing an affirmative action program.

One of Thornton's (1990) criticisms of the nature of the affirmative action legislation was that the legislation could only be 'piecemeal', as companies could not be forced to be committed to the spirit of the legislation (see section 3.5.4 of this thesis). That such a small proportion of companies were apparently putting affirmative action in place would seem to lend support to Thornton's (1991) criticism. The tit-for-tat (TFT) nature of the legislation (Ayres & Braithwaite, 1992) may have enhanced compliance with the reporting requirement of the legislation, but it seems the implementation of affirmative action policies in accordance with the spirit of the legislation has been less pronounced.

The five types of affirmative action policies being implemented by a sample of Australian companies over the period 1990/91 to 1992/93 were described in the final sections of Chapter 4. In a critique of the affirmative action legislation, Burton (1991) argued that, given the non-prescriptive nature of the legislation, Australian companies would opt for the 'soft' option in implementing affirmative action; that is, they would only implement policies which would not challenge the traditional order within the organisation. In this sense, Burton's 'soft' option is similar to Cockburn's short agenda. In particular, Burton (1991) anticipated that policies designed to ensure discriminatory practices are removed from personnel processes and policies providing training for women to help them 'fit in' with the work environment would be the most 'popular' policies.

As the most common type of policy described in the 288 reports reviewed was 'social structural' (policies which address personnel practices within the organisation),

Burton's predictions about the responses of Australian companies would appear to be supported by the findings of this study. While policies designed to help women 'fit in' with the work environment ('temperamental') policies were also reported by a number of organisations, they were far less frequent than the 'social structural' policies.

While certainly not a common response, Burton's (1991) 'hard' option of challenging the traditional order has, it seems, not been completely avoided by companies. Of the 12 per cent of organisations identified as having made efforts in the affirmative action domain, a number indicated they had introduced policies which facilitate more flexible work arrangements ('work & family' policies) as they recognised that traditional work patterns may not be compatible with other responsibilities employees may have. As well, some organisations had developed policies to increase the number of women in traditional male occupations ('non-traditional' policies) and to improve the career opportunities in traditional female occupations ('opportunities' policies). However, the number of these types of policies were significantly less than the predominant 'social structural' policies (see Figures 4.6 and 4.7).

Cockburn's (1989) belief that the practice of equal opportunities within companies is more accurately described as a continuum (or agenda) of shorter or longer length would seem to be supported by the various mixes of affirmative action policies evident in some Australian companies. There were a number of companies who did nothing but fill in their affirmative action reports to the Agency (a very short agenda!); others opted only for 'social structural' policies which removed discriminatory practices to ensure personnel processes were fair (a short agenda), and yet others had in place a variety of policies from the 'temperamental', 'work & family', 'non-traditional', 'social structural' and 'opportunities' categories (examples of longer agendas).

The relative frequency of 'social structural' policies (especially those concerned with removing discriminatory barriers) cannot necessarily be attributed to the affirmative action legislation alone. Rather, one should not overlook the impact of the more punitive anti-discrimination legislation in driving organisations' efforts to review their

personnel processes. The anti-discrimination legislation proscribes discriminatory practices, and financial penalties can be incurred if discrimination is proven.

Similarly, many of the work and family policies implemented within organisations may not have been motivated by affirmative action legislation specifically. Ratification of ILO 156, Workers with Family Responsibilities, by Australia in March 1990 has resulted in work and family issues informing enterprise bargaining and award restructuring. There may have been external pressures operating on organisations to introduce such policies to assist workers balance work and family responsibilities (Cass, 1995a).

While there is no requirement within the affirmative action legislation for organisations to implement any specific form of affirmative action policy, the anti-discrimination legislation and ratification of ILO 156 may have been influential in the implementation of 'social structural' and 'work & family' policies. The other, less common policies ('temperamental', 'non-traditional' and 'opportunities') may be viewed as 'voluntary' actions, since there do not appear to be the same external pressures on organisations to implement these types of policies. In choosing to implement such policies organisations are, it could be argued, moving beyond a strategy of avoiding penalties and complying with industrial requirements to initiating processes seeking to improve employment opportunities for women. But how effective have these processes been?

The three companies selected as case studies in the research reported here — Technico, Pharmsco and Healthco — were identified as having well-developed affirmative action programs in place, with an increasing representation of women both in employment generally, and in management positions specifically, over the period 1990/91 to 1992/93. As was evident from the discussion in Chapter 6, each of the companies had a particular combination of policies making up their affirmative action program. In Cockburn's terms, all would appear to have 'longer' rather than 'shorter' agendas in place. Technico appeared to have implemented the most comprehensive affirmative action program as it had examples of each type of policy — 'temperamental', 'work &

family', 'non-traditional', 'social structural' and 'opportunities' — in place. Pharmsco had policies from the 'temperamental', 'work & family' and 'social structural' categories. Although Healthco had 'work & family', 'non-traditional', 'social structural' and 'opportunities' policies in place, it had assiduously avoided any policies which targeted women specifically for there was a concern expressed by the Human Resources staff that such policies could be seen as 'positive discrimination'.

In summary, the practice of affirmative action in Australia in the early 1990s has taken many forms. Although the legislation covers all private sector employers, voluntary bodies, group training schemes, trade unions and non-government schools with more than 100 employees, only a relatively small number of companies appear to be committed to a comprehensive improvement of employment opportunities for women. As Burton (1991) anticipated, the most commonly reported policies by companies are those apparently concerned with 'tidying up' their personnel policies. Fewer organisations are, it seems, prepared to take on a longer agenda to equal opportunity which would challenge the traditional order within organisations.

9.3 Employees' perceptions

Affirmative action policies are designed to improve employment opportunities for women. Each of the case study organisations had a range of affirmative action policies which had been in place over a number of years. The rhetoric of their formal policies appeared to offer a great deal to women in terms of employment opportunities. In this study, the question of the 'effectiveness' of the companies' affirmative action programs was examined in terms of employees':

- understanding of affirmative action;
- perceptions of their companies' affirmative action policies and human resource policies in general; and
- perceptions of their employment opportunities.

Both qualitative (interviews of a sample of employees in each company) and quantitative (surveys of a larger group in Technico and Pharmsco) techniques were used to conduct the research. The interviews made it possible to probe employees' perceptions of their work environment and their perceptions of affirmative action. The survey research complemented the qualitative interviews by providing a means of measuring the incidence of the views expressed during the interviews. It 'quantified' the qualitative research.

The questions driving this stage of the research were related to identifying strategies to enhance the practice of affirmative action. What can we learn from employees about the practice of affirmative action? Can we improve the implementation of affirmative action within organisations? In light of these questions the key findings from the interviews and surveys are summarised. Some factors which may be influencing individuals' perceptions of affirmative action are then reviewed in section 9.4 and the implications of these for the practice of affirmative action are considered in more detail in section 9.5

9.3.1 Understanding of affirmative action

Despite the fact that the three companies studied here were apparently among the best performers in the affirmative action domain, the research findings in Chapters 7 and 8 suggest that some employees were still unsure as to what affirmative action is and how it is practised in their companies. Over one third of respondents in Technico, and a quarter of respondents in Pharmsco, indicated they were unsure about the meaning of affirmative action. These numbers are consistent with the findings of the Macquarie University studies; where one third of employees in the companies surveyed were unfamiliar with the concept of affirmative action (Macquarie University, 1991, 1992, 1993).

Although each of the case study companies had indicated in their reports to the Agency that they had distributed an affirmative action statement to employees, on closer

investigation it was found that each, in fact, labelled the policy distributed to employees as an 'Equal Employment Opportunity' statement. It seems this term was perceived by the decision-makers in each company to be more acceptable to all employees than the apparent pejorative tone of 'affirmative action'. The companies did refer to 'affirmative action' or the 'affirmative action legislation' in their policy statements, but they had chosen not to focus on it in labelling the policy. The down-playing of the term 'affirmative action' may explain the high number of employees who were apparently unaware that their company had an affirmative action program in place and had difficulties operationalising the concept of affirmative action.

The misunderstanding about the nature of affirmative action may also have been the result of the recent press concerning the ALP's decision to introduce quotas to ensure that 35 per cent of Federal and State seats are held by women by 2002 (Delvecchio, 1994). In the press coverage of the ALP's decision, reference was often made to this as an 'affirmative action' initiative (Millet, 1994: 1; Kingston, 1994: 9). That over 40 per cent of respondents in both Technico and Pharmsco were unsure about whether affirmative action involved setting quotas for determining how many women should be employed in particular jobs could be a reflection of this press coverage. That there is no provision for quotas in the affirmative action legislation was generally not well understood.

In each of the company's reports to the Affirmative Action Agency, reference was also made to communicating the affirmative action legislation to employees through articles contained in their in-house magazines, induction programs and supervisory training. The interviews suggested awareness of articles concerning affirmative action initiatives was low, and this was generally supported by the responses from the Technico and Pharmsco surveys. Assuming that employees read, and then remember, the articles in the in-house magazines is clearly a very big assumption. One of the interviewees from Technico related the difficulty in communicating information about affirmative action

through the newsletters to her own efforts to publicise a new project with which she was involved.

I'm in a project at the moment that is replacing all the core business systems. We have newsletters and we put articles in different publications throughout Technico and people still say they're not getting information. So if I say maybe they're not putting articles in *In Brief*¹, they probably are, and I haven't taken any notice of them. I'm sure if I went through *In Brief* I'd probably find something. Communication is a problem.

(Female, mid-20s, Technico)

A number of interviewees indicated they did not consider an occasional article in their in-house magazine as consultation, because it was not a two-way process.

A similar finding emerged from questions concerning employees' awareness of the affirmative action components of the training programs they have attended. Approximately half of Pharmsco respondents indicated they could recall a component of their training making reference to affirmative action, but less than a third of Technico respondents could. As a means of communicating a policy affecting all employees, the inclusion of a section on affirmative action in induction programs and supervisory training may have its limitations.

9.3.2 Perceptions of companies' affirmative action policies

With respect to employees' awareness of specific affirmative action policies, there were mixed responses. Some respondents indicated they were familiar with most policies, while others indicated very low levels of awareness. There was no single policy with which all employees could indicate they were familiar. The (sexual) harassment policy in both Technico and Pharmsco was the policy with which respondents were most familiar. In Pharmsco, in particular, awareness was very high. Both companies had taken a more active approach to communicating this policy than they had for their other policies. In Pharmsco's case, all employees were required to attend a one day workshop detailing the company's policy on harassment and EEO. For Technico employees, an information package had been distributed and those in supervisory positions and above

¹ This is a pseudonym for Technico's in-house magazine.

had to attend a training session detailing Technico's sexual harassment policy and their responsibilities for implementing the policy.

Employees' awareness of other affirmative action policies was more variable. From the interviews with Healthco staff, and the surveys of both Technico and Pharmsco, it seems despite the fact that there are both maternity and paternity leave policies in place in each of the companies, awareness of the maternity leave policy is still much higher than for paternity leave.

The higher awareness of the sexual harassment policy relative to that of the family leave policies may be understood, in part, by reference to their coverage. Family leave policies are only of direct interest to those who are seeking to use them — generally younger staff members with young families — and of indirect interest to others. The sexual harassment policy, on the other hand, is one that relates to all employees, since it concerns what is/isn't acceptable behaviour within the organisation.

With respect to the Women's Forums (a 'temperamental' policy) which had been running in Technico for three years before being changed to the People's Forums, there were mixed responses. From the survey of Technico employees², it seems that almost a third of women and nearly half of the men were not in complete agreement with the policy of Women's Forums. Some interviewees expressed concern about the issue of singling out women in a particular policy. The studies by Macquarie University gauging attitudes to affirmative action (Macquarie University, 1991, 1992, 1993) found a similar concern with policies which paid particular attention to women, expressed by respondents (see section 5.4.1 of this thesis). Some of the opinions expressed by the women interviewees about the Women's Forums indicated the forums were highly valued by them. Reconciling these two views — those for and those against this type of policy — clearly creates a difficulty for those responsible for designing and implementing policies. In Pharmsco and Technico in 1994, the views of those against

² As noted in Chapter 8, I was not given permission to survey Pharmsco employees about the Women's Forums that had been run in Pharmsco prior to 1994.

the policy had overridden those for it, and what had been the 'women only' forums had been extended to include men.

In contrast to the Women's Forums, the Career Development Library and Service which was available to all employees within Technico (an 'opportunities' policy), was generally well supported by female and male employees. Although designed as a service available to all Technico employees, a greater percentage of women than men indicated they had made use of the facilities. Similarly, the principle of companies offering flexible work practices to help employees balance work and family ('work & family' policies) is apparently well supported by employees. These practices are not, however, widely available in the case study organisations.

From the survey responses, it seems only a small number of employees were aware of Pharmsco's Managing Diversity policy (a policy document with reference to a range of types of policies). This document had been released a year before the interviews and surveys were conducted. This policy had been reported to the Agency as one which addressed a number of important issues in the affirmative action domain and where efforts had been made to communicate the policy to managers. Once again, the manner in which the policy had been communicated must be questioned, given the low levels of employees' awareness. Informing one level of the organisation will not ensure that all employees are made aware of the relevant policy.

It seems there were both varying levels of awareness of and support for the different policies. It seems that policies specifically targeting women ('temperamental' policies) had generated some resistance, while the 'work & family' and 'opportunities' policies appeared to attract greater support. The sexual harassment policy in Technico and Pharmsco (a 'social structural' policy) appeared to generate the highest levels of awareness and approval.

9.3.3 Perceptions of employment processes

Efforts by the organisations to ensure personnel procedures are non-discriminatory ('social structural' policies) are generally not immediately apparent to employees as they tend to happen 'behind the scenes'. As such, directly ascertaining employees' awareness of, and response to, efforts to ensure personnel procedures are non-discriminatory was not possible. Instead, the more indirect route of gauging employees' perceptions of the fairness of these processes was taken.

From the surveys it seems a significant percentage of women in the case study companies indicated they did not believe women enjoyed the same employment opportunities as men. Many women indicated they did not feel the recruitment and promotion processes were fair. Moreover, they indicated they still perceived there to be an expectation within their companies that top positions should be held by men, that women working in non-traditional areas were still not readily accepted and women had to work harder than men at the same level.

While many women perceived women's employment opportunities to be somewhat less than those of men, their perceptions of women's employment opportunities in their own organisations were brighter than for the workplace generally. This is taken up in more detail in section 9.5.

In contrast to recruitment and promotion processes, interviewees in the three companies expressed a strong belief that training was readily available to women and men for both professional and personal development purposes. The survey responses of Technico and Pharmsco employees reinforced this perception. Burton (1991: 17) raises a cautionary note about interpreting the availability of training. She points out that not all training is the same, and that although women and men may appear to be accessing similar levels of training, the focus of the training may be different. While this concern cannot be ruled out in the case studies, none of the interviewees raised this when discussing the availability of training in their companies. Even those interviewees who

were able to recount other areas in which they perceived women to be disadvantaged did not identify differences in the quality of training available to women and men as a problem.

Across both Technico and Pharmsco men appeared to view women's employment opportunities more positively than women did and the employment processes as more fair than women did.

9.3.4 Inter-company differences

While there were similarities evident in the patterns of responses from women and men in Technico and Pharmsco, there were also differences in the patterns of responses between the two companies. Generally, Pharmsco employees reported a more favourable view of the fairness of the personnel processes within their work environment and the opportunities available to women than did Technico employees. This was a somewhat surprising finding since, at first glance, Technico had a more comprehensive affirmative action program in place than Pharmsco and it had, moreover, won an Affirmative Action Award. Intuitively, one would expect a more comprehensive affirmative action program to be more effective.

Two features which distinguished Pharmsco and Technico responses may help us understand the differences in the patterns of responses between the two companies. First, there was a significant difference in employees' perceptions of commitment from senior management to the concept of equal employment opportunity between respondents in the two companies. More employees perceived the senior management in Pharmsco to be committed to equal opportunities than was the case in Technico. Second, there was also a significant difference in respondents' perceptions of employee support for equal employment opportunities. Pharmsco employees, it seems, were perceived to be more supportive of equal opportunity than Technico employees (see Table 8.8).

In trying to understand the differences between the two companies it is important to note that the industry bases of the two companies are different. Whereas Technico is a high technology company with an engineering bent (a traditional male industry), Pharmsco is in the pharmaceutical industry, where women have traditionally been better represented. Achieving change in a traditional male environment is a more difficult task than in an industry which has been more used to the presence of women (Leck & Saunders, 1992).

9.4 Factors affecting perceptions of affirmative action

Taylor–Carter *et al.* (1995: 130) argued that to achieve genuine change in the workplace ‘there is a real need to understand the way individuals in organisations respond to and think about affirmative action’. While it was not within the realm of this research to fully explain the origins and meaning of the factors influencing the respondents’ perceptions, reference to recent research from the US does suggest some insight into possible factors influencing employees’ perceptions. Reviewing the key findings of this research in light of the factors influencing employees’ responses to affirmative action may suggest important considerations in the design and implementation of affirmative action policies within organisations.

In seeking to understand the factors affecting employees’ responses to affirmative action, Taylor–Carter *et al.* (1995) developed a model of an individual’s response to affirmative action. Drawing heavily on a special issue of the journal *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* (15(1 &2)) devoted to research into the implementation and consequences of affirmative action, Taylor–Carter *et al.* (1995) identified policy context (external) factors and evaluator perspective (internal) factors affecting employees’ responses to affirmative action. These factors are worthy of review as they highlight the complex nature of employees’ perceptions of affirmative action³.

³ For a more detailed discussion of the various factors influencing employees’ perceptions of affirmative action, see Taylor–Carter *et al.* (1995), Turner and Pratkanis (1994a and 1994b), Crosby (1994), Murrell *et al.* (1994), Barnes Nacoste (1994), Major *et al.* (1994), Taylor (1994), de Vries and Pettigrew (1994) and Eberhardt and Fiske (1994).

9.4.1 Policy context

According to Taylor–Carter *et al.* (1995) the policy context variables affecting employees' perceptions of affirmative action include the specific type of affirmative action policy used and the organisational setting in which it is implemented. In particular they note the importance of the relative emphasis of the policy on sex or merit, the history of discrimination in the firm, managerial support for the policy, and the presentation of the policy⁴.

Emphasis of the policy on sex or merit

Taylor–Carter *et al.* (1995) argued that perceptions of the fairness of affirmative action policies are an important influence on individuals' responses to affirmative action. They pointed to many studies which have demonstrated that resistance to a particular affirmative action policy increases if it is believed that an individual's sex, rather than merit, is emphasised (Kravitz & Platania, 1993; Singer, 1990). Merit-based affirmative action policies are viewed as more fair than those policies which incorporate an individual's sex. In this context, 'social structural' policies could be expected to generate greater support than 'temperamental' policies.

History of discrimination in the firm

Taylor–Carter *et al.* (1995) maintain that an individual is more likely to support affirmative action in a situation where it is clear that the organisation has been discriminatory. Affirmative action can then be seen as an equity-restoring device; it may be seen as fair. Researchers have demonstrated that if an affirmative action policy is presented to employees as a means of overcoming past discrimination in the organisation it may be seen as more fair and so generate more support (Nacoste, 1987).

⁴ As the research on which the model was based was largely drawn from the US experience, some of the factors are not directly relevant to the Australian experience. For example, race is not covered by the private sector affirmative action legislation in Australia (although it is included in the EEO legislation covering public sectors). As such, I have not included specific reference to their arguments concerning race. As well I have omitted the variable relating to the perceived legality of affirmative action initiatives as this reflects an ongoing dispute among US Supreme Court justices about the criteria for legality. For more information see Taylor–Carter *et al.* (1995:149–150).

Managerial support for the policy

The acceptance of affirmative action policies is more likely when there is clear support from senior management for the policies. This factor can be understood more generally in the context of affirmative action as a change program. There is substantial evidence to suggest that commitment from senior management is critical if a change program is to be effective (Rodgers *et al.*, 1993; Patrickson & Bamber, 1995). According to Taylor–Carter *et al.* (1995) signs of managerial support for affirmative action send an important message to all employees and encourage their support of affirmative action.

Presentation of the policy

How an affirmative action policy is presented to employees may also influence their support of, or resistance to, the policy. In particular, research suggests that communication about the policy which places it in the context of remedying past discrimination may enhance acceptance of the policy (Crosby & Clayton, 1990). For instance, making it clear to employees that a particular policy is being introduced as a remedy for under–representation of women in particular occupations may promote greater acceptance of it among employees.

9.4.2 Evaluator perspective

As well, Taylor–Carter *et al.* (1995) have identified and explained the evaluator perspective factors affecting employees' perceptions of affirmative action as those beliefs and values relevant to the judgment of fairness of the affirmative action policies. These include the beliefs regarding employment opportunities for women, attributions regarding the source of any perceived inequality, sex role beliefs, beliefs concerning the appropriateness of government intervention in business and the perceived consequences of affirmative action.

Beliefs regarding employment opportunities of women

Whether an individual believes equal employment opportunities exist for women is considered an important factor in influencing their support for affirmative action. From their research, Veilleux and Tougas (1989) concluded that men who believed women were relatively disadvantaged in terms of salaries, hiring and promotions tended to be supportive of affirmative action policies. They also concluded that men who believed their own group would be deprived as a result of affirmative action tended to be less supportive of it. This suggests that responses to affirmative action can be partly understood with reference to individuals' beliefs concerning the opportunity structures for women and how changing them may impact on men's own opportunity structures.

Clayton and Crosby (1985) also demonstrated how women's reactions to affirmative action may be understood with reference to their beliefs about the opportunities available to women. Women who believe that women as a group are deprived of equal opportunities are more likely to be supportive of affirmative action policies than those who don't believe differences exist between the opportunities available to women and men (Taylor-Carter *et al.*, 1995).

Attributions regarding the source of any perceived inequity

While beliefs that there are inequities in employment opportunities may be a necessary, it is not a sufficient, basis for support of affirmative action (Taylor-Carter *et al.*, 1995). For individuals who do not believe that women have the same opportunities as men, how they explain the perceived inequality may also be an important factor in determining their support of, or resistance to, particular types of affirmative action policies. According to Taylor-Carter *et al.* (1995: 136)

to the extent that the cause of unequal employment opportunities can be attributed to characteristics of the minority group rather than some form of societal discrimination, affirmative action may be viewed as unnecessary and unfair.

For instance, those who believe that women are not equally represented in many occupations because of lower motivational or ability levels than men are less likely to support policies to improve women's representation in those occupations (that is, 'non-traditional' policies). If, on the other hand, individuals attribute the inequality of opportunity to structural problems in the organisation or to society more generally they are more likely to support affirmative action policies of this type.

Taylor-Carter *et al.* (1995) suggest that while much of the research about stereotypic perceptions of women's abilities is based on men's perceptions, it is also possible that some women may subscribe to those stereotypic perceptions too. Some women may believe that women, generally, do not possess the abilities necessary for effective performance in some occupations and so may also resist efforts to improve women's opportunities.

Another, related, point is suggested by research which demonstrates that even where there is evidence that women clearly have fewer opportunities in the workplace, women may often believe that discrimination doesn't happen in their own organisations (Crosby, 1982; Clayton & Crosby, 1985; Dahlerup, 1988; Mawson, 1993; Matheson *et al.*, 1994). Two explanations are proffered for this phenomenon. First, individuals may have problems aggregating information about how organisational resources are distributed, which may make it more difficult for them to 'see' discrimination (Taylor-Carter *et al.*, 1995). An alternative explanation for women denying the existence of inequality in their workplace concerns psychological 'comfort' levels. According to Taylor-Carter *et al.* (1995: 139)

...some women may be motivated to ignore the presence of discrimination in order to avoid the psychological uneasiness which attends being at a disadvantage. Studies have shown that women may acknowledge employment inequities at a group level, and yet deny the existence of discrimination at a personal level.

Sex role beliefs

Sex role beliefs concern behavioural expectations for women and men. Taylor–Carter *et al.* (1995) maintain that individuals who hold ‘traditional’ views about the appropriateness of women in the paid workforce and in traditional male occupations are more likely to oppose affirmative action policies designed to bring women into non-traditional occupations.

Values concerning the role of government intervention in business

Another factor which may explain an individual’s response to affirmative action relates to their beliefs about whether government has a right to intervene in the workplace. With respect to affirmative action it is argued that individuals who believe that government regulation of employment opportunities is inappropriate will be more likely to oppose affirmative action (Taylor–Carter *et al.*, 1995).

Perceived consequences of affirmative action

A further factor affecting support for affirmative action may be the perceived consequences of affirmative action. Research in the US (Nacoste, 1990; Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990) suggests that women may be more supportive of affirmative action policies operating outside of their own work environments than those within. It is argued that this is because affirmative action policies in one’s own organisation may suggest women need special help; some women may believe such actions could reflect on the perceived competence of the individual woman. As well, women may also be reluctant to support affirmative action policies in their own organisations because they fear negative reactions from men in the organisation. Taylor–Carter *et al.* (1995) suggest that women who believe affirmative action will result in stigmatisation and resentment from men will not be supportive of affirmative action.

As noted earlier, another factor affecting responses to affirmative action relates to the fear some men may have that improving employment opportunities for women will be

at a cost to the opportunities available to them. Men who believe that men as a group would lose opportunities in terms of hiring, promotions and salaries as a result of affirmative action policies would be expected to be less supportive of affirmative action (Taylor–Carter *et al.*, 1995).

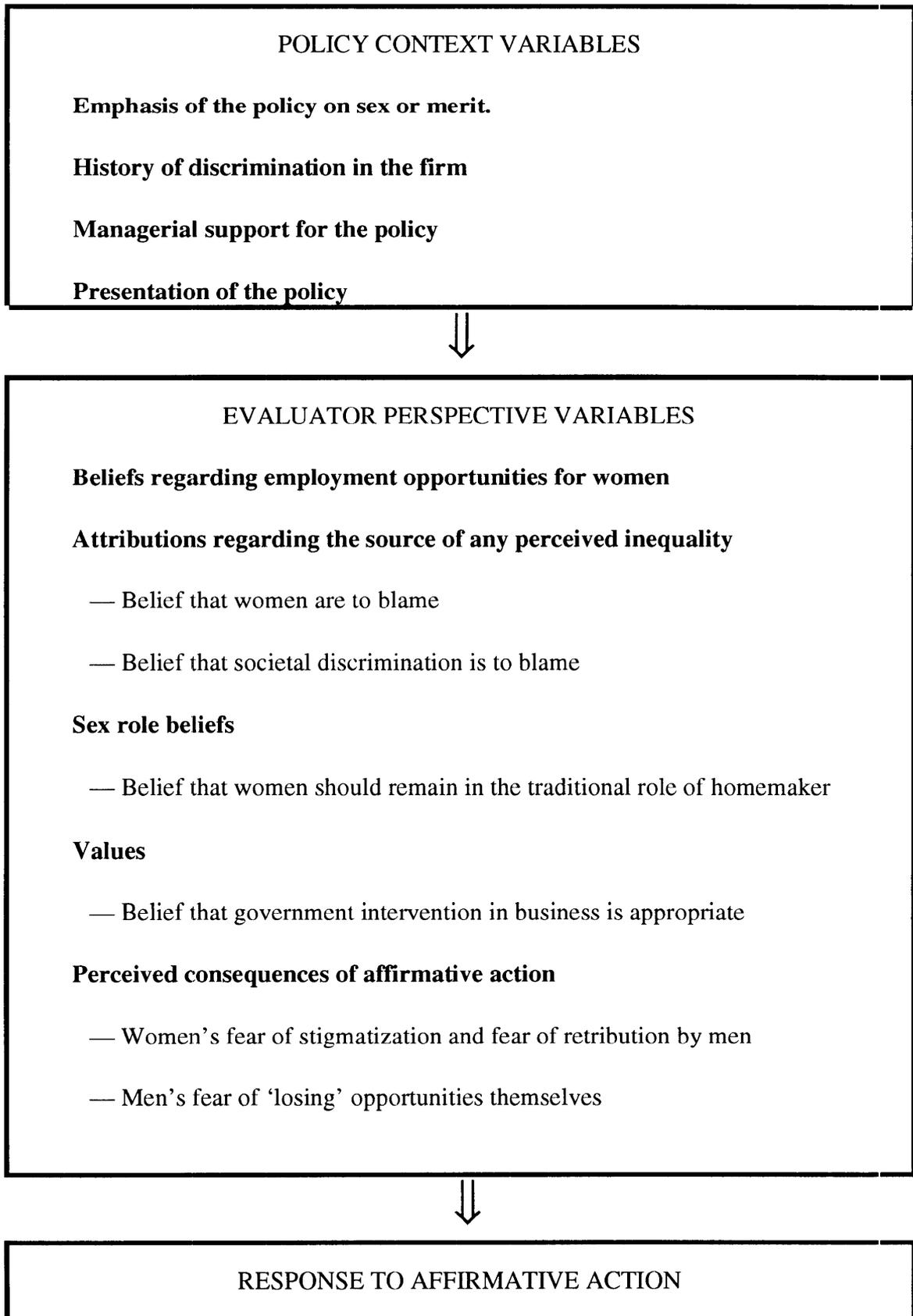
According to Taylor–Carter *et al.* (1995) individual perspective variables are assumed to moderate contextual variables. They argue that an individual’s reaction to contextual variables will be shaped by their belief and value systems; they are the lens through which affirmative action is perceived. (See Figure 9.1 for their model of the factors affecting employees’ response to affirmative action.)

From the analysis presented in Chapter 4 it is clear there are many variants of affirmative action policies. This brief review of research concerning the way individuals may respond to affirmative action points to many different factors which may be affecting their responses. In considering the findings of this study concerning employees’ perceptions of affirmative action in the Australian context, reflection on the factors listed by Taylor–Carter *et al.* (1995) may assist practitioners implement more effective affirmative action programs. Developing affirmative action policies that are well-supported within the organisation may be an important process for improving the effectiveness of the policies.

9.5 Implications for practice

The purpose of gauging employees’ perceptions of the practice of affirmative action in their organisations and their perceptions of their employment opportunities was to learn from those who have experienced affirmative action; can we identify means of improving the practice of affirmative action in organisations? The work of Taylor–Carter *et al.* (1995) suggests that developing effective affirmative action policies for organisations requires a sound understanding of factors that may be affecting employees’ perceptions of specific affirmative action policies and their support for

Figure 9.1: Individual's response to affirmative action



Adapted from Taylor-Carter *et al.* (1995)

those policies. Consideration of key findings from the Technico and Pharmsco case studies in light of factors which may be influencing employees' perceptions may suggest practical solutions to enhancing the practice of affirmative action.

9.5.1 Establishing the need for affirmative action

That women's and men's perceptions of the employment opportunities available to women within their organisations (and in the workplace more generally) significantly differed was a key finding from the analysis of responses from the interviews and surveys. While the vast majority of male respondents in Technico and Pharmsco (82 per cent and 93 per cent respectively) agreed that women and men had the same employment opportunities in their organisations, significantly fewer women did (38 per cent and 68 per cent respectively).

Why women's and men's perceptions of employment opportunities available to women differ so much cannot be fully explained by this research. Some authors have argued that a major reason for such differences concerns the relative positioning of women and men in society generally (Harding, 1987) and in the workplace specifically (Schein, 1994; O'Leary & Ryan, 1994). As men have traditionally held the dominant positions in organisations, this has clear repercussion for the 'lenses' through which women and men view their environment (Harding, 1987). While the differences reported here undoubtedly deserve more attention in future research, the significance of these findings for this study lies in the implications it may have for the levels of support men may provide for affirmative action policies. An important influence on men's support for affirmative action policies is a belief that women are disadvantaged in the workplace (Tougas & Veilleux, 1989). With so few men apparently believing this in Technico and Pharmsco, generating support for affirmative action policies may be a problem facing those responsible for implementing affirmative action policies, particularly considering the findings that 20 per cent of men in Technico and 27 per cent of men in Pharmsco believed that women now have greater opportunities than men.

This belief that women are not disadvantaged in the workplace may have particular relevance to the apparent resistance expressed by some men towards the Women's Forums (a 'temperamental' policy) in Technico. Some interviewees expressed concern about the forums and almost a third of male respondents in Technico agreed with the statement that the forums were 'discriminatory against men'. If women are not seen to be disadvantaged in the workplace, it could be argued there is no reason to implement affirmative action, particularly those policies in which women are being specifically targeted (for example, 'temperamental' policies).

One suggestion made by Taylor-Carter *et al.* (1995) to increase men's support for affirmative action is to present data on inequities in the firm, and in the workplace more generally. In seeking to convince employees of the need for affirmative action, Taylor-Carter *et al.* (1995) also highlight the importance of recognising that some men may believe they will be disadvantaged as a result of efforts to improve employment opportunities for women. Educating men about the relative disadvantage women experience may be a means of generating their support and alleviating their fears of being disadvantaged themselves. Why men may need to be educated about women's disadvantage may be understood, in part, by reference to the point Taylor-Carter *et al.* (1995) made about the difficulties some women may have in recognising discrimination in their workplaces. That is, individuals may have problems in aggregating the data about the distribution of resources in their organisation and so cannot 'see' inequities. Making this aggregate data clearer to employees may generate more support for affirmative action initiatives. In the cases of Technico and Pharmsco, highlighting the unequal representation of women in more senior positions and their clustering in the lower status, lower paid positions may be a useful strategy in generating more support for affirmative action.

9.5.2 Stereotypes and sex role beliefs

Taylor-Carter *et al.* (1995) note that stereotypic beliefs about women's abilities relative to men's and beliefs about appropriate roles for women and men may be factors

affecting support for affirmative action policies. In the cases of Technico and Pharmsco, there does seem to be some evidence to suggest that some men, particularly men over 35 years old, subscribe to some of the traditional stereotypes concerning women's abilities. A consequence of this belief may be that even if these men do acknowledge that inequality between women and men may exist, they may see the cause of that inequality as grounded in women's own deficiencies, and so see no role for the organisation to play in seeking to improve women's opportunities. Such attitudes may limit the effectiveness of policies seeking to address inequality in the workplace.

Taylor-Carter *et al.* (1995) also suggest that individuals holding traditional views on appropriate roles for women and men may be somewhat resistant to policies seeking to improve women's representation in traditional male areas, that is, 'non-traditional' policies. That only 45 per cent of women in Technico and 50 per cent of women in Pharmsco agreed that women working in traditional male areas are readily accepted may suggest that such resistance may be problematic to achieving an environment perceived as open and equitable.

Related to resistance to women moving into traditional male domains may be the resistance there seems to be for men's roles to change with respect to family responsibilities. In Chapter 3 it was noted that Poiner and Wills (1991) argued that affirmative action policies would largely be ineffective in changing the employment status for most women while the traditional division of labour between women and men in household and child care responsibilities continues to prevail.

Each of the case study organisations has family leave policies in place which cater equally for both women and men. The maternity and paternity leave policies contain essentially the same provisions. The parental leave policies make it possible for women and men to take leave, or opt for part-time employment, for up to 12 months after a child is born to care for it. Significantly more women and men were apparently knowledgeable about the maternity leave policy than they were about the paternity leave

policy operating in the companies. While both organisations have made paternity leave available, this leave does not seem to have made any significant changes to who takes leave after a child is born — women still do⁵. In her study of a retail company in Britain in the mid-1980s, Cockburn (1989) reported a similar finding.

As to men taking more responsibility for children and home life, however, here men were clearly united. Though they would certainly welcome a few days off for a new baby, especially if this were provided as a right, there were very few who would seriously consider taking a long 'paternity suspense' or career break. ...Men show no signs of treating their careers as interruptible.

(Cockburn, 1989: 221)

That paternity leave is apparently less well accepted than maternity leave appears to be consistent with the research of Gelb and Palley (1982) which suggests that policies concerned with role equity (that is, policies which extend rights enjoyed by men to women) are more likely to be supported than policies involving role change (for instance, policies enabling men to take a more active role in family responsibilities). In this context, 'social structural' policies may generate greater support than 'work & family' policies which seek to change men's role in the private sphere and 'non-traditional' policies which seek to change women's roles in the public sphere.

What do these findings suggest for the practice of affirmative action? Policy makers may need to consider how to make these types of 'role change' policies more acceptable. Some means for dealing with such resistance to changing roles are explored in section 9.5.4.

9.5.3 'Expected' consequences

Taylor-Carter *et al.* (1995) pointed to women's own fears of stigmatisation as a result of affirmative action and men's fears of being disadvantaged as possible factors generating some resistance to affirmative action. Fear of these 'negative' consequences may have an effect on the levels of support for affirmative action policies within an organisation. Hunter (1992) also suggests that women may resist affirmative action

⁵ While they did not provide the exact figures for women and men taking parental leave, the HR staff in each company indicated that women, overwhelmingly, were the ones accessing it.

policies if they believe that such policies imply they are deficient in some way; that they need special help. As a consequence of these fears policies specifically targeting women, for example, 'temperamental' policies, may engender less support than policies seeking to improve the fairness of employment processes more generally (for example, 'social structural' policies).

There was some evidence to suggest these fears may be held by some employees in the case study organisations. One of the women interviewed in Healthco proffered the following comment concerning affirmative action:

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

In Technico, 27 per cent of women did not agree that they approved of the Women's Forums. Their apparent concern about this type of policy may be the result of a fear of stigmatisation, and/or how men may respond to policies (as one woman interviewed in Technico described) 'privileging' women. That men might be somewhat antagonistic to women receiving what they perceive to be 'preferential treatment' may, in part, explain the number of men indicating they believed the forums were discriminatory against men (33 per cent) and that women now have a greater opportunity to advance than men (23 per cent).

One means of dealing with these fears may be through making it very clear to all employees that the merit principle underpins all employment decisions in the organisation. While this has been implied in each of the EEO statements of the organisations, it may be necessary to promote this principle in a more effective manner. Making it clear that employment decisions are made on the basis of merit rather than sex may help alleviate resistance to affirmative action from this source. It may also enhance employees' understanding of affirmative action and counter the unfounded beliefs that affirmative action involves quotas, which may be another factor affecting employees' support of affirmative action.

In the case study organisations such an emphasis on the merit principle may also be important for addressing concerns expressed by a significant proportion of employees about the fairness of the employment processes more generally.

According to their public reports submitted to the Agency, in each of the companies efforts had been made to ensure the personnel processes were fair to both women and men ('social structural' policies). Significantly, however, there were differences between women's and men's perceptions of the fairness of the processes — particularly the promotion processes. A significant proportion of women were not convinced that the reviewed employment processes were fair. This suggests that formal policies may be a necessary, but not a sufficient condition, for guaranteeing equality of opportunity.

Simply because policies are officially in place, does not ensure they are practised in the workplace (Kramar, 1995b). For instance, the policy of internally advertising positions to ensure that all employees are aware of opportunities (a 'social structural' policy) within all three organisations was viewed with some scepticism by women and men. According to some of the interviewees, positions had already been 'ear-marked' and the positions advertised only because a rule was in place that all vacancies be internally advertised. It seems that the merit-based practices enshrined in some of the 'social structural' policies espoused by the organisations are not perceived by many women as being practised.

That formal policies can be circumvented by informal processes is certainly not unique to the case study companies. A similar finding is reported by Kramar (1995b) in her review of personnel processes within a leading financial institution in Australia. Kramar (1995b: 268) provides an example of how the formal processes for selection are by-passed by the informal networks at work in the company.

These informal networks circumvented the formal policy...The networks operated through three mechanisms: first, selectors asked their friends in the organisation if they were interested in a position; second, selectors informally discussed individuals with their managers; third, informal meetings were held with candidates before the selection process in an attempt to 'sound them out'. The use of these techniques was widely known, and many employees questioned the use of merit as the basis of selection to positions.

The means by which the official selection and promotion processes are undermined within the case studies can not be as clearly explicated as this from the survey findings. The significance of these findings for this study lies in their implications for more effectively managing employment processes within organisations so that employees perceive the processes as fair.

It is possible for organisations to address the problems of the effectiveness of such 'social structural' policies through reference to literature in the social psychological domain. Barnes Nacoste (1994) claims that organisations can have some role in managing employees' beliefs about policy procedures. This is possible because we are not talking about non-specific global beliefs, rather these are beliefs about the relative weights placed on decision-making criteria. According to Barnes Nacoste (1994) an organisation can manage beliefs about procedures through revealing, in understandable terms, the nature of its personnel selection procedures. Importantly, once revealed, the organisation must encourage general discussion of the structural fairness of these procedures and take and then make use of suggestions for change.

That strategy should lead to positive changes in individual beliefs about and evaluations of procedures in the particular setting because that strategy (a) would eliminate the air of secrecy and (b) would allow individuals to have a 'voice' in the design of procedures. In that way both the process of designing procedures and the resultant procedures would likely be perceived as fair. That should then lead to a very powerful fair process effect; when procedures are perceived as fair, outcomes of the procedures are evaluated as more fair and more appropriate
(Barnes Nacoste, 1994: 108).

For the case study organisation this may entail closer scrutiny of the personnel processes as they stand and consideration of the views expressed by employees about their relative fairness. More particularly, it may entail further investigation of employees' perceptions of where problems lie with the processes and then taking action to rectify the problems; that is, learning from the insiders.

9.5.4 Commitment from senior management

From the literature concerning change programs more generally, and affirmative action in particular, there seems to be considerable evidence that the perceived level of support

of senior management for equal employment opportunity principles is an important factor influencing employees' support for affirmative action within their own organisations (Rodgers *et al.*, 1993; Hammond, 1994; Taylor–Carter *et al.*, 1995). Leck and Saunders (1992: 26) maintain that an affirmative action program will be more effective when management is perceived to be committed to it, because the program 'is taken more seriously and employees work harder' at achieving the objectives.

The significant differences between employees' perceptions of the Technico and Pharmsco environments may be understood, in part, by the significant differences in employees' perceptions of the commitment of senior management to equal employment opportunity. While only 47 per cent of employees in Technico agreed that senior management were committed to equal employment opportunity, 72 per cent of Pharmsco employees did.

What factors may be influencing employees' perceptions of the commitment of senior management? From the case studies the high visibility of the EEO policies in Pharmsco relative to Technico emerges as a possible explanation. In Pharmsco, the EEO policy had been coupled with the Harassment policy, and posters outlining the coupled-policies (signed by the Managing Director) were highly visible throughout the offices and staff rooms. As well, workshops had been conducted in which the harassment policy had been explained in detail. Interviewees in Pharmsco indicated the high visibility of the policy suggested to them that senior management was committed to the principles enshrined in the policy and that such behaviour was expected of them too.

As one middle manager in Pharmsco reported:

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)

Technico's EEO policy, on the other hand, was not as highly visible throughout offices and staff rooms and it had not been reinforced in workshops for most employees.

Instead, the policy had been circulated to employees via pamphlet form and through articles appearing in the in-house magazine.

What are the implications for practice of these findings? Clearly, it is important that senior management are not only committed to equal employment opportunity but that they are seen to be by employees (Heilman, 1994; Simons, 1995). Taylor-Carter *et al.* (1995) suggest that support from senior management will be perceived to be stronger if it is not confined to mere platitudes; it must also be seen to flow through to what behaviours are rewarded in the company. The high visibility afforded to the Pharmsco policies apparently helped convey this impression. A further suggestion for creating an environment that is perceived by all employees to be equitable is including this responsibility as part of the performance evaluation processes for managers (Moore and Haas, 1990). Commitment to equal employment opportunity should be seen to be rewarded.

9.5.5 Symbolic messages

Another factor to consider in seeking to understand the significant differences in employees' perceptions of their work environments may be the representation of women in senior management in the two companies. In commenting on the Technico environment, a number of the women interviewed referred to the lack of women in senior management positions. One such reference was the following:

All we have to do is look at the figures. There is no equal representation in Technico. There's management at the top with 160 fellows and one or two women. We don't have any male receptionists and we don't have any female directors.

In contrast, a number of women in Pharmsco referred to women in senior management positions, in particular their Divisional Head, as evidence of the opportunities available to women.

The survey responses supported these views. While only 29 per cent of employees in Technico agreed that there were a number of women in senior management, 73 per cent of women and 85 per cent of men in Pharmsco agreed with this statement.

As Newman (1995a) points out, organisations must be attentive to the symbolic messages they send out (often inadvertently) which may affect employees' perceptions of the organisation. A number of studies have shown that a concentration of women in more junior positions coupled with an absence of women in the senior posts sends a very definite message about the relative worth of women in the organisation (Mills & Tancred, 1992; Ellis & Sonnenfeld, 1994; Ely, 1995) Although many affirmative action policies have been implemented within Technico, the lack of women at the executive level may be sending a symbolic message to many women about women's (and men's) opportunities within Technico, undermining the impact of efforts to improve employment opportunities for women.

The responses from Pharmsco would seem to support the importance of women's presence in senior management as a symbolic message. While certainly not proportionally represented in senior management (women make up 25 per cent of managers in Pharmsco but only 12 per cent of senior managers) they do have a presence. Ely (1995) argues that women's perceptions of their opportunities will not improve simply as a result of more women being employed within the organisation. Rather, it is women's representation at senior organisational levels that impacts on women's expectation about their right to be in the workplace and the opportunities available to them.

9.5.6 Communicating the policies

It is through the presentation and communication of policies that policy makers may have the greatest scope for improving the support for and ultimate effectiveness of affirmative action policies.

According to the reports to the Affirmative Action Agency, induction and training programs play an important role in communicating the equal employment opportunities policy and associated affirmative action policies to employees in Technico and Pharmsco. These workshops and training programs range from a couple of hours to day long sessions to, in some cases, programs lasting a number of days (for example, the Management Development Programs in Technico). That so few respondents could recall any reference to affirmative action in training programs may suggest that this means of communication may not be very effective. In the first instance, induction programs do not cover existing employees and not all employees participate in leadership and management development training. Some employees may not have been exposed to the equal opportunities policy through training. Second, a two hour session or even a one day program which includes, among other things, a segment designed to make employees more aware of EEO issues will have limited impact; particularly when the training program stands alone and does not appear to have any actionable or measurable implications for an employee's daily experience (Thompson & DiTomaso, 1988; Hellervik *et al.*, 1994; Ellis & Sonnenfeld, 1995; Gentile, 1995). Real changes in attitudes towards affirmative action are unlikely to be achieved through the delivery of abstract knowledge in a workshop lasting a few hours. As was noted in the preceding sections, for policy makers this suggests that attention may need to be paid to developing more effective means of educating employees about issues surrounding equal employment opportunity.

One means of more effectively educating employees about the processes that continue to limit women's opportunities and the need to address these is to make visible to organisational members the assumptions, stereotypes and perceptions that shape selection and promotion decisions (Ruderman *et al.*, 1995). Real visibility cannot be achieved in a three hour workshop in which 20 people are 'spoken at'. There is ample evidence (Brewin, 1989; Fazio & Zanna, 1981; Shiffrin & Schneider, 1977) that experiential learning is 'more compelling and more likely to influence behaviour than is abstract knowledge' (Epstein, 1994: 711). It is widely recognised that information

procured through personally-meaningful experiences has a greater chance of changing feelings and behaviour than does information gained through impersonal means such as formal documents (Leck & Saunders, 1992; Hall *et al.*, 1993; Epstein, 1994). One of the interviewees from Healthco made a similar point:

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)

The significant difference between respondents' awareness of, and support for, the EEO and Harassment policy and their awareness of other affirmative action policies within Pharmsco reinforces the importance of attending to how the different means of communicating the policies may have had relatively different impacts. The EEO and Harassment policy was presented to almost the entire Pharmsco work force through a series of one day workshops in which a consultant presented a number of scenarios to help explain to employees what discrimination is, what harassment is, and how to deal with them. The scenarios were developed to reflect 'real life' situations in which the employees could be involved and participants were involved in working through the scenarios. Of particular importance was that employees were involved in the process of communication. It was not simply a matter of a formal policy being conveyed to them via a written medium.

The experiential processes need not be difficult, or necessarily costly, to manage. For instance, Ruderman *et al.* (1995) suggest one process they have observed to apparently great effect in making men more aware of the inequities women perceive in their organisations. This involved executives who were involved in a process of assessing current practices for promotion in their organisation having an ongoing dialogue with junior women in their business units about the perceived barriers to their advancement. This sort of process may make it clearer to those involved why affirmative action may be necessary and so may engender greater support for affirmative action in general.

Role playing may be another form of experiential learning that may be useful in generating support for affirmative action. Nacoste (1987) described how subjects involved in role playing of a woman in an organisation in which discrimination had taken place in the past were more supportive of affirmative action policies. Contextualising the need for affirmative action is an important consideration for generating support for it.

Another recommendation for more effective training is that sequenced ongoing programs of awareness development have more impact than one-shot interventions, as single sessions may simply open up painful issues without providing closure, let alone developing skills for addressing them (Ellis & Sonnenfeld, 1994). As well, the training should be made relevant to the participants' own environment. Concrete examples to which the participants can relate should be provided for role playing, as the immediacy of the need for affirmative action may then become more apparent, generating more support.

The value of this more personally meaningful approach is supported by the greater awareness and approval of Pharmsco's approach to harassment training. In contrast, Pharmsco's Managing Diversity policy — a policy which aims to ensure 'that managers respect and manage diversity in all its forms' has been presented to employees in a passive, textbook, impersonal manner. The data show that employees' awareness of, and support for, this policy is accordingly much lower.

Russell (1994) also has something to say about the value of more 'personally meaningful' training in dealing with role change issues and men's involvement with family responsibilities. He maintains that change can occur in men's role perceptions through well-targeted training where men have the opportunity to explore work and family issues in more detail.

It may be relevant to consider the low levels of support for paternity leave policies, and their low rates of take up, in light of how it has been communicated to employees — in

pamphlet form distributed to employees. It may be that altering the means of presenting these policies to employees may enhance the likelihood of 'work & family' policies involving role changes being accepted and acted on. Rather than simply formalising the paternity leave policy and leaving it to employees to avail themselves of it — in a societal context in which it is simply assumed women will be the primary care givers — Russell (1994) suggests that organisations could take a more active approach to convincing male employees that paternity leave is a viable option for them. Tailoring workshops in which employees are involved in discussions about the prospect of time off and/or part-time work as they deal with family responsibilities may have a greater impact on employees than simply distributing a pamphlet which states such leave is available. For someone who has never entertained the prospect of a career break because of family responsibilities, to realistically incorporate such a break in career planning will clearly entail more than simply introducing a formal policy that makes such leave available to them.

The social psychology literature has a great deal to offer with respect to understanding and effecting behavioural and attitude change (Tajfel & Fraser, 1978; Magnusson, 1988; Daubman & Lehman 1993; Epstein, 1994). In the practice of affirmative action in these case study companies, it seems very little attention has been paid to implementing policies in a way that reflects a real understanding of change. It has only been in the harassment workshops in which employees have really been involved in the process of working through a policy — and it is the harassment policy with which employees are most familiar and approving. Simply alluding to affirmative action, merit-based recruitment and promotion processes and the family leave policies in non-experiential formats may not have the same impact on employees.

9.6 Crafting more effective policies

So what can we learn from the case studies reported here about the practice of affirmative action? From their reports to the Affirmative Action Agency these

organisations each appeared to be committed to the spirit of the affirmative action legislation and were implementing policies suggesting they were seeking to effect real change in their workplaces. But a significant proportion of women in these organisations still did not perceive their employment opportunities to be equal to those of men and the employment statistics for each of the organisations indicate that women remain clustered in low status positions. Moreover, many men indicated they believed women now have greater opportunities than men. The practice of affirmative action was not, apparently, achieving the outcomes sought.

The process of designing and implementing affirmative action policies is a complex process. Policy making should be recognised as a craft, requiring skill and ingenuity and a strong base in empirical research. Developing a suite of policies that may effect real change in the workplace will require policy makers to be sensitive to a range of issues, relating to both contextual and ‘human’ issues and to the social psychology literature on how to do these things effectively.

For a variety of reasons, some types of policies (for example, ‘temperamental’, ‘non-traditional’ and ‘work & family’ policies concerning role change for men) may engender greater resistance than others (for example, ‘social structural’ and ‘work & family’ policies which help women balance their existing role in the family with paid work). In considering the types of affirmative action policies appropriate for their organisations, practitioners will need to be aware of the possible sources of resistance to policies, and plan accordingly. Simply because some policies may be perceived to be less likely to generate support from all employees should not prompt practitioners to avoid them. There may be strategies policy makers can follow to decrease resistance to some types of policies and so increase the likelihood they will lead to more equal opportunities in the workplace. In particular, policy makers should pay close attention to the processes by which policies are communicated to employees as there may be scope for them to enhance the levels of acceptance of these policies.

9.7 Limitations of the research

There are limitations to the research reported here. The process of reducing the variety of affirmative action policies to five ‘types’ of policies was to help make the process of reviewing the complex reality of affirmative action more manageable. The objective was to provide some insight into the practice of affirmative action — what types of policies are most common? That the five categories don’t describe perfectly the range of policies implemented is recognised; but this is a first step in explicating the variety of policies that are implemented as ‘affirmative action’. This is important as, too often, affirmative action is (wrongly) spoken of as though it were a uniform entity. Further research could, no doubt, refine this system of categorisation to even better reflect the rich variety of policies making up affirmative action in Australia in the 1990s.

At the time this research was conducted, the affirmative action legislation had been in place for a relatively short period of time. Given the diversity and multiplicity of disadvantage in employment, the time frame covered in this research may be inadequate to provide a fair evaluation of the affirmative action policies in place in the case study organisations. The process of dismantling the institutional barriers disadvantaging women may have begun, but translating this into practice in the workplace generally — achieving real change within organisations — is a slow process (Braithwaite, 1994). On-going monitoring of women’s perceptions of their opportunities may enhance our understanding of the impact of affirmative action policies and provide insight into the nature of the problems to be tackled and the strategies that might be used.

In addition, the study was designed to explore employees’ perceptions of affirmative action and their employment opportunities. As such, I sought to reflect a variety of experiences of affirmative action, rather than simply the rhetoric contained in the official policies espoused by the companies. In reporting the perceptions of employees, individual detail tended to be sacrificed for the overall picture. The variety of views held could only be portrayed in a very general sense. The diversity of experience and

views surrounding affirmative action is worthy of further exploration as it is indicative of the complexity of evaluating a public policy such as this.

While not within the realm of this study, further investigation into the factors affecting employees' perceptions of the affirmative action policies and their employment opportunities may provide a more solid basis for developing more effective processes for implementing affirmative action.

Another limitation of the study is that the three case study organisations were selected because of their apparent commitment to improving employment opportunities for women. They were companies which, by legislative measure, had actively addressed issues of equality of opportunity. As such, they were prepared to participate in a study concerning affirmative action (although in Healthco's case, this did not follow through to involvement in the quantitative component of the study). To more fully understand the extent to which the policies implemented within the three companies have affected employees' perceptions of their work environment and their employment opportunities and the 'confounding' results of the comparative analysis of employment statistics, it would be useful to conduct similar research on companies without such policies in place. The difficulty here is that those companies without affirmative action programs in place are unlikely to participate in a study concerning affirmative action (Macquarie University 1991). Such a comparison, however, may shed more light on the impact of affirmative action policies.

9.8 Conclusion

The practice of affirmative action in Australia in the 1990s has taken many forms. At one extreme there are companies covered by the legislation which have done nothing to improve employment opportunities for women, while at the other extreme, there are companies which have implemented a range of policies ('temperamental', 'work & family', 'non-traditional', 'social structural' and 'opportunities') in their efforts to improve employment opportunities for women. It would seem from my review of the

policies reported to the Affirmative Action Agency that the policies more commonly implemented in Australian organisations are 'social structural' and 'work & family' policies. While these policies could be seen as the types most influenced by external factors (the anti-discrimination legislation and a commitment from the Australian government to ensure workplaces are family friendly), it would also appear from the case studies that these sorts of policies are likely to generate greater approval from employees (in the case of 'work & family' policies, it would be those assisting women balance their family roles with paid work).

Three of these companies with apparently well-developed affirmative action programs in place were studied further to assess whether the goal of affirmative action — that women and men enjoy equal employment opportunity — had been achieved. From the research reported here concerning perceptions it is clear that despite the various efforts of these companies to create an environment in which women and men enjoy the same employment opportunities, the goal has yet to be fully achieved.

The finding in this study that a significant percentage of women still perceive their employment opportunities to be somewhat less than those of men suggests that the promise of affirmative action has yet to be fulfilled. Given the complexity of the problem of inequality of opportunity and the historical fact of women's secondary status in the paid work force, this finding is probably not surprising.

Despite the rhetoric of merit-based recruitment and promotion processes espoused in the equal employment policy statements of the case study companies, employees still have reservations about the processes. Importantly, what emerges from the case studies and consideration of the extant literature (Crosby & Clayton, 1990; Taylor-Carter *et al.*, 1995) is that a reason for the unfulfilled promise of affirmative action may be that the means by which affirmative action policies have been put into practice within the companies has been less than ideal and has not taken sufficient account of research in the social psychological domain. Crafting more effective strategies for implementation

will require learning from experience and heeding the relevant social psychological literature.