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# Picking the pitch: a grounded theory study of the impact of equal opportunity officers on the culture of universities

Ann Joan Burrett
*Southern Cross University*

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# PICKING THE PITCH: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITY OFFICERS ON THE CULTURE OF UNIVERSITIES

**Ann Joan Burrett**

**B.App. Sc (C.C.A.E.)**

**Grad. Dip. Administration (Canberra)**

**Litt. B. (Deakin)**

**Southern Cross University**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.**

**March 2002**

## STATEMENT OF SOURCES

The work presented in this Thesis is to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text. This material has not been submitted, either in whole or part, for any other degree at this or any other university.

Signed……..

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I wish to thank the equal opportunity officers in universities who have assisted in the development of this thesis, either directly through participating in the research, or indirectly as I listened and spoke with them about the work that they do.

# ABSTRACT

Equal opportunity offices have been described as agencies of organisational change, and the term 'cultural change' has been used to describe aspects of equal opportunity work.

Universities are sites of organisational cultures where equal opportunity officers have worked in Australia for the past decade. In this time there have been significant changes to higher education, in terms of the size of the university sector in Australia, and also in terms of funding, governance and management. These changes in universities provided the context for questions about the roles of equal opportunity officers in universities, and how they may have changed.

This research investigated the practice of equal opportunity officers in universities by using a grounded theory approach to generate understandings about how this group of university staff may have impacted on university cultures. The study develops links between theories of culture and organisational change that was situated in the practices of equal opportunity officers.

The research identified a central conceptual category that was described as 'picking the pitch', as the main theme in the work of equal opportunity officers in identifying issues and gaining support for a cultural change agenda. All of the preliminary themes that were identified, and the interactions, the observations and the analysis of culture were prerequisites for 'picking the pitch'.

The thesis uses the research for further reflection and integration of the goals of equal opportunity, and the means that were available to equal opportunity officers to achieve these goals. The interactions of power and influence, and some of the limitations on equal opportunity officers are discussed.

In the thesis the usefulness of the concept of culture to equal opportunity officers is examined, along with the underpinning theories about the mind of humanity that contributed to their approach to their task.

Finally, the thesis discusses the impact of the research for equal opportunity officers, and for the universities in which they worked.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Equal opportunity offices have been described as agencies of organisational change (Shoemark 1996, pp.129-131). Shoemark identified a shift in the role of equal opportunity officers in universities from being the agents of compliance with legislation, to a role that brought expertise to assist with incorporating accountability for equal opportunity into management.

The term 'cultural change' has also been used to describe some aspects of equal opportunity officers' roles. The research for this thesis was undertaken by an equal opportunity officer in a university who sought to understand the implications of the shifts in role and definitions, both theoretically and practically.

There have been previous indications that there was uncertainty and ambiguity in the roles of equal opportunity officers. A study of university equal opportunity officers by Wienecke in 1991 identified a strong sense of uncertainty among role incumbents, and an echoed uncertainty from the universities which employed them. Uncertainty has been identified in similar roles in North America. Barclay (2000, pp.37-41) wrote about Equal Employment Opportunity Officers, that:

> One of the difficult tasks for both the EEO officer and for management personnel is to determine what the EEO function should actually do for the company. Is the officer an advocate for employees, a management consultant, or a police officer-or all three? Are the roles compatible? Is the officer a change agent or facilitator?

The uncertainty was mirrored in Britain, where confusion about the definition of equal opportunity was reported, and job specifications for equal opportunity roles were fluid (Farish et al.1995, pp. 2, 24, 58).

There has also been criticism of the role of equal opportunity officer. Poiner and Wills (1991, p.84), regarded equal opportunity officers as major beneficiaries of anti-discrimination legislation, and agents of privilege maintenance. This criticism highlights a need to examine both the role and its impact on universities.

In the equal opportunity field there was information about the practices of equal opportunity officers. However, there was not an approach that linked theories about culture and organisations, with equal opportunity practices in organisations. The aim of this thesis was to develop an approach that linked theory and practice in answers to questions about how equal opportunity officers impacted on university cultures, which was grounded in the practice and the understandings of equal opportunity officers.

## 1.1 Summary of the Problem

Equal opportunity officer positions have existed in Australian universities since the passage of the *Race Discrimination Act* in 1975, and the *New South Wales Anti-Discrimination Act* in 1977. Their presence was an organisational response by universities and other organisations to the legislation and the compliance obligations that it brought. Subsequently, there was a change to the emphasis in their role that was identified by Shoemark (1996).

This change of emphasis occurred at the same time as universities were undergoing a period of considerable change. From the mid 1970s, there was an expansion in the numbers of students proceeding to higher education. Following that, there was a diminution of government funding, a consequent increase in student: staff ratios (Marginson and Considine 2000, p.59), workloads (McInnes et al. 1994, p.5, McConville and Allport 2000), and official encouragement to universities to find other sources of income through policies that increasingly enabled universities to charge fees.

A question that arose for this research with regard to the equal opportunity officer role was how it had changed since the introduction of equal opportunity officers into universities, in particular whether their role as agents of change had impacted on the culture of universities, and also how the role had changed in the light of the broader changes in higher education.

As the research was concerned with the impact of equal opportunity officers on university cultures, there was a need to identify what these officers thought they were trying to do, what means and processes they used, and also what they thought inhibited their efforts. At the same time, there was a need to identify what meanings they gave to the concept of culture, and how in turn those meanings affected the impact that equal opportunity officers had on cultures in universities.

## 1.2 Summary of Methodology

Because this research concerned equal opportunity officers in universities it was situated within the broad field of organisational research. It was a study about organisational culture, and the culture in universities in particular, using the knowledge and experience of equal opportunity officers.

The methodology chosen for the research was that of grounded theory. Grounded theory is an inductive approach through which explanatory theory is derived from a close consideration of the data. Its intention has been described as being to further an understanding of social phenomena (Chenitz and Swanson 1986, p.3). Through the use of the technique, theory can be '…discovered, developed and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon' (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p.23).

This research began from questions that arose from equal opportunity practice, so the initial search through the literature was problem-based, rather than based in a particular discipline. The literature was examined as a source of theoretical sensitising (Glaser 1978, p.32), and the initial literature search covered a number of discipline areas. These included general questions about concepts of culture and the ways in which cultural practices may reveal inferences about the mind of humanity. The literature also provided information about the way in which a knowledge of organisations and management theorists could inform a study about culture, as well as features of organisational culture and cultural change in organisations. The literature related directly to the practice of equal opportunity, and equal opportunity in universities in particular was reviewed. Literature related to the university environment in general was also used.

The research was guided by the following general questions:

- What are the major processes through which cultural change occurs in universities?
- What are the factors that inhibit cultural change?
- What cultural change do equal opportunity officers in universities attempt?
- What values affect the processes of cultural change?

Information was obtained through interviews, through observations of the university setting; through observations made by attendance at conferences; through review of Internet pages; through scanning of the news and through further reading of the literature. From these sources, the researcher applied the grounded theory techniques to develop a theoretical framework for understanding the impact of equal opportunity officers on university cultures.

### 1.3 Summary of Theoretical Findings

A number of insights were developed from this study into the impact that equal opportunity officers had on university cultures.

The central conceptual category that was identified through the grounded theory approach was that of 'picking the pitch' in realising a cultural change agenda. It was identified as the 'core category' (Chenitz and Swanson 1986, p.135) as it was considered to be the main theme, the theme that all the categories were pointing to, and it related the preliminary categories that had been identified, of choosing the people, and defining the role, through to an analysis of ways in which equal opportunity officers worked and the techniques that they used.

This central category was identified through the coding as an 'in vivo' code (Strauss and Corbin 1990, pp.61-74), and confirmed through the interviews, and subsequent follow up and checking. The meaning of the phrase 'picking the pitch' derives from the place at which street sellers placed themselves to show their wares to best advantage, and was used in a metaphorical way to represent the analysis and

communication techniques that were required to gain sufficient support or commitment for a cultural change agenda.

All of the interactions, the observations, and forms of analysis of the culture, were a prerequisite for 'picking the pitch' correctly. If the 'pitch' was not right, then a cultural change agenda would not get sufficient support to be enacted.

Organisational change work as analysed in this study was a highly political task, and depended for its impact on communication skills and an ability to pick a pitch that appealed to managers, or to work with other coalitions or individuals.

There was the potential for equal opportunity officers to impact on university cultures through all of the techniques that they used to make change in universities. The analysis of data revealed detail of the processes identified as agenda setting, ways of working and the various techniques for change which they used. Equal opportunity officers used the currency of processes that were prevalent within the university to achieve their impact, including for example, strategic planning, research and teaching.

The data analysis demonstrated that the impact of equal opportunity officers on university cultures was constrained by a number of factors. These included: their position in the university hierarchy; their acceptance within the university, and the congruence of their values with those in the university. The impact of equal opportunity officers on university cultures also depended on their interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, organisational skills, and flexibility within a framework of ethical values. In addition, the research demonstrated that the impact of equal opportunity officers on universities was achieved through both rational and non-rational means, and through continual personal interactions, both formal and public, informal and private, with both individuals and groups.

The success of equal opportunity officers was inevitably partial, because they had unclear or diffuse goals, and also because of changes in the goals and their roles over time, as well as changes in the university and societal context of the university.

## 1.4 Summary of Discussion

This chapter provided an opportunity for reflection and integration. Following from the initial questions raised in the Literature Review chapter, and the theoretical categories developed through the use of the grounded theory approach, the Discussion chapter extended and synthesised the findings.

The first section in the Discussion chapter provides a reflection on the goals and objectives of equal opportunity officers' work that was illuminated through this study as they sought to impact on universities.

It was found that the goals of equal opportunity officers were increasingly diffuse, and sometimes unclear or mutually contradictory. Additionally, the field of operations for their goals appeared to have been subject to almost indefinite expansion. At the same time, their relative position in the university organisation had remained the same or had been displaced downward in the hierarchy as universities tended to follow business models in centralising power and influence. From this it can be seen that the description of the task for equal opportunity officers as 'endless' by one of the participants, was apt.

This was followed by a section which discussed the means for promoting organisational change that were available and acceptable to equal opportunity officers in the university setting. The means equal opportunity officers used were framed by a mixture of rights-based and care-based ethical approaches, supported by values that could be shared by others in the organisation, and limited by pragmatism and political realism, or vetoed by moral concerns.

Consideration was given to strategies of power and influence that were available to equal opportunity officers in universities to achieve change. In working to achieve cultural change, equal opportunity officers were found to be constrained to working within an existing structure and a given set of power relationships in which their own power was relatively limited. Generally equal opportunity officers did not seek to subvert the principal power dimensions. Their own experience of having been part of a university as students was a partial explanation, in that aspects of the university

culture were congruent with their own. This both allowed them to work within the culture and constrained the amount of change they were likely to want to make.

The existing power structures did not only constrain equal opportunity officers in their work. The central conceptual category of 'picking the pitch' demonstrated that in finding an equal opportunity agenda that was acceptable to the powerful, power could be observed to be making things work. This supports the analysis of power by Foucault (1980 pp.111-128, 130-133), which is raised in the Literature Review chapter, that power is not only repressive, but it is also productive.

What then follows is an extended consideration of the role of the equal opportunity officers and of its limitations. It was difficult for participants to remember positive cultural change experiences, though they noted the personal development that accompanied a challenging position. The question of their level of success was integral to this issue. They found it difficult to measure impact of equal opportunity, either positive or negative, in general. Formal measures, such as statistical analyses or surveys, were used, but their interpretation was subject to the political processes within universities, and did not convey impacts as sharply as some of the informal analyses that equal opportunity officers reported. This difficulty was exacerbated when attempting to judge the efficacy of an equal opportunity officer as an individual change agent, especially as they made tactical decisions to give away credit for their ideas and their contribution to success, and also that their role required maintenance of confidentiality on some individual successes to which they had contributed.

The value of the concept of culture for organisational change workers was also considered. The term 'culture' remained ambiguous, and there was the possibility of using it in a romantic and relativistic way to privilege certain cultural manifestations or practices that risked ignoring power and subjugation. This was a difficulty for some participants in this study who were committed to establishing the value of cultural difference, but were dealing with aspects of that difference which had the potential to disrupt their other value positions.

The thesis also reflects on the various theories about the mind of humanity (Shweder and LeVine1990) that may underpin equal opportunity officers' ideas about their role.

It was evident from this research that equal opportunity officers worked within a tension that existed because their practices exemplified different views of the mind of humanity, characterised by Shweder and LeVine as either the enlightenment, or the romanticist view. This demonstrated both their operational flexibility, and also that they, in common with the rest of humanity, did not consistently apply abstractions about the mind in their practice.

Finally there was a consideration of the impact of the research for equal opportunity officers, and the universities in which they worked. This study described a group of workers in an organisation, who worked with a great deal of autonomy, though to an agenda that was based within anti-discrimination legislation and their own values. It was evident from the Findings chapter that holders of the role required high levels of interpersonal and communication skill, emotional intelligence (Goleman 1996), planning and organisational skills, energy and flexibility.

Equal opportunity officers were also found to have a role that was concerned with both cultural maintenance and with change. Their tasks included monitoring the external and the internal environment, in order to grasp opportunities to make changes that were consistent with the university's response to some general internal or externally driven change, while at the same time attempting to resist those effects of the changes that were not regarded as consistent with the values that promoted equal opportunity. For the universities, the relative clarity of their values has the potential to support change, or to stiffen resistance.

The work of equal opportunity officers examined in this research demonstrated that cultural change in universities requires efforts in a plurality of ways, and over long time frames. In a sense equal opportunity officers were revealed to be internal specialists in organisational change, and their skills could be engaged by executive managers to assist in strategic change.

# 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Introduction

For workers who want to understand the work that they are engaged in, there is a need to develop an iterative process which incorporates both the daily practice of a role and the thoughtful consideration of any theory that might support that daily practice, or critical insights into practice. When first entering any type of work, there is a sense of strangeness about it, which sooner or later becomes a familiarity. This familiarity can make the most bizarre work practices or ways of making meaning of work, seem ordinary or everyday. A great deal of work in anthropology and sociology deals with the entrance of the stranger, seeking to make sense of the otherness of experience outside one's own.

An underlying basis and source of interest for this research concerned how to find ways in which to understand how people in organisations go about their own practice. This research used as its material example a work role which was familiar to the researcher, who had been a practitioner in the area for four years at the start of the research, but for whom the role and practices still seemed interesting and strange in some ways.

The subject of this research was the experience of equal opportunity officers in universities, and in particular the role and impact of the equal opportunity officer in cultural change in universities. The subject of the research, therefore is predicated on the development of an understanding of the ways in which equal opportunity officers work as practitioners within a culture while also resisting aspects of it, and working actively to change other aspects. As the researcher had experience in this role in a university, it was possible to start with a set of thoughts, hunches and perceptions about the role. These thoughts and questions informed the direction of the research and the areas of interest for the initial search of the literature.

As the research started from practice, rather than from a position situated within an existing academic discipline, the initial literature review was exploratory, and issues-based. It provided a source of theoretical sensitivity to create some distance from daily practice, to guide the construction of questions, and to begin to establish the

domain of enquiry. Further investigations of the literature were subsequently used throughout the research task, to aid exploration of matters that arose as the research progressed and to assist interpretation through reading sceptically and critically, as well as appreciatively (McCracken 1988, p.31). Therefore this chapter reports the reading that set the parameters for questions and analysis of findings, rather than providing a summative analysis. Support for this approach can be found in qualitative research procedures (Strauss and Corbin 1990, pp.48-56).

This chapter begins with the broadest of questions: what is culture, and how might this question inform research into the work experience of equal opportunity officers? It then focuses on cultures in organisations, in order to gain an overview of some of the literature on organisations, particularly work organisations, as cultures. The focus then moves to a consideration of ways in which workers may be involved in changing the cultures of organisations. This is of particular relevance to equal opportunity officers, who are sometimes involved in producing or resisting change in organisations. The focus is then brought to universities. Finally insights are sought into the role that equal opportunity officers in universities have as organisational culture workers.

## 2.2 Concepts of Culture

The plurality, generality and ubiquitous nature of the word ‘culture’ required some consideration before being used to conduct research into the task of equal opportunity officers as agents of cultural change within the culture of universities, and their impact on university cultures.

Perhaps there was a time when the meaning of the word ‘culture’ was considered to be straightforward. Matthew Arnold with magisterial authority described culture as ‘...a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know...the best which has been thought and said in the world...’ (Storey 1994, p.6). This definition conveyed an absolute quality to the idea of culture and expressed a confidence that the standards by which ‘the best’ were measured applied everywhere, and that ‘the best’ could be sifted from the rest by the application of certain types of knowledge, that of ‘the

implicit standards that order the finer living of an age...' (Leavis 1994, p.13). This meaning of culture constitutes an evaluative term (Eagleton 2000, p.5).

There has also been an equation of the word 'culture' with civilisation, which definitions such as those above imply. Again, the implication is that definitions of civilised behaviour were universally acknowledged and accepted (Jenks 1993, p.9). Culture defined in terms of civilisation was connected with an orientation to secular, progressive, self-development (Eagleton 2000, p.9). This equation of civilisation and culture, took the 'us' of a particular cultural elite, and bound it into an apparent inclusion of we, the readers. Eagleton differentiated this as Culture with a large 'C', and observed that the point about Culture was that it was cultureless, in that its values were not part of any particular way of life, but thought to be universal to human life. Self-examination, or a look at the world beyond the confines of such conventions, reveal this inclusion to be at best partial.

Culture as civilisation carries with it implications of moral worth, in which the 'civilised,' people, modes and behaviour, are contrasted with the 'barbarian'. There was an early meaning of the word 'culture' as 'worship'. Culture defined as civilisation can be regarded as that which is worthy in some sense of worship. In this formulation, culture is not description, or evaluation, but is constructed as a value.

During the twentieth century the term 'culture' was transported from the ideal realm of human perfectibility, in which it was described in terms of absolute or universal values, and it was redescribed in terms of a social meaning. One such definition of culture was as a description of a way of life which expresses certain meanings, not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour, signifying a 'whole way of life' (Williams 1981, p.10). This shift brought the word 'culture' back into processes, which reflects another earlier meaning, as agricultural production. However, allied with 'art and learning', for Williams it evidently still carried with it the history of its earlier valorisation in terms of civility and moral goodness.

All of these traces of the earlier meanings may continue to influence the understanding of what culture means which is held by those who regard their work as affecting culture.

Geertz (1973, pp.49,352) regarded culture as the link between what people are intrinsically capable of becoming, and what they actually in fact become. He regarded becoming human as becoming individual, and thought that this was achieved under the guidance of cultural patterns in terms of which we give form point, order and direction to our lives. He regarded the work of studying culture as only apparently the study of customs, beliefs or institutions. He regarded it as fundamentally the study of the mind, of thought.

The descriptive meaning of culture is that it comprises facts about the way lives are lived, illustrated through the variety of ordinary human behaviour and the institutions set up by different groups of people. To examine culture as institutions and ordinary behaviour has been the life's work of many anthropologists, who have recorded the diversity of human ideas and practices. Part of the fascination of learning about other cultures is the extent to which they differ from, or are similar to, one's own. However, this is not any longer a fascination without its critique, as evidenced in the work of Said who analysed the way in which 'Orientalism' was constructed by Europeans and later North Americans, as a needed contrast to 'the West' , and as '…one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other' (1995, p.1).

The continuing diversity of human ideas and practices provokes a central question concerning the relative values of practices. It was posed by Shweder and LeVine as:

> How do we explain the apparent diversity of human ideas and practices, and what warrant is there for our own ideas and practices in the light of that apparent diversity? (1990, p.58).

This question about culture is a crucial one for people, such as equal opportunity officers, who seek not only to observe ideas and practices, but also to change them.

The study of culture requires a movement beyond observing and describing a culture through behaviour inscribed in rituals, rules or models if it is to assist a worker to reflect on cultural change through ideas and practices as they are played out in organisations. That is, it requires a movement from regarding people from an

objective stance that constitutes them as ‘other’, or ‘exotic’ to finding ways in which to reflect and understand the subtlety, heterogeneity and flexibility of human ideas and practices. Bourdieu provided guidance on what had to be avoided:

> It is necessary to abandon all theories which explicitly or implicitly treat practice as a mechanical reaction, directly determined by the antecedent conditions and entirely reducible to the mechanical functioning of pre-established assemblies "models" or "roles" (1977, p.73).

The aim of this research was to study the practices of equal opportunity officers from within a knowledge and appreciation of their work. This reflexive approach provided the opportunity to develop theory about their role in cultural change in universities that resisted treating their practice in a mechanical way, and that yielded the possibility of revelation of some of the flexibility and subtlety involved, as they worked to change culture while at the same time working within a culture. It is acknowledged that this approach can cause difficulties of being too close to the practice and therefore subject to the biases of the equal opportunity officers, and that ways to challenge this difficulty needed to be found. The methodology was developed to support resistance to these biases.

### 2.3 Culture and the Mind of Humanity

A knowledge of the diversity of cultural practices that one can know about raises other general questions, in addition to those about the warrant for one’s own ideas in the light of diversity. There are also philosophical and cognitive questions that concern what inferences can be made about the mind of humanity in the face of:

> …countless ethnographic and historical examples of deeply entrenched yet apparently false beliefs and deeply entrenched yet apparently irrational practices (Shweder and LeVine 1990, p.27).

One of the questions a theoretical study of any cultural practice will raise is what underlying inferences about the mind inform a particular practice. Equal opportunity officers in universities work within a culture, and they may have ideas about the mind

of humanity which may be in agreement with, or may be different from, those of other workers in the university. The degree to which their ideas are in concord or discord with others in their workplace, and the degree to which they are conscious of these conceptual and philosophical underpinnings is likely to affect how they do their work. Also, the degree to which their ideas about the nature of the mind agree, or disagree, with others in the university culture, may impact on their possibilities for success in maintaining or changing culture.

Shweder and LeVine present two significantly different high-level explanations of the mind of humanity, which they characterised as 'enlightenment' and 'romanticist'. According to their construction, the 'enlightenment' figures, among whom they include for example, thinkers from Socrates to Chomsky, hold that:

> the mind of man (sic) is intendedly rational and scientific, that the dictates of reason are equally binding for all regardless of time, place, culture, race, personal desire, or individual endowment, and that in reason can be found a universally applicable standard for judging validity and worth (1990, p.27).

From this view they see the flow of certain ideas. These include: an expectation that it is possible to discover universals; that there is natural law; the concept of deep structure, and notions of progress or development. Views that can be characterised in this way would lead practitioners to certain conclusions about what it may be possible to maintain or change in culture, what methods to use and how to judge success.

The 'enlightenment' perspective takes the view that people are intendedly rational, and incredible practices or unbelievable beliefs are explained as errors, even though they may be widespread. According to Shweder and LeVine (1990, p.31) adherents to the 'enlightenment' view of the mind of humanity 'bequeath to anthropology the image of the alien as a deficient logician, faulty statistician and muddled empirical scientist'. Those who subscribe to 'enlightenment' views would see a distinction between the 'modern' and the 'primitive' mind. The 'primitive' mind would be regarded as being prone to such errors as magical thinking, and to confusing similarity with causation. An underlying assumption would be that the mind of humanity inevitably bows down before reason and evidence, and that the dictates of reason and

evidence are the same for all. This view accords with Eagleton's (2000, p.9) description of 'Culture' as 'cultureless'. It also leads Shweder and LeVine (1990) to a further question, which is whether knowledge of what constitutes reason and evidence is equally possessed by all.

The answer to this question divides those who hold the 'enlightenment' perspective into two strands: universalists and developmentalists. For universalists, the answer to questions of the type of 'What are the moral virtues?' for example, is not only dictated by reason, but is obvious to reason. If equal opportunity officers were to hold universalist assumptions, for example by basing their work on international declarations and charters, this research could illuminate how such assumptions impacted on their work.

'Developmentalists' on the other hand, are held by Shweder and Le Vine (1990) to argue that normative standards, for example the standard of logic, undergo development. According to this conceptualisation, while all people and peoples have normative standards for regulating thought, knowledge of the proper, that is the 'enlightenment' standards may be achieved by only some individuals and a few cultures.

'Developmentalists' give credit to experts who are virtuosi in their fields, as they would be regarded as having insights into the proper norms for correct thinking, norms that the rest of humanity may be striving to attain. This account raised another question for this research, which was whether equal opportunity officers regarded themselves as experts, and the holders of proper standards. If so, this would lead to a construction of their task, at least in part, as educational and developmental towards normative standards.

Shweder and LeVine (1990, p.36) drew on ethnoscience research to conclude that normal adults were not like the 'enlightenment' model, at least they were not like it for part of the time. They asserted that people tended to confuse propositions about language with propositions about the world, and explained this confusion as part of the 'word magic' ascribed by enlightenment thinkers to the 'primitive' mind. What had been posited as characteristic of the 'primitive' mind was, in Shweder and

LeVine's opinion, close to the ways in which most people operate a lot of the time in the everyday world, and their observation and analysis indicated:

> We have deficient data-gathering strategies. We have limited deductive-reasoning skills. We have faulty inductive-inference procedures. We do not know how to calculate the likelihood of an event. We do not know what evidence is relevant for testing a generalisation. We overlook base-rate information. We confuse likeness with likelihood. We are disinclined to compare conditional probabilities or to process correlation-relevant information. We are just not very good at doing applied sciences (1990, p.36).

If this were the case, the search by the 'developmentalists' for the virtuosi and the best way would be arduous. Also, should one discover them, perhaps they would reveal a limited amount about how people, or peoples, actually function in cultures. For the purpose of this research it raises the question about whether equal opportunity officers sought to construct their work around an applied science model, even in part, and if so, how successful it was, and what points and in what instances it was successful or unsuccessful.

In opposition to the 'enlightenment view,' is what Shweder and LeVine (1990) characterised as the 'romanticist' view of the mind. This, according to the authors, encompassed thinkers from the ancient Sophists to modern anthropologists such as Geertz. A central tenet of the 'romanticist' view is that ideas and practices fall beyond the scope of either deductive or inductive reason, and that ideas and practices are neither rational nor irrational, but rather nonrational. It is also a relativist model, in that practices are not either right or wrong, but may be more or less advantageous for the people who use them.

From these central ideas flows several concepts which are in marked contrast to the 'enlightenment' view. There is the concept of arbitrariness, by which ideas of absolute right are challenged. Related to the concept of arbitrariness are the ideas of paradigm and cultural frames, which describe bundles of practice or ways of thinking about practice without presupposing a hierarchy or evolution to more complex or improved ways of thinking about the world (Shweder and LeVine 1990, p.28).

‘Romanticists’ regard action as expressive, symbolic or semiotic, rather than entirely goal-oriented. There is also a strong anti-normative, anti-developmental presumption culminating in the view that the primitive and modern are coequal and that the history of ideas is a history of a sequence of ideational fashions.

Another idea inherent in the ‘romanticist’ view is that a social order is a self-contained framework for understanding experience. Adherent to their own rules, these frameworks are not thought to lend themselves to normative-comparative questions. A frame or paradigm, is a statement about the world whose validity can be neither confirmed nor disconfirmed. Logically, any classification is possible: none is better or worse, only more or less useful.

If frames and paradigms provide a good description of cultural phenomena, this leads to questions about what processes are needed to develop the accepted frames or paradigms in a culture, and how are they changed, by whom, and by what right. If this is the view of the mind were to be adopted, what warrant would there be for people such as equal opportunity officers to seek to change aspects of practice or to maintain them, and what impact would the concept be likely to have on their success?

A positive effect of thinking of culture in terms of frames and paradigms includes its potential to provide a richer and subtler description of cultural practices, such as that described by Geertz (1973, p.6), quoting Gilbert Ryle, as ‘thick’ description. This rich description may in turn provide an interpretative guide for practitioners.

The risks of using the concepts of cultural framework or paradigm may include validating oppressive practices by describing them without critique. This could present equal opportunity officers with the dilemma of acknowledging cultural difference or applying a critique based on their own cultural practice.

Nussbaum (1995, pp.449-469) explored the philosophical implications of cultural relativism, and then proposed a form of essentialism or universalism based on conceptions of the shape of human life and basic human functional capabilities in order to address public policy and social justice questions.

In this research, some of the issues that it was possible to illuminate through consideration of this literature concern the ways in which an equal opportunity officer who is involved in organisational culture as part of a work role, may adopt a universalistic or a relativistic point of view. A further consideration for the research was that if some equal opportunity workers had a relativistic point of view, to what extent would that point of view match with other workers in the university, and in what ways would the degree of similarity affect their projects of cultural change? It is also possible that sometimes, or for some purposes, they may adopt a universalistic point of view, and take a relativistic view for other purposes.

## 2.4 Levels of Generality in Culture

This research sought to develop a practice-based theory about cultural change in organisations, which gives rise to questions about the level of generality at which culture may be considered, and how levels of culture may intersect with one another. For people who are working to change cultures, the level at which they think they can or should engage with cultures may guide or constrain how they go about their work.

At the highest level of generality one can pose questions about what is basic to humans, in the sense of what is biological in its origin and therefore not easily changed. This could form a limit point to the definition of the cultural and what it would be possible to achieve through cultural change. Biological similarity can yield considerable cultural difference, but cultural differences have often been interpreted as if they were biological. As Powell (1993, p.42) observed, beliefs about masculinity and femininity have, for the most part been unguided by research evidence about sex differences. Advances in science, particularly in research on brain function and the recent explosion of genetic knowledge, also frequently re-formulate the borderlines.

Nussbaum (1995, pp.458-459) proposed a set of universals as constituting what she thought of as the shape of the human form of life, and included in the set: mortality; the human body; capacity for pleasure and pain; cognitive capability; practical reason; affiliation with other human beings; relatedness to other species and to nature;

humour and play, and separateness. This could also form a limit point for what could be considered a cultural framework.

Ethnic and national differences provide another high-level framework for differences and comparisons between cultures. In the management literature, comparisons between people doing similar jobs in different countries have interested multinational companies and management educators, for example Hofstede (1994), and Mead (1998). In Australia, high levels of immigration have led to interest in aspects of ethnic and national difference. There has also been a more recent and increasing awareness of the ancient heritage of the Indigenous peoples of the country, and the impact of invasion on their cultures. Processes such as that which led to the report *Bringing them Home*, (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997) of the 'stolen generation' have sharpened an understanding about the effect of policies intended to assimilate minority cultures into a dominant one.

Australia is a country of people who originate from over 200 other countries, with 282 major languages (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996). How Australia has dealt with ethnic diversity, and how difference is dealt with in the culture of the workplace, forms part of the work of equal opportunity officers.

Australia adopted the term 'multiculturalism' as a way to describe a change from ignoring cultural difference to a position in which ethnic cultures were regarded as adding to the richness of Australian culture. This was often interpreted in a superficial way, for example, by appreciating the increased variety of food and restaurants.

During the 1990's there was criticism of multiculturalism by politicians from the conservative side of politics as a phrase only used by part of an urban cultural elite. It has also been criticised by others as an inherently homogenising term (Gunew and Yeatman 1993, p.5). It has however continued to be used, and it was re-confirmed as useful by a national advisory committee in terms of a vision for a:

> united and harmonious Australia, built on the foundations of our democracy, and developing its continually evolving nationhood by recognising, embracing,

> valuing and investing in its heritage and cultural diversity (National Multicultural Advisory Council 1999, p.4).

What impact does the construction of multiculturalism have on the work of equal opportunity officers? How do they use concepts such a multiculturalism, and in what ways do they seek to affect culture in universities following from knowledge of national and ethnic cultural difference? This research is concerned with the impact of equal opportunity officers on university cultures, but of course major concepts such as multiculturalism impact on the equal opportunity officers themselves, and may then be reflected in their impact on university cultures.

Gender, meaning the social constructions of sex, intersects as a major cultural phenomenon with ethnic and national cultures. There are also cultural features based on class, religion and other sub-cultural groupings, which add to the complexity of intersections and points of difference for those working in organisations, and in particular for those examining organisational culture. This variety and intersection of levels of cultural generality have been argued by Itzen and Newman (1995, pp.120-121), as a reason to use perspectives which foreground diversity, rather than attempting to look at each aspect of cultural difference separately. Insights may be gained into the ways in which culture is maintained or changed by analysing the extent to which perspectives that foreground diversity are used by equal opportunity officers, rather than focussing on particular cultural groupings, for instance women, or Moslems.

By the time a person becomes a worker in an organisation, the possible layers of cultural complexity are clearly considerable. A person in an organisation brings features from other cultural levels and milieux, which are capable of informing, interacting with and sometimes subverting the culture of an organisation. For workers inside an organisation, such as equal opportunity officers, who see their work as maintaining culture within an organisation or as changing it in planned and particular ways, the task is complex, and this research aimed to provide insights into how this complexity was dealt with.

From the unproblematic and universal to the relative and unknowable, culture becomes an increasingly slippery entity. Ott (1989, p.51), for example, reported that Kroeber and Kluckhohn had identified one hundred and sixty-four definitions of culture. In the light of the many levels of generality at which ideas of culture operate, and the multiplicity of definitions, there is a question of whether organisational culture workers can use 'culture' as a framing concept, and if so, how it is useful to do so.

## 2.5 Organisational Theory and Cultural Perspectives

Those who study organisations have ancient precursors. For example, Socrates made a case for generic management, thus making the first known statement that organisations as entities have substantial similarities. Aristotle, who tutored Alexander the Great, asserted that executive powers and functions could not be the same for all states but must reflect different cultural environments. Sun Tzu in *The Art of War* recognised the need for hierarchy, interorganisational communication and staff planning (Shafritz and Ott 1987, p.10).

The development of organisation theory as a domain with theoretical substance and tradition gathered momentum in the twentieth century. At the start of the century, two figures who embodied the two pillars of organisation theory were developing their major works. One was Vilfredo Pareto, whose ideas of 'social systems' would later be applied by Elton Mayo, which led to the development of the pillar of theory comprising the human relations school of organisational theorists. The other was F. W. Taylor who, in 1903, published *Shop Management*, which formed the pillar of organisational theory which became known as 'scientific management.'

Scientific management, and later related theoretical developments in organisational theory were characterised by an absorption in the machine metaphor (Gergen 1992, p.5). According to Gergen, the industrial revolution and the subsequent burgeoning of technologies gave rise to a prevailing metaphor of organisations as machines. His opinion was that it was from this that the ideas of economy, efficiency and outputs which had been applied to machines were also applied to the human beings in organisations, without consideration that this was a metaphorical characterisation.

People were workers, were part of the machine, were cogs in the wheel of industry. This idea was conveyed through powerful images that featured Charlie Chaplin as a human machine in the film *Modern Times*. According to Gergen, management was predominantly about how to control the parts of the machine in predictable ways, and organisational theory was predominantly in the service of this aim.

Even though scientific management was based in the machine metaphor, Taylor knew that it required what he called mental changes to be successful, and he understood that such changes took time (Shafritz and Ott 1987, p.70). Current organisational theorists would probably define such change as cultural change.

The ways in which organisations attempt to predict and control the workers within them was examined by Etzioni (1975), who developed a typology of compliance relations. The typology assumed three major sources of control: coercive; economic, and normative, (or value-based) control. He established through experimentation that organisations tended to shift their compliance types to be congruent with the type of power used in the organisation. These types were alienative, calculative or moral. If equal opportunity officers seek to make changes to culture, or to preserve and support certain cultural manifestations, their understanding of compliance and their organisation's compliance patterns may affect the way they do this, and also their degree of success. Etzioni's work, and that of others who based studies on his models, found that university compliance patterns were predominantly normative, though differences were found between the sciences and humanities disciplines.

The other side of compliance, the power used in organisations, and how it is used, has been a major theme in organisational studies since at least the instrumental pragmatism of Machiavelli (Plamenatz, 1972), and was a central feature of political and historically based organisational theory (Clegg and Dunkerley 1980).

The pervasiveness of the concept of power has made definition difficult, but Pfeffer (1992a, p.309) asserted that most definitions contained an element of the capability of one social actor to overcome resistance in achieving a desired result. He defined organisational politics as 'those activities taken within organisations to acquire,

develop and use power and other resources to obtain one's preferred outcomes in a situation in which there is uncertainty or disagreement about choices'.

Dimensions of power described by Pfeffer included the hierarchical dimension, wherein supervisors have power over subordinates, and the relative power of one department over another. Both of these are forms of structural power. Other structural approaches have considered power in terms of lines of supply, lines of information and lines of support (Kanter 1977). A matter of interest for this research was how equal opportunity officers deal with power and hierarchy, and the effects of power and compliance on their work of cultural change.

In addition to hierarchy and formal sources of power, organisational theorists have examined informal sources of power. Mechanic (1987, pp.349-364) considered a number of sources including: expertise, effort and interest, attractiveness, location and position, coalitions, and knowledge of rules. The access to, and use of, informal sources of power may be significant for equal opportunity officers, and may vary between them.

Another strong theme through organisational studies and management literature can be traced to the concerns with the legitimisation of power through authority which is found in Weber (Albrow 1970, p.39). Organisations have been described as having a purposive-rational character, and the techniques of organisation as devices to regulate the '…idiosyncratic behavior of individuals…' (Denhart 1981, pp.65-67). Formal and informal sources of power may both be needed to affect organisational culture, and the limits to the use of either source include moral as well as practical dimensions.

For equal opportunity officers, where they are placed in the power structure, what authority they have and how they use their power is likely to affect the means that they employ to change or maintain culture, and would also be likely affect the impact that they have.

All of the above analyses of the operation of power in organisations tends to treat power as a constraint or a condition for action. The analysis by Foucault (1980 pp.111-128, 130-133) offers different perspectives. In an interview he said:

> If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse.

Foucault also asserted that power produces knowledge, and that truth itself is not outside of power, or lacking in power. This has been interpreted as the capacity of power to produce reality, through calling the world into being (Storey 1994, p.105).

If this is the case, then power is not only a matter of control and compliance, but about what is constituted as knowledge and the stuff of reality. It would not be something to be overcome or ignored, but would be something for equal opportunity officers to understand and engage with.

Even though not limited to repression, power as analysed by Foucault did construct a framework for reward and punishment. 'The right to punish has been shifted from the vengeance of the sovereign to the defence of society' (Foucault 1991, p.90). His analysis outlined changes from punishment as a somewhat haphazard and public spectacle to a more rule-bound and efficient operation of power. If equal opportunity officers were involved in some way in the defence of society, in making operative rule-bound law, then they may have a role in this economy of power as sources of reward or punishment.

Engaging with power may also require trying to increase one's own power. Kanter (1977, p.179) considered what types of activities enhanced staff members' power. She wrote, 'For activities to enhance power, they must be visible'. She also asserted that these activities had to be regarded as relevant. Whether equal opportunity officers were active in enhancing their power and how that affected their work of cultural change, was another aspect of interest to this research project.

Mary Parker Follett, one of the few women mentioned in the earlier management literature, was an early exception to the general thinking of power as a source of

control, as she called for ‘power with’ rather than ‘power over’, and anticipated moves towards participatory management (Pepper 1995, p.91).

In contrast to the scientific management approaches, some organisational theorists, often from a background in psychology and influenced by anthropological research, studied work organisations both from the point of view of people as individuals, and also studied the behaviour of people in groups. Their focus was on what motivated people to work; on how compliance might be internalised, or on what would satisfy internal felt needs and also contribute to the success of an enterprise. The work of Elton Mayo (1949), and the influential and long-running Hawthorne Studies formed the nucleus of the human relations school which influenced the work of many organisational theorists, including: Herzberg (1966); Schein (1990), and Vroom (1995). The extent to which life at work meets a person’s internal needs may be affected by the extent to which cultures are felt to be stable, and therefore unlikely to change, or the extent to which they are permeable to change. Change could be in the direction of increasing their motivation to work, or decreasing it.

From the 1970s, there was an increasing emphasis on the cultural and symbolic processes through which organisations were socially constructed (Reed and Hughes 1992), that might be characterised as the organisational culture school.

Most early interest in organisational culture derived from a management perspective, and it was frequently described as corporate culture. Culture was viewed as a feature of organisations that could be manipulated to achieve a fit between the business needs of the organisation and what people were doing inside it. Deal and Kennedy (1982, p.15) for example, regarded ‘strong’ cultures with approval. They asserted that in strong cultures, everyone knew the goals of the corporation and was working towards them. Culture was regarded as another element of corporate life that successful managers managed. Management of culture meant that informal rules spelt out how people were to behave most of the time, which saved managers a lot of intervention through the use of power or other forms of compliance assurance. Peters and Waterman (1982), in another influential management text, similarly emphasised a role for leaders in providing clarity of values, that could be articulated and adopted throughout the organisational hierarchy. This point of view was criticised by later

theorists (Lundberg 1989) as reducing the capacity for organisations to adapt because it led to rigidity and closed boundaries.

Deal and Kennedy (1982) investigated several aspects of culture including values, heroes, myths and rituals. Their aim was to understand the cultural aspects of organisation and diagnose from the inside what these meant for the success of a company. Success was defined in terms of the long-term financial position of the organisation. They did not deal with aspects of culture which did not necessarily impact on financial success. Non-financial factors, likely to be of interest to equal opportunity officers, such as the fair treatment of staff, or whether an organisation is welcoming to ethnic minorities, was not of interest in the model proposed by Deal and Kennedy.

An example of the lack of attention which Deal and Kennedy gave to the non-economic aspects of culture can be found in the masculine cultural world they described. The heroes they identified were John Wayne and Burt Reynolds. The cultural myths they described included 'torture' inflicted by some corporate managers to make a point about the cultural requirements of the organisation. There was no consideration in the text about the ethics of subjecting staff to ritual 'torture', and it was reported with a jocular tone which carried no comment other than tacit approval. The implication was that if the technique was good for the bottom line, it could be counted as a success.

With regard to other aspects of culture also, Deal and Kennedy were conservative. They regarded assimilation of women and minorities as rituals that did not work. They expressed concern about the exclusion of women but thought that the matter could be addressed by mechanisms which enhanced the assimilation of women and minorities into the prevalent culture. Deal and Kennedy provided a conservative management model of culture with an assumption that the organisational culture that provided the highest level of profitability was a 'given', to which there should be compliance. Managers who adopt an organisational culture approach using this type of model would be likely to provide one of the barriers to equal opportunity officers trying to create cultural change.

Deal and Kennedy described cultural change as a ‘black art’, and a costly exercise which they estimated at 5-10% of the annual budget. Cultural change was seen as both mysterious and risky, and only to be undertaken in specific and identified circumstances. These circumstances related to the profitability of the company. Managers who had absorbed the ideas of Deal and Kennedy would be unlikely to embrace cultural change which was not designed to impact positively on the bottom line. An insight into the level of expectation of cultural change in an organisation may be gained by knowing what proportion of the budget was allocated to such change, and how it was used.

Schein (1990) positioned the imperative for an interest in organisational culture as an issue of competition, particularly between the U.S.A. and Japan, with the idea that other cultures may have features which gave them a competitive advantage. Schein sought, through an analysis of culture, to illuminate the study of leadership, which he regarded as of central importance to organisations. He believed that culture and leadership were two sides of the same coin, and that it was not possible to understand one without the other. He thought it was possible that, ‘the only thing leaders do is to create and manage culture...’ (1990, pp.2-5). While Schein’s leaders were owners or top managers in companies, his interpretation of leadership leaves open the possibility of leadership in other positions of organisations.

Schein (1990, p.30) was critical of simplistic statements about culture, as he regarded culture as a complex and deep phenomenon. He reported the impact of failure to take culture into account, even if other factors were positive:

> Many companies have found that they can devise new strategies that make sense from a financial, product, or marketing point of view, yet they cannot implement those strategies because they require assumptions, values and ways of working that are too far out of line with the organisation’s prior assumptions.

This analysis of the negative effect of failing to take culture into account was supported by the work of Kotter and Heskett, (1992) who investigated some of the companies that had been subjected to cultural change initiatives by consultants, and

found that many of the changes had not lasted for long. Later research into organisational change also indicates the difficulty of bringing about successful cultural change. The report of one analysis was that fewer than 40% of the organisational change efforts investigated produced positive change, and furthermore, that some resource intensive change initiatives made the existing situation worse (Dent & Goldberg 1999, pp.25-41). Additionally, Molinsky (1999, pp.8-24) reported that in some organisations, change initiatives were used to perpetuate the conflicts they were meant to resolve.

Organisational change efforts that ignore the complexity and multi-layered aspects of culture may also fail. This is illustrated in Baba's (1995, pp.202-233) report of change efforts that produced differences in work group responses. The findings illustrated the sub-cultural differences even in staff who were very similar with respect to demographic characteristics.

The management literature on organisational culture illustrates that culture is complex, deep, and difficult to change, even given leaders who want to make change, and who have budgets and consultants to help them. In the face of this, it constitutes an important aspect of this research to discover how equal opportunity officers go about the process of cultural change, and what measures of success they use.

Apart from ideas about organisational change which have a strong emphasis on business management, another strand of study in organisational culture comes from anthropological description and analysis of cultures. From this perspective, in contrast to looking for answers for managers, researchers have considered general questions about how organisational life is made. Smircich (1985, p.65) was among researchers with this interest. She suggested 'Instead of researching organizational culture, we can engage in cultural analysis of organizational life'.

### 2.6 Organisations As Sites of Culture

Louis (1985, p.79) conceptualised the definitional features of cultures, and concluded that organisations contained all the relevant properties for being the sites of cultures. The features described were: that they are regularly convening settings, (that is they

are not just chance or irregular meetings); that they impose structural interdependencies, (that is people within parts of the organisation rely in some ways on those in other parts); that they provide opportunities for affiliation, and that they constitute a constellation of interest or purpose.

For those inside a culture, it has often been described as analogous to the water in which a fish swims. It is so basic, so pervasive, so taken for granted and so accepted as truth that it is not thought about or remembered. Organisational culture can be so ubiquitous that particular beliefs, values and ways of thinking have all become unquestioned assumptions. These can result in highly effective organisations, or they can result in organisations that are dysfunctional as systems, and for those who work within them (Ott 1989, Kotter and Heskett 1992). Culture renders certain matters as 'natural' or 'facts'. However, it may not be until a person is presented with another set of 'natural facts' that a cultural framework becomes evident.

For those who regard themselves as workers on culture, there may be a need to maintain a certain distance from an organisational culture, in order to see what the unquestioned assumptions are, in order to question them. The question arises for this research as to whether it is possible for equal opportunity officers to maintain sufficient distance from the culture to be able to see it and, and at the same time remain sufficiently part of the culture to maintain their power or influence, and if so, what techniques are employed to achieve this.

Using the analysis of Smircich it is possible to see organisations as symbolic expressions of, and representations of, the search for meaning. Thus '...to see organizations in cultural terms is to understand them as symbolically constituted and sustained within a wider pattern of significance' (Smircich 1985, p.66). The task of studying organisational culture is then the task of interpreting, decoding and deconstructing the meaning of organisation. If part of the role of equal opportunity officers is to attempt to change culture, it is necessary to consider their interpretative tools, and they were sought as part of this research task.

Even though authors such as Ott (1989, p.52) found few areas of consensus about organisational culture, he regarded it as a powerful lever for guiding organisations. He

also thought that each organisational culture was relatively unique. Implications for equal opportunity officers and other agents of cultural change in the relative uniqueness or similarity of organisations, were explored in this research.

## 2.7 A Taxonomy of Organisational Culture

Schein's work (1990) developed a three level taxonomy of organisational culture, which can be summarised as follows:

Level 1: Basic Assumptions.

These basic underlying assumptions are described as taken for granted, invisible, and preconscious. They comprise: humanity's relation to nature, the nature of reality, truth, time and space, the nature of human nature, the nature of human relationships, and the nature of human activity.

Level 2: Values.

Values are generally at a higher level of awareness for individuals, though there would be a need to consider whether the possible disjuncture between what Argyris (1990, p.17) described as 'espoused values' or the values that people actually operated in accord with which he described as 'values in use'.

Level 3: Observable Behaviour

At this level are such items as: patterns of behaviour, familiar management tasks, visible and audible behaviour patterns, norms, and artefacts, technology and art.

Schein's taxonomy is sufficiently broad to illuminate the work of a large number of the authors who have written about organisational culture between the 1960s and the 1980s (Ott 1989, pp.64-66). It provides a basis to begin an examination of organisational culture. However like all taxonomies, it assumes consistency in the object under investigation. Writers including Shweder and LeVine (1990) and Gherardi (1995), have raised the possibility that people may hold contradictory expectations, and muddled opinions which are coloured by feelings, and this would mean that taxonomy would best be used as a sketch outline.

## 2.8 Language and Organisational Culture

Language is one of the major ways in which culture is transmitted, and this applies also in organisations. Culture in organisations is also reflected in and shaped by language. The shaping may be made purposively, often by managers. Two examples from the modern Australian context is that any change tends to be described as 'reform', which has the effect of foreclosing on criticism. Aligned to this is the management-oriented use of the word 'transformation' in leadership. This use of language can lead to a cynicism among workers, and a view for instance that corporate vision or mission statements aim to manipulate workers in the interests of management. Thus the use of language may contain a dilemma for equal opportunity officers, who may need to use language purposively, but who also need to take into account both the ethical issues of manipulation, and the practical issues of cynicism.

It has also been noted that there are gender-based differences in linguistic styles that impact in the organisational arena. Analysis by Tannen (1995) described styles used predominantly by men, as 'power talk'. These styles may originate in early childhood, and be employed as gender-appropriate communication. This style then becomes the 'normal' or expected style in organisations, and those not using it, whether they are women or men, are subject to criticism, and to feeling alien in the culture.

In equal opportunity work, awareness of the way language has been used has resulted in purposeful shifting of language, sometimes through the development of guidelines on language use. In this context, their efforts could be regarded as either manipulations to reflect an accurate cultural picture, or to create cultural reality which is regarded as desirable, but not yet evident. Efforts of these kinds have been criticised as 'politically correct'.

For some, the role of language is predominant, and is regarded as more than a means of communication about reality, but rather a tool for constructing reality (Spradley 1979, p.17). The question of the role of language for equal opportunity officers in the process of describing, understanding, and changing culture may be central to their work.

## 2.9 Cultural Change in Organisations

If organisations are cultures, then research that aims to analyse cultural change ought to give some consideration to what factors cause organisations to seek to change their cultures. As has been outlined above, the pursuit of a competitive edge has been the principal feature of organisational cultural change efforts in business.

Beneath the search for profit, there may also be other factors which are relevant. The idea that organisational cultures either must or should change in itself reflects a cultural assumption or a cultural value, that which regards change as positive (Trice and Beyer 1993, p.290). In Schein's (1990) taxonomy, this constitutes a basic assumption, as part of an understanding of the nature of reality, truth, time and space. Certainly in the modern organisation, change is regarded as inevitable.

While change may be valued, or may be regarded as inevitable, it may also be the case that some people in organisations introduce change without reflection about their reasons for doing so. They may be following the cultural imperative, or using models from other businesses or other types of organisation. This has been observed in universities. Marginson and Considine (2000, pp.4-5), after interviewing many university leaders, concluded that universities were choosing '…from an increasingly restricted menu of commercial options and strategies…' and that those in positions of greatest influence in universities were often fixated on simplistic outside norms of governance.

## 2.10 Change Makers in Organisations

Some theorists have considered individual factors that motivate some people within organisations to want to make changes. These are thought not only to be based in rationality. Mant (1997, p.260) proposed that the internal needs of agents of change may be a factor among managers and leaders who need external chaos, and so they create chaos within organisations because it serves their psychological needs by creating an environment that is congruent with their own inner chaos, which thus renders the world coherent and meaningful for them. In a similar vein, Kets de Vries and Miller (1984) put forward a tightly-argued psychoanalytic perspective in which individuals in organisations were analysed in terms of common neurotic styles. If

people in power are making cultural change because of their own inner chaos or need, this can have a major impact on other workers, and the culture of organisations, for no necessarily beneficial outcome.

Management forums have generally taken a positive and optimistic view of the motivations for cultural change in organisations. Lundberg (1989, pp.61-82) attempted to address some of the assumptions that may underpin this optimism in an analysis of organisational learning, and its relevance to organisational development. Lundberg wrote about organisational transformation as including changes to the basic character or culture of an organisation. He noted that the paradigm of organisational development was unidirectional and deterministic, with assumptions that included the centrality of work to life, and the self-determining freedom of individuals.

These assumptions and cognate values have fed into descriptions of transformational leadership and ideas about charisma which have been the focus of many consultants, according to Trice and Beyer (1993). Transformational leadership has also featured as a topic in higher education, where it shares the common emphasis on self-directed individual effort. In higher education, transformational leadership has been described by Ramsden (1998, p.66) as values-driven and engaging followers through inspiration and exemplary practice, collaboration, spontaneity and trust.

In general, it is those in positions of leadership who have the opportunity to change culture. Mant (1997, pp.34-35) used as a cautionary tale the example of the innovative female monkey Imo, who learned a technique for cleaning food by washing it. This technique was gradually adopted by female and young monkeys, but never adopted by that generation of the powerful males in the hierarchy. It may be the case that the current leaders in organisations, usually males, may be unable to perceive innovations if they are suggested by members lower in the hierarchy because they do not attend to them. The positioning of cultural change agents in an organisation is therefore likely to be important in whether they will be attended to. Lansbury and Spillane (1992, p.173) observed that internal change agents often lacked power, and that top management support was a prerequisite for successful change.

It may also be possible to change culture from other points in the organisation: the example of Imo above illustrates this possibility, as well as the probability that it is likely to take longer. If equal opportunity officers are not among the current leaders, they may find the pace of the changes they want to implement slower than those sponsored by managers.

### 2.11 Reasons for Cultural Change in Organisations

As has been mentioned above, the idea that change is necessary appears to be an assumption of organisational life. Some theorists are sceptical of the uses being made of ideas of cultural change. For example, Lundberg (1985, p.83) implied the self-interest of some of those seeking to promote cultural change. He wrote, 'Corporate culture is the magic phrase that management consultants are breathing into the ears of American executives'.

The history of organisational theory could be interpreted as the application of different paradigms in search of the bottom line, and management of corporate culture as another such paradigm; of interest to managers if change can improve profitability.

Major theorists such as Schein (1990), Ott (1989) and Kotter and Heskett (1992), all thought that cultural change took time and effort. However, Lundberg observed that the impression had been created, perhaps partly by management consultants, that cultural change was both necessary and easy to achieve. The culture within which organisational change consultants are working, principally in North America, may require such a direct approach.

In Australia, similar efforts to change corporate culture can be observed. It has its own national flavour as there has been the perceived need for business, and in the last decades of the twentieth century, also for universities to become more competitive in the region.

This has led to recommendations that corporations capitalise on the diversity of Australia's population. In both North America and Australia, the global business environment has signalled that increased diversity among customers and employees is

a major adaptive challenge (Peters 1999, pp.166-172). Workplace diversity has become an opportunity for corporate competitiveness. Equal opportunity officers have also been interested in workplace diversity, though more from a social justice and anti-discrimination perspective. The corporate move to embrace diversity has impacted on universities, and their cultures, and the effects of this on the role and work of equal opportunity officers could be illustrative of the relative success of cultural change efforts that are supportive of a management imperative.

The corporatist view of when it may be necessary to change culture regards the following as the precipitating motivators: business interests; atypical performance demands; stakeholder pressure; organisation growth or decrement, and crises (Deal and Kennedy 1982, p.159). Most of these are tightly-coupled to the financial performance of organisations, but at least some of them might be meaningful for equal opportunity officers. Stakeholder pressure can come from outside the organisation. In business this would generally be from clients or shareholders. In universities the stakeholder groups can be even broader. They include students, their parents, employers, professional bodies, and government. Knowledge of the precipitating motivators for change could also affect any changes that equal opportunity officers are either to encourage or to resist in organisations.

## 2.12 Universities as Organisational Cultures

Universities have all the features of culture–bearing milieux as analysed by Louis (1985, p.79). In addition, the educational ends have been both explicitly and implicitly to create or change culture. This is put succinctly by Vincent (1994, pp.97-98):

> Appointed by tradition with the advancement and tradition of learning in its highest forms and as dispenser of the qualifications governing access to the learned professions, higher education represents itself, and outwardly appears in all its modalities of operation and in the demands which it makes, not as a system of vocational training, but as an education in culture.

They are also, like corporations and many other types of organisation, structured into hierarchies. The hierarchy of universities is tripartite, with some overlap between groups. Students form one part, in general without a great deal of influence until they become postgraduates when they may be inducted into the academic group as beginning academics. The general staff are a separate group, with separate salary structures, rewards and representation. While there is some interchange of people between the academic and the general staff group, general staff have not participated in university culture in the same ways as academic staff. While the gradual merger of the academic and general staff unions in Australia in recent years may see some merging of conditions and some reduction of the differences, it was still possible for Marginson and Considine to observe in 2000 that, 'General staff are still poorly catered for in systems of representation' (p.251). Equal employment opportunity officers are part of the general staff, and their situation in this hierarchy is likely to affect the impact they have on the culture of universities.

Universities also have the strong influences of academic disciplines as subcultures, that have been characterised (Becher 1989) as 'tribes and territories'. The development and recognition of discipline areas, their merger, breakdown and change form major themes in the political life of universities. The strength of disciplinary culture has implications for equal opportunity officers who may be attempting to change the culture from outside of the discipline.

Harman's (1989, pp.30-54) study of organisational culture at the University of Melbourne revealed a university full of inconsistencies, particularly in regard to the differences between the traditional and change resistant, and the radical and liberated. She investigated the differences between disciplines, and the way that disciplines form sites for misunderstanding and stereotyping.

She also observed an increased central control, which Marginson and Considine (2000, p.10) reported more recently as symptomatic of a new type of executive power in universities. They reported that disciplines were a target for executives because, in addition to being somewhat inaccessible to control from above, they could be seen as obstacles to the remaking structures and the freer movement of resources, and that

there was a consequent move by university executives away from discipline bases to other groupings, controlled by budgets and targets.

There are reasons for reviewing the disciplinary base of universities, other than the desire for both control and flexibility by university executives. Coaldrake and Stedman (1999, p.5), critiqued disciplinarity from the point of view of the needs of students or corporate clients which '…do not fall neatly into disciplinary compartments'. Harman's research referred to the ways in which members of disciplines deliberately engaged in mystifying techniques, which may be subversive of other university values, for example that intellectual differences should be separated from social conflict.

Ramsden (1998, p.21) described four characteristics that are found or can be expected to be found in traditional universities. These were: autonomy; academic freedom; collegiality, and professionalism. Both autonomy and academic freedom are contextually and politically defined. For example, Olswang and Lee (1984, p.5) observed that academic freedom was historically limited by a requirement for religious orthodoxy, and Neave (1988, pp.31-38) contrasted the meaning of autonomy at the University of Bologna, which was based on the students' freedom to learn, with that of the University of Paris, which was based on the freedom to teach. He asserted that in Britain the notion of autonomy was both individual and institutional, based on a university's individual charter and a collegial style of self-government. The current context of higher education in Australia inevitably affects the definitions of autonomy and academic freedom, and on this shifting ground, equal opportunity officers seek to affect the culture of universities.

Collegiality was described by Ramsden (1998, pp.22-28) as both the unselfish collaboration of a group of scholars, and as shared decision making. He noted that collegiality as shared decision making can result in giving ownership to all, or no accountability to any, and could be characterised by groups or cabals.

Within universities, collegiality as shared decision-making requires that change has often to be negotiated through extensive participatory processes, involving many stakeholders. There has been an impatience with the slowness that this amount of

participation brings with it, particularly from university executives who would wish to introduce particular types of change, which either would not be successful at all if taken through this participatory process, or which would take much longer to implement. The concept of collegiality has been criticised by university leaders. Marginson and Considine (2000, p.11) reported that, 'Without exception the university leaders in our study saw collegial forms of decision-making as an obstacle to managerial rationalities.' This may cause dilemmas for equal opportunity officers with regard to how much of the participatory processes they can use, for what purposes and how successful it is, compared to how much of the managerial style they can use. The concept has also been criticised as characteristic of white middle class males, and implicitly patriarchal or fratriarchal (Hearn 2001, p.76). Harman (1989, pp.30-54) attempted to find a way to work within and also to change a culture. Her findings implied that, 'sensitive, low-key facilitators who are cognisant of cultural differences…' may have a workable approach.

This research will explore the ways in which equal opportunity officers work within university cultures, and what approaches they use to try to impact on them.

### 2.13 Equal Opportunity in Universities

Equal opportunity practices in universities are firmly situated within a legislative base.

Equal opportunity legislation derives from international conventions, which in turn arise out of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (United Nations 2000). This Declaration set out:

> '…recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.'

The Declaration also stated that rights should be protected by the rule of law.

At the federal level in Australia, there are a number of pieces of legislation that have been enacted to give effect to the Declaration of Human Rights. They include the *Sex Discrimination Act* of 1984, the *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Act* of 1986, and *the Disability Discrimination Act* of 1992. In addition to making unlawful certain types of discrimination, there has also been the *Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women)* Act which requires all employers of more than one hundred people to develop a plan to improve the employment opportunities for women. At the state level, there is a variety of anti-discrimination legislation. Some, such as the New South Wales *Anti-Discrimination Act*, sets up reporting requirements for public employers, which includes universities established under state legislation. An example of a state law that imposes requirements for equal opportunity can be found in New South Wales, where the *Anti-Discrimination* Act established an Office of the Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment, with requirements for state public employers to produce management plans and report to it on activities undertaken 'to provide equal employment opportunity for women, members of racial minorities and the physically handicapped.' (The language illustrates a cultural shift since 1977, when the law was enacted). Universities are included in the remit of the requirement as they were established under state legislation.

Another relevant example of a kind of external requirement is in the federal *Disability Discrimination Act*. While this legislation does not make it mandatory, it provides for lodgment of a Disability Action Plan with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

Apart from the direct link to human rights, all legislation is also based on certain cultural expectations. Some theorists have analysed the function of equal opportunity legislation as reducing the legitimacy of opposition to changes already occurring through other means (Poiner and Wills 1991, p.81). There is an interplay evident between the function of law to lead change, and its function to reflect changes in cultural expectations.

Some of the cultural expectations embedded in legislation were, at the time of drafting, regarded as so obvious they did not even require justification. These change over time and become anything but obvious. An ancient example, used by Sedley

(1999) was that the right of Athenian citizens to vote did not include women and slaves. As cultural expectations such as these change over time, legislation changes accordingly. In the area of anti-discrimination legislation in Australia, legislation changes relatively frequently. In New South Wales, for instance, the broadly-based *Anti-Discrimination Act* recently added transgender and sexual harassment to prohibited discriminations, and the state government has indicated an intention to add physical appearance as a further ground. In the federal jurisdiction, the *Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women)* Act, was re-named *the Equal Employment Opportunity for Women in the Workplace* Act, and several of the reporting requirements were changed, following a review in 1999. This frequent change is indicative that the equal opportunity area is still undergoing definition, and also that it is subject to challenge from other value positions.

It can be seen from this legislation that equal opportunity officers' work is quite directly supported, and may also be constrained by the legal framework.

Much of the above legislation applies to both staff and students. Equal opportunity offices in universities have been sources of knowledge about the legislation, and some were established for both staff and student matters. In addition, there were changes introduced to higher education after the election of the Whitlam government in 1972. These changes were designed to increase access to higher education through abolishing tuition fees and other measures. This had limited success in opening access to people from lower socio-economic groups and other under-represented groups. Subsequently, federal governments increasingly came to specifiy measurable objectives and to require reports on specific groups in terms of their access and success in higher education. This requirement of government led to an expansion of the role of equal opportunity in universities in order to develop inititiatives in response (Beasley 1997).

### 2.14 The Effects of Change Brought About by Legislation

In general terms, laws decide between the permitted and the prohibited, and in this sense deliberately cause some actions to be described unlawful, such as certain sorts of discrimination. Other actions may be unfair, but if they do not fall within the

bounds of legislation, they are not prohibited. Laws also establish bases for redress of those discriminated against, and reparation to be made by those found to have discriminated unlawfully.

Other direct effects of anti-discrimination legislation that have been reported are improvements to practice, for example improvements reported in personnel policies and practices, and particularly in recruitment of staff (Poiner and Wills 1991, p.85). Thus legislation intended to prevent discrimination against certain groups has resulted in improved and fairer practice in general.

Anti-discrimination legislation also resulted in staff training and development programs. These programs can vary from compliance-based information sessions, to more extensive developmental programs concerned with managing in a changed legal framework. Both types of training were often conducted or organised by equal opportunity officers, and both types could have led to some effects on the culture of organisations.

There have been also less direct effects of anti-discrimination legislation. One of the indirect effects has been to move matters that were thought private, or part of the prerogative of a manager, into the public sphere. Sexual harassment, for example, changed from being a source of discomfort and private shame to being a matter in the workplace to be criticised and addressed. In turn, there were staff required who could address these matters. These were usually the equal opportunity officers.

Poiner and Wills, (1991, p.84) regarded equal employment officers as early beneficiaries of anti-discrimination legislation. Their general critique of the effects of legislation was that it was a middle class, managerialist initiative, which benefited primarily the middle class elites of the groups covered. They regarded the effect of legislation as profoundly assimilationist and the opportunity to be equal was the chance to be like the middle class people who had framed the legislation. This critique raises a profound question for equal opportunity officers regarding their place in the culture that they are seeking to affect. If they are indeed, part of a middle class elite which, according to Poiner and Wills, framed legislation without consulting the

intended beneficiaries, how do they conceptualise the cultural work they are doing in organisations, and with what effectiveness?

Another effect of making certain sorts of discrimination unlawful, apart from making them more public, is to draw attention to a distinction between unlawful behaviour, and that which is regarded as unfair or unjust but which is not unlawful. This can cause dilemmas for equal opportunity officers. They have to consider if they are required to confine their role to those activities that, directly or indirectly uphold the law. Alternatively, they could address themselves to whether they have a role in shifting organisational cultures to be fairer in a broad sense. In other words, to what degree is their role in the culture a general one, and to what degree do they remain within the limits of legislation?

### 2.15 Goals and Constraints of Legislation

The goals of anti-discrimination legislation were to eliminate certain behaviours and practices, certain elements of culture in society and in organisations. There was a prevailing idea among managers in universities that, at some stage equal opportunity would become part of the culture, and that at this time, there would be no further need for equal opportunity officers. This was described in terms of 'mainstreaming' or 'devolution'. This overall cultural change does not seem to have occurred yet, as evidenced by the continued presence and efforts of equal opportunity officers. Also, further grounds of unlawful discrimination are proposed on a frequent basis, for example, following increased success in genetic analysis and testing, the United States government have been discussing making discrimination on the grounds of a genetic testing unlawful. Does this mean that there will never be equal opportunity: perhaps that it is a place, like Moscow in Chekov's *Three Sisters*, a place which is much desired and discussed, but never reached? If laws and rules do not eliminate inequality of opportunity, what do cultural change agents such as equal opportunity officers use to legitimate their continuing attempts to eliminate inequality of opportunity?

The dilemmas of affirmative action also highlight the question of whether it is possible to attain the goal of equal opportunity. Affirmative action generally rests on

an assumption that, if all members of a group had equal opportunity, their presence and success would be in proportion to the percentage of the population in any given field of endeavour. This brings together the issues of equality of opportunity and equality of outcomes. It assumes that, but for past unequal opportunity, those outcomes would be manifest. To take women as an example. If they form about 50% of the Australian population, at what point would it be possible to say that affirmative action had succeeded? When women were 50% of the workforce, or 50% in every type of job, or 50% at each point in the hierarchy? This outcome-based approach, while it has proven useful to practitioners as a challenge to employers, leaves aside the questions of culture. If these are added, will affirmative action have succeeded when the society and the workplace take account of matters which are more likely to impact on women, such as family leave, or when men welcome the contribution of women? These questions in themselves include assumptions about the kind of culture that affirmative action is seeking to establish.

In response to the slowness of change, some affirmative actions have included targets through identified positions for particular groups, or quotas. In Australian universities this has been evident in employment through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment strategies, where a certain number of positions has been set aside for this group. For students, access targets have been set by federal governement, and strategies have been introduced, such as scholarships for particular groups. This type of activity, where there are clearly some winners and losers, can require cultural management skills from equal opportunity officers if resentment and further discrimination is not to result from measures intended to provide equal opportunity. While these types of affirmative action are allowable within the Australian legal framework, they require an additional form of consent for their legitimacy to be validated in the workplace. Such special measures are more likely to be acceptable in times of plenty, but can result in a type of competition in disadvantage as funds decline.

The goals and objectives of equal opportunity officers form part of the investigation of their experience in seeking to impact on university cultures.

## 2.16 Equal Opportunity Officers as Organisational Culture Workers

In Australia, there are equal employment opportunity officers in most large public service, publicly funded enterprises, and many of the larger private companies, as well as in universities. Their presence was an organisational response to anti-discrimination legislation and also its attendant reporting requirements.

The role of equal opportunity officers was developed to attend to these reporting requirements, which included writing of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action plans and developing mechanisms to deal with complaints of unlawful discrimination within organisations. The beginnings of the role were therefore inevitably linked with an organisational requirement to comply with legislation.

The presence of equal opportunity officers in universities came from a university's need to respond to legislation rather than as a response to an internally-felt need. This raises questions about how equal opportunity officers operate, and how they are expected to operate within university cultures. For instance in what ways equal opportunity officers work as part of an organisational culture, and also in what ways they support and maintain the existing culture of an organisation. It also raises questions about the priority given to equal opportunity in universities. If it was not a priority prior to legislation, and political and financial changes have in recent years swept universities along in a climate of increasing competition, there is a question for practitioners of the relative priority of equal opportunity issues in universities.

Women in universities have identified 'culture' as an impediment to their ability to achieve equal rights at work. The title of a major Australian conference on women in universities characterised it as a 'chilly climate' (Payne and Shoemark, 1995). Women have provided a major focus for the work of equal opportunity officers. This was inevitable in part because of the reporting requirements of *Affirmative Action* Act, which set out steps to be taken to produce a plan to improve women's chances in the workforce. In addition, the expansion in higher education since the 1970's provided many women with the opportunity for a university education and later employment. The increased numbers of women in the system provided information to equal opportunity officers about how the culture impacted on their success at study and

work. Another reason for the focus on women by equal opportunity officers could be ascribed to the fact that most of the equal opportunity officers were, and remain, women. An e-mail survey conducted in Australia in 1999 identified three male equal opportunity officers, and forty females.

If the definition of university culture as 'chilly' seemed apt for women, it could be equally salient for others, such as the other groups designated as equity groups by equal opportunity agencies. These are: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders; people from language backgrounds other than English, and people with disabilities. If the climate was indeed chilly, the research will investigate what mechanisms and measures have been used by equal opportunity officers to try to change it.

A particular feature of equal opportunity in universities is that equal opportunity officers may be dealing with students' opportunities, as well as those of staff. In a paper *A Fair Chance for All*, Martin (1990) developed a set of equity indicators, that analysed sub-groups of the student population which had less representation in higher education than their presence in the population generally. These groups were known as 'equity groups', and comprised women, (later changed to women in non-traditional areas), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, people from rural or isolated areas and people with disabilities. This set of indicators was then used by the federal government to set targets and direct a certain amount of funding support, intended to improve the access, participation and success of these equity groups. The designation of certain groups, while Martin defined them in a statistical way, has caused a great deal of discussion, and the single descriptor for people from non-English speaking background, with its definitional homogenisation of diverse groups of people, has been particularly problematic.

In response to the funding and reporting requirements, universities developed plans, which were often produced by equal opportunity officers. The federal government supplied small amounts of discretionary funding to each university for special initiatives or 'seeding' of projects. This constitutes a form of affirmative action for those groups designated as equity groups by Martin.

The employment of equal opportunity officers introduced a new set of workers into universities who inevitably caused issues to be raised about how much they were part of the culture, and therefore reflected it, and how much they maintained points of reference outside the organisation, for example to the state or federal governments, to whom they report. The management literature refers to such roles as 'boundary spanners' (Vecchio et al. 1992, p.510; Pepper 1995, p.180). Pepper suggested that the more turbulent the environment, the greater the need for boundary spanners, as a device for organisational protection and responsiveness, while Katz and Kahn (1966, p.61) observed that boundary positions were stressful. The extent to which equal opportunity officers are a part of, or are separate from, university cultures, is part of this research task.

### 2.17 Equal Opportunity Officers as Agents of Cultural Change

As equal opportunity officers developed their roles, their work increased from the initial requirement to comply with legislation. This may have followed from a hypothesis that, if legislation had been necessary to address discrimination, then there was a need not only to change behaviour, but to change attitudes and values in organisations. This would avoid a situation in which the work place would be an arena in which, but for the law, all sorts of discriminatory practices would take place. This type of change is cultural change, and includes the behavioural and value levels of cultural operation identified by Schein (1990).

Shoemark (1996, pp.129-131), an equal opportunity officer, referred to equal opportunity officers as 'change agents', in a paper which considered devolved responsibility for equal employment opportunity in universities. She was concerned that successful devolution depended on shared values which supported equal opportunity; in other words on cultural factors. In a more theoretical approach, this hypothesis was supported by Burton (1996), who spoke of, 'understandings, beliefs, values, traditions, within which people interpret merit and equity', and the need for equal opportunity officers to understand these, because the understandings, beliefs and values of the most powerful people in organisations tended to become embedded in structural arrangements and rules; they became, in effect, part of the culture.

It is evident that some equal opportunity officers were aware that they were trying to change the status quo, while also being part of it (Rollison, 1999). How this affects their role is part of the research question.

Much of the literature on cultural change in organisations strongly focuses on managers and positional leaders. Equal opportunity officers are not generally at the senior management level, though some definitions of leadership may apply to them. This raises the question of how these people 'do' cultural change, what tools or techniques they use, what methods of power or influence they employ, what assists or impedes them and how they measure their success. The ways in which equal opportunity officers work will be addressed in the research.

### 2.18 Ethics and Legitimacy of Cultural Change

There is a central ethical question that underlies all efforts to change culture. It is: in the light of the diversity of cultures, by what right and with what warrant does a person attempt to change culture? The underpinning question is likely to be answered in a different way by generalist managers from equal opportunity officers, and the differences may be relevant to the success of either group. The question raises issues of organisational legitimation, as well as of individual moral positioning.

In all social institutions, there are other forms of legitimacy beside laws or formal rules. There are forms of legitimacy that may reside in the values frameworks of universities (Ramsden 1998, pp. 24-26). The degree to which equal opportunity officers can find common ground with those values frameworks would have an impact on how legitimate their work was considered to be.

There is also a theoretical perspective mentioned above, that regards equal opportunity officers as agents of privilege, a middle class phenomenon, providing the assimilationist opportunity for others to become middle class. If this were the case, equal opportunity officers would derive their legitimacy from prevailing or mainstream norms. Such an approach would be likely to deny or seek to minimise difference.

## 2.19 Summary of Literature Review

The literature review began by considering a number of interpretations of the concept of culture, and then the implications that these concepts may have on the inferences that people may make about the mind of humanity. It provided a more sensitive understanding about what equal opportunity officers, as the subjects of the research, may understand culture to be, and a better understanding about how the inferences they make about the mind of humanity may affect their goals and ways of working to impact on university cultures.

The examination of organisation theory, and its bearing on theories of cultural change provided both theoretical perspectives on organisational change, and also insights into the perspectives of management-trained staff in universities.

Schein's (1990) taxonomy provided an evaluative tool that has the potential to assist in considerations of whether any change brought about by equal opportunity officers could be characterised as cultural change.

The literature raised questions of power and compliance relations in organisations. If equal opportunities officers had any impact on culture, then the ways in which power and compliance operates provides insights into the impact that they have. The impact may be through the experience of equal opportunity officers as both objects and agents of power and compliance.

The review of the literature also provided a broad appreciation of universities as cultures, which raised questions for the research about where equal opportunity sought to impact on culture, what the cultural features were on which they sought to impact.

# 3. METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Purpose

The purpose of the research project was to present a substantive and grounded theory of the impact of equal opportunity officers on the culture of universities that was based on their experience and practice.

## 3.2 Aims

The aim of the research was to consider the practices of equal opportunity officers in universities, and to analyse what those practices could illuminate about the processes of cultural change in universities. The research was guided by the following general questions:

- What are the major processes through which cultural change occurs in universities?
- What are the factors that inhibit cultural change?
- What cultural change do equal opportunity officers in universities attempt?
- What values affect the processes of cultural change?

## 3.3 Domain of Enquiry

The domain of enquiry incorporated: equal opportunity, higher education, organisational theory, corporate culture, and cultural change.

## 3.4 Rationale

This research concerned a group of staff in organisations, equal opportunity officers. It can thus be regarded as situated within the broad field of organisational research. It was a study about organisational culture and the culture in universities in particular, using the knowledge and experience of equal opportunity officers.

The Human Relations School of organisational research first introduced the term ‘culture’ into the vocabulary of organisational research. As part of their research, the previously disregarded informal organisation of workers was ‘discovered’. The Human Relations school used qualitative research approaches, based partly in

ethnography, to study the cultures in an organisation. It also started as a hypothesis-testing approach and became, over the course of time, hypothesis generating. (Schwartzmann 1993, pp. 5, 16, 26).

This research topic, which investigated culture and cultural change in universities, was suitable for the application of a qualitative approach. It was also considered explicitly to be less suitable for a quantitative approach. The topic concerned itself with the meanings which equal opportunity officers make of their work, and specifically how those meanings affected cultural change. Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.106) assessed the value of a qualitative research approach by analysing those matters which research based on quantitative approaches would miss. They concluded that the elucidation of meaning or purpose was among those matters.

As qualitative research is a set of interpretative practices, which does not privilege any single methodology (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, p.3), the specific choice of methodology was open to further choice. However, the insights of symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1969, p.50), in particular that people, individually and collectively, are prepared to act on the basis of the meanings of the objects that comprise their world, set the parameters for analysing the ways in which equal opportunity officers interacted with their clients, colleagues and managers.

### 3.5 Selection of Grounded Theory

The methodology chosen for this research was that of grounded theory. Grounded theory is an inductive approach through which explanatory theory is derived from a close consideration of the data. Its intention has been described as being to further an understanding of social phenomena (Chenitz and Swanson 1986, p.3). Through the use of the technique, theory is ‘discovered, developed and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon’ (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p.23).

The social phenomenon investigated in this research was the way in which equal opportunity officers understood, conceptualised, and also attempted to change and to deal with, the organisational culture of universities. The grounded theory

methodology was particularly suitable for the topic as the research was concerned with elucidating understanding from the practice of equal opportunity officers, and from that, deriving substantive theory concerning their role and impact in cultural change. It was aimed at meaning and understanding, rather than objective truth, and was therefore inclined towards a constructivism approach to grounded theory (Charmaz 2000, pp.509-535).

This research was concerned with practitioners in a specific field of employment, equal opportunity. The researcher was a practitioner, and had developed an interest in organisational culture, and the ways in which culture may affect what was done and the ways things were done in universities. The research was founded on a curiosity about the practices of equal opportunity officers, and a concern to explore those practices within a framework that allowed the development of theoretical approaches to the practice, without the danger for a practitioner to succumb to autobiography. The grounded theory framework imposed a discipline through the necessity to continually refer to data which assisted resistance to autobiography, and provided a sources of reflexivity (Lincoln and Guba 2000, p.182-184) The research investigated the understandings that other equal opportunity officers had about the meaning of events in their working experience, and how their practice impacted on them, or how their practice may have been impacted. The research sought to build ways to theorise about those meanings.

There is an ongoing issue regarding theory for all professional practitioners. Practitioners are intensely involved in what they do, and may find that they have little time for theory, consequently their field remains under-theorised. Alternatively, they may find that existing theory does not seem to fit the complex realities of their experience. Schön (1998, p.14) noted this lack of fit as a significant issue for professional practitioners. He wrote:

> …professional knowledge is mismatched to the changing character of the situations in practice - the complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and values conflicts which are increasingly perceived as central to the world of professional practice.

Grounded theory offered the prospect of identifying some of the complexities that Schön had observed.

If Schön's description of the lack of fit between practice and theory were the case for all professionals, it would be particularly relevant for equal opportunity officers. Their professional task includes bringing about change, not only to their own field of employment, as may often be the case with reforming professionals who seek improved ways of being, for instance, a medical practitioner or lawyer. In addition, their task is to bring about change in the professional practice of others. The nature of this role and its concomitant high level of complexity, uncertainty and instability is both a cause of lack of fit with extant theory, and a strong reason to try to develop theory which matches some of their practice.

Whilst the research was designed to generate understanding, from the experiences and point of view of practitioners, of their impact on university cultures, it also sought to access some of the cultural assumptions with which practitioners viewed their working world (McCracken 1988, p.17), and how those assumptions affected their practice in cultural change in universities.

### 3.6 Use of the Practitioner

The choice of the research topic was generated from some of the concerns of an equal opportunity practitioner about how equal opportunity officers dealt with cultural change in universities. One aspect of this was about how they attempted to sponsor, generate and lead change. Another aspect was how they attempted to maintain aspects of culture or to resist some types of change. This genesis for a research topic in a problem identified in the lived experience of the researcher is a commonly identified source of topics (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p.35).

It is acknowledged that an approach which uses a practitioner as the instrument of an enquiry creates both dangers and opportunities. Some anthropologists and ethnographers have considered it a requirement to be close to the subject matter if cultural interpretation is to be possible. Geertz (1993, p.24.) noted:

> …there are a number of characteristics of cultural interpretation which make the theoretical development of it more than usually difficult. The first is the need for theory to stay rather closer to the ground than tends to be the case in sciences more able to give themselves over to imaginative abstraction.

Another potential advantage which can be provided by practitioners who enquire into issues related to their own professional practices is that of increased depth, and the possibility to challenge the data with a particularly critical eye. In this way it can represent a source of theoretical sensitivity (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p.43.)

However, the analysis of practice as a type of cultural interpretation presents also the dangers of using the research as a form of 'hidden' biography, of failing to appreciate the cultural situatedness of the conditions of conducting research, and thus for practitioners' activities to become uninspected, a part of the 'common understandings' between practitioners (Garfinkel 1967, p.38). There is thus the need to both interrogate one's own practices and one's cultural situatedness while at the same time involved in them, which constitutes the need for reflexiveness (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.62). The processes of asking about the practice of other equal opportunity officers, of comparing it with the practice of other professions, and of contrasting this knowledge with the researchers' experience, all contributed to this description of reflexiveness in this research.

### 3.7 Use of the Literature Review

From acknowledgment of the need for reflexiveness, it follows that the researcher must find ways to make the material uncovered 'anthropologically strange' (Garfinkel 1967, p.10-11). The methodology was instrumental in this. Another way to help a researcher to challenge the underlying common understandings and assumptions is through a use of the literature. Reading the literature serves both to sharpen the capacity for surprise, and to create additional distance (McCracken 1988, p.31). This research began from the questions that arose from practice, so the search through the literature was problem-based, rather than based in a particular discipline. The literature was read as a source of theoretical sensitising, and the initial literature search covered a number of discipline areas. These included general questions about

the nature of culture, and the ways in which cultural practices may reveal inferences about the mind of humanity. The literature also provided information about the way in which a knowledge of organisations and management theorists could inform a study about culture; features of organisational culture and cultural change. The literature related directly to the practice of equal opportunity, and equal opportunity in universities in particular was reviewed. Literature related to the university environment in general was also used.

As the research progressed, literature was sought to continue the process of enhancing sensitivity. Issues of morality and ethics, the links between the cultural and the psychological dimensions of behaviour, reading about leadership, power, conflict and mistakes in organisations, assisted in the development of the theoretical categories.

### 3.7.1 The Data

Data gathered came from interviews and other personal interactions with equal opportunity officers; from the topics and proceedings of conferences and meetings; from scanning the press and relevant Internet sites, and from observations of the setting of the work of equal opportunity officers in universities.

### 3.7.2 Interviews

The major source of data for the research was a series of interviews, conducted with equal opportunity officers in universities.

The reason that interviews were used was that the experience of practitioners was a source of information which would be rich enough to generate understanding and could provide the stuff of the complex interactions and practices experienced in reality. Pertinent comment was found in Fontana and Frey (1994, p.361) to support this approach: ‘Interviewing is a paramount part of sociology, because interviewing is interaction, and sociology is the study of interaction’.

The decision about number of interviews to conduct was guided by two considerations. The first consideration was a need to cover sufficient of the universities to facilitate a full analysis. A higher education report recorded thirty-six

universities and other degree-granting institutions in Australia (DEET 1996). A second consideration arose from the coding and analysis of interview transcripts. When it appeared that sufficient data had been obtained to satisfactorily analyse the phenomena, through saturation of data, interviewing ceased. The researcher interviewed eleven equal opportunity officers.

A further four equal opportunity officers were selected for detailed feedback on interview findings. They were selected from universities that had been inaccessible for the initial interviews, and to attempt to maintain a balance between the types of universities identified in Table 1. They were approached initially by e-mail, and the findings, amended in response to feedback from the participants who had been interviewed, were then sent. These four participants were subsequently telephoned, and their comments and responses were incorporated. This feedback provided a source of trustworthiness to the data.

### 3.7.3 Selection of Universities

An initial analysis of universities was conducted, based on higher education statistics (DEET 1996). The consideration of how to select the match of equal opportunity officers with their universities was based on the criterion of maximum variety of universities, in order to maximise the generality of the findings.

The cultural setting also contains information which can add to the richness of theory development. As the literature review reported, universities have a diversity of cultures. Firstly, there are the variations found in many large organisations: of hierarchy, age, sex, ethnic background and social class. Further variety can be provided from the fact that, as teaching and research institutions, universities represent a large proportion of the professional fields including: pure and applied science; the social sciences; humanities, and arts. Also a particular feature of universities is the marked and continuing difference between academic and general staff. These different and perhaps multiple realities of culture in universities have the potential to yield information-rich material on cultural change (Patton 1987, pp.51-52).

The dimensions of the initial analysis of universities for consideration were size and location. The researcher attempted to ensure that all sizes of institution were represented. Large universities were defined as those which had 15,000 or more students. Medium-sized universities were defined as those between 10,000-14,999 students. Small institutions had between 1,500-9,999 students. Very small institutions had fewer than 1500 students.

In order to represent the diversity of higher education institutions, a further selection was made based on a categorisation developed by Marginson (1999). This was based on historical distinctions. Those categorised as 'Sandstones' were the oldest universities in each state, founded before the 1914-1918 war. The 'Redbricks' were created after the 1939-1945 war. The 'Gumtrees' began between 1960 and 1975. The 'Unitechs' grew out of the large institutes of technology. The 'New' universities were also founded in the last decade. The categorisation is shown below.

**Table 1**. **Australian Universities by Segment**

| **Sandstone** | **Redbrick** | **Unitech** | **Gumtree** | **New** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sydney | ANU | UTS | Macquarie | Charles Sturt |
| Melbourne | NSW | QUT | Newcastle | Southern Cross |
| Queensland | Monash | RMIT | W'gong | VUT |
| W.A. | | Curtin | La Trobe | Swinburne |
| Adelaide | | South Aus. | Deakin | Ballarat |
| Tasmania | | | Griffith | Central Q. |
| | | | James Cook | Southern Q. |
| | | | Murdoch | Sunshine Coast |
| | | | Flinders | Edith Cowan |
| | | | | Canberra |
| | | | | Northern Territory |
| | | | | Batchelor |
| | | | | Western Sydney |
| | | | | Australian Catholic |

Equal opportunity officers who were interviewed were from the following types of institution:

- One Sandstone
- Two Redbrick
- One Unitech
- Two Gumtrees
- Three New
- One very small specialist

In addition, the opportunity arose to interview an equal opportunity officer, currently at a Sandstone university, who had experience at a university in England.

Detailed feedback on findings for triangulation purposes was provided by equal opportunity officers from two Sandstones, a Unitech and a New university. They were selected from states or areas that the researcher had been unable to access for interview.

### 3.7.4 Gaining Access and Consent

Approval to conduct the research was obtained from the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Participants from the interview group were approached first by telephone or e-mail and invited to be part of the research. All those approached agreed, but some were not subsequently interviewed for logistical reasons, and others were then formally invited to participate.

Letters of consent were taken to the interviews. The letter gave a brief explanation of the project, gave information about tape recording, the opportunity to give or retract consent, and the measures taken to preserve anonymity (See Appendix 1).

Following the coding process, described below, a copy of the draft findings was sent to participants, with an invitation to comment. At this stage, as a further tactic to preserve anonymity, they were asked if there were sections that they thought would be identifiable to them or their university, and if they wanted this amended or removed (See Appendix 2). One participant requested one part be amended.

### 3.7.5 Confidentiality and Security

The references in the findings that came from individuals were identified with only a letter code, and amendment was offered (see above) for any examples that participants thought would identify them.

All of the tapes, addresses and other identifiable material were stored securely, away from a university site and separately from the coded material.

### 3.7.6 The Interviews

The conduct and design of the interview was to attempt to encourage thoughtful and sincere responses.

The conduct of the research was based on the understanding that the equal opportunity officers were knowing participants, and that the researcher was a practitioner asking other practitioners. This awareness provided a source of data and questions, based on reciprocal understanding, and added a dimension of meaningfulness that was a requirement of the research. The participation and understanding of respondents was posited as a requirement by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.105) for this type of research. Their view was that 'Meaningful human research is impossible without the full understanding and co-operation of the respondents'.

The interviews were semi-structured, using prompting questions as a guide. The questions were developed from the research aims and from the literature review.

The interview began with some general questions about the length of time the participant had been at the university, some biographical details, and a question about why the participant had gone into equal opportunity work. In addition to collecting

data, these general questions helped to establish rapport. After that a 'Grand Tour' (Schwartzmann 1993, p.53) question was asked in order to elicit an open response. This question was; 'What is happening in your area of work at the university at the moment?'

The rest of the prepared questions were:

- How would you describe the culture of your university? Does it have any special or particular ways of doing things?

- Do you think equal opportunity officers fit in with the way things are done at your university? If so how?

- Are you regarded as an expert in the university? What areas of expertise do you think you have?

- What sorts of cultural shifts have you seen in your time at the university?

- Can you give me some examples of cultural change you have attempted?

- How do you decide when a culture, or part of a culture needs changing?

- What are the factors that inhibit change?

- What helps to make change?

- Are there areas of the university that are more or less responsive to your change efforts? Can you speculate on the reasons why this may be so?

- How does the university power structure affect your efforts to make cultural change? Where do you see yourself in the hierarchy? Do you try to increase your power/influence? If so how?

- Do you try to measure your success in making a cultural change?

- Are there cultural features of the university that you would like to maintain, and if so how do you try to do that?

- Do you think that there are any things about the culture that are too difficult to change?

- What techniques do you use to bring about change?

- Do you think that there are things about you, your experience or upbringing for example, that affect how you try to change culture?

- Do you see your work as involving punishment or reward, and if so how?

- Assuming that equal opportunity officers want to make changes to culture, what do you personally regard as the things that give you legitimacy, or the right to make changes?

While these questions formed the framework for the interviews, there was a degree of reciprocity that derived from the interviewer also being an equal opportunity officer, and there was some exchange involved that led to follow-up or slightly varied questions. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.105) asserted that reciprocity was the basis for all human relationships, including the relationship of research participants with researchers. This position has been supported by feminist scholars, for example Oakley (1986, pp.230-253). An important advantage of reciprocity is that it recognises that the respondent is an equal, which, apart from being professionally appropriate in this study, was considered likely to elicit more reliable and richer information. However, because of a commitment to maintain the integrity of other equal opportunity officers' experience (Fontana and Frey 2000, p.658), and to resist autobiography in the interest of a greater level of generalisability, the interviewer was careful not to affect the participants' interpretation of questions, nor to lead them in a response.

Being a practitioner and conducting research with other practitioners is somewhat like being a participant observer, with the same kinds of possible pitfalls. These include the difficulty that one may be acculturated and overlook significant data, and that one may be lied to or denied access because you are an insider, (Taft 1988). These difficulties were addressed through the use of unobtrusive measures, and further access to literature.

Interviews took between an hour and two hours. They were taped and transcribed. After the first interview and coding, subsequent interviews had additional or follow-up questions based on the coding process.

### 3.7.7 Other Material

3.7.7.1 Conferences and Meetings

One set of unobtrusive measures used in the research was attendance at conferences of practitioners. Analysis of the questions officers asked one another, the conference topics, and conversations at the conferences provided material for analysis.

Two conferences were the focus for these observations. One was the 1999 Conference of Equal Opportunity Practitioners in Higher Education (EOPHEA), in New Zealand. At this conference, note was taken of the topics chosen, and general topics of conversation. The other was the EOPHEA conference 2001 in Canberra at which similar notes were taken.

In addition, the researcher attended several state-based practitioner meetings, which also provided material about matters that were of interest to practitioners.

3.7.7.2 Internet Pages

The use of Internet pages as a source of information has become almost ubiquitous. The researcher accessed relevant Internet pages of twenty-five universities and analysed them by topic, type of information and evidence of type of activity. These documents provided examples of the types of policy statements, publications and plans that were produced by equity offices.

#### 3.7.7.3 Observation of the Setting

The material reality of the university was also a source of information. The buildings, spacing, location of the equal opportunity officer and various artefacts were also used to provide information. They provide a source of insights into the ways in which the participants and the university fashioned their lives at work. This type of examination of material culture is supported by Hodder (2000, pp. 703-715). Location was considered, for example, some offices were in the university's central building, others were tucked away and one participant's office had been moved several times. These pieces of information fed into insights about the way in which the role of equal opportunity was perceived within the university. The setting of one participant was full of posters about affirmative action, human rights, and one that exhorted the Prime Minister to 'say sorry' for the policies that removed Aboriginal children from their parents, and reflected the concerns of the equal opportunity officers when compared to the decoration of other offices in the vicinity. Brochures and pamphlets that were evident in the setting were collected.

#### 3.7.7.4 The Press

Topics obtained from regular scanning of higher education sections of newspapers, and also from the general press, formed sources of information and theoretical sensitivity. Some of these have been referred to directly in the Findings and Discussion chapters of this thesis.

## 3.8 Analysing the Data

After the first interview was transcribed, it was analysed line by line and coded with conceptual codes to identify incidents or facts that related to the research topic. Some of the codes were taken directly from interviews, 'in vivo' codes. Notes were written about each of the codes. This process is referred to as 'open coding' (Strauss and Corbin 1990, pp.61-74). The codes were written by the text, and given identifying alpha/numeric markers.

After the first interview, the coding of subsequent interviews was conducted by firstly making a check of the codes of the previous interview, and applying codes to the

same phenomena, or amending and adding codes. Other materials from the unobtrusive observations and further reading of relevant literature, were considered and coded. This process is known as constant comparative analysis (Chenitz and Swanson 1986, p.18).

A full list of codes was recorded to ensure that none was missed. Each new code was checked against other instances of the code to ensure its uniqueness, and then added.

While this coding was taking place, the researcher was writing memoranda. The memoranda contained: thoughts about the initial codes; considerations of the relevance of other data; conceptual maps; code groupings; diagrams of interrelationships between codes, and possibilities for further search of literature. Subsequent memoranda considered what categories, or higher level abstractions from the data, could be developed which brought the codes into relational form, through considering the ways in which they may be linked: as causes; contexts; contingencies; consequences; covariances, or conditions (Chenitz and Swanson, 1986, p.126). Diagrams of the categories with their codes were drawn to check for completeness and overlaps. The categories that emerged from the data were grouped into the major sections of the chapter of findings.

### 3.9 Interview Follow Up

After interviews were coded and a first draft of a narrative of the findings had been produced, the participants who had been interviewed were sent the narrative, and asked for their comments. They were particularly asked:

- Is there anything that did not ‘ring true’ for you?
- Are there things about your experience in bringing about cultural change in universities that do not appear here?
- Are there any additional examples that you would like to offer of the categories I have developed?

Participants were also asked if there was any comment in the findings which they could identify as their own and which they wanted removed. Comments were received

and incorporated into the narrative. Care was taken to include dissenting responses that were relevant to the topic of cultural change.

### 3.10 Reporting the Findings

Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.31) provided two ways to present grounded theory results. They wrote that: 'Grounded theory can be presented either as a well-codified set of propositions or in a running theoretical discussion using conceptual categories and their properties'.

These findings were presented as a narrative with examples and quotations to illustrate and give additional body to the conceptual theory developed. Direct quotations, references or examples were used that conveyed typical, insightful or succinct illustrations of conceptual categories.

The aim of the narrative was to accord with the aim provided for sociologists by Glaser and Strauss (1965, p.8), who wrote:

> A sociologist contributes most when he reports what he has observed in such a fashion that his account rings true to an insider, but also in such a fashion that they themselves would not have written it.

### 3.11 Trustworthiness

Several checks were built into the research in order to establish its trustworthiness. These were; member checking; triangulation; taking account of disagreement; peer debriefing and confirmability.

#### 3.11.1 Member checking

As noted above, the findings were sent to all those who had been interviewed, and changes based on feedback were incorporated into the narrative.

### 3.11.2 Triangulation

Triangulation was achieved through the use of comment from the second set of four equal opportunity officers, following the processes of interview and other data collection, feedback to interview participants and the development of the narrative.

Triangulation as a source of trustworthiness was noted by Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p.2), who wrote 'Triangulation is not a tool or a strategy of validation, it is an alternative to validation.'

The narrative, which formed the draft chapter of findings was sent to four equal opportunity officers, who had not been interviewed, at universities that had not been included in the initial interviews. They were sent the same framework questions for comment as those who had been interviewed, but were encouraged not to be constrained by them (See Appendix 3).

### 3.11.3 Taking Account of Disagreement

Another source of trustworthiness in the narrative was that it deliberately took into account disagreement between participants in the research. Methodologists have recorded this as a requirement of work dealing with practitioners. Glaser and Strauss (1965, p.9) wrote '…since insiders, especially those in stressful circumstances, do not always agree with each other on all matters, a sociological narrative must also take disagreement into account'.

### 3.11.4 Peer debriefing

The researcher's supervisor constituted a source of debriefing by checking diagrams, and discussing emerging codes and categories.

### 3.11.5 Confirmability.

All of records of consent, and the interviews were kept, together with their coding data. Diagrams, personal notes, and code lists were all kept. Newspaper clippings and Internet page information were retained.

### 3.12 Summary of Methodology

The research was conducted through an examination of the experience of equal opportunity officers in universities. Information was obtained: through interviews; through observations of the setting; through observations made at attendance at conferences; through review of Internet pages; through scanning of the news and through further reading of the literature.

From these sources, the research applied the grounded theory techniques to develop a theoretical framework for understanding the impact of equal opportunity officers on university cultures.

# 4. FINDINGS

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the results of the analysis of the data that had been collected to provide a description of the impact of equal opportunity officers on university cultures that is grounded in data, both from the knowledge and insights of the equal opportunity officers, and from other sources. As described in the Methodology chapter, information was gathered from interviews with eleven equal opportunity officers in the five types of university identified by Marginson (1999) as: Sandstones; Redbricks; Unitechs; Gumtrees, and New. In addition, there was an equal opportunity officer from one very small institution interviewed. Triangulation was provided by sending a draft of the narrative of the findings for comment to equal opportunity officers who had not been interviewed.

In addition to interviews, as described in the Methodology chapter, data were collected by: observation of the physical setting of equal opportunity offices; attendance at conferences and meetings; analysis of university Internet pages; analysis of breaking news and media comment, and continuing reference to the literature as analysis proceeded.

As all of this data were coded and analysed, several major themes were identified. The first set of themes concerned the preconditioning factors that established the framework for the work of equal opportunity officers. Firstly, there were factors that affected the decisions of individuals and the organisations in the choice of staff to undertake equal opportunity work. Then there followed an analysis of the roles required for equal opportunity officers that had the potential to impact on university cultures, and how equal opportunity officers were socialised into their roles. Contextual factors were also identified, such as the relative clarity of the role, and its change over time.

The second major set of themes concerned the principal tasks identified by equal opportunity officers that potentially had an impact on university cultures. These tasks included: analysing the current culture in the university; then attempting to set an

agenda that would impact on the culture by using various processes, ways of working and techniques for interventions.

The last section of this chapter analyses the outcomes of their efforts in terms of a typology that considers positive impacts, negative impacts, and also stasis, or no change.

In the analysis of findings, letter codes have been used to establish where interview participants have been quoted or have provided an example that has been referred to directly. Except where disagreement has been noted, all equal opportunity officers who participated through interview or through providing triangulation, gave either explicit or general endorsement of the findings.

### 4.2 Choosing The People

A set of preconditioning factors for the role of equal opportunity officers was identified through the data analysis. A set of personal preconditions was identified that determined the participants' decision to work in equal opportunity. There followed a matching process that comprised the matching that employers undertook to select staff into equal opportunity positions, and the matching process that led individuals to apply for positions. A difference was identified in the factors that participants emphasised from the selection processes undertaken by employers.

Equal opportunity officers identified values as a major contextual category for their work, and the analysis considered the comparison of participants' values with those which they thought prevailed in their universities.

Checking the match between employers' expectations of equal opportunity officers, and ways in which the officers dealt with mismatches of expectations, provided another contextual set of factors for the impact of equal opportunity officers on university cultures.

Aside from these factors, the other major preconditioning factor to their role which was identified by participants was their organisational location.

### 4.2.1 Preconditions-Personal

As a preliminary to considering how equal opportunity officers thought about their impact on university cultures, and how they went about making cultural change in their work, data were collected about the backgrounds of equal opportunity officers.

Many jobs in universities have a specialised education and skill requirement. Most academic staff positions for example are specified in disciplinary terms, and many general staff positions have particular professional requirements, such as a degree in accountancy for accountants or a degree in psychology for counsellors.

Other positions in universities have more general requirements. Even so, the breadth of disciplines represented by equal opportunity officers in this study was considerable. They had qualifications in teaching, social work, psychology, law, industrial relations, history and humanities. This variety of background could be an indication of either flexibility, or uncertainty from employers, in that there is clearly not an 'obvious' professional disciplinary base to the equal opportunity officer's role.

Every equal opportunity officer interviewed had a university degree, and some had postgraduate qualifications. They had therefore been socialised to some degree by university academics, and shared some common understandings with other university staff. These shared understandings provide for the possibility of an agreed context for the equal opportunity officer's work in implementing organisational change. An example of this kind of common understanding was provided by one participant. She used as an example of her work the negotiation of special admission processes for school leavers from disadvantaged backgrounds. The basis of the scheme was that the disadvantage suffered by these school leavers should be compensated for by dropping the entry requirement. The participant said:

> (we're)…talking about people in the top 25% in the state which is the point I made, (to course selectors)…you're not talking about dummies, they're top students…(S).

This shared understanding about the importance of the measure of intellectual ability was a material part of the interchange that would serve to pre-empt resistance to the change being proposed.

For some equal opportunity officers, their understandings were not only shared with others in universities; they were formed by them, particularly by academic staff who had taught them. One participant spoke of the mixture of her personal involvement and the content of her university program as a source of interest and awareness in equity and social justice. She said:

> I guess I've been involved in a lot of student activities, especially in the women's movement and especially looking at the curricula in the university, in the courses that I was doing, and issues of representation and so on. Aboriginal studies was just starting at the time and that was an area that I've found absolutely fascinating…(T)

As was noted in the Literature Review chapter, the vast majority of equal opportunity officers in universities are women. In 1999, an e-mail survey of equal opportunity officers in universities established that there were three men, and over forty women. Poiner and Wills (1991, p.84) described the appointment of women, particularly middle class women, as one of the more dubious advantages of anti-discrimination legislation. To have women positioned to attempt change to organisational cultures in the highly gender-segregated workforce that exists in Australia provides significant challenges, particularly since they are working with preponderantly male managers.

One participant noted that the category 'woman' could encompass other aspects of identity that may be obvious, such as differences in ethnic background, or may not be obvious, for example social class or sexuality, that equal opportunity officers would also bring as part of their interest in equal opportunity work (V). This was supported in a paper by Durur (1999, pp.102-106), who reflected on her experience as a:

> Turkish-born, woman, daughter, sister, mother, wife, brown-eyed, middle-aged, of medium-height, short-haired, a student, an equity practitioner, cross-cultural management consultant…

Leitch's paper (1999, p.123), also resisted the ethnocentricity of the 'white women's movement' and recommended dealing with both race and sex at their intersection.

The elements of difference that equal opportunity officers embody may to some extent delineate areas of greater or lesser interest that equal opportunity officers choose to emphasise in the ways that they fulfil their role.

The presence of staff from other designated equity groups in equity offices, for instance Indigenous Australian staff, or staff with disabilities, has predominantly tended to follow from an identification of a need to address staffing shortages in relation to these groups within the university. Their appearance has thus been often a response to a problem (usually specified in terms of lack of numbers of staff or students in the same group). Their presence and their work to address this problem of lack of presence then brings them the dilemmas of being a token that Kanter (1977, p.207) identified: of high visibility; falsely-assumed identity, and homogeneity.

### 4.2.2 Preconditions-Matching People and Job

There is a two way matching process that occurs in any staff selection. The interested applicant selects the job and perhaps the employer of their choice, and the employer selects the best person for the job. The data analysis indicated that for equal opportunity officers, there were differences of emphasis in the factors that were considered in this matching process that have the potential to lead to differences of view between the equal opportunity officers and the employers about the basis for their role in organisational change and cultural impact.

#### 4.2.2.1 Employer matching

The alignment of applicants to jobs that an employer seeks can be found partly by looking at the education level and skill requirements stipulated in job specifications. In universities this would be usually be notified through advertisement and provision of a set of selection criteria that candidates are required to meet.

Universities emphasise the concept of merit in staff selection, so it is interesting to consider how the concept is actualised in the selection of equal opportunity officers, and whether the emphasis on merit supports their function in making cultural change. Difficulties in the application of merit as a concept were analysed by Burton (1996), who commented on the effect of cultural factors and the ways in which they played into the prevailing understandings of the concepts of merit and equity. She was of the view that much of the activity undertaken supposedly in support of merit and equity was protective of strategic interests. Employers selecting to protect strategic interests would find a person to fill a vacancy from among those least different from the power elites whose strategic interest were most likely to be protected. If this were the case, and Burton had worked in university contexts, then equal opportunity officers may be selected to produce little organisational change.

It has been noted above that most equal opportunity positions in universities were filled by university-educated women. One implication of this is that they are likely to be somewhat different, (at the least in that they are women and not men), but perhaps not too different, from the power elites of universities. The observation by one participant that her own unit was 'very white' (S) indicates awareness of this issue with regard to other dimensions of similarity to the power elites.

#### 4.2.2.2 Employee Matching

The reciprocal part of the employer seeking to match the applicant to a job, is the matching done by applicants to decide to apply for and accept a position.

Participants in this research, when they reflected on how they got into the type of work, generally identified personal interests and values. The matching process for them was therefore different from that which was likely to have predominated in the selection by the employer, as selection criteria for positions foregrounded qualification, experience and skill. Even the participant who said that she had 'just fallen into' an equal opportunity job, outlined an interest in feminism and social justice that derived from her university study (T).

Some participants could trace their values to an early life experience. The following is an example of the way that early experience has led to a preconditioning commitment to values that are congruent with the role.

> I was talking to a friend about what is it about people who do these jobs and I've got no idea where my sense of social justice…you can't do this job unless you've got a sense of social justice…effectively…you can do the surface stuff…but are you getting underneath? No because I don't think your heart's in it. I think it came from primary school we had a student who was older, taller, people called her ugly, and I was one of those kids who would have said ooh, I'm not going to play with her, but I had a very astute teacher who said 'E will you look after so and so', and I can still hear myself saying to my friends 'she's all right you know'… (E).

One participant spoke of her personal values being derived from her professional field. The prior professional field of equal opportunity officers may thus either provide or reinforce a set of values which give the equal opportunity officer a basis for the way in which they interpret and play the equal opportunity officer's role. For instance, one participant mentioned a value she held about supporting families which came from her professional background. Through her equal opportunity officer work, she had interpreted this as an active interest in providing child-care opportunities (O).

Some of the values that equal opportunity officers have are espoused and overt. Other values became apparent in reading the interview transcripts. One spoke about going into a meeting with 'guns blazing,' (S) indicating that combat was at least sometimes considered as necessary or useful in the interest of impacting on university practices.

Some values were spoken about as shared and unquestionable. In particular, fairness, human rights, and social justice were among those regarded as 'immutable' and spoken about in terms of values with which all equal opportunity officers would agree. One talked about some things not being negotiable, and thus having to 'take a stand' (S) at some point if these values were in danger of being compromised.

### 4.2.3 Precondition - Values Fit with the University

While the place of values in the selection process may not have been evident, the extent to which the values of equal opportunity officers were congruent with those recognised generally in the university creates a context within the university that would provide either a door or a barrier to their work in organisational and cultural change.

Some of the values identified and held by research participants were clearly congruent with broad university values. As noted above, this congruence of attitudes and values came about at least partly because the university had contributed to forming their cultural attitudes and values and so sometimes assisted in pre-empting resistance to proposals for change. The degree of congruence could also form a limit point for organisational and cultural change that an officer would consider putting forward, with the consequence that change would tend to be incremental and evolutionary.

Equal opportunity officers reflected on their values and their place in an organisation. They were generally of the view that equal opportunity officers did not fit easily into organisational cultures, and ascribed this partly to the fact that their agenda was presumed to be known. They were therefore less amenable to some of the other university agendas, and not available for some kinds of coalitions, for example initiatives to reduce staff numbers or other cost-cutting measures. They also thought that they were less able to join together with other departments for mutual protection. Also, from their introspection, they reported the degree to which they were part of the culture that they were seeking to change. Some observed that their own equal opportunity sections had similar staff profiles to that of the university generally, for example in being '…very white…' (S) and so sought to change it.

Some participants also considered some of the ways in which other managers worked, and sometimes thought about adopting similar techniques, for example by inflicting punishment on staff they regarded as recalcitrant. They acknowledged however, that techniques such as this did not fit with their preferred consultative and educative approach.

There were of course limits to this introspection. One participant spoke of how difficult it is for people, in particular equal opportunity officers, to appreciate their own advantage (S). Another commented that equal opportunity officers often acted as moral warriors or moral crusaders, and that their need to be morally right sometimes overcame the utility in terms of the desired objective (H). For some therefore, their values may sometimes become a source of 'goal displacement' (Merton 1968, p.253).

To the extent that universities value disinterested and rational enquiry, the emphasis that equal opportunity officers placed on human rights and social justice meshed well with their organisations.

In addition to an emphasis on human rights and social justice, equal opportunity officers also had a strong focus on emotional values such as caring, feeling, and passionate commitment. This was evident in the interviews, and was also exemplified in an exercise conducted as part of the 1999 National Conference Of Equal Opportunity Officers In Higher Education, at which each participant was asked what they brought to the conference. Caring and commitment were repeated themes in the responses. Their values were therefore articulated both in terms of rights and justice, and also in terms of caring and feeling.

A gender-based difference between the moral universes of men and women was proposed by Gilligan (1993, p.164), whose thesis was that there were two different moral ideologies. She wrote:

> These different perspectives are reflected in two different moral ideologies, since separation is justified by an ethic of rights, while attachment is supported by an ethic of care.
>
> The morality of rights is predicated on equality and centred on the understanding of fairness, while the ethic of responsibility relies on the concept of equity, the recognition of differences in need.

Participants in this research showed evidence of a double articulation in their value system, of both an ethic of rights and an ethic of care. This added richness to their

moral view, and also complexity to their work, as they negotiated cultural change while attending to both these moral perspectives.

Values have been identified as among the defining features of culture, (Schein 1990, p.14) and so for equal opportunity officers to engage in cultural change, a strong awareness of the values with which they are operating is prerequisite. This research has indicated that participants were highly aware of this requirement. It would clearly also be beneficial for them to have an understanding of the values that are operating for others within an organisation and the degree to which their own values are congruent with, or differ from, the culture to which they are seeking to make changes. Some participants articulated more awareness of this issue than others.

#### 4.2.3.1 Checking Role Match

Literature on person/job matching indicates that some employers explicitly consider whether employees will fit in with the prevailing culture of their workplace. It appears to be a commoner practice in business, where 'strong' culture has been regarded as important for success (Deal and Kennedy 1982, pp.4-5), whereas it is not apparent that universities have in the past overtly adopted such strategies, and have not generally analysed this in a formal way.

A consequence of not considering the employee's fit with the university culture was apparent in mismatches identified between employers' expectations of equal opportunity officers, and equal opportunity officers' expectations of their own role. One piece of evidence for the existence of a degree of mismatch between them was the strong belief among equal opportunity officers that employers had put them in place for reasons of compliance with legislation. This contrasted with their own view, held to varying degrees among those interviewed, that they were there to change the way things were done, to change the standard policies and practices, and perhaps to change beliefs and attitudes. In effect, many of the priorities of equal opportunity officers involved some degree of change to the culture.

This mismatch was a source of tension for equal opportunity officers, and a limitation on their effectiveness in bringing about cultural change. It also resulted in strategies used by equal opportunity officers specifically to address some of the mismatch.

#### 4.2.3.2 Dealing with Mismatches

There were some political strategies used by equal opportunity officers to deal with the mismatch of role expectations, one of which can be characterised as 'mobilising myths' (E). These were the espoused values or practices of the university that could be appealed to, even though they may not be fully 'values in use' to use Argyris' formulation (Schein 1990, p.17). The 'myths' of the university that might be activated to support their approach to their role included those identified in the Literature Review chapter: collegiality; academic freedom; autonomy and professionalism.

Another way of dealing with the mismatch was to employ a technique described by one participant 'being a good citizen.'(S). There were several identified ways of being a good citizen, which fell into two groups. One group involved taking on the tasks of compliance that the university expected of the role, and doing that successfully. This would sometimes build sufficient confidence for equal opportunity officers to be free then to pursue their cultural change agendas. Another group of ways of demonstrating citizenship reported was to take on other tasks, such as being a member of a university committee, for instance serving as a member of the governing Council.

Being seen as part of the university also involved participants reporting that they did not seek exemption from general university conditions, for instance overall university staff cuts, nor seeking 'special' treatment for their own positions.

Another way of dealing with mismatches was described in terms of being realistic about power relationships (H). This involved forming alliances, partnerships, and coalitions of interest to assist the role preferences of the equal opportunity officer to be translated into action. These tactics are characteristic of a political perspective, focussing on the function of interests (Bachrach and Lawler 1998, pp.67-87). A limit to this type of action was identified by participants in matters described as non-

negotiable or inappropriate to their conception of the role. Another limit was identified in the values preferences of equal opportunity officers referred to above.

If the mismatch could not be resolved, then the equal opportunity officer would often experience tension. A decision to remain in the role of equal opportunity officer in the university may then require continuing to endure this feeling of tension (O).

### 4.2.4 Precondition-Organisational Position

Another preconditioning factor for the work of equal opportunity officers that was identified by participants was their organisational location within the university, and to whom they reported.

This positioning within universities has been of interest to equal opportunity officers, and was criticised by one as indicating an exaggerated interest in status and hierarchy, with insufficient regard to its effectiveness in delivering outcomes (C).

A survey of thirty-seven universities was conducted in 1999 by Equal Opportunity Practitioners in Higher Education (EOPHEA). Of the respondents, eleven reported to human resources managers, thirteen reported to a Deputy or Pro Vice Chancellor, seven reported to a Registrar or other senior administrative officer, and five reported to a Vice Chancellor.

For some equal opportunity officers, there was a split between their operational reporting, and their reporting line on policy or complaints matters. In general, for policy and complaints, the reporting line was to a Vice Chancellor or Pro Vice Chancellor.

In terms of their salary ranking, equal opportunity officers were towards the upper end of the general staff scale in universities. They were at between six and ten on a ten point, Australia-wide scale for general staff (senior executives are not on the scale). The rating of their positions appeared to depend on factors such as: whether they were managing other staff; the size of the university, and the breadth of their responsibilities.

Organisational position affected their access to senior staff, which in turn gave other staff an impression that the position had power and influence.

## 4.3 Defining The Role

After the processes that determined who filled an equal opportunity officer position, and where they were located organisationally, a set of categories was identified through analysis of the data that concerned the role of equal opportunity officers.

Several aspects to the role were identified, and issues of socialisation into the role were analysed. Some major conditions that impacted on the ability of equal opportunity officers to successfully impact on university cultures were identified and analysed. These conditions were: legitimacy; autonomy; expertise, and trust.

There were also contextual factors that affected their performance in the role, including relative uncertainty or clarity, boundaries, and changes in the role over time.

### 4.3.1.1 Aspects of the Role

All roles in organisations have a number of aspects, that is, ways in which the role may be viewed or regarded. The aspects reported by participants in this research were instrumental in considering how they thought the task of cultural change in universities was progressed.

The following aspects of the role were identified by participants. They were: manager; role model; planner; facilitator; loyal opponent; challenger, and cleaner.

*Manager*

As equal opportunity offices may have a small staff, some of the positions have a management aspect. For some equal opportunity officers, this provided additional budgetary responsibility and flexibility.

*Educator*

Many equal opportunity officers have teaching qualifications, and many participants had a direct role in delivery of formal training within their universities. In some universities, they provided commissioned training for a fee. In some universities, the task of training all staff in equal employment opportunity was undertaken by participants, while in some it was regarded as too big, and had not been completed over many years of incumbency. Some universities had recently attempted to address this issue by providing Internet-based training. In some universities, equal opportunity officers used external experts to deliver training into the university, for example in cultural diversity training or disability discrimination information.

Some of the training was more broadly-based within a staff development framework, for example, executive staff development programs for women.

There were also informal aspects of an educator's role that one participant reported. This could occur, for instance in the course of informing a staff member about the requirements of legislation, or the policies of the university (C). It could also become aligned to the role modelling that participants consciously undertook.

*Role Model*

Equal opportunity officers were aware that their own behaviour was likely to be under scrutiny, and they also wanted to be a role model for equitable work practices within their university. For example, flexible work practices to provide for staff with family responsibilities was part of the agenda for one equal opportunity officer who was also the unit manager, so she attempted to provide flexible arrangements for her own staff (S).

One participant regarded this aspect in an even stronger sense than that conveyed by the term 'role model'. She regarded the presence of the equal opportunity officer as both the symbol and embodiment of the goal of equal opportunity (V).

*Planner*

Many of the strategies for cultural change were contained in one, three or five year strategic plans, and so there was a strong planning dimension to the role. While

strategic planning is a management technique, for equal opportunity officers it was applied both formally and informally, and with reference to a particular issue at hand, rather than being just a formula to be followed. The example below illustrates how equal opportunity officers used an awareness of what they understood to be the political and cultural realities, as well as the need to examine their own resources, together with some early feasibility assessment, prior to actually writing a formal strategic plan and assigning responsibilities.

> …O.K. take for example…the Indigenous employment strategy into the next phase and I'm calling it 'Beyond the Funding', the thought patterns are: we have to have a range of people included, it can't be a top down thing, and this is a real challenge. I'm thinking we've got to get a cross section, a lot of people involved, it's got to be a cross section, we've got out there because it becomes everybody's responsibility, but this is more than that, there's this whole client (group) of the Indigenous communities, so I'm weighing up thinking, what are the protocols here, what do I know, who do I have to talk to because I don't have a clue about this. So I'm taking into account the stakeholders, the clients, the different protocols. And then what's going to work…what do I know about Indigenous cultures so what's going to raise people's hackles, how do I get to the people, what do they want to hear and not want to hear, then what programs might work, how are we going to build on what's successful. What's obvious failure, so we're not even going to talk about that… and I think, now what have I forgotten?… (E).

*Facilitator*

Helping things to happen was part of the pattern of influence that equal opportunity officers worked with in their role in cultural change. Facilitation included activities such as: giving advice; providing access to funds, or providing assistance with framing plans. For some equal opportunity officers this was a major aspect of their work, which was partly conditioned by a shortage of staff or other resources to work in other ways.

*Mediator/Negotiator*

This aspect of the role was sometimes done formally, as part of processes to deal with anti-discrimination claims or grievances, or it was sometimes done informally by suggesting ideas for handling a problem or issue.

*Loyal opponent*

Equal opportunity officers have a role in telling people, often powerful people, within their organisation, things that they would prefer not to hear. Part of the role is to do this in a way that maintains a sense that one is committed to the organisation, while pointing out faults or problems within it.

One respondent described this aspect in the following way:

> …with my boss I say look, you may not want to hear what I've got to say but I get paid to tell you and then you therefore have the full information…you get paid to make the decision (I).

*Challenger*

Another part of the role that equal opportunity officers saw themselves as having was that of challenger. This sometimes took the form of challenging the absence of groups of people from the university, either in the student population or among staff. Sometimes it also took the form of challenging the assumptions of other staff within the university (E, S, O).

*Cleaner*

There was an element of the role that had to do with putting in place processes that resolved complaint and problems. This was distinct from the facilitator aspect of the role as it involved cleaning up after a problem had occurred.

Equal opportunity officers learned about what has been called 'the dark side' of organisations. They got to know about mistakes, discrimination, bullying, and other forms of misconduct. They were often expected to resolve them, and protect the university's reputation in the process.

It has been argued that mistake, misconduct and disaster are to be expected in complex organisations. Vaughan (1999, pp.217-305) noted, these are '…not anomalous events, but systemic products of complex structures and processes…'. Vaughan described the efforts of organisations to deal with these types of events as 'clean-up work.' It is evident from Vaughan, and the participants in this research, that there were strenuous efforts made to keep such events from becoming public. Universities have been characterised as 'prestige maximisers', (Marginson and Considine 2000, p.51), so that matters which could reduce their prestige would be likely to be kept from the public eye.

In this aspect of their work, equal opportunity officers at times found themselves in an amount of conflict with managers. Denhart's (1981, p.viii) observation of modern managers was that they '…adhere to a philosophy of collaboration, but under pressure revert to master/slave patterns of behavior'.

It may be that efforts to keep such matters inside the university can be ascribed to another cultural factor. In universities there is a strong cultural norm of rationality, and a unifying principle of critical reason. This cultural factor may lead to the non-recognition of these aspects of organisational life, which are steeped in emotion, or to regarding them as peripheral and therefore not attending to them.

In dealing with this secret matter, equal opportunity officers are doing what Goffman defined as 'dirty work' (1969, p.53) and he observed that this type of work was often given to a specialist. This had the effect of keeping the tainted knowledge from intruding itself on the sense of dignity, and became part of the backstage management of a university's prestige.

The concealment and confidentiality required in clean-up work has consequences for equal opportunity officers. Once the work has been dealt with, others in the university tended not to acknowledge that it had ever happened, which meant that there was little acknowledgment, and certainly no public acknowledgment for handling the dirty work with skill (E). Another consequence identified was that, because equal opportunity officers could not predict when they may have to be involved in such work, their role therefore required an unusual amount of circumspection in their

allegiances. This could have the consequence for other parts of their role, particularly those that require the development of coalitions. They were therefore limited not only by their own values, as identified earlier, but also by this aspect of their role.

The equal opportunity officer's role identified in this research encompassed aspects that were very similar to that of any manager, or administrative staff member, in which the tasks and ways of working are publicly acknowledged and alignable with other staff at similar levels. Some of the above role aspects can readily be played by using standard, rational, management-oriented approaches.

It also included a great deal of confidential work, particularly in mediation or complaints and grievances, that would be exceptional for most managers. These aspects of the role often involved high levels of emotion and irrationality. Equal opportunity officers are required to have skills to manage emotionally-charged situations.

Those doing grievance work regarded it as very demanding, but some participants found it also very satisfying. It demanded reflection on practice, which has sometimes to be done alone because of confidentiality requirements, though in universities with more than one equal opportunity practitioner or grievance officer, there existed the possibility of support.

The role also included identifying ways to challenge the university's culture. It is relatively unusual for this role aspect to be an acknowledged part of the role requirements in a university, though it was in some instances.

The selection of one aspect of the role or another to apply in particular circumstances was often a matter that the equal opportunity officer had the autonomy to judge for themselves.

#### 4.3.1.2 Socialisation into Role

As has been identified above, the role of equal opportunity officer comprises a number of aspects, and relatively large degrees of freedom to decide how to play the

role. This raises the contextual question of how equal opportunity officers are socialised into their role.

How does an equal opportunity officer 'get' the role? A standard expectation about role behaviour is that it is taken in the first instance from observation of other role holders. This may happen early in life, for example through observations of parents, teachers or doctors. However, the equal opportunity officer's role is not like these roles, though some parts of the role have behaviours in common with them. These early opportunities to develop appropriate role behaviour are therefore of limited use to a new equal opportunity officer.

Within organisations, another way of adopting a role has been analysed. Ibarra's research (1999, pp.764-791) reported that organisational members experimented with new professional selves by observation of others performing in roles, experimentation with the adopted role and evaluation based on feedback. However, this source of modelling was often not available to equal opportunity officers either, as they were usually individual operators or members of small groups. With no direct source to model the role on, they consequently had to use those available from other work or life experience, and the role was then adopted by analogy.

Equal opportunity officers in this study commonly had a self-defining story, or a reflection on life events, that concerned how their interest in equal opportunity had arisen. Their socialisation was less based on how they became socialised into the role or the university, and more about how they became connected with the set of values and beliefs that encompassed equal opportunity, and how their own previous professional training provided a base.

### 4.3.2 Conditions of the Role

From the data analysis, four major conditions were identified for the role of equal opportunity officers in organisational change. These were: legitimacy; autonomy; expertise and trust.

#### 4.3.2.1 Legitimacy

Participants in this research were asked directly what they thought gave legitimacy to their role in cultural change. Most of them believed that legitimacy came from the anti-discrimination legislation, and that without it, their role would not exist. This provides continued support for the assertion of Poiner and Wills (1991, p.84 ) that it was a direct result of anti-discrimination legislation which led to the creation of what they called EEO coordinator positions. This was also the case in North America, where equal employment officer positions came into existence after the passage of the *Civil Rights Act* in 1964 (Barclay 2000, pp.37-41).

This externally imposed source of legitimacy is to some extent in conflict with traditional university values that have emphasised autonomy, and that have generally been embedded in one's own intellectual discipline (Ramsden 1998, p.21, Tight 1988, p.38). It would therefore be regarded by some staff, particularly academics, as part of the increasing interference with their freedom to run their own institutions in their own way. It could even be regarded as interfering with the powerful value of academic freedom (Harman 1989, pp. 43-44). This source of legitimacy for the role is thus potentially a conflicted one.

Another possible source of legitimacy has arisen because of the trend noted by Marginson and Considine (2000, p.10) of decline in the academic disciplines and a move to greater executive power. Executive approval as a site of legitimacy for equal opportunity officers may be increasingly a necessary condition for their work, though it is one that has been resisted and continues to be resisted within universities, particularly by academic staff.

For some elements of an equal opportunity officer's work, legitimacy may derive from other outside agencies. An example was given by one participant of a university which was directly approached by the federal Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) and asked to develop an Indigenous Australian employment strategy (C). Outside sources of funding, however small, also contribute to both legitimacy and autonomy within universities.

Of course, some legitimacy for the role is found from within the organisation. Formal, bureaucratic sources of legitimacy derive from duty or role statements, and also the placement in the university hierarchy, which has been noted above as a matter of interest to equal opportunity officers. Also, some equal opportunity officers had the management of cultural change written into their duty statements, so it was explicitly recognised as part of their role.

Another form of legitimacy claimed by participants is derived directly from a rights-based moral approach, in particular that contained in the *United Nations Declaration of Human Rights*, which underpins anti-discrimination legislation and encapsulates a formulation of a concept of social justice. This form of legitimacy allows for an appeal to universal values, but has the weakness that these values may not be shared, or may not be regarded as equally important or relevant throughout the university.

An attempt to appeal to common values can cause dilemmas for equal opportunity officers. For example, in an attempt to find a value that would have motive force in changing behaviour, one participant combined together an appeal to risk management with using the legitimacy from the legislation as a threat. She said that she had pointed out that certain activities would cost the university money, or that 'you're going to be hammered by the Human Rights or Anti-Discrimination Board.' (S). Such a mixture of sources of legitimacy was troubling to some participants, who said that they found the implied threat in the risk management approach did not fit well with their ideas of what ought to motivate people to action, and what means were legitimate or appropriate (U, C).

One participant reported that the assertion of values such as human rights, social justice and inclusiveness in many aspects of the role continued to be central for equal opportunity officers, and she thought that this assertion of values countered the economic-rationalist and pragmatic approach that she saw as becoming more salient in universities (V). The increased salience of these approaches, sometimes described as managerialism, is supported by recent literature (Coaldrake and Stedman 1999, Gallagher 2000, Marginson and Considine 2000).

Another technique used by equal opportunity officers to enhance the legitimacy of their role was the development of statements of mission, policy and plans. These written sources could be used as a point of reference for an equal opportunity officer when consulting or negotiating with staff in order to add the university imprimatur to suggested changes. It was also of itself one of the techniques for introducing and embedding change.

There were some indications that legitimacy for some equal opportunity officers could also derive from using the traditional tools of university work; that is, through teaching, and particularly through research. For some, the technique had become central to the role. This could become another example of goal displacement if it did not result in any other action towards cultural change.

Positional power was not regarded as a source of legitimacy by equal opportunity officers, and they were clear that they did not have a great deal of positional power, though some participants reported that this was sometimes assumed by their university colleagues because of their senior reporting relationship. One talked about the idea of her positional power as a myth that helped to make access to decision-makers and negotiation with them easier.

#### 4.3.2.2 Expertise

Professional roles are characterised partly in terms of particular areas of expertise and bodies of knowledge required. As universities are institutions whose function is partly to produce professionals of various kinds, expertise is a concept which is valued in the cultures of universities.

Equal opportunity officers were asked whether they thought of themselves as experts, and whether they were regarded as experts within the university.

One obvious area of expertise for equal opportunity officers is in the knowledge of relevant legislation, and knowledge of the developing case law that arises from legal decisions that have been reported. This was interpreted by participants in terms of their knowledge about the likely implications for the university of these legal

decisions. This expertise was regularly sought by both senior managers and other staff, generally in a confidential setting. It was also used by equal opportunity officers to effect changes to work practices or to put training programs into place.

However, while it was a source of both expertise and legitimacy, it did not automatically result in the expertise of the equal opportunity officer being accepted as a legal opinion by the university. Another participant reported with some puzzlement on being paid a large salary, but not having a sense that she was regarded as an expert (H). Participants reported that if there were powerful people who wished to maintain the status quo, or to challenge the equal opportunity officer, universities have ignored the advice of their equal opportunity officers. Examples of this were given by participants.

Thus it can be seen that expertise interacts with power. One officer said that she thought she was regarded as an expert, and then said, 'Does the VC see me as an expert? I doubt it but he doesn't see anyone as an expert' (E).

Apart from specific areas of expertise, qualifications in some universities were regarded as a general source of expertise. One equal opportunity officer with a Ph.D. said that it made a great deal of difference, particularly in her early years at the university. Another said she thought it had made little difference in Australia, but that she had worked in England, and thought that it had made her more accepted there. She speculated that this could have been because equal opportunity seemed to her to have less legitimacy and acceptance in England, so the higher degree added an element of legitimacy to a more marginal role in universities.

Some participants reported that they could not spend a great deal of time thinking or reading in areas that related to the theoretical basis of their work. Some said that they regretted this, but that the workload, and keeping up with the pragmatic reading needed left no time for them to pursue this source of expertise. One participant commented on what she regarded as the fundamental necessity of understanding of some theory, and used the concept of structural disadvantage as an illustration (S). However, it appeared that most of the theoretical basis for their work had to have been obtained prior to their employment in the role.

#### 4.3.2.3 Autonomy

The amount of freedom of action, or autonomy was also identified as a condition for instituting cultural change in their organisations.

An autonomous staff member has the freedom to decide what and how much action is needed, what it is possible to achieve and within what time frames. This freedom in decision making also gives importance to the employees' own priorities, as they plan and allocate their time.

The literature review identified that autonomy was one of the values regarded as important within universities (Ramsden 1998, p.21), so an autonomous staff member would be regarded as working within the general values framework of a university.

Even for participants who reported that they did not work in a supportive environment, the degree of autonomy was notable, and expressed in terms of the wide variety of tasks that they had the opportunity to undertake, the freedom to set their own agenda, and being largely their own manager. This was noted by one participant as an unusual freedom, and in contrast with other jobs at a similar level in the same university (T).

Autonomy was also evidenced in the lack of direct supervision that equal opportunity officers experienced, particularly in their confidential work dealing with individual grievances. In this lack of surveillance, the role is more like that of medical practitioners than it is like most of the other general staff positions in universities.

One participant reported that the degree of autonomy was not necessarily a considered decision, but she thought it could equally be ascribed to a certain amount of neglect of equal opportunity officers by senior managers (C). Even if this were the explanation, it created a space for operation that staff in areas of higher priority, who would thus experience higher levels of supervision and management, would not have.

#### 4.3.2.4 Trust

Another theme evident from the data was that of trust. Trust is a condition that contributes to autonomy. It was identified as being particularly relevant for senior managers, who, once they decided that an equal opportunity officer could be trusted, would then generally respect the advice, and leave them to do their work (C).

The dimensions of trust identified included: trust to act with competence; to employ expertise, and also trust not to betray the university. It was apparent that the trust of loyalty was invested in a particular person, and did not carry over to the next person in the role. One equal opportunity officer, who had taken over from a person who had worked at the university for many years, observed that her predecessor was regarded as more part of the university than she was, that this predecessor was accepted as having 'the university's interests at heart', while the participant thought that she was still regarded with suspicion (S).

While trust was invested in a person, and did not spill over to the next person in the role, suspicion seemed to. Two participants reported that they had to explicitly differentiate themselves from previous incumbents because senior managers had been critical about the way the role had been performed. This manifested as criticism that for instance the previous incumbent had been too ready to tell them bad news, was inefficient, or had been regarded as too close to the union movement (H, R,C).

Because many equal opportunity officers reported that they dealt with complaints and grievances about staff, they had a lot of knowledge about mistakes and misconduct in the university. Consequently, the university depended on their respect for confidentiality.

In addition to trust depending on personal integrity, those equal opportunity officers who dealt with grievances spent a lot of effort in defining and redefining the processes for dealing with complaints and grievances. Part of the reason identified for this ongoing task was to interpose some degree of distance between trust in the equal opportunity officer as a person and trust in the role, and to put a structure in place that was independent of individual personality. This could be interpreted as an attempt to

replace the trust that resided in an individual equal opportunity officer, or charismatic authority, with a more rational-bureaucratic mode of operation, to use Weber's analysis (Albrow 1970, p.40).

The acceptance of a structure for dealing with grievances gave the equal opportunity officer the tools to deal with power differentials, and also a way to delegate some of the investigative tasks. Trust in process was emphasised. One participant who had several grievance contact officers who were sometimes overwhelmed by the complexities of the task said: 'I keep saying, just stick to the process, no matter who wants to do it or not do it, I just keep on saying just stick to the process…' (I).

### 4.3.3 Contexts for the Role

In addition to those conceptual categories that contributed to defining the role of equal opportunity officers, the data revealed contextual categories. These were: those of clarity or uncertainty; those of shifts and changes, and those of boundaries.

#### 4.3.3.1 Clarity/Uncertainty

The analysis of data identified the degree of clarity or uncertainty in the role requirements as a significant contextual factor for an equal opportunity officer's task of making organisational change and the impact that they had on culture.

There were matters that contributed to clarity in the role. Apart from the legislation, there were external reporting requirements. These are potentially quite prescriptive. As an example, the *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency* (2000) provides compliance guidelines to all employers that contain issues for reporting, and what is titled a 'Workplace Analysis Toolkit'. The toolkit includes a number of questions about behaviour and practices, and provides guidance in surveying the workplace. There is a section headed 'Managing for Diversity', with questions such as:

'Is there a climate of mutual respect regardless of a person's level in the organisation, gender or ethnic background?'

‘Is there an environment of openness and trust?’

‘Does everyone recognise their individual responsibility for progressing diversity in the workplace?’

‘Are the informal patterns of association in your workplace inclusive or monoculture?’

These questions clearly indicate a preferred organisational culture, and equal opportunity officers are expected to use them in analysing and planning for response to the Agency. Thus, to the extent that equal opportunity officers agreed with the agenda that is implied in the questions of the Agency, and could then give effect to it within their universities, the reporting requirement would make for clarity in their role performance.

A factor that contributed to uncertainty in the role was the amount of autonomy an equal opportunity officer had to pursue different aspects of the role. As was noted above, this degree of autonomy was regarded as exceptional for workers at equivalent levels. To take grievance work as an example: equal opportunity officers sometimes had the freedom to decide whether to limit their role to doing only reporting and grievance work; to doing no grievance work by instituting processes wherein it was undertaken by others; to doing research into grievances or not; to doing training in grievance management and prevention, or whether to pursue particular projects related to grievance matters within the university.

Another factor that contributed to uncertainty was the need for equal opportunity officers to scan and respond to changes both within the university and in the external environment. Like newspaper journalists, most of them tried to remain alert to environmental changes as there was always the possibility that change could present new opportunities to pursue their role.

#### 4.3.3.2 Shifts and Changes

All roles shift and change. They change in response to environmental changes, to changes in the professional context and they also shift depending on the wishes of the manager or the preferences of the incumbent.

A review of a paper by Wienecke (1991), who had interviewed equal employment opportunity officers, revealed that while there were aspects to the equal opportunity role that persisted, there have been changes over time to the equal opportunity context. One change identified was that Wienecke's participants reported a great deal of uncertainty about the role which was not evident among participants of this research. Another difference between the Wienecke research and this research was that there was some level of expectation then that universities would naturally respond in appropriate ways to the legislation, while that straightforward optimism about compliance was not evident in the current research.

The Literature Review chapter reported on the addition of student equity to the work of many equal opportunity officers in universities, following federal government planning and reporting requirements that focussed on defined equity target groups.

Poiner and Wills (1991), undertook a critical review of the equal opportunity field and strongly emphasised the social positioning and other cultural factors that they regarded as not being addressed in a model of equal opportunity which emphasised assimilation with current practices and grudging compliance by employers. This study found that the role of equal opportunity officers had changed since Poiner and Wills' book from an emphasis on compliance towards attempts to change culture. This had made the role both more demanding, and more diffuse.

A notable example of an overall shift in the role can be found in the shift from a predominant emphasis on gender equity, which occurred partly in response to expansions in legislation. There has also been a later de-emphasis on anti-discrimination to what could be considered as a broader agenda, frequently described as respect for diversity or cultural diversity. This trend was commented on by Bhabha (1994, p.1) in a general social context. He wrote that there had been a move away

from ‘the singularities of ‘class’ and ‘gender’ as primary conceptual or organisational categories’ to the variety of positions that ‘inhabit any claim to identity.’ A sign of this change in the equal opportunity area was the renaming of a Victorian consultancy from *The Victorian National Centre for Women* to the *Centre for Gender and Cultural Diversity.*

All these changes have made the equal opportunity role both broader, and at the same time more diffuse in encompassing many other identity groups. This has had consequences for equal opportunity officers who, while they have autonomy with regard to what they have to do, felt pressure in terms of what they ought to do, and in terms of what they have time to do. They questioned whether they should still focus on programs for identified disadvantaged groups, or try to develop strategies that addressed all groups, or the more recent constructions of cultural diversity. This is particularly poignant when there is only one equal opportunity person in a university. One participant said with feeling, ‘I want to be cloned’ (E).

Though under pressure as reported above, there was not the level of personal stress reported by Wienecke in 1991, which included reports of abusive e-mails and letters. In the current research, while tension was reported and acknowledged, participants did not convey the same level of stress.

Within universities, equal opportunity officers made shifts in their own roles to adapt to the changing university context, and this affected both what they did and how they did it. There was a change observed by equal opportunity officers from being the ‘equity police’ (H), or the ‘guardian angel of equity’ (I), to being consultants within the university. That there was some degree of discomfort with working as a consultant was evidenced by one participant talking about it being ‘out there’, (S) that is, outside the equity office where there were shared understandings.

Many equal opportunity officers continued to have both compliance management and consultant aspects to their role, and the two did not necessarily always sit easily together. This could lead to role strain (Hardy and Conway 1988, p.159), and further shifts in the role.

#### 4.3.3.3 Boundaries

> ‘I can do a bit of a party trick, you name anything, and I’ll tell you how it links to equal opportunity’ (I).

One participant used this to illustrate the potential pervasiveness of the role, and consequently that there were few obvious boundaries.

However, one obvious boundary identified in this study with regard to cultural change in organisations was that no equal opportunity officer was a senior manager, so the aspects of senior management that concerned making people do things through positional power were not part of the role. This is interesting when considered in the light of the literature on corporate cultural change identified in the Literature Review chapter, which emphasises the significant task of leading cultural change as the responsibility of the most senior managers. In fact, Schein wrote that there was a possibility that ‘…the only thing that leaders do is create and manage culture' (Schein 1990, p.2). However, this lack of positional power may be less of a difficulty in universities than in some other types of organisation, as some of the traditions of universities can be congruent with dispersed sources of leadership (Harman 1989, p.33).

As equal opportunity officers knew that there were many good things to do, and to the degree to which they had autonomy and freedom of action, they had to set boundaries for themselves. That this was not straightforward can be seen from the following segments:

> …you know we have got a disability action plan, we have got an Aboriginal employment strategy, we have got women’s programs, we have got a student equity program…what we say is what is our first priority… (H).

The above quotation illustrates an element of the boundary setting that acknowledged the need to deal with an amount of work that would be achievable.

The following interview segment illustrates another type of boundary setting, which was concerned to set boundaries that were more about the ways in which the role may be performed:

> …we occasionally get into strife around falling into advocacy, or them ('stakeholders') expecting us to take more of an advocacy approach…so we've been clarifying that role, but they think we are letting them down because they really want us to be in there…(that) we'll work a campaign with them…it's like working with the unions, we try to do that stuff but we're in danger of slipping over into…I mean I have to have the confidence of the human resources manager because I get shown confidential information if …(the human resources manager) feels that I'm going to run off to the union and tell them stuff or work the scenes and not be ethical… (S).

The data analysis revealed that the equal opportunity officers' roles have usually sufficient breadth, flexibility and autonomy to be able to make an impact on a university's culture, but that they are constrained by a number of factors including: a lack of positional power; the existence of specific external reporting requirements; the multiplicity of possible things to do, and the relative modesty of resources with which to do them.

### 4.3.4 Analysing the Current Culture

A major category identified in the research was that of analysis of the current culture. In order for equal opportunity officers to be able to set about their task, the data analysis identified access as a primary and necessary condition. The data analysis also yielded several contextual aspects of culture for participants: the national context; the university context in Australia; the individual university's context in comparison with other universities, and contexts inside the university. Another aspect of cultural analysis was that it was done by equal opportunity officers as other relevant contextual aspects changed, so they had to conduct their analysis of culture continually and cyclically.

For organisational workers who are engaged in cultural change, analysing the existing culture establishes a baseline from which to proceed. For participants in this study, the analysis of culture was seen through a particular lens, which focussed them on areas such as possible discrimination, and so they highlighted aspects of the culture that may otherwise not have been noticed by others or remarked on. Without their particular lens, it could be easy for people in organisations not to notice for example, who is present or 'who is not sitting at the table' (S) as one participant put it. It is easy to accept a way of doing things that mirrors one's other experiences in organisations, and not to question why it is so. A level of alertness to matters of presence and of process was mentioned by participants in this research that would not be common to other staff. This supports an insight gained in the Literature Review chapter that the equal opportunity role was a type of 'boundary spanner' (Vecchio et al. 1992, p.510, Pepper 1995, p.180), a role that is valuable to organisations, but which may be stressful to the individual who cannot have the same sense of belonging that other workers in an organisation may have.

For equal opportunity officers, their analysis was an ongoing and iterative part of the way that they thought of their work. They did it while working in the culture, as participants of the university culture, and while trying to achieve cultural change, or maintain aspects of culture in the university. Although the data analysis demonstrated that participants had formal analytical instruments which they used, these instruments tended to be adjuncts, or ways to convince the decision-makers about what they had discovered through their continuous listening and observation. Their analysis was generally based on the lived experience, both their own, and those of staff and students with whom they talked. From this they generalised about what was needed to change the culture to become one that was accepting of the ethos of equal opportunity.

### 4.3.5 Access

Access was identified as a condition for analysis of a university's culture. Equal opportunity officers required access to people and processes in the university, so that they could analyse what was happening from an equal opportunity perspective. For example in one university that was characterised as being highly bureaucratic, the participant talked about needing to gain access to committees as that was the way

things were done in her university (E). For another, it was more important to gain access to the senior manager (H). This condition of access may be more difficult in larger universities, or in conditions where the decision-making group of senior executives deliberately restrict access to themselves. As Marginson and Considine (2000, p.94, p.15), have reported, access to the Executive group in a university is one of the powers in the Vice Chancellor's gift and who gets consulted is a manifestation of power.

Participants had a certain level of access to some processes that they had in common with all staff members. Access to some information or processes varied from university to university. Access for equal opportunity officers was not always an automatic right, as it would be for staff in positions of power or authority, and access would sometimes have to be negotiated. In this regard, one equal opportunity officer talked about feeling like she had to put her foot in the door as if she were selling encyclopaedias door to door (S).

Equal opportunity officers also checked the amount of access that their colleagues had. For example, one officer was denied access to monitor academic promotion committees, and she checked with colleagues to assist her in making a case for access within her own university. Equal opportunity officers used e-mail to establish informal 'benchmarks' for the practices of equal opportunity officers. In this way, they were 'isomorphic' in communicating within the university system to establish norms and practices, a feature asserted for the Australian university system in general (Marginson and Considine 2000, p.183).

### 4.3.6 Cultural Contexts, Australia- the 'Fair Go'

'Fairness' was a word used frequently throughout the interviews, and one participant spoke of it in universalistic terms, as a concept with which everyone would agree (U).

The idea of the 'fair go' is one of the pervasive cultural stories or myths about Australia, and dates at least from the publication of Donald Horne's *The Lucky Country* in 1964. While not fully articulated or consistently applied, it continues to be a demotic version of the principle of social justice that can be appealed to. *The*

*Australian*, for example on 17 June 2000 had a full page banner headline, 'Death of the Fair Go' to head a series on Australian culture. It continues to have descriptive and ethical value through the significant changes to the make up of the Australian population.

There are many definitions of equal opportunity (Poiner and Wills 1991, pp.1-20), and the idea of the 'fair go' emphasises a definition of equal opportunity as providing people with equal chances to benefit. The contextual story of the 'fair go' affects the success of equal opportunity officers in changing aspects of culture. It was appealed to when trying to encourage changes to the make-up of people in the university, or its practices and policies. On the other hand, the prevalence of the myth of the 'fair go' also supports an explanation of the relative lack of success of other definitions of equal opportunity, for example one that emphasises equality of outcome, particularly if the techniques proposed do not convince others that they are in accord with the idea of the 'fair go'.

### 4.3.7 The University Context

A general context for universities in Australia was identified through this research that was threaded into equal opportunity officers' analysis of their particular university culture. Participants in the study acknowledged issues such as the declining government funding base, and noted the rise of fee-paying students, predominantly international students, but also increasingly domestic students. There was some lamentation that some universities were chasing the dollar crudely and adapting to the market, and that universities were becoming more like businesses.

While this analysis was informal and was based on their daily observation and reading, it has been supported by recent research. It was identified in Bessant (1994), and Ramsden (1998, p.14). Marginson and Considine (2000, pp.4-6), in *The Enterprise University* identified similar trends for universities to adopt business-based models, and a similar criticism to that made by equal opportunity officers, describing it as a '…brash but brittle lurch into the world of enterprise', or more critically by others as a '…new kind of fundamentalism' (Currie and Newson 1998, p.154). Marginson and Considine's research was conducted on seventeen universities and

involved interviews with senior managers. Coaldrake and Stedman (1999, p.4) had identified as external demands, the need for universities to be flexible, independent and entrepreneurial. That the requirement to be entrepreneurial is a response to external demand is evidenced by a paper, *The Emergence of Entrepreneurial Public Universities in Australia,* published by the Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs. The author described the 'main drivers' of this development as being partly in response to the 'push' of government policies and incentives, and partly the 'pull' of new markets and opportunities (Gallagher 2000, pp.5-10).

The change identified in the Australian university context, tending in similar directions, was contrasted with the two major identifying concepts that continued to permeate university cultures: collegiality and academic freedom. These concepts were identified by participants as having continuing importance in the university context, whether as values regarded positively, and adhered to (H), or as myths that hid other agendas (E), or as lost virtues that had fallen away because of the changes identified above (E). Marginson and Considine's research (2000, p.65, p.11) identified collegiality as a concept that was universally regarded as problematic by University executives, as it interfered with their move to 'management rationalities', but they confirmed this research in observing that the idea was still 'surprisingly strong'.

There was an interplay between the demands of the external context, expectations of executives, and the concepts of collegiality and academic freedom. This interplay constitutes a significant part of the context of university culture, and participants in this research were actively engaged in working within the cultural context, and considering which of the contextual factors would advance their agenda of equal opportunity.

### 4.3.8 Placing the University

Equal opportunity officers have an interpretation of how the university sees itself, or sometimes how its senior managers would like it to be seen. This was often described in terms of the ways in which they compared themselves with their competitors, for example seeing themselves as another Harvard, or, for some, as another Melbourne. Sometimes this placing was in terms of the characteristics of its student population,

for example, as being for the brightest and best. Sometimes instead of the placing being competitive, it was done in terms of what differentiated the university from others, for instance through emphasising distance education. Participants in the research used this placing in their efforts to promote cultural change. It often became part of their considerations in choosing an approach that would appeal to managers. For example, if a university declared that it was aiming to be a first rate provider for international students, then an equal opportunity officer asked about what skills staff would need to support that particular aim (H). The equal opportunity officer used the placing to raise awareness about cultural difference and its implications for teaching and learning.

This conceptual category of placing a university constitutes a form of cultural interpretation. Like all interpretations about culture, it provided opportunities for participants to raise equal opportunity topics as part of a broader strategic canvas. At the same time, such interpretation also acted as a constraint on what equal opportunity officers thought they were able to do, on how they would attempt to make some changes, and on what 'reality' they could appeal to when advocating change.

### 4.3.9 Contexts Inside the University

Universities as a whole may have a particular way of doing things, and this affects what equal opportunity officers can do and how they can go about their work. For example, some participants described their universities as being generally very competitive (I) or bureaucratic (H), so they had to consider how to work effectively within the system and the processes that this university context produced.

Some officers did not think that there was any generally describable and distinctive culture for their university as a whole, but they identified groups based on academic disciplines, organisational units or individuals that had their own particular cultural contexts. This is consistent with many analyses of universities. They have been characterised as comprising tribes (Becher 1989). Some of these sub-university units were described as having a high level of awareness about equal opportunity matters that was grounded in their discipline areas. Sometimes the interest was identified as based in the personal interests of influential staff. One anecdote about an effective

way to raise awareness of discrimination issues for women in non-traditional areas, for instance engineering, was to make sure one of the university executives had a daughter who wanted to study in such a field.

Discipline-based, or professionally-based groups within universities would often have their own ways of doing things and their own language. Participants in this research were aware that this challenged them to be able to adapt their communication, in order to be able to appeal through language and methods to these groups as a technique for gaining a hearing and for persuasion (U).

### 4.3.10 Analysing Change in Cultures

Equal opportunity officers recognised that university cultures were not monolithic, and that neither were they static. Just as equal opportunity officers attempted to make changes and shift the culture of a university, they were working in an environment where others, both internally and externally, were making changes and seeking to impact on cultures.

As these changes happened, equal opportunity officers attempted to assess the impact of the change on equal opportunity issues. One general example of this reported by several participants in this research occurred when universities undertook organisational restructures. Equal opportunity officers were often in the situation of reviewing the changes as they occurred. One participant talked about trying to analyse the variable impact of organisational change on different groups of staff within the university (S). This could result in a group being advantaged, or possibly disadvantaged by the changes. The officer would then consider whether some of the possible disadvantages could be pre-empted. Another consequence from restructures was that there was little time or energy left for anyone after the efforts of the restructuring process. One equal opportunity officer said that managers were ‘dealing with very scarce resources, huge demands, and a lot of structural change, so they don’t want to take on anything unless they absolutely have to’ (C).

In the context of internal change, equal opportunity officers also often made assessment in emotional terms of what it meant, in terms of the general mood or

climate of the university. This could for example be one of 'shrinkage and gloom and doom' (U), or on the other hand, one of a '…very positive outlook for the future' (R).

As well as the possible impacts on people, and on the general climate, impacts of change were also assessed by equal opportunity officers in terms of values. For example they considered whether the changes were dealt with openly, and whether staff were dealt with honestly.

### 4.3.11 Analytical Tools

The data analysis identified both formal and informal analytical tools that equal opportunity officers used in the analysis of university cultures.

#### 4.3.11.1 Statistics

The collection and analysis of statistics about staff and students was a major analytical tool used by equal opportunity officers. These collections were predominantly those required for reporting to federal or state government agencies. Information on staff included data organised by level, employment type, and was categorised by sex. Some states also required collection of other groups of staff that had been identified as belonging to equity groups. These included: Indigenous Australian people; people with disabilities, and people from language backgrounds other than English. This last category has been a contested and changing one, but has been used as a marker for ethnic diversity.

Not all groups covered by anti-discrimination legislation found their way into external reporting requirements, for example, information was not collected on sexual preference or religion.

Some universities collected data that was not required for external reporting purposes, for example staff details were kept by age by some universities.

There are additional equity reporting categories for students. These are students who came from rural and isolated backgrounds, and those from low socio-economic

backgrounds. These were identified based on an analysis of postcode and income statistics.

Universities collected these data with different degrees of disaggregation. Some provided and analysed statistics at faculty level, and these were then used to consider discipline-based differences, or differences between campuses of multi-campus universities. Equal opportunity officers often took the statistics from general university statistical collections, and they depended on the co-operation of the custodians of the data for its production. Its format was also largely directed by external reporting requirements. Some equal opportunity officers were consulted about these decisions, while others were not.

For universities which had been collecting comparable statistics over long periods of time, for ten years for example, the evidence of historical patterning had been persuasive in gaining agreement to strategies and processes to redress evident imbalances in the staffing profile, for instance the long-term and continuing low proportions of women staff in certain areas.

The use of statistics provides an analysis of presence. Presence may invite considerations about absence, but does not necessarily do so. Analyses of presence are often expected to lead to strategies to increase presence, for instance if there are few women in senior positions, or people with disabilities. These strategies form some of the work of equal opportunity officers, and in themselves cause cultural change. However, while most equal opportunity officers regarded them as necessary, they were increasingly understood as not sufficient to cause overall cultural change.

#### 4.3.11.2 Formal consultations

Some participants described their work as being consultants to managers. Analysing the culture within a university included analysis of information gathered from formal consultations with managers. Consultation remains an expectation in universities, particularly by senior staff and senior academics, and it is easy for someone not in favour of some change to prevent it by saying that one had not been consulted (C). As

the staff numbers in equal opportunity offices are small, this consultation can consume large amounts of time.

#### 4.3.11.3 Research Reports

Another formal way of analysing the culture that was identified was to do research, either to analyse the culture generally, or to analyse particular aspects of interest to the equal opportunity officer.

There is an area of research that relates to directly measuring organisational climate. Some universities have conducted this type of research. Some however, have been reluctant to do so. This reluctance was couched in academic terms, asserting that the research was not properly based. It was also couched in pragmatic, political terms, with an argument that if the university discovered something it did not like, then exposing the problem could make matters worse, or that it may set up expectation of change that will be disappointed. One university suppressed the results of such a survey that revealed problems. In this way political pragmatism may sometimes overwhelm the values of rational disinterested enquiry and universally-available results (N, T).

Equal opportunity officers included in this research also undertook other forms of research that analysed aspects of the university culture. Examples of this type of research were: surveys of child-care usage, research into sexual harassment experience of staff; research into the experience of staff employed under affirmative action strategies, and research into the perceptions of casual staff on their working conditions. It has been observed that one of the great benefits of this approach is that it fits well with the academic practices of research and enquiry (Woodward and Ross 2000, pp.20-21).

#### 4.3.11.4 Informal Tools

In addition to using formal tools to analyse university cultures, participants in this research did a great deal of informal observation and scanning of the cultures in universities.

One type of informal observation reported was simply listening to what people told them. One participant who started a job where there had been no predecessor in the equal opportunity position, spoke about people bringing problems to her or reporting problem areas, and that she decided to act 'like a sponge' for the first month before deciding on the priorities for change (V). These insights were usually validated or confirmed through more formal tools, but they often provided a vivid idea for equal opportunity officers of what items should be on the agenda for their work. There is support for this in the literature on organisational learning. In particular, that 'Information that is not routinely collected may be richest in data about the need for change, such as errors in coordination or conflict of priorities. But these data are …not systematically collected or assembled,…' (Mahler 1997, pp.519-540).

Participants in this research gathered impressions from a variety of sources, and then used these impressions to extrapolate and generalise about the policies, practices and beliefs that formed part of the university culture. Using these informal sources of information, participants sifted, checked, and compared the various sources of information, and tried to judge whether they had found a systemic issue to address or an opportunity to make a positive change. This then formed part of their agenda for cultural change.

### 4.4 Agenda Setting

A theme of major significance that was identified from the data was that of agenda setting. Agenda setting comprised: identifying issues that equal opportunity officers would work on; then selecting what they regarded as the critical interventions, followed by the critical tasks required to get their agenda on to the broader university agenda, and agreed to by relevant authorities and managers.

Two issues were identified as relevant to getting an agenda agreed by the relevant authorities and managers: these were the equal opportunity officer's authority; and the requirement to pre-empt resistance. Following those considerations, the equal opportunity officer had to find ways to balance and prioritise the work that was required.

### 4.4.1 Identification of issues

Among the first processes required in setting an agenda was the identification of issues. This was done by using the preliminary work of analysing the current internal culture, and also analysing the relevant external culture. An example of issue identification was given by one participant who spoke about the external change that has resulted in cessation of funding for supporting employment strategies for Indigenous Australians. She said that she knew that some staff in the university thought that the end of external funding meant that the university's employment strategy would cease. She identified a need to continue with the strategy, and thus she observed that a cultural shift was needed within the university from regarding this strategy as an external responsibility, to dealing with it as part of the internal staffing responsibilities of the university (E).

Many participants believed that they had a great deal of scope and freedom to set their own agendas. This formed part of the autonomy identified earlier as a condition for instituting cultural change. For instance, one said that if she said she wanted to have a strong focus on reconciliation with Indigenous people in the following year, no-one would say she couldn't do that. She said that this freedom often resulted in issues being raised because of the personal passions of equal opportunity officers (S). This would have the benefit of providing a personal motivation for equal opportunity officers, but it also carries the possible limitation that it could result in a form of bias that could come from identity-based or single-issue politics. This has been a criticism in the past of equal opportunity offices. For example, there has been criticism that as equal opportunity units were predominantly staffed by women, they were only interested in issues that impacted on women.

This criticism created a source of tension identified through the responses of the research, between the degree to which participants thought they could represent or speak for groups of people who were unlike themselves. This tension can apply not only with regard to specified client groups or equity groups. In universities it also applies to disciplinary and professional groups, who regard their culture and ways of operating as inhering to their training and experience in the discipline or profession, and therefore are likely to resist ideas about change from outsiders.

External requirements and external networking also shaped the identification of issues. As has been reported in the Literature Review chapter, the external requirements within Australian universities that affect equal opportunity officers are set mainly by state and federal anti-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation, federal government education department requirements, and some requirements that are a consequence of decisions in the industrial arena.

Another way of identifying issues which was identified in this research was through networking among equal opportunity officers which leads to adoption of ideas, following from the practice of other equal opportunity officers. In this way it becomes a norm among equal opportunity officers.

An examination of the relevant university Internet sites of twenty-five Australian universities revealed a great amount of commonality. Twenty-two had policies on their sites. Twelve had plans, some of these were the plans required for reporting, others such as cultural diversity or inclusive curriculum plans, were broader. Eleven had their grievance procedure posted, six had various reports and publications, and seven posted the relevant committees. While a more detailed audit would reveal differences in approach, depth and amount, the work of equal opportunity offices clearly has a great deal of common ground, either from the requirements of legislation, or from networking, and also isomorphism.

Internal consultation was also used by participants as a common technique for identifying agenda items. Internal consultation involved seeking the views of existing staff or students about policies and practices that they wanted changed. Equal opportunity officers used representative committee structures, for example an Equal Employment Opportunity Committee, or single-issue committees, for example a committee on workloads. The results of analyses of culture were often passed to these committees as part of the process of setting an agenda.

‘Challenging’ was also used by some equal opportunity officers as a technique for issue identification. One form this challenging took was, following the preliminary activities such as: checking of presence; analysing groups, and checking knowledge

levels, the equal opportunity officer challenges absence, identified as ‘pushing people to think about who is not sitting at the table, and whose voice is not being heard’ (S).

In addition to challenging the absence of particular groups of students or staff in the university, participants sometimes also challenged the practices of the university. Topics such as staff conditions, staff or student assessments and rewards are all areas in which the culture of the university, or parts of the university may be both realised and reflected.

### 4.4.2 Selecting critical interventions

Formulating the criteria by which to decide on the critical interventions was a matter that participants reflected on in this study. As noted above, sometimes their personal preferences or interests would play a part. This occurred not only with regard to the topic areas of interest, but also affected what form of intervention would be used. For instance one participant reported that she enjoyed doing large-scale projects, whereas another preferred to work by inserting changes, sometimes small into policies which then became an embedded part of the way things were done (N). Sometimes participants decided the critical intervention on the basis of which equity groups seemed to them to be most in need of their efforts, and then tried to balance that with the interests of senior managers (E).

Some issues were deleted from further consideration, even though they may have been noted in the analysis of culture and identified as important to some groups within the university. One participant, for example, spoke about the university culture as one that rewarded long working hours, where for instance they regularly held working breakfasts. She noted that this was inimical to efforts to assist staff to balance their work and family responsibilities. However, she spoke strongly of deciding not to attempt to deal with this issue, because of the difficulty of trying to get across a concept to management that they did not share, or care about, and the consequent frustration that attempting to make this change would bring. (E).

Participants sometimes deleted an item from their agenda for the time being because they judged the time not to be right. Sometimes they may have identified a particular

person as likely to block the change which they thought would have greater success when a change of personnel occurred (T).

Sometimes equal opportunity officers deleted an item from their workload because they believed that it belonged in another area of university responsibility, for instance the human resources area or the academic policy area of academic boards and committees.

### 4.4.3 Getting Issues Up onto the Agenda

Once issues were identified by equal opportunity officers, there were processes for getting these issues incorporated into the university's agenda. Getting the commitment of senior managers; getting support; pre-empting resistance, and then prioritising the work to be done were all part of the work identified by participants that contributed to getting issues up onto the agenda.

#### 4.4.3.1 Gaining Top Management Commitment

The Literature Review chapter identified managing culture as a central feature of the role of staff who were in top management, and their commitment has often regarded as necessary for cultural change, particularly when adopting techniques that involved working within central decision-making forums, or working with those who had centralised power and responsibilities. Observing the way senior managers worked, and then finding ways to get their attention and commitment were part of the tasks of getting issues onto the agenda. This was easier in some universities than others. Some senior managers were seen as genuinely caring about equal opportunity issues and so were predisposed to support an agenda. One participant talked about her Vice Chancellor as 'not the sort of person who will give a verbal commitment and then you know go out and say nice things in a speech and walk away from it, he's more likely to say, a lukewarm thing in his speech and then stick faithfully to what he says' (S). Equal opportunity officers generally did a lot of similar observation of decision makers in their universities.

Some universities have an executive whose area of responsibility is explicitly equal opportunity or equity and diversity, and so it is built into the agenda at a high level within the university.

The view that senior commitment is vital for cultural change is common among equal opportunity officers. It was identified in a workshop conducted in Sydney in 1999 by *Catalyst*, (North American consultants in organisational change and workplace diversity). The participants were equal opportunity officer officers from private, government and university employers. Both the workshop convenors and the equal opportunity officers strongly emphasised the need for the support of the chief executive officer in order to effect cultural change in an organisation. In fact, they recommended that if the organisation did not support the equal opportunity officer, the best tactic would be to resign and find another organisation.

This emphasis supports the importance of gaining senior management commitment. However, it also tends to simplify it to a polarity: either top managers support equal opportunity or not. Participants in this research had a more complex and nuanced understanding. They knew that some managers supported some aspects of their agenda but not others, and also that the level of support could vary greatly.

The amount of senior-level support may also depend on how skilful the equal opportunity officer was in linking equal opportunity to a wider agenda, what one officer described as 'hitching your wagon to a star' (C). Some examples of these 'stars' that were identified by participants were: internationalisation; risk management; strategic planning, and quality. However, some equal opportunity officers interviewed clearly did not have top management support, and therefore had to find other sources of support to advance any aspect of the equal opportunity agenda. Also, some equal opportunity officers had a background in community activism and therefore looked to other ways of gathering support, sometimes in addition to seeking senior management support, and sometimes because they had not experienced a significant amount of support.

In universities, the chief executive officer is the Vice Chancellor, and could be an important source of support for equal opportunity. However, there is more than one

possible source of senior support. Many universities in Australia now have an Executive group structure, which comprises a number of senior managers. Some participants in the research reported that they would attempt to advance an agenda by gaining commitment from one or members of this group.

The power of the Vice Chancellor remained clear to participants. One said that if the Vice Chancellor wanted something, then it would happen. She acknowledged that the Vice Chancellor listened to other senior managers, and so she attempted to work out who had leverage with the Vice Chancellor, who among the senior staff was aligned with whom, and who was not getting on with whom. This political type of knowledge she regarded as vital to getting things done (E).

#### 4.4.3.2 Identify Supporters For The Agenda

Participants in this study reported that identifying supporters other than the Vice Chancellor or members of the executive group was also an important part of gaining commitment to an agenda within a university. Equal opportunity officers identified that this could be a single person, in one instance, it was person described as a 'wonderful dean' (N). Or it could be a group of people. To be able to identify supporters presupposes a considerable knowledge of the attitudes and interests of staff in the university, and also sometimes of students or members of the University Council. Regardless of the senior management support within a university, other supporters were often regarded as necessary if an agenda was to be actualised. As mentioned above, it may also be a necessary tactic for those equal opportunity officers who did not have senior management support if they wanted to be able to proceed with any change.

#### 4.4.3.3 'Picking the Pitch'

This was the central category of the work of an equal opportunity officer in getting a cultural change agenda realised. It was identified as the 'core category'(Chenitz and Swanson 1986, p.135) as it was considered to be the main theme, the theme that all the categories were pointing to, from the preliminary categories of choosing the

people, defining the role, to the ways in which participants worked and the techniques they used.

It was revealed in interviews, and described by a participant as the need to 'pick the pitch'. The meaning of this phrase derives from the place at which street sellers placed themselves to show their wares to best advantage, and was used in a metaphorical way to represent the analysis and communication techniques that were required to gain sufficient support or commitment for the cultural change agenda. It has been incorporated as an *in vivo* code, (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p.69) as it captures a central feature of the work that equal opportunity officers do when they have identified a strategy and program for cultural change in their universities.

All of the interactions, the observations, and forms of analysis of the culture, are a prerequisite for 'picking the pitch' correctly. If the 'pitch' is not right, then cultural change agenda will not get sufficient support to be enacted.

The 'pitch' may differ across universities, even if the topic is the same. 'Picking the pitch' requires political and tactical skill. Participants would frequently attempt to select an agenda that aligned with senior management's interests, and then worked out what equal opportunity aspects of it were likely to get support, or at least legitimisation.

It was noted that meetings with senior managers were often brief, so one equal opportunity officer talked about how she planned the meeting with a top manager as a marketing 'pitch.' She said that she identified three things that she wanted to get out of the meeting, and she knew that she wanted to present them in a way that attached to things that she had previously identified as important to the senior manager. Her informal indicator of success was if she subsequently heard the senior manager use any of her three things as his own ideas in some later forum (H).

A consequence of this type of political and tactical activity is that if equal opportunity officers had good ideas, they may have been adopted but would not necessarily be acknowledged. Indeed, as observed above, the senior manager may not have noticed that the ideas came from the equal opportunity officer, and so the worth and value of

the equal opportunity officer would not be likely to be acknowledged. This adds vulnerability to the role.

Equal opportunity officers were aware that when pitching to different groups, the language they used had to change. This was particularly challenging if they are pitching to, for example, a humanities faculty, and also to a science faculty. They knew also that they had to be able to engage in dialogue in a way acceptable to the particular academic or organisational unit, or they would not gain respect (U). This supports the assertion raised in the literature review, that language can be a tool for constructing reality.

#### 4.4.3.4 Authority

The personal authority of an equal opportunity officer may also be an issue in getting an agenda up. Participants thought that they were ascribed authority because of the positional power of their direct manager, but were aware that this was only ‘an aura’(U).

As many equal opportunity officers had been employed in the same university for several years, there may also have been a personal authority that had developed over time as respect for the person, and which could then be used when getting an agenda up.

A few equal opportunity officers reported that they were, or had been, on a university’s governing Council. This provided another form of authority, through being part of the central decision-making process. It also has the potential to cause tension between their roles. For example, when one Council found it necessary to make a decision about cutting one out of two programs, the Council cut the program that had a predominantly male staff, rather than the other, which had a majority of female staff. The equal opportunity officer was blamed for pushing her feminist agenda instead of representing all staff. As it happened, she had abstained because of a potential conflict of interest (O).

#### 4.4.3.5 Pre-empting Resistance

Apart from positive tactics to gain commitment and support, participants in the study also considered ways to pre-empt possible or likely resistance. One way that was reported was through the use of external people, often political figures, experts in a field, or senior staff from other universities. One example given was to invite the external person to give a speech on a very public occasion about an issue that an equal opportunity officer wanted on the agenda, and attended by senior managers. The idea was that this may change the senior managers' minds, or at least pre-empt their active resistance.

In this aspect of getting an agenda up, as well as other parts of the role, it was evident that the communication skills of equal opportunity officers were crucial. Changing culture involves individuals changing both what they do, and the way they do things. It involves change to their habits, attitudes and values. This can be an uncomfortable experience, and resistance can be expected.

#### 4.4.3.6 Consultation and Participation

The research identified that participants were involved in a great deal of consultation with staff and students across the university. Consultation and participation is both a method for getting the cultural change agenda up, and also a method for pre-empting resistance. Using similar processes to those identified above as equal opportunity officers analysed the culture, participants used both formal and informal modes of consultation. Formal consultation for some required them to operate inside the university's extensive committee structure. Participants reported that formal consultation also included setting up structures to consult with specific equity target groups.

Sometimes participants also consulted and involved people from outside the university, who had been identified as experts or stakeholders; for example, local Indigenous people or ethnic community representatives.

### 4.4.4 Balancing and Prioritising

The autonomy that equal opportunity officers had, and the breadth of their possible agenda, led to an analysis of considerations by participants about how to balance and prioritise their work.

‘There are nine million good things to do in the world’; ‘I want to be cloned’; ‘it’s a bit of a bottomless pit of need’ (H, S, E). These were the ways that participants described their possible agendas. These comments reflect the extent of the possible work, the resource limitations, and the possible endless call on their efforts in equal opportunity work. In this context, the research also explored how equal opportunity officers tried to balance and prioritise.

The relative needs of equity groups formed one aspect of this balancing. Some officers took the view that they should prioritise those with the greatest need. As a consequence there arose the possibility of a kind of competition of disadvantage within equity offices, in which one equity group’s needs were argued as greater than another. This itself caused dilemmas for those who did not want to use what has been described as a deficit model. The deficit model contains the assumption that the reasons that equity groups do not succeed is because there is something wrong with them, or something missing in their background, education or knowledge, something that needs fixing up. This side-steps issues of structural and cultural disadvantage of which some participants were clearly aware.

The small amount of resources provided to some equity offices meant that the equal opportunity officers were doing a great deal less than they thought was necessary, or than they would have liked to do. In one very small institution, the equal opportunity officer was a full time academic, and acknowledged that she had not been able to do a great deal in the equal opportunity role. This disparity between what participants saw as the size of their task, and their resources is a considerable source of strain.

In addition to the processes used within equity offices to prioritise and balance their agenda, participants were highly aware of the university’s requirements of them. They realised that some of their work involved giving senior managers bad news, and that

senior managers were much more likely to be appreciative if they could find some good news to deliver from time to time. This was a difficulty if an equal opportunity officer decided to prioritise something because it was difficult to achieve as there was likely to be little kudos in choosing items for the agenda that had a high degree of difficulty. The example given by one participant was of the area of disability, where student and staff numbers were low, there was not much commitment to change matters, and success in raising the numbers was not highly regarded as a goal. In this context, success may provide payoff for the equity group members, but may not provide kudos for the equal opportunity office.

The requirements of external reporting also added to the difficulty. Universities, as prestige maximisers (Marginson and Considine 2000, p.51), generally wanted to look good on all dimensions of their operation, so any reports going outside the university that did not portray a generally positive picture were not likely to be acceptable to senior management. Also, equal opportunity officers, who were often with one university for several years, had a loyalty to the university and did not want to publicise its difficulties, even though they wanted to address them.

### 4.5 Ways Of Working

There were three broad categories identified in the data analysis of ways of working to produce cultural change that were used by equal opportunity officers. These were: group working, individual working and working with the self.

#### 4.5.1 Group Working

Working with groups was a twofold process. It was an example of a process of bringing about cultural change in itself, by involving people whose understanding and support developed over time. At the same time it aimed to bring about cultural change by advancing a particular aspect of equal opportunity, through whatever project or process is being addressed.

For working with groups, two major conditions were identified by the participants in this study. These were awareness and visibility.

#### 4.5.1.1 Awareness.

For equal opportunity officers working with faculties or other organisational units, the level of awareness in those areas about equal opportunity was an issue identified. Different parts of the university had different levels of awareness. For some their awareness was derived from their own discipline or practice. For others, a high level of awareness came from a personal interest that a staff member or a group of staff members shared, about equal opportunity.

If there were low levels of awareness, equal opportunity officers had the work of raising awareness, while at the same time taking into account the experiences of the group concerned. This sometimes resulted in a sense of frustration in having frequently to go over ground that equal opportunity officers thought were well-established, for example the definitions of discrimination. One participant spoke of this terms of not wanting to go back to kindergarten, indicating a sense of frustration is inherent in the role for some.

#### 4.5.1.2 Visibility

To work with groups, an equal opportunity officer required a certain amount of visibility. This could be personal, and individualised. An example of personal visibility was reported by one research participant, who said that when people couldn't get their tongues around 'Equal employment opportunity co-ordinator', they would say, 'oh you know, C.' Some participants worked to enhance their personal visibility by making sure they went out and met large numbers of people.

Another type of visibility concerned the equal opportunity unit and its work. This type of visibility could be achieved by activities such as placing articles in the university newspaper, producing reports, information materials, posters and Internet sites.

A third type of visibility concerned the equal opportunity agenda broadly, where reports in the press, or awards given, would not necessarily mention the equal opportunity unit, but which were the work of the equal opportunity officer in initiating and supporting. Being able to give away kudos in the interest of the agenda was an overt device used by some participants to raise visibility of equal opportunity.

### 4.5.2 Types of Groups

Group work varied as to size and scale. Some activities involved the whole university, for example in the development of a strategy to consider work/life balance. Some activities involved faculties, or smaller sub-groups in working on specific projects, for instance a group of academic staff working on an inclusive curriculum project in law, or a group developing policy on access to facilities for people with disabilities.

Where senior managers were thought to be hostile to equal opportunity in general, or to particular instances of it, then equal opportunity officers worked with sub-university groups to try to continue to make some gains, or to maintain any ground that they had made. These groups would form coalitions of interest. Coalition formation is an established feature of the political life of organisations (Pepper 1995, p.191), and may also be indicative of low levels of influence and resources (Bachrach and Lawler 1998, p.74).

Group work also varied in time-scale. Some policy development work involved long time frames, sometimes taking up to two years to gain approval. These often involved processes such as: first getting the principles and parameters accepted by a representative and interested group, and then putting together drafts of policy and getting them through the various university committees. At each point along the development process, the participant often took on the task of keeping the momentum of the initiative going, being prepared to change drafts, while maintaining awareness of the principles on which it had been based. This work is similar to other types of policy development work, except that in general, the impetus had usually come from the equal opportunity officer, rather than being a requirement or initiative of a supervisor.

Sometimes initiatives were developed in a short time frame. One example given by a participant was of an equal opportunity plan for an offshore campus, which was achieved in a few months (I). The relative speed of this strategy was connected to a strong requirement from senior management.

#### 4.5.2.1 Informal Interest Groups

Informal committees that participants have used included decentralised equity advisory groups. Working with these groups enabled knowledge, expertise and action to be fostered outside the equity office. This development occurred partly as a consequence of small, relatively powerless equal opportunity units, in which if the staff wanted to make cultural change, they needed to find other people to assist them, or their options for action would be limited. This was one of the realities of power that participants understood themselves to be working within.

Working with informal interest groups required choosing a topic that was important to the group, and being able to make sense of things in their terms, that is, reframing the equal opportunity agenda or providing examples that were relevant to the group in question. It also required that people have time to become part of a group, and some equal opportunity officers observed that this was decreasingly the case in universities. The increases in student: staff ratios and consequent sense of pressure within staffs of Australian universities has been widely commented on in the general academic press, reported on in publications (Coaldrake and Stedman 1999, p.9) and researched by Chapman (2001). The effects have trickled down to the work of equal opportunity officers, so that staff members who had formerly been prepared to give time to a matter of interest that was however peripheral to their main tasks, were decreasingly able or willing to do so. One participant also noted that, as equal opportunity programs had been running for fifteen years in some universities, some of those people who had been long-term supporters had moved on, perhaps through promotion, or had left the university sector (N).

Another form of informal group working identified by participants was through working with equity groups. Sometimes these groups had been already defined as equity groups through reporting requirements to state or federal government, sometimes they had to be defined for the particular agenda, for example part-time staff. Working with groups was a way of mobilising support and was a political process. The mobilisation of support through promotion of coalitions and influence has to be achieved through an enhancement of identification, according to Bachrach and Lawler (1998, pp.69-81).

Some groups may not be easy to mobilise if they do not see it to be advantageous to enhance their identification and visibility through forming coalitions. One participant in this study reflected on the difficulty of mobilising interest if the group lacks consciousness about what she regarded as its oppression, and the dilemma of consulting people about their perceptions of their needs, while also wanting to raise awareness (S).

Also, difficulties were reported by several participants in getting groups of staff or students with disabilities, and one offered the explanation that those who could pass without notice would often choose to do so.

Women in organisations will often be aware of their disadvantage, but may choose not to speak of it. *The Australian* newspaper, on 22/23 April 2000, ran an article on women managers that supported this view. The reporter summarised '…why should junior managers risk attracting the spotlight of a debate about their powerlessness with an organisation in which they still hope to prosper?' It is evident that this was regarded as a career-limiting action.

Consequently, equal opportunity officers may have difficulties in mobilising equity groups, and they were sometimes expected to speak on behalf of those who would not necessarily participate with them, or support them actively.

#### 4.5.2.2 Formal Groups

Formal group working for participants in this research generally meant working with committees. Committees have been a major part of the internal democracy and collegiality of universities, and are also a site for the exercise of power. Some participants dealt with a large number of committees, and found them sometimes frustrating, but noted that at least they provided a clear path for pursuing initiatives and strategies (C). Some equal opportunity officers noted though, that this was changing as decision making was increasingly being referred to small committees of the Vice Chancellor, which had no formal reporting line or function. This trend has been observed across Australian universities, as the powers of Councils and other

formal committees are being reduced and replaced by advisory types of committees (Marginson and Considine 2000, p.4).

Equal opportunity officers also attempted to use the groups which were powerful within universities, mainly the Vice Chancellor's executive group. Some equal opportunity officers tried to lobby members of these groups, but some had no direct access to them, or had only access to one. No matter how many people have been involved in discussion and consensus-seeking though group processes, the centralisation of power into a small university executive has tended to create a funnel through which any changes subsequently have to go.

#### 4.5.2.3 Mainstream Group Working

Another type of group work identified by participants involved equity office staff working with staff members from other parts of the university on ordinary work. This type of work was mainstream in that it involved the equity officer being there and doing the work alongside them, being part of the considerations. One example of mainstream working identified by a participant was helping with admissions processing to incorporate equitable practices, or special admission programs. Mainstream groups could also involve being a presence among a group of managers and contributing an equity perspective on the topics discussed. This constitutes a type of direct intervention in change.

#### 4.5.2.4 Impacts of Group Working on University Culture

The analysis of group working provides insights into the impact of this way of working on the cultures in universities.

The nature of group work provides a situation with a strong potential for awareness raising, which may lead to cultural change. Also, if the groups are large, their impact in turn can be considerable. Group working allows equal opportunity officers to have some impact on culture even if senior management is not particularly supportive.

Some group work takes place over long time frames, for instance two years, and consequently the effect on the culture of the university is likely to take at least as long again to become part of the unquestioned way things are done.

Informal groups appear from the participants to be a declining resource as staff and students become busier and therefore less willing to devote time, so the impact of equal opportunity officers is likely to be less. Also, as noted above, some equity groups do not, for various reasons, participate in group work. This affects the impact that the equal opportunity officers can make. Committees and other formal ways of working in groups were identified as time-consuming, but the results were often clearer and more stable.

### 4.5.3 Individual Working

Individual working occurs when an equal opportunity officer interacts with a staff member or a student on a one-to-one basis. While this may be just to provide advice, one participant noted that every interaction had the possibility of illustrating or modelling possible changes to ways of doing things within the university, and so every interaction is a possible site for cultural change effort (C).

#### 4.5.3.1 Information gathering

One type of individual working identified was the informal gathering of information, referred to by one participant as ‘the underground,’ and ‘the informal chit chats’ (I). This served as a kind of reality-checking that in turn contributed input to a further analysis of culture.

#### 4.5.3.2 Advice

Equal opportunity officers were often a source of individual advice, and sometimes this type of work was done within an established grievance procedure. Often the advice sought of participants concerned allegations of discrimination or some other misconduct, and therefore the equal opportunity officer worked in an atmosphere of charged emotion. High levels of emotion affected the person bringing a concern or grievance, and also any respondent or manager who was subsequently part of the process.

Participants illustrated that they needed tactics to manage the high levels of emotion which incorporated both a rational and an emotional perspective. One participant reported that she would try first to calm the person, and then may suggest structures for handling the high emotional contexts of dealing with a complaint or a dispute (O). These included mediation or conciliation. Sometimes equal opportunity officers would suggest ways for the person to deal with his or her own emotion, such as getting counselling assistance, or focussing the emotional energy into a process for addressing the complaint.

Participants also provided information about the person's rights and responsibilities, and avenues for moving forward with a complaint or concern.

Participants in the study were highly aware of ethical issues that governed the provision of advice to individuals, whether these individuals were supervisors or managers, or were staff or students with a complaint or grievance. They identified certain ethical parameters which included matters such as: that anyone had a right to complain or bring a grievance in an appropriate way and be supported; that advice was given in confidence or the circumstances when it was not confidential were described, and that an equal opportunity officer was impartial in giving advice. These ethical matters are sometimes found in codes of ethics for professions, but have not been codified by equal opportunity officers.

#### 4.5.3.3 Mediation/conciliations

Another form of individual work sometimes done by equal opportunity officers was formal mediation or conciliation, usually in the context of a formal complaint or grievance procedure.

#### 4.5.3.4 Advocacy/Lobbying

This type of interaction undertaken by some equal opportunity officers involved taking a position with regard to a person or group and attempting to impress that position on another within the university. Some equal opportunity officers regarded this as outside their role, and would refer a person on to industrial union or elsewhere.

Advocacy could result in changes to processes and practices, and in that way to change culture, but it carries the danger, reported by one participant, that the equal opportunity officer is no longer regarded as neutral, and so it can backfire, or be ineffective in the longer-term.

#### 4.5.3.5 Consequences of Individual Work

From the data, it was possible to see some of the consequences of individual work, and its impact on university culture. Individual work was time consuming, and this was an issue of significance for equal opportunity officers who were sometimes sole workers, or were part of a small staff. Response to numerous individual enquiries may have the consequence that there was no time for larger scale programs, which potentially could have a bigger effect on the culture of the university. This resulted in a continual need to balance and prioritise, as noted above.

One equal opportunity officer spoke about the way things got done at her university which was through continually negotiating personal relationships with people, and she thought that the reason why she had to engage in such a time-consuming process was because of a lack of structure within the university. However, others reported doing the same kind of thing, because although there were structures, they did not include automatically the equal opportunity officer, or people did not want to use the other structures (T, S).

Individual work, particularly grievance work, was also reported as being emotionally tiring, though some participants reported satisfaction in seeing people who have arrived upset and confused, leaving empowered to deal with their complaint or concern (C).

One source of the emotional tension for an equal opportunity officer in individual working was that sometimes in situations of conflict, they may be the one person dealing with both sides of a dispute to provide advice and options in neutral terms, and without revealing knowledge of another side of the issue.

Below is a summary of an example provided during a conversation with an equal employment opportunity officer:

- A woman complains to the equal employment opportunity officer about a male staff member who she says is bullying her

- The equal employment opportunity officer advises the woman to mention the matter to the male staff member, and gives her advice that the male staff member may not known that his manner is bullying

- The male staff member separately seeks advice from the equal employment opportunity officer. He is concerned and confused that his manner is regarded as bullying

- The equal employment opportunity officer advises the male staff member to apologise and discusses with him communication techniques

- The woman reports back to the equal employment opportunity officer, with evident satisfaction, that the man has apologised. She was clearly happy that their professional relationship has been restored.

Individual work of this type sometimes led to private decisions, that is, resolutions that are not known outside of the parties concerned. This was a source of personal respect for an equal opportunity officer, but because of its confidential nature, the acknowledgment accorded to the equal opportunity officer was limited. Also as a source of cultural change, it is very slow.

Participants also used individual work to fold knowledge gained into broader political or procedural agenda if a systemic issue appeared to have arisen. For example, one participant received a complaint about a student publication containing material demeaning to women. After dealing with the specific complaint, the officer developed a training and awareness-raising program and delivered it to all new students (O).

### 4.5.4 Working with the Self

The analysis of interviews revealed another type of working, which was that equal opportunity officers worked with their professional selves as they responded to the culture in which they found themselves. As equal opportunity officers attempted to demonstrate and provide an appropriate cultural model, their personal interaction with the prevailing culture had consequences for them, and for their efforts to make changes. The data showed that they found themselves along a spectrum, from agreement with the existing culture, through accommodation to it, to rejecting some aspects of the culture in which they worked. Their attempts to model certain behaviours and practices were affected by their level of concordance with the existing culture.

#### 4.5.4.1 Agreement

When equal opportunity officers were in agreement with aspects of the current culture, then they worked to assist in maintaining it. These aspects were sometimes directly relevant to the agenda of equal opportunity, for example working within a university that has had a history of inclusion and support for people from disadvantaged backgrounds into its student body. Also, there may be aspects of culture that were indirectly relevant to their work, for example, valuing rationality, or valuing high levels of academic achievement. There may also be things about the culture which were very general, such as the sense of prestige from working in a highly-ranked university, or a sense of optimism from working in a university that seems to have a clear sense of itself and its path.

#### 4.5.4.2 Accommodation

Many participants were aware that they did not entirely fit with the culture of their university. They wanted to be part of the university, or at least, they wanted to be part of their vision of a university, and that could be somewhat different from the current culture that they experienced. Several reported feeling that they were on the edge, rather than central in the university. One informal sign of this which was given of this by a participant was of the informal cultural ritual of Christmas drinks held by a Vice Chancellor for managers, to which she was not invited. Another participant reported five changes of location for the equity office, a symptom that the university was

perhaps not sure where to fit the equal opportunity officer either literally or organisationally.

Participants reported ways in which they tried to deal with this sense of apartness and marginalisation. One was to deliberately set out to be a good citizen. This sometimes involved doing additional service that was not directly related to equal opportunity work, or taking part in the ritual events of the university such as Open Days or Graduation ceremonies.

#### 4.5.4.3 Rejection

There were some points at which the equal opportunity officer disagreed with the prevailing culture, and rejected working with it. This happened particularly in relation to clashes of values, where sometimes they believed that they had to take a stand for the values that they held, even though they knew it would not be popular.

One participant reported that she on occasion created tension in a deliberate way, because people were too comfortable with the status quo. This stirring up of tension may also be part of a personal agenda to demonstrate one's own capacities, and is a phenomenon observed among new managers. It may even be that these change agents need chaos outside to reflect their own inner chaos (Mant 1997, p.260), or even their neuroses (Kets de Vries and Miller 1984).

If equal opportunity officers found a great deal about the culture that they wished to reject, they might resign. If not, they might tend to move back towards a situation of accommodation by limiting their agenda and focussing on what they thought could be done in a constrained situation. For one participant at least, this was also partly a mechanism of self-protection.

#### 4.5.4.4 Modelling and Its Impact on University Culture

Participants knew that the way in which they worked within an organisation would be highly visible, and so for both political reasons, as well as out of conviction, they tried to model the kinds of practices that they would like others to adopt.

Because of this, some of the methods and means adopted by participants who also had staff to manage were different from other university managers. Their offices tended to have more staff from equity groups, more working in flexible ways, and this caused tension reported by some participants between a highly goal-oriented desire to achieve, and a wish to be an inclusive and thoughtful manager.

The impact of working with the self on the culture of universities was in the intersection between the amount of difference between the equal opportunity officer and the prevailing culture. Briefly, the closer they could be to the prevailing culture, the more their work would be acceptable within the university, but also the less change they were likely to see as necessary. Conversely, the closer they moved toward rejection of the culture, the more they saw as needing change, and the less likely it was to be acceptable. This situation is mediated by the political and communication skills of individual equal opportunity officers, and their ability to deal with the inherent tension.

### 4.6 Techniques For Cultural Change

The analysis of data showed that the techniques used by equal opportunity officers to bring about cultural change fell into four major groupings. These groupings were: techniques of compliance; techniques of presence; techniques of awareness, and techniques of support and liaison. Any particular project or program that an equal opportunity officer was engaged with would have elements of some or all of the groupings. For example, a work and family strategy may have involved making changes to human resources practices to ensure that maternity and paternity leave conformed with legislative requirements. Next it may have involved analyses and considerations about whether women were being retained in the university after taking maternity leave and if not how to change matters. Subsequently it may have had an awareness raising campaign, often in the form of pamphlets on work and family, together with training on work/life balance. Finally, there may have been a support group introduced for workers with family responsibilities.

These techniques comprise the mechanical or formal part of the processes of cultural change.

### 4.6.1 Compliance

As has been referred to above, compliance with anti-discrimination legislation was regarded by many equal opportunity officers as a necessary condition of their existence, and was thought by some of them to be the sole function that managers accepted. In addition to the legislation, there were internal policies and university rules that had been developed to ensure compliance with the legislation, or to ensure practices that were broadly supportive of the intentions of the legislation.

One conception of the work of equal opportunity officers was originally as something that had a short term or at least finite nature, that would finish once the compliance measures were put into place. In other words, it was thought that the change that was required was to ensure that behaviour and practices would not be regarded as unlawful under legislation. As equal opportunity officers monitored and investigated complaints of discrimination, a perception arose in organisations of the equal opportunity officer as a sort of internal police officer. The perception may of course have been accurate in that some equal opportunity officers spent a great deal of their efforts on investigating complaints and directly intervening to achieve compliance.

An illustration of the limitation of techniques that emphasise compliance in bringing about cultural change was given by one of the participants in this research. It featured a sketch that was enacted at a staff Christmas party, in which there was a door marked 'EEO Office', and whenever anyone knocked on it, a person popped out and hit the person knocking on the head. Using Etzioni's (1975) typology of compliance, the equal opportunity office in this example was thought to be emphasising coercion rather than normative types of power. Etzioni characterised universities and professional organisations were largely normative in compliance type, so that coercive techniques were less likely to succeed.

Apart from the direct effect of dealing with particular complaints and grievances, information gained through dealing with grievances provided data for further analysis of the culture of an organisation. The level and type of complaint could then form the basis for more systemic action. However, some participants were reluctant to use

complaint numbers in this way, as they thought that they could be ambiguous in their indication. They could be an indication of the approachability of the equal opportunity office, which staff would regard as a good sign, or a positive comment on the openness of the university culture to complaint. Conversely, lack of complaint could, without other evidence, be a sign that the culture was not open to dealing with complaint, or the equal opportunity officer was not regarded as approachable. In some universities, complaint statistics had simply not been kept in a way that allowed for analysis of possible systemic or cultural issues.

Apart from direct investigation and intervention in complaints, compliance work involved developing policies and procedures and informing staff and students about them. This technique was usually actioned by using formal groups as a way of working.

While compliance techniques may be both necessary and sufficient to cause some behavioural change, for equal opportunity officers there remained issues that arose from attempting cultural change through compliance. One was that the area of law is a developing one, and that means changing expectations of organisations with regard to liability. This in turn means that policies and procedures have to be under regular review by equal opportunity officers.

Another issue that arose for some participants was that while some behaviour may change in response to compliance techniques, some participants regarded this as a superficial success if underlying attitudes were not changed.

### 4.6.2 Presence

Techniques of presence involved analysing the current staff or student population, and then setting targets for particular groups. The targets generally related to the proportion of the population that are in the group. For example, in New South Wales, the target for women staff was 50%, for Indigenous Australian peoples it was 2%. These targets are predicated on an assumption that equality of outcomes is both desirable and an achievable goal.

Techniques designed to increase presence of targeted groups have been known as affirmative action techniques. They have encountered significant resistance in Australia, particularly with regard to women (Harris 1999, pp.15-19). It may have been partly due to its unpopularity, that the name of the *Affirmative Action Agency* was changed to the *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency*. The section on context above referred to the concept of the 'fair go', and the hesitation that is felt with regard to techniques that might be seen to emphasise equality of outcome, particularly if the techniques proposed do not convince others that they are in accord with the idea of the 'fair go' for all.

Misunderstanding and misinterpretation of affirmative action techniques has been a source of difficulty for equal opportunity officers. The difficulty is magnified when the beneficiaries do not necessarily acknowledge or like it. This is likely to pertain in societies that emphasise individual effort, and evidence was provided by Terkel (1992, p.71) with regard to race in the North American experience. Thus, the technique gave some equal opportunity officers another type of 'backstage work' (Goffman 1969, p.13) to manage, in which the messy reality of unequal chances and unequal outcomes in the workplace or in university study, had to be converted to a set of techniques that accorded with other university values, such as selection on merit, or academic excellence.

Participants also reported that it was easier to gain acceptance for techniques of presence with regard to some equity groups than others. This sometimes depended on the local culture in part of the university, or sometimes it depended on the levels of knowledge within the university about the effects of disadvantage among groups of staff. For example, one participant said that some faculties were interested in scholarships and projects for students, but rarely initiated projects for staff, and if employment issues were raised, they were prepared to consider a project for academic women, but not other equity groups (S).

Changes in presence may be conducive to changing culture, but are not sufficient. Techniques that are designed in a general way, but in the expectation of assisting the presence of a particular group, were also found to be more acceptable. For example, a

work and family policy may be more acceptable than one which directly attempted to increase the number of women with children in the workforce.

### 4.6.3 Awareness Raising

There were active and passive forms of awareness-raising identified by participants, both of which contribute to cultural change.

Active awareness raising comprised activities such as: holding events; having visiting speakers, and direct training programs.

The passive forms of awareness-raising included publication of posters, brochures and pamphlets, and the establishment of Internet sites. While in themselves they may be passive, staff or students could use them in an active way. They could use them to promote a change that is advocated in the publication, such as putting a sexual harassment poster on their walls, or taking the flexible work practices booklet with them when asking their supervisor about job sharing. All the equity offices visited had supplies of pamphlet, brochures and posters on various equity and cultural diversity topics.

### 4.6.4 Training

The training programs delivered by participants in the study fell into three groups. Firstly there were those that provided information directly about equal opportunity and anti-discrimination matters. Sometimes this could be as brief as a ten-minute orientation session for new students, or it could be an Internet-based program that new staff members worked through at their own pace. The function of this type of program was mainly to provide information, and also to support the compliance function of the equal opportunity office.

The second type of training was either done as a part of, or was woven into, general training and development programs. For example a management-training program may have had a section devoted to equal opportunity issues. This type of training had an information dimension, but it also dealt directly with good personnel practices.

The third type of training attempted to shift culture in particular ways. For example, cross-cultural awareness training programs had an information component, but some also attempted to challenge and address the way people thought about culture, their own and that of others. Similarly, mediation and conflict resolution training may make overt and seek to change underlying attitudes and beliefs about how people work in an organisational setting.

In this study, there were conditions reported that made for difficulties in doing training. These included a belief among participants that there was rarely enough time to cover the material necessary, and also that there was something of a reluctance to undertake training, especially among academic staff. The issue of increased workloads that was identified in the Literature Review as a contextual factor may be a partial explanation. Another explanation given by a participant was that academic staff were reluctant to attend training conducted by general staff. Two possible consequences arose from these difficulties. One was that equal opportunity officers sometimes spent more time than they would have liked preaching to the converted, when those who they thought needed the training did not attend. The other consequence identified was that training was made compulsory in some universities. One participant in a university where the Vice Chancellor had made a training program compulsory reported that, after the initial reluctance, staff who attended training had found it interesting and useful (N).

A major consequence of the pressures referred to above was that the emphasis of the training given by participants tended to be more on information provision and awareness raising. For some equal opportunity officers, this was appropriate, as their declared focus was on behaviour. For some, however, who were attempting to deal with broader aspects of culture, particularly in cultural diversity awareness training, this was frustrating as there was insufficient time in short training sessions to come to grips with complex questions of values and ways of looking at the world.

### 4.6.5 Support and Liaison

Further techniques identified in this research were those of support and liaison, which encompasses activities aimed at providing encouragement to people to make changes to the culture of the university.

This support was sometimes given by participants to managers or to whole organisational units, and it required an allocation of time from the equal opportunity office for general communication and for meeting to discuss a particular initiative. This kind of support was identified by some participants as an important way for equal opportunity officers to persuade and assist staff in other areas to take accountability for equal opportunity in their own departments around the organisation. This type of support sometimes also comprised funding, and some participants also had budgets for allocations to departments. In particular, some have access to a source of funds for student-related projects under a *Higher Education Equity Project* of the federal government.

For some participants, the support provided was through nominating a staff member or a group of staff for an internal or external award. These were generally known as 'best practice' awards, and external agencies provide some of this kind of award, for example, in areas of work and family. Internal awards were either specifically Equity awards, or were part of other awards, such as those for good university teaching. Some participants were sceptical about the value of awards, while others regarded them as part of the praise and encouragement that assisted people to make changes to a culture. The awards were a recognition that staff had usually put in additional work, and that this effort was worthy of acknowledgment and celebration.

Support and liaison were also achieved by participants through the formation and development of various equal opportunity networks throughout the university. These were, for instance, anti-discrimination advisers or sexual harassment advisers, or faculty co-ordinators for women's matters. This contributed to the informal group way of working to achieve change.

While support and liaison may help motivate change, it is not sufficient as a technique in itself. It depends on a pre-existing interest from staff or students, or on some requirement from inside or outside the university.

### 4.6.6 Impacts of Techniques

The research indicates different impacts of the techniques identified for cultural change.

As was identified above, techniques of compliance had limited success in universities, as they have been organisations with a predominantly normative power type and moral compliance pattern, and the compliance techniques of equal opportunity officers are sometimes regarded as coercive (Etzioni 1975, p.14). In spite of recent tendencies towards centralised power, (Marginson and Considine 2000, p.1, Currie and Newson 1998, p.163) the value of academic freedom in universities leads to questioning and analysis of compliance. Therefore if equal opportunity officers are to have an impact by using compliance techniques, they need to be able to persuade, as well as obtain approval to require compliance.

Compliance techniques can lead to cultural change when people stop questioning and thinking of it as compliance. The use of inclusive language was an example given by more than one participant of a technique of compliance that had raised considerable discussion and initial opposition, but that was now generally accepted.

Another feature of compliance techniques is that failures in compliance, usually indicated through complaints, fed into the analysis of culture that equal opportunity officers used to identify what agenda is required.

Techniques of presence can impact on the culture to a variable extent. The impact can be large or small, and negative or positive. Large positive impacts were noted by participants in the ability that an individual had to lead support for an agenda. Negative impacts, which included lack of support of the equal opportunity agenda from a recipient who had been part of a successful strategy of presence, were noted

with regret. However, they did not form a reason for participants to abandon strategies of presence.

Techniques of awareness-raising have two impacts. Firstly they have the potential to change an individual's way of thinking, and secondly they feed into group work of the types identified above.

The techniques of support and liaison were facilitative and helped motivate change, but were not sufficient in themselves as a technique for cultural change.

The diversity of techniques used by equal opportunity officers underscores a difference in the way they go about their work from the leadership model of cultural change found in much management literature, and identified in the Literature Review (Deal and Kennedy, 1982, Peters and Waterman 1982, Schein 1990), which concerns itself with the role and power of senior managers to change cultures. The support of senior managers was acknowledged by participants as having a highly significant effect, but the above techniques were pursued by equal opportunity officers who, while they were aware of their constraints and limitations, nevertheless believed that they were nearly always in a position where they could take some action in support of their cultural change agenda.

### 4.7 Outcomes

This section analyses the outcomes of the efforts of equal opportunity officers to change university cultures that were identified through the analysis of data. These outcomes were first analysed according to two sets of dimensions. One axis of the dimension was whether the analysis of the outcome is formal or informal. The other is whether the analysis is externally reported or internally reported (See Figure 1. below). The outcomes were next analysed in terms of whether they were regarded by participants in the research as positive in type, as negative or as static. Factors that participants reported as limiting outcomes were then identified.

### 4.7.1 Dimensions of Outcomes

One dimension of outcomes in the quadrant of formal external outcomes included reports to external agencies, such as the *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency*, or statistics supplied according to equity groups to the *Department of Employment, Education and Youth Affairs*. While the intention of external reporting is to place accountability on organisations, in effect it placed most of the compliance requirement on equal opportunity officers, who were usually responsible for compiling and submitting reports. This requirement sometimes produced from equal opportunity officers the sort of complaints that were made to them about their own compliance attempts. One officer described the reporting requirements as the tail wagging the dog (H). Another consequence of formal external reporting requirements was that, as equal opportunity officers were loyal to their university, and as the draft reports were usually previewed by senior managers before they were issued, these reports were likely to put the best gloss on the data, and also to omit matters that could be avoided if they did not make the university appear in a positive light. Some participants were also vividly aware of the incommensurability between the objectives and the outcomes, as they appreciated that they worked in an environment where multiple factors operated in conditions of flux. In this environment, change was affecting university cultures from a number of directions. Consequently, participants did not interpret this dimension of outcome as conveying the full picture of their impact on university cultures.

Informal external outcomes reported by participants included papers at conferences, and the exchange of anecdotes between colleagues at conferences and meetings. Conference papers are public documents, and thus are likely to be carefully worded and to show the impact of a project or program on cultures reported on in a relatively positive way. There was a notable feature among participants of sharing successful initiatives. The exchange of anecdotes at conferences and meetings was sometimes much less guarded, and therefore likely to be more revealing. Some of the relatively private information about outcomes may be shared between equal opportunity officers, for example if a particular strategy was a failure or if little was happening with regard to equal opportunity in a particular university. This informal information sometimes caused wry amusement among participants when the public relations of

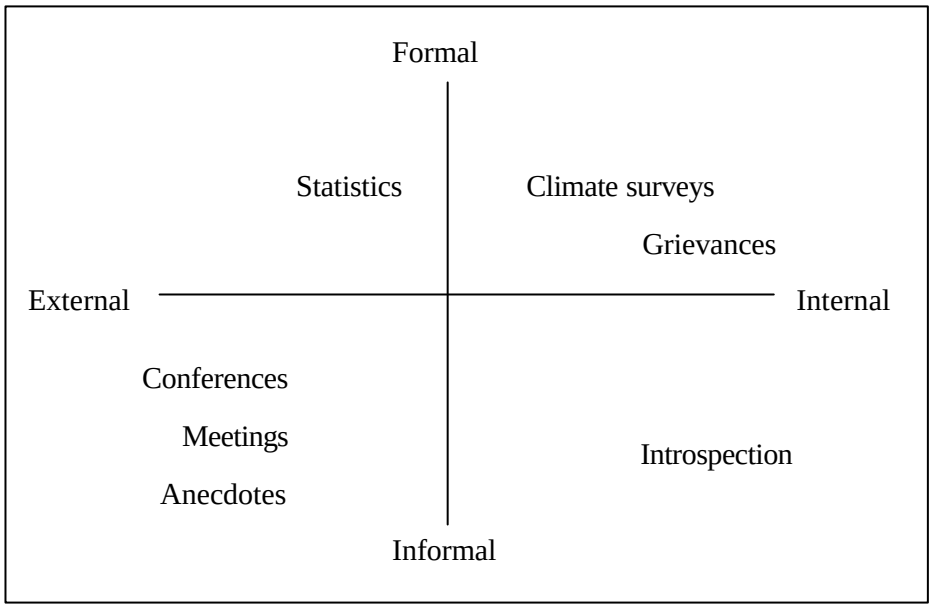
the university was sufficiently effective to gain national awards, whereas private indications provided a different picture.

Outcomes reported in the quadrant of formal internal analyses (see Figure 1) included university climate surveys and grievance statistics. As reported above, both these outcome measures were acknowledged to be problematic: climate surveys because management tends not to want to produce anything that is less than positive and grievance statistics because their meaning was regarded as contestable without further analysis. However, they can be a powerful tool, particularly if collected over several years, and were used to challenge assertions that progress had been made over time (N). Internal reports that used research and report methodologies were also useful in giving information about what outcomes had been achieved.

Informal internal analyses of outcomes included the introspection and emotional assessment of equal opportunity officers and anecdotal reports of the respect and regard with which the equal opportunity office was held.

In general, the less formal and more private the outcome measure, the more sharp and telling it was likely to be for the equal opportunity officer in assessing impacts.

**Figure 1. Dimensions of Analysis of Outcomes**



### 4.7.2 Outcome Types

Another way of analysing outcomes is by the type of outcome. These outcome types were identified as: positive, static, or negative.

#### 4.7.1.1 Positive Outcomes

Data analysis indicated that positive types of outcomes included positive, formal outcomes that were reported externally, for example increased numbers of staff or students in a targeted equity group. There were also informal positive outcomes that were reported externally, such as conference reports of completed projects indicating satisfaction from clients. Positive internal formal outcomes included changes in grievance statistics or climate surveys that indicated positive changes to aspects of university culture, or informal indications of positives outcomes such as anecdotes illustrating increased awareness of some aspect of equal opportunity, or indications of the type of change that participants had been attempting.

Participants identified that they deliberately tried to find and note progress, and to celebrate milestones. Sometimes this was done inside the equity offices, so that the equal opportunity officers could celebrate achievements that they had been instrumental in bringing about, but for which people outside of the equity office may have received the acknowledgment. Some participants also deliberately and personally praised, thanked and found other ways to acknowledge those outside the equal opportunity offices who had contributed to some cultural change. In looking back to note and celebrate achievement, equal opportunity officers were often surprised about the amount of progress that had occurred. This was in part because they had moved on to redefine, refocus or move to new projects. It was also the case that some participants were looking back over ten or fifteen years in the equal opportunity field. Some recalled with varying degrees of amusement or horror, indicators of the culture of the past, such as the vigorous opposition to having inclusive language guidelines (T), or the fact that an early equal opportunity officer (not in a university) had received death threats (I).

Recounting achievements to others, giving public affirmation and rewards were all used by equal opportunity officers to mark and celebrate positive outcomes. While some were cynical about the value of external awards, for others it provided a powerful symbolic focus to affirm the university's commitment.

In some circumstances, outcomes that had achieved a positive effect on the culture from the equal opportunity officer's point of view were not made public. For example, if there was a private decision made as a result of a complaint of grievance process, and this may have included the dismissal or resignation of staff members, then the positive effects of this outcome would be known only to a few people.

Telling the news of positive outcomes and designing strategies so that there was good news to tell, formed both part of the political process of cultural change, and also constituted a strategy to maintain the equal opportunity officer's profile and reputation with senior managers.

Apart from changes to others, equal opportunity officers noticed changes that they themselves had gone through. As a positive outcome of the cultural change that they had sought to bring about, they believed that they themselves had learned and improved.

#### 4.7.1.2 Negative outcomes

Participants reported that there were times when the news was bad, or the outcomes were negative, and the equal opportunity officer may have had a duty to inform the university. Telling people things that they did not want to hear was identified by participants as one of the tasks of equal opportunity officers. Analogous difficulties were reported for potential whistleblowers in organisations, which indicates that this is a common phenomenon of organisations (Messick and Ohme 1998, p.193). Participants knew that they had to try to do it in a way that did not alienate the usually powerful staff they were telling, but that at the same time enabled further work and change to be put onto the agenda. This required strong interpersonal skills. For some types of bad news, it was possible for the equal opportunity officer to impersonalise it by using the formal analyses, and pointing to the statistics or the surveys. However,

one participant observed that it often sent a more powerful message to senior managers to give reports of cases, which could be used to overcome scepticism of senior managers about whether the issues were real and in need of attention (R).

Legal action against a university was identified as a negative outcome within the experience of many participants. It may have occurred as a consequence of failed efforts to change the culture. It could sometimes be used by equal opportunity officers to highlight aspects of the culture that required addressing, such as attitudes embodied in practices that were discriminatory. However, equal opportunity officers cannot necessarily use the outcomes of legal action as a cautionary tale in this way. Legal cases all depend on unique facts, and also legal action is not necessarily taken by those who seem to have a good case, or it may be taken by people who do not seem to have such a good case.

There are indications that organisations can respond in positive ways to legal action, but they may equally return to 'business as usual' after the crisis is over and make no attempt to change the culture.

If equal opportunity officers believed that discrimination had occurred, but no legal action or internal action had been taken, or if the culture was not changing in the way an equal opportunity officer had tried to move it, then people were sometimes described by participants in terms of having 'got away with their bad practices' (V). This negative outcome was reported with regret by participants. While they regarded it as part of their role to draw the attention of managers to unfair or unlawful practices, none of them saw it as part of the role to punish individuals who had transgressed. As part of their attempts to anchor accountability for equal opportunity, some participants had been successful in adding the topic to the performance measures for senior managers, and dealing with transgression was regarded as being among the powers of senior managers.

In terms of personal negative impact, participants noticed times when they were not consulted, and when they were not respected for their expertise. They also noticed that sometimes they were silenced. This was sometimes achieved with subtlety, by

blocking mechanisms that simply prevented their initiatives from seeing the light of day. Alternatively, it could be done very crudely, for example, one participant reported that the chair of a committee tried to change the decision in the Minutes, after the action in the Minutes had been agreed to by a higher level committee (V). Another reported an attempt by a senior manager to prevent anyone except the senior manager from seeking external advice from anti-discrimination agencies (T).

Equal opportunity officers acknowledged loss or failure and then continued trying. They would do this by going back to set the agenda in a different way. One participant talked about 're-badging' (I), so that an equity initiative appealed more to senior managers. For example, if management did not think it a good idea to have a campaign about racism, the equal opportunity officer might pitch an agenda around the benefits of cultural diversity, or the values of acknowledging the Indigenous Australian heritage.

#### 4.7.1.3 Stasis

No change, or stasis is also an identified outcome, and it may be positive or negative from the point of view of the equal opportunity officer.

There were many things that equal opportunity officers reported that they enjoyed about the culture of the universities they worked in, and that they would like to support and see maintained. These sometimes featured a belief that there was a genuine commitment in the university to equal opportunity, and not just lip service (S, H).

Sometimes the positive cultural features identified were more general, and captured aspects of culture that are traditionally regarded as elements of a university. For example, one participant talked about her university hanging on to certain principles, and not being completely driven by managerialism, but maintaining a genuine belief in education. She acknowledged that this did not necessarily make her work easy, when compared to her experience of working in a more straightforward bureaucratic structure, but she was pleased that they were not simply driven by 'administrative

tidiness' (H). Another spoke about the willingness to debate ideas and to consider evidence from research.

Some elements of culture were regarded as static and uncongenial to equal opportunity. Senior managers' opposition to equal opportunity matters was named by one participant (T), though others observed that they had to differentiate, as individuals could be very supportive on some matters, and not on others.

For equal opportunity officers who were trying to use positive aspects of the cultures they worked within, and to gather support for particular types of changes, stasis may itself be regarded as a negative outcome.

Stasis may arise from what has been called 'sticky ties' (Valley and Thompson 1998 p.39) that are inherent in structures. These authors asserted that:

> Dictating formal structures is a critical medium of control in complex organizations. Through prescribed reporting and production structures, management compels certain ways of getting the work of the organization accomplished, and imposes certain constraints on the other ways of completing that same work.

The ability to dictate structure is assigned only to the powerful. Indeed, it has become a commonplace that on assumption to the position, a new Vice Chancellor will restructure the university. Structures then become the given organisational world within which equal opportunity officers have to work.

Stasis may also be a form of resistance described by Poiner and Wills as '…circumvention by neglect' (1991, p.62).

The dimensions and types of outcomes identified by equal opportunity officers provide indicators of the impact that they have had on university cultures, and also provide further input to the analysis of culture which is both a continual and an iterative process.

### 4.7.2 Limiting Factors

Cultural change in organisations has been reported as a long- term and complex phenomenon. One book on cultural change in organisations described getting cultural change into organisations as a 'black art', which can be interpreted as an unknown and mysterious process (Deal and Kennedy 1982, p.166). This description was applied even in circumstances where top managers wanted to achieve change, and had the budgetary power to fund it. Senior university managers are well aware of the power of the budget, as is evident in Marginson and Considine (2000, p.81), who reported one senior manager to have said :

> The only way to change culture in the university is to link the budget with it…then you get a reaction in the first year it is introduced.

Equal opportunity officers are not top managers and they generally had little freedom of budgetary allocation, so their ability to affect culture through the power of the purse was not strong. The degree to which they can institute changes depends therefore on their being able to pitch to senior managers and to get their interest and commitment, or the degree to which the university is 'loosely-coupled' enough for them to operate without senior approval (Weick 1976, pp1-9), through forming coalitions of interest, working with groups and also with individuals.

One equal opportunity officer in this study described the work as an endless task. The accuracy of this description was exemplified through reports in the interviews of outcomes having been partially achieved, of slippage occurring over time, of staff changing and so efforts needing to be re-done, or of opportunities re-emerging. It was also exemplified by evidence that the equal opportunity officer's own agenda had changed over time, for instance from an emphasis on anti-discrimination to an emphasis on cultural diversity.

The endlessness of the task could also be seen in terms of aims and underpinning philosophical positions that were diffuse or largely unarticulated. While some equal opportunity officers would ask themselves 'what would success look like' (H), it is evident that this picture was subject to ongoing re-painting.

In business and strategic management, general terms are often used in high-level mission statements in order to encourage the maximum co-operation among disparate interests. The mission is then used as a point of alignment to ensure that outcomes of all activities support the strategic purposes of an organisation.

Something similar is done in universities. In Australian universities, the aims are sometimes very like one another across all universities, for instance, of being known for excellence in teaching or research, or for a focus on international education. These general terms were used by equal opportunity officers in the process of picking the pitch to assist them in getting their agendas implemented, but they are more useful as myths to mobilise support and action than to provide ideas about what outcomes to measure.

### 4.8 Summary of Findings

From this research, an analysis of the equal opportunity task that was grounded in data, both from the knowledge and insights of the equal opportunity officers, and from other sources, came a number of insights into the impact that equal opportunity officers had on university cultures.

Organisational change work as described by participants in this research was a highly political task, and depended for its impact on communication skills and an ability to pick a pitch that appealed to senior managers, or to work with other coalitions or individuals. Picking the pitch was identified through the grounded theory analysis as the central conceptual category, and required sensitivity, reading the political situation and utilising internal political factors.

There is the potential for equal opportunity officers to impact on university cultures through all of the techniques that they used to make change in universities. The analysis of data revealed detail of the processes of agenda setting, ways of working and various techniques for change.

Equal opportunity officers used the currency of processes that were prevalent within the university to achieve their impact, for example: strategic planning; research and teaching.

The data analysis demonstrated that the impact of equal opportunity officers on university cultures was constrained by a number of factors. These included: their position in the university hierarchy, their acceptance within the university and the congruence of their values with those in the university.

The impact of equal opportunity officers on universities was achieved through rational means, and also through emotional means and through continual personal interactions, both formal and public, and informal and private, with individuals and groups.

The impact of equal opportunity officers on university cultures depended on their interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, organisational skills, and flexibility within a framework of ethical values.

The success of equal opportunity officers was inevitably partial because of unclear or diffuse goals, and changes in the goals and their roles over time, as well as changes in the university and societal context.

# 5. DISCUSSION

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an opportunity for reflection and integration. Following from the initial questions raised in the Literature Review chapter, and the theoretical categories developed through the use of the grounded theory approach, together with additional reading, further synthesis and extension of the research findings is provided.

A secondary purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the usefulness to practitioners of this type of research, which is grounded in practice, and enables a continuation of the task outlined in the Methodology chapter of continual reflexiveness (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.62) for the practitioner.

The chapter is divided into ten sections. The first section is a reflection on the goals and objectives of equal opportunity officers' work that was illuminated through the research as they sought to impact on universities. This is followed by a section on the means for promoting organisational change that are available and acceptable to equal opportunity officers in the university setting. The third section extends the discussion of strategies of power and influence that can be used by equal opportunity officers in universities to achieve change. This is followed by an extended consideration of the role of equal opportunity officer and of its limitations. The value of the concept of culture for organisational change workers is then considered, and a reflection on the various theories about the mind of humanity that may underpin equal opportunity officers' ideas about their role follows. Finally, the impact of the research for equal opportunity officers, and for organisations is considered.

## 5.2 Goals and Objectives

For a deep evaluation of the impact that equal opportunity officers had on culture, the goals and objectives that they expressed need to be considered. Some participants in the research were aware that this was not a straightforward matter, and one spoke of asking her colleagues what success might look like.

In discussions of the practice of equal opportunity officers, participants in the research rarely defined their goals in terms of the broad dimensions of equal opportunity. Goals and objectives were usually described in terms of success in achieving project outcomes, even though they mentioned fairness, social justice, human rights, and structural disadvantage. These were however, generally spoken of as unproblematic terms: named as values with which all equal opportunity officers would agree, and were not defined further.

Within this large ambit of fairness, social justice and human rights, the objectives of cultural change were framed by equal opportunity officers. There was a lack of overt consideration of their higher level goals, and in particular whether they were consistent with one another, and whether they were consistent over time.

The Literature Review chapter cited the work of Poiner and Wills (1991) which focussed on employment equity, and particularly its distributional effects. However, as Callinicos noted, the history of equality has been of an ever broader compass, since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He wrote (2000, p.24) :

> Ideals that were intended initially to have a quite narrow reference, to benefit primarily white men of property, proved capable of indefinite extension.

This extension challenges equal opportunity officers to attempt to define their field, and their goals within it, or else to be subject to the practical consequences of indefinite extension. Participants in this research who spoke of the million things that could be done were perhaps voicing one practical consequence of this extension, as was another participant whose party trick was to ask a person for any topic so that she could demonstrate how it related to equal opportunity.

As Callinicos (2000), Dworkin (1981) and Sen (1992) have observed, debates about equality raise two central questions: why equality, and equality of what? There was evidence in this research that equal opportunity officers have concerned themselves with these questions. For example, at the 1999 conference of Equal Opportunity Practitioners in Higher Education, Professor Anne Salmond, an anthropologist and a senior university manager with an equity portfolio, posed the question; ‘Equal

Opportunity what does it mean?' and invited practitioners to consider the question as a matter of urgency. However, the remainder of the conference did not take up the topic, and the call for papers for the conference in 2001, listed twenty-two topics that once more addressed agenda items that indicated substantive goals, such as grievance processes, disability access audits, and children on campus policies. There appeared to be little space made by practitioners for overt discussion of this central conceptual issue.

Sen (1992, p.ix) wrote about the ethics of social arrangements that:

> …a common characteristic of virtually all the approaches to the ethics of social arrangements that have stood the test of time is to want equality of something….

Equality of something leaves plenty of space for entirely different social arrangements, so the notions of social justice that might underpin equality of opportunity are required to narrow the field.

In this study, social justice was referred to by equal opportunity officers as among the values that were central to their work. Their emphasis on social justice, while there was no overt analysis of the philosophical positioning that they used, fits well with Rawls' (1971, p.4) normative social contractarian approach that proposed a set of principles for choosing between various social arrangements and agreeing on distributive arrangements that is based on a premise that, if one did not know one's original position in the social arrangements, one could derive a set that was fair.

In considering what constituted social justice, Fraser (2000, p.83) further unravelled the concept by definition of two types of justice: redistributive justice and cultural or symbolic justice. According to Fraser, redistributive justice has a socio-economic basis and attempts to deal with phenomena such as exploitation, economic marginalisation and deprivation. This is relevant for equal opportunity officers because much of the work that they do deals with redistributive justice. To take some examples provided by participants in this research, strategies of presence, such as targeting proportionality of workers or students in a particular group, fall within this

category of redistributive justice. Another example can be found in policies, such as wage equity accorded by equal pay for work of equal value. The success of redistributive efforts provide a relatively straightforward measure of the impact of equal opportunity officers on universities.

This raises a question as to whether strategies that are based on redistributive justice amount to cultural change. Changes to behaviour, such as paying equal wages for work of equal value can of course be successful as a result of straightforward compliance, and compliance is a reaction to power (Etzioni 1975, pp.4-14). Later writers on organisational culture (Pepper 1995, p.41), also thought that behavioural change was not the same as cultural change, and that a person may change behaviour simply to avoid management's intervention. According to Pepper, true cultural change involves the workers exhibiting the changed behaviour without thinking about it, because it has become part of the way they do things. While this may be difficult to test, it could be said that once behaviour becomes part of the way things are done, then the cultural practices have changed. Indications of this kind of change having occurred in universities came from remarks of participants in this research about the overt nature of past resistance. For example one participant reported that an equal opportunity officer in the public sector had received a death threat, and more than one participant reported on the furore surrounding policies on non-discriminatory language use. They remarked on these difficulties in the course of observing that things had changed over the years, with greater acceptance of their presence within institutions, and changes to language use that were scarcely the subject of controversy any longer.

The effects of redistributive strategies that provide employment or educational places for people in particular groups is subject to many complex effects, as participants in this research verified. They spoke, for example, of women in management positions who made no efforts to support the entry of other women, or worse, some who were beneficiaries of redistributive justice who caused difficulties for others in the same equity group. This caused participants the difficulty of acknowledging that the impact of their success in efforts of redistributive justice, could lead to an environment where the overall social justice had declined, and that therefore their net impact on the university culture may have been negative.

In an analysis of the changes that had occurred in equal employment opportunity activity in universities since the enactment of legislation and the development of programs from the 1980s to the 1990s, Reed (1995 pp.169-175) identified a shift in the work of equal opportunity from policies that conformed with the law to those that sought to make cultural change. Not all participants in this research had identified this change of priority for themselves, and some maintained a definition of their work in terms of conforming with the law and dealing with discriminatory behaviour.

There has been significant amount of structural change within universities in the last decade, which has meant that some equal opportunity officers have had to attempt to deal with these changes and their attendant distributive impacts. In a relatively turbulent environment, attention to matters of cultural change may have become displaced by a need to consider the distributive impacts of structural change, even for those equal opportunity officers who had turned their focus to cultural change.

For those research participants who identified cultural change as an objective, their work was concerned with both redistributive justice and with the second type of social justice identified by Fraser (2000, p.83) as cultural or symbolic justice. According to Fraser, within this definition, injustice is rooted in patterns of representation, interpretation and communication.

Fraser gave examples:

> Examples include cultural domination (being subjected to patterns of interpretation and communication that are associated with another culture and are alien/hostile to one's own); non-recognition (being rendered invisible via the authoritative representational, communicative, and interpretative practices of one's own culture); and disrespect (being routinely maligned or disparaged in stereotypic public cultural representations and/or everyday interactions).

Strategies that participants in this research used to deal with these types of social injustice included such measures as inclusive/non-discriminatory language policies,

and identifying non-recognition, for instance by identifying and naming who was not being part of a discussion.

Fraser also noted that redistributive and cultural forms of social injustice were intertwined, but thought that it was worthwhile drawing a distinction between them in order to be able to characterise accurately the different kind of remedy required. Participants in this research held elements of both definitions of social injustice in their frame of reference, and carried a tension between them as they tried to balance and prioritise their work. For instance they may have had to decide whether to emphasise the presence of women throughout all levels of university employment which is a strategy to achieve redistributive justice, or whether to spend their efforts in strategies to address cultural injustice, such as through diversity awareness training programs.

There is not only a question about balance and priority for equal opportunity officers, but also the possibility of an inherent contradiction between redistributive and cultural social justice. As noted above, the effect of a successful distributive effort can be negative for the culture of the university in general.

Another central question about equality concerns equality of what. The nomenclature of the role of participants in this research as equal opportunity officers places emphasis on providing the opportunity for people to make the most of their capacities. This emphasis is however, unstable, and some equal opportunity officers have changed the names of their units to Equity and Diversity, or Equity and Social Justice, which indicates that there are other aspects of equality that had come to be considered as part of their agenda.

Equality of opportunity consorts well with the Australian idea of the ‘fair go’, the contextual myth identified in the Findings chapter that continues to resonate through Australian public policy and comment. Under this construction, the world and its values are not changed, but measures are taken to try to produce a level playing field for people to participate. Thus the equality of opportunity under this definition is the opportunity to compete for the same goals that the majority of the population is

striving for. In universities this may be graduation for students, and career progression for staff. It can fairly be described as an assimilationist goal.

In universities, equal opportunity is overlaid with a meritocratic framework that emphasises intellectual performance within an already established set of scholarly traditions, and within already established fields of knowledge. While the traditions change, and the knowledge fields change also, equality of chances to maximise success in this meritocratic framework is still the opportunity to succeed in terms of the status quo. Harding (1999, pp.113-122) questioned this approach by situating the concept of merit within neo-classical economics, and characterising it as a troublesome concept because it was predicated on individualistic and competitive economic and organisational theories that gave little credence to the complexities of social reproduction and hegemony.

This research analysed the various outcomes of equal opportunity officers' work. While linking outcomes to goals was not regarded by participants as straightforward, the reported outcomes provided some frameworks for the definition of equality that could be inferred.

A significant type of outcome identified by participants was concerned with presence or redistributive justice. The underlying assumption of the Australian affirmative action legislation for women could be interpreted as predicated on the idea that, in the absence of discrimination, women (in the instance of this legislation) would be evenly distributed through the workforce, and the work of the equal opportunity officer was to plan and set targets to achieve this objective. This type of assumption about presence was then extended by equal opportunity officers and government agencies to other groups of people defined as equity groups or target groups. This emphasis on redistributive justice as numbers tended to be lead to an objectification of the group in question, as the objects of equal opportunity officers' work, rather than as subjects, as colleagues or as clients. This is particularly noticeable when a group constructed from heterogeneous cultural groupings, such as the grouping of people into 'non-English language background'. This may itself be a consequence of the rational-planning approach to change that was evident in the first Australian Affirmative Action Act for women, and then adopted and extended by equal opportunity officers.

There is another issue that is problematic with regard to objectives of presence and redistributive justice. A structural problem can occur through the success of increasing numbers of minority groups, together with an increase in the number of identified target groups for presence, and a consequent decrease in the proportional size of groups. A consequence of this decrease would then be that the problems identified by Kanter (1977, pp.207-245) as associated with being a token intensified, and the tendency to assimilationist models for equal opportunity increased. This effect, in the absence of other efforts to change the culture, supports the thesis that strategies of presence promote assimilationist models of cultural change. There would then be a consequent tension between assimilationist models and those that result from analyses of culture that emphasise heterogeneity and difference (Cox 1994, Bhabha 1994, Hage 1998), and which regard difference as inevitable, and organisational culture as negotiable (Cox 1994).

In addition, the logic for inclusion of some groups as targets of presence and not others is questionable. To take an example used earlier, age is a category in which there is evidence of discrimination, of both the young worker, and the worker aged over 45, but it does not appear to be a target for presence, though occasionally a political commentator may comment on the ageing Australian population and implications for finances if they are pushed, or decide to leave the workforce early of their own accord.

The choice of groups for strategies of presence is largely dependent on successful political lobbying, together with some moral positioning about which groups are more deserving.

Another outcome of cultural change efforts reported by participants in this research was of policy and practice changes. Examples of this type of outcomes included: policy on the rights and obligations of workers and employers in work and family and the institution of practices such as inclusive language policies. These reflect an address more to matters of cultural domination, to use Fraser's terminology. These changes also illustrate a more general goal of social justice that includes providing different treatment for staff on the basis of their different circumstances. The impact

that these changes have on university culture are relatively indirect, but may over time be significant.

The cultural change agendas that foreground diversity were a source of tension for some participants in this research. There were two issues raised that indicated this tension. One was in regard to the ongoing significant need for redistributive redress for particular groups, and a concern that foregrounding diversity potentially diluted the particular needs of equity groups. This problem was highlighted with regard to policy for Indigenous Australian people where the policy of assimilation shifted to a policy of self-determination with no accompanying resources (Kalantzis, Cope and Howard 1997, p.10). Another was a concern that the cultural diversity agenda had been too closely aligned in Australian universities with the income-earning potential of international students. Bacchi has noted a trend to link the language of diversity to a commitment to increase the number of international students (2001, p.123).Whether cultural diversity and corporate objectives could be meshed to provide a productive and equitable future, was a question posed by Peters (1999, pp.166-172), and also recently by Bacchi in the university context (2001, pp.119-135). In Britain the celebration of diversity was criticised as 'static' in comparison with the active pursuit of 'anti-racist practice' (Woodward and Ross 2000, p.55).

The complexity of multiple identities experienced by participants is a fact of cultural life. Considerations of cultural diversity provide a theoretical framework that allows for an escape from a concentration on single-issue identity. This was noted in the Literature Review chapter. In particular, Itzen and Newman (1995, p.120) expressed the view that the exploration of ambiguities and tensions consequent on the acknowledgment of multiple social identities enabled a shift from the politics of social class, to the emergence of political movements based on combinations of identities. These authors were also cautious because they saw that perspectives that foreground diversity could lead to fragmentation of power (1995, p.121). Their emphasis on the primacy of social class has less resonance in Australia, and was not a group referred to by participants in this research, though the student equity group of 'low socio-economic background' makes some slight referral to it.

With regard to cultural diversity, Australia's emphasis on multiculturalism has the potential to look in two opposite directions, to the politics of assimilation, or the politics of difference. The assimilationist possibilities of multiculturalism are evident in the broader political sphere, in which the consequences of globalisation have been increasingly criticised for the tendency to homogeneity and the commodification that follows from adoption of business models based on predominantly North American cultural practices (Brooks and Mackinnon 2001, p.15). This is a common source of unease, and may also contribute to the unease expressed by some equal opportunity officers about agendas of cultural diversity. It has also been thought possible that globalisation, like multiculturalism, could also work in the other direction; to increase hybridisation (Burbules and Torres 2000, p.15).

Whether their social justice goals were redistributive or were concerned with symbolic justice and cultural domination, the cultural change sought by participants in this research did not constitute a major challenge to power. Their goal was not in this sense politically motivated. They were generally not comfortable with the idea of seeking to use their own power or to extend it. They were also very conscious that their objectives had to be negotiated through management.

Holding a goal in mind as these negotiations took place within a context of structural change, that included changes of managers, took some tenacity. More than one participant spoke of the need for a long-term focus, and a continuous 're-badging' to maintain the relevance of the goal and its alignment with the current strategic directions. Their impact on culture was therefore long-term and evolutionary.

Participants in this study were concerned with whether the cultural change objectives that they had achieved were stable and maintainable. Some participants thought that they were vulnerable and they had concerns about regression in the light of changes within the university or the higher education environment more generally. For change to be designated as cultural change, it has to be at least relatively stable over time, so achievement of a goal may not be identifiable once and for all.

The idea of the final goal or endpoint for equal opportunity officers having been achieved once everyone within the university understood and took responsibility for

equal opportunity in their own workplaces, did not appear to participants in this study to have arrived. There were some indications in the opposite direction; of a lowered status of the goals of equal opportunity in universities. This was evidenced by participants who observed that restructure processes had tended to centralise power, following which they found themselves lower in the hierarchy with more levels of management above them. They also referred to the trend for universities to imitate one another as they increasingly adopted business models into higher education. This trend is supported by the research of Marginson and Considine (2000, pp.6, 45,131). This tendency would be likely to lower their opportunities to impact on university cultures.

With regard to the idea that there was an end point for equal opportunity work, Durham and Miles (1995, pp.138-146), while adhering to the idea that an endpoint was a possibility, were highly sceptical about how far universities had travelled towards it. They wrote in regard to affirmative action for women:

> Despite the progress being made in the universities, let's not get carried away with the rhetoric that EO people and units automatically have a sunset clause. Universities are further along the continuum of AA than other organisations but they are still a long way from the end point. It is important therefore that universities identify and safeguard the progress they have made in the field of AA. One way of doing this is to accept that changes in the workplace go deeper than improved statistics, ie the number of women at all levels. Significant and long-lasting change must reflect a cultural shift towards women's full and active participation, an inclusion of women-centred perspectives, and a re-evaluation of masculinist hegemonies found throughout the social fabric.

The possible endpoint described by Durham and Miles was described in cultural terms, and so even though participants in this research observed that women as a group had been fairly successful and capable of 'matching' the cultural expectations of the men in universities, there was still a long way to go. For other groups who are either less numerous or more different from the group in power, the objective remains further from realisation.

In addition to their perception of lowered status, and an Australia-wide trend in universities to centralisation of power to executive groups, participants in this research had experienced an increased diffusion of their task. This was evident both through the changes of their type of work from attempting to assist in compliance to attempting to change culture, and also through the increased numbers of groups on whose behalf they were expected to act, together with the agendas that foregrounded general practices to encompass diversity.

As the goals and objectives become more diverse and diffuse, and as their capacity for influence decreased, some equal opportunity officers attempted to imitate the universities' imperative of seeking sources of funding that would provide some level of independence and extra resources to bring to their task. This comprised seeking external grant money for research or projects.

In summary, the research indicated that the goals of equal opportunity officers were increasingly diffuse, and sometimes unclear or mutually contradictory. Also the field of operations for their goals appears to have been subject to almost indefinite expansion. At the same time, their relative position in the university organisation has remained the same or has been displaced downward in the hierarchy as universities tend to follow business models in centralising power and influence. From this it can be seen that the description of the task for equal opportunity officers as ‘endless’ by one of the participants was very apt.

### 5.3 Acceptable Means for Cultural Change: A Balancing Act

The goals and objectives of equal opportunity officers in leading cultural change were revealed through this research to be complex, diffuse, and in addition, sometimes one goal could be in conflict with another.

This research considered the question of the processes that equal opportunity officers used in going about the work of changing culture within universities. Underlying that task, and one of the questions of the research, concerned what values affected the processes of cultural change. These values then formed the basis on which equal

opportunity officers were able to decide which means for cultural change were available and acceptable to them.

The results of the research revealed aspects of the moral world inhabited by equal opportunity officers, and the ways in which their values determined or limited the means that they used to bring about cultural change in the university. This overt emphasis on moral and value positions contrasts with some other research on change in academia. For example, Conrad's (1987, pp.101-112) grounded theory research on academic change gave strong emphasis to the contextual, political and power aspects of change, but did not report any emphasis on values, except the value of collegiality, which was reported as a tool to delegitimise opposition.

A major reason for the employment of equal opportunity officers in organisations including universities was the requirement for organisations to respond to the various anti-discrimination laws enacted in Australia since the 1970's. The anti-discrimination legislation enacted rights for women and some minorities to be free from certain types of discrimination.

In giving effect to this legislation, equal opportunity officers first took on the task of attempting to ensure compliance. They did this in a variety of ways, including: through investigation of complaints; through provision of information; through training, and through analysis of university policies and processes which resulted in suggesting changes to policy or processes that could be regarded as discriminatory. Such straightforward administrative and rational processes can lead to sufficient change to address direct discrimination, or the harmful effects of treating a person less favourably because of one of the proscribed bases, such as sex, or race or disability.

The situation became more complex for equal opportunity officers when they were obliged to consider effects that can be construed as indirect discrimination. Indirect discrimination refers to a policy or a practice that on the face of it, treats people equally, but which in its effect has a disproportionate and deleterious outcome for any of the groups for which discrimination is proscribed by legislation. The famous illustrative case of this in Australia was the Banovic case (*Australian Iron and Steel Pty. Ltd. V. Banovic & Anor. 1989 EOC*), in which a redundancy policy, which

prescribed ‘last on first off’, was found to have indirectly discriminated against women, as the reason they were ‘last on’ in the job was a previous direct discrimination that had prevented them from working in a particular area of the company’s operation.

If equal opportunity officers are to be able to consider policies or practices that may be indirectly discriminatory, there is a requirement for them to consider all of the policies and practices of an organisation, and then to seek to have them changed if they are likely to be a problem. While this may seem similar to the straightforward administrative and rational processes that were required to deal with direct discrimination, the large-scale consideration and critique of organisational policy and practice gave equal employment officers a significantly increased area of operation and indicated a need to move beyond behavioural change and more into the arena of cultural change. The impact that participants in this research could have was limited by the amount of access they had to decision-making processes, or their ability, to get a ‘foot in the door’, and also by the needs to balance and prioritise their time.

Once the law established rights, part of the role of equal employment officers was to uphold them, and they were also involved in the work of investigation of possible breaches of rights, as well as explanation and training about what the rights were. All equal employment officers are committed to upholding the rights that are protected through legislation. In this sense they are conservative and their change processes do not include the revolutionary. Some participants of the research displayed an attitude that indicated they wanted wrongdoers punished if they did not respect these legislated rights, which clashed with their educational purpose to bring people to a full understanding of these rights through developing understanding. This was a source of internal conflict. Other participants took the view that they regarded any punishment as an inevitable consequence of the wrongdoer’s actions, and so it formed part of the university’s response, in which they therefore had no necessary direct interest. Equal employment officers’ attitudes to punishment reveals that a rights-based approach, which is based in legislation and predicated on complaint and judgement, does not tell the whole story of their moral world.

The possibility of a different basis for moral decision-making was considered by Gilligan (1993). In her analysis of narrative responses to visual presentations of sources of moral conflict, she found a difference in the moral evaluations of men and women. Her work was begun because of her concerns about the implicit adoption of maleness as the norm, which led Freud, among others, to characterise women as having less of a sense of justice than men, and thus led to problematising women's moral life as less developed than men's. Gilligan found differences in the responses of men and women to moral dilemmas, in that men tended to see a danger in connection, whereas women saw danger in separation. Her book, *In a Different Voice*, referred to the different voice that was characterised, not necessarily by gender, but by theme. However, she made a generalised observation that women tended to think that care makes the world safe, while men tended to think that rules and limits did. Gilligan (1993, p.164) proposed that:

> These different perspectives are reflected in two different moral ideologies, since separation is justified by an ethic of rights, while attachment is supported by an ethic of care.

For equal employment officers, whose existence and legitimacy is strongly linked to rights-based legislation, the role would seem to suit men rather than women. However, the role is predominantly filled by women, which leads to the question of whether the 'different voice' proposed by Gilligan was evident through the work of equal employment officers, and if so, how it affected their work in cultural change.

Gilligan (1993, p.65) asserted that it was often the case that for women, a moral person is one who helps others and appears uncertain about his or her right to make moral judgement. For participants in this research there did not seem to be a hesitation about making moral judgement, but more an unwillingness to be the direct agent of any punishment that might be part of a system to impose compliance. There was a belief held by some participants that it was the non-conforming behaviour that led to its own punishing consequences, which removed equal employment officers from the responsibility for providing punishment.

In addition, one participant described herself as being 'forgiving', that is, she was not uncertain about a moral judgement, but was prepared to give people another chance. Some participants also thought that they needed to realise that people were not necessarily consistently for or against the equal opportunity agenda. They reported that people may, in one dimension have discriminatory views, while in another might be very supportive. In other words, the moral judgement was not of the person as a totality, but was particularised to behaviour in different dimensions. Their own strong sense of the value of fairness was supported by this way of dealing with people. It was also practical in that it allowed the building of networks and coalitions of interest that was an activity identified in the Findings chapter for gaining support for different parts of their equal opportunity agenda.

Equal opportunity officers displayed their attachment to what Gilligan described as an ethic of care in the way they performed their roles. For example, some of them sought to make cultural change to the workplace through practices that reduced conflict and encouraged harmony. They also conveyed empathy for individuals and groups who had suffered, either through their previous life circumstances, or through events in the workplace. Gilligan's work has been described as positioning of the moral self which is defined by its historical connections and relationships (Blum 1988, pp.474-475), and her portrayal of 'the moral agent as approaching the world bound by ties and relationships…not wholly of the agent's own making' mean that they '…cannot be pictured on a totally voluntarist or contractual model.' This description provides some of the complex texture of moral positionings that equal opportunity officers experienced.

Staff who try to take care of others in the workplace, and to mitigate suffering caused by the workplace, were researched by Frost and Robinson (1999, pp.97-106). Their investigation was concerned with staff, usually managers in organisations, who took on a task that they characterised as 'toxic handlers'. They observed that these 'toxic handlers' provided compassionate listening, soothing words and protection, and that this was a particularly needed function because of two major trends for organisations in recent years. These trends were identified as change initiatives and downsizing. They noted that while such transformations had created shareholder value, they also caused confusion, fear and anguish among employees. Their research demonstrated

that ‘toxic handlers’ provided a necessary function, often at the expense of their own health. Equal opportunity officers in adopting an ethic of care may also perform the function of ‘toxic handlers’ for universities, with its attendant stress. The Findings chapter identified that their work with individuals who had complaints could be a source of impact on a university culture. In the ‘toxic handler’ role it was a conservative one, though it was identified as a source of empowerment for others, and also as a source of insights about areas in need of systemic evaluation.

With regard to balancing an ethic of rights with an ethic of care, Gilligan (1993, p.149) wrote:

> ‘A consciousness of the dynamics of human relationships then becomes central to moral understanding, joining the heart and the eye in an ethic that ties the activity of thought to the activity of care’.

This study provided evidence that this tying the activity of thought to the activity of care was what some equal opportunity officers sought to do. Of course, the balance of rights-based or cares-based approach may vary because of personal differences between equal opportunity officers. It is arguable that it contributes to the stress of the role, as equal opportunity officers attempted both to balance rights, and to consider care as they developed a cultural change agenda.

### 5.3.1 The Place of Values in Cultural Change

The Findings chapter identified that personal values provided a significant reason why participants had entered equal opportunity work. It also identified that they shared some values which were prevalent in the broader university culture.

The shared values of the university can be a source of either assistance or impediment to workers, such as equal opportunity officers, in considering the acceptable, appropriate and ethical means by which they moved towards their goals in cultural change.

The Literature Review chapter identified some of the values that have been a traditional part of university life. Harman (1989, pp.30-54) wrote of these as 'shared commitments and common ideals'. There have been considerable changes in higher education since Harman's article, (Ramsden 1998, Martin 1999, Marginson and Considine 2000, Gallagher 2000), but participants in this research demonstrated their continuing commitment to some of the traditional university values and ideals, even as they were regarded by some with cynicism, and by some as useful myths.

The major shared commitments that have been identified in universities are: academic freedom; collegiality; autonomy, and professionalism (Ramsden 1998, pp.22-28).

According to Ramsden, academic freedom in its strongest form implies the absolute right to pursue the truth wherever it may lead, uninfluenced by 'management and accountable only to the community of scholars' (1998, p.25). For equal opportunity officers, a consequence of the assertion of this right by academic staff is the requirement for them to be equal to the task of convincing staff in various disciplines and with differing opinions, that the changes to culture that they seek to institute are consistent with, and not a challenge to, academic freedom. To the extent that the strong form of academic freedom exists in a particular part of a university, managerial prerogative will not be acceptable and will be ineffective in impacting on culture. It is therefore a different task to that of equal opportunity officers in private firms or government departments, in which there is a higher level of expectation that hierarchy will be able to impose conformity. In universities, in spite of the increase in centralised management power, there is still a greater need to argue each part of the change agenda, or to find ways, through research results or other means acceptable in the university, to demonstrate the need for change. The impact may be a greater commitment to the change once made, but the effort involved is likely to be greater.

Participants in this research also referred to the value of collegiality, which at its most elevated is the unselfish collaboration of a group of scholars in shared decision making. One participant spoke of collegiality as a myth that veiled power plays and the influence of groups and cliques. However, there is in universities at least a structure for collegially shared decision-making. While the process of making change through such structures can be very time-consuming, and can lead to dilution of the

equal opportunity agenda, it also can result in a sense of ownership once the decision is taken. The impact of changes made within strongly-held values positions is likely therefore to be more robust and long-lasting.

Pepper (1995, p.39) raised as a problem about cultural change whether it was ethical to try to alter other people's values. From time to time there have been outcries about social engineering with regard to affirmative action strategies, and generalised complaints about 'political correctness' also indicate that this is a source of unease for many. The university value of rationally-based argument and the structures to allow discussion both provide a mechanism to defuse this concern. On the other hand the increase in executive management, while it may add speed and force to cultural change, raises the anxiety about the imposition of practices based in values that have been imposed and have not been accepted. For equal opportunity officers, a quick result gained by negotiating an agenda through executive management may limit its impact in the culture.

The first allegiance and source of professionalism for academics has been in their discipline expertise (Becher 1989, Gerhorn 1990, Parry 1998), though there are signs that this has been changing (Coaldrake and Stedman, 1999). Ramsden (1998) argued that an allegiance to a discipline produced a professional culture which regarded management as interference. Consequently, techniques related to quality management have been difficult for universities to implement. There are somewhat the same difficulties for equal opportunity changes if they are seen to be interfering with the professional values that were discipline-based, and some participants in this research were aware of the usefulness of having some acquaintance with the language and ethos of various disciplines in order to have persuasive impact.

This research demonstrated that equal opportunity officers shared some of their values with other parts of the university community. This was valuable as shared values provided access to relatively direct means of implementing cultural change.

### 5.3.2 Rationality/Emotion

Most equal opportunity officers used organisational change techniques that were

based on the rational-planning approach commonly used in organisations.

In addition, some deliberately used emotional approval through reward, approbation and congratulation, to acknowledge and reinforce efforts by others to change culture. They sometimes conveyed an impression of the emotional warmth of this approval as they spoke of the way they indicated their positive regard to their colleagues. Some participants also emphasised forgiveness. Some participants seemed to use the emotions in a more conscious and deliberate way than others, from whom the warmth may have been a general characteristic of their own personality. This use of emotion could be thought of as persuasion by non-rational means, and therefore regarded as an unethical manipulation. On the other hand, the bringing of the whole force of the person into play in the process of influence and persuasion is a standard political skill, which may be used in the pursuit of worthy ends. Different equal opportunity officers seemed to be more or less willing than others to use this kind of non-rational means to achieve their ends of cultural change.

### 5.3.3 Leadership/representation

Another ethical question raised by this research concerns the emphasis by some participants on leading cultural change as opposed to representing and implementing change that had been agreed to either outside the university, for instance in legislation, or inside the university. Research participants were of the view that their work allowed a considerable amount of autonomy, so there was an element of individual preference that equal opportunity officers could use in this regard, and it was evident that some did opt for leadership, while others did not.

### 5.3.4 Means to Bring About Cultural Change

In the course of this research, participants illustrated opinions about the means that might be used to bring about cultural change. This is summarised in the table below:

**Table 2. Summary of Means to Bring About Cultural Change**

| | |
|---|---|
| Some means are unavailable | Pragmatism |
| Some means are unpalatable, but important to reach some ends | Political realism |
| Some means are not proper to use | Morally vetoed |
| Some means should be used | Best practice |
| Some means should be used | Moralist |

Throughout the course of the interviews, participants demonstrated an active concern with questions about means. They engaged in seeking a balance between pragmatism and ideals to a degree that may be shared by other professions, for instance counsellors and medical professionals, but is less commonly required of administrative roles that are more prescriptive about means and operate within a more bureaucratic framework, at least up to a senior level. This freedom of action and balancing with regards to the means they used requires that equal opportunity officers have a clear grasp of ethical and values-based issues as they fulfil their role. It is particularly important when they have to deal with individuals and groups of people, sometimes in tense situations, when there are inherent ethical questions of some complexity.

For equal opportunity officers, knowing one's ethical positions had not been a result of specific training for the role, so the knowledge came from other sources. For some participants in the research, it was early childhood recollections about justice and injustice, for others it was their education, particularly their university studies, and for some it came from the clear ethical requirements of their professional base.

The means equal opportunity officers used were framed by a mixture of rights-based and care-based ethical approaches, supported by values that could be shared by others in the organisation, and limited by pragmatism and political realism, or vetoed by moral concerns.

## 5.4 Strategies of Influence, Power and Legitimacy

The following section discusses the operation of influence, power and legitimacy as they affected the work of equal opportunity officers in bringing about cultural change in universities.

### 5.4.1 'Picking the Pitch': Influence

The central conceptual category identified in the Findings chapter of this research was identified as 'picking the pitch.' Picking the pitch involved finding ways to get an agenda for organisational change noticed and agreed to, usually by senior managers. A pitch is a place to set down one's goods, a metaphor for the agenda, and a place to station oneself for selling. Picking the pitch formed part of an internal process of influence that equal opportunity officers used to display their wares to advantage. The wares were related to their task of bringing about cultural change. These were not necessarily of immediate interest to senior managers, whose horizons would be predominantly externally focussed on the competitive higher education environment, or on imitation of the activities of other universities that has been characterised as isomorphism (Marginson and Considine 2000, p.5, p.176). The metaphor of 'picking the pitch' can also be interpreted as getting the tone: finding the resonances with senior managers who have direct power. The ability of participants to 'pick the pitch' was a significant factor in their impact on a university culture.

Equal opportunity officers knew that they could lobby directly if they thought that a direct pitch would be acceptable to the relevant manager. It was reported by some participants that there were some senior managers who regarded themselves as committed to equal opportunity, and that in this situation, the agenda could be raised with those managers directly. Influence used in this way can be described as an appeal to values.

In circumstances in which managers were not judged to be obviously committed to equal opportunity, participants observed that they needed to consider the manager's way of doing things, and to cast a proposal accordingly. To propose the agenda in terms of the manager's way of doing things required close observation. For instance, one manager's style was to 'sneak up on people', rather than to lead from the front,

and the equal opportunity officer, to be most effective in influencing this manager, would be required to craft strategies accordingly. Influence used in this way is an alignment of the agenda with the philosophy and style of the senior manager. It is a tactic to maintain rapport and can be characterised as partly an appeal to maintaining the 'face' of managers (Spencer-Oatey 2000, p.2).

Some senior managers would not of their own volition consider the link between equal opportunity and their own strategic priorities, and in this circumstance, an equal opportunity officer, in addition to appealing to the 'face' of managers, would sometimes attempt to make the link by putting a proposal in terms of the university or sectional strategic direction. This can be described as an appeal to interests.

As a way of managing a change agenda, these attempts to pitch an agenda through various tactics of appeal, to values, to interests, and to 'face', are all indirect. Such a way of working differs from standard strategies for the management of change. These tend to derive from mainstream organisational theory, and emphasise a rational model of the organisation (Reed 1995, pp.169-174). They concentrate either on the position of the leader or top managers to undertake the task (Schein 1990, Deal and Kennedy 1982), or the variations of an approach that involves bringing in consultants, doing surveys and using project-based methodologies, that have been used since at least the 1970s (Trice and Beyer 1993, p.31).

The indirect approach used by equal opportunity officers required greater watchfulness, and an ability to scan the organisational environment, and to seize opportunities as they appeared. These were sometimes small opportunities that needed to be grasped quickly and aligned with the broader equal opportunity agenda. The indirect approach to achieving influence for a particular agenda does not replace the rationally-based approaches. Equal opportunity officers were very familiar with using organisational program planning. However, techniques of influence sometimes preceded or augmented this approach.

The success of 'picking the pitch' and its attendant techniques of influence relies to a considerable degree on both the personal attributes and the interpersonal skills of the equal opportunity officers. Participants in this study often provided evidence that they

had a strong awareness of the areas of communication that have been identified as relevant to building rapport: those of tact; generosity; approbation; modesty; agreement, and sympathy (Spencer-Oatey 2000, p.33).

A rapport-enhancing approach is also a kind of flirtation with the powerful; through dealing with an agenda indirectly, and through playing to the wishes and plans of the senior managers. This raises the question of whether there is a gendered relationship between predominantly female equal opportunity officers and predominantly male senior managers.

Gherardi (1995) explored the 'symbolic order' of gender in organisations, and considered how gender relations are culturally and discursively produced and reproduced. Her focus was on the relationship between gender, power, and culture in organisations. She raised the issue of organisational theories that claimed to be gender neutral, while there remained an implicit subtext in the literature which assumed that managers were men with virile characteristics. Another subtext she identified was that organisations were the symbolic locus of production, while the home was the locus of reproduction, so organisations were places for men, and homes were places for women. She noted that there had been feminist critique of traditional organisational theory which targeted this purported neutrality, which was in fact gendered and perpetuated male domination and gender-based social inequality.

Gherardi's analysis is also supported by Sinclair's work in Australia. Sinclair (1998, p.2) wrote:

> ...there is a close but obscured connection between constructs of leadership, traditional assumptions of masculinity and a particular expression of male heterosexual identity.

Sinclair also observed that women were good at negotiating culture because it has been necessary for them, as people in less powerful positions within organisations. This point was supported by More (1999, pp.53-62), who observed that for women managers:

> …working with men means finding ways to manage, lead and perform professionally that will not threaten male egos, make them uncomfortable and that will, somehow, be fitted in to the still prevalent stereotypes of male success and leadership to which men, and indeed many women, still cling.

Hearn (2001, p.69) asserted that universities are themselves gendered organisations, which supports Burton's (1997) analysis of gender equity in Australian university staffing.

Sinclair's work indicates a hegemonic masculinity of workplace culture, and of managers in particular. Hegemony, a concept identified by Gramsci, is defined as a combination of force and consensus (May 1996, p.42), and operates to define and monitor the maintenance of advantage for a particular group, in this case men. Under conditions of hegemony, what presents itself as common sense is symptomatic of ideological distortion.

A practical consequence of a gendered workplace that advantages men would be that the preponderance of women in equal opportunity roles would assist in maintaining the status quo both structurally and culturally, even as the individual women concerned attempted to make change. The self-selection of women into equal opportunity positions, and the paucity of men, can thus be interpreted as a mechanism of hegemony in action, where the relation of men managers to women equal opportunity officers is maintained by both. In circumstances of hegemony, the likely impact in organisations will be small.

Bourdieu (1992, p.168) analysed relations of power in a different way. He asserted that they were not necessarily deliberately manufactured, as Gramsci had posited, but that they arose out of the structures of perception that are inherent in the way a social world is structured. He wrote:

> Legitimation of the social order is not the product of a deliberate and purposive action of propaganda or symbolic imposition; it results, rather from the fact that agents apply to the objective structures of the social world structures of

> perception and appreciation which are issued out of these very structures and which tend to picture the world as evident.

Whether they are deliberatively hegemonic, or as Bourdieu asserted, they are predispositional, the effects of these mechanisms are played out in the equal opportunity role. For example, equal opportunity officers often fulfil duties that may characterise them as the secular and university manifestation of a role described in Summers as 'God's police' (1975, p.21), or, to use the terminology of one of the participants of the research, as the 'moral guardians' of the university. The role of 'God's police' in Summers' book, was for women, who were expected to keep wayward men under social control. The role of equal opportunity officers have been constructed to serve in this way through the design of policies and practices that have promoted certain values, for example fairness, equal opportunity, and conflict resolution, that can be seen as constraining the free play of the powerful, usually males.

Using Bourdieu's analysis this dilemma for women could be generalised and described in terms of the dominated, who always have to deal in terms of their own domination (1992, p.24). In this instance, women have been expected to be the supporters of goodness, and they serve the powerful by putting in place structures and processes that constrain the behaviour of all workers, including themselves, without seriously impacting on the powerful.

This analysis allows that a pattern of dominant/dominated relations, while it may be typically gender-patterned, is not necessarily so. Bourdieu's analysis permits consideration of the exceptional circumstance of women senior managers, and the even more exceptional circumstance of male equal opportunity officers.

A major prerequisite of using techniques of pitching to someone else's agenda found through this research was that that the equal opportunity officers required particular personal attributes. The two that were identified were flexibility, and the ability to handle complexity. The requirement for flexibility was a trait identified by Deal and Kennedy (1982, p.166) as necessary for leading cultural change in organisations. For equal opportunity officers, the amount of flexibility they have is bounded by both

their commitment to certain values, such as fairness, and also by their adherence to certain processes. Thus they had some of the necessary attributes for leading cultural change, while on the other hand their values may serve to reduce their capacity to make an impact.

The need for managers to be able to handle complexity is a feature of many modern organisations. This research showed that equal opportunity officers also needed to be able to handle complexity. In particular, they needed to watch organisational developments, sometimes without being invited to participate in them. They had to find ways to participate, sometimes by putting their 'foot in the door', as one participant put it, and then being able to align or meld the equal opportunity agenda with the organisational developments that were occurring.

One consequence of pitching the agenda noted by participants was that of having to negotiate everything on a personal basis, which was very time-consuming, and placed a limit on the amount that they could achieve. There are structural reasons for this endless negotiation, as universities do not assign a large amount of direct power to these equal opportunity positions. There are also cultural reasons. The still-pervasive university value of collegiality, while partly a myth, and one that disguises power plays, nevertheless requires considerable debate and consultation with all areas of the university before binding decisions are made. In addition to this, some equal opportunity officers have their own personal or political values that are usually congruent with participatory decision making and so would wish to maintain a highly participatory mode, even if it delayed changes that they themselves wished to make.

Participants identified a dilemma for some equal opportunity officers in that there was a tendency of some equal opportunity officers to be 'moral crusaders'. Characteristic of this was that they would prefer to have little influence and be able to take the moral high ground, rather than to seem to be resiling from the high moral ground by attempting to pitch an agenda that would be agreed to by senior managers.

Some equal opportunity officers did not pitch an agenda. This was either because they lacked access to senior managers or decision-making groups, or because they were personally not comfortable with this way of initiating change. There was a sense for

some participants that the intensely personal effort required through pitching an agenda ought not to be necessary, and that the university should acknowledge the centrality of equal opportunity and management processes and should then embed them in practice. This is consistent with an approach observed by Wienecke (1991).

One equal opportunity officer who had tried to pitch an agenda to an unsympathetic management had eventually ceased attempting to do so, and worked more with sympathetic groups within the university. Equal opportunity officers who did not seek to pick a pitch to managers either worked with groups of like-minded staff and students to bring about change in more localised ways, or they tried to bring about change by using the rational-planning approach.

Whether or not to pitch an agenda to was a source of dilemma for practitioners. For example, some management agendas did not necessarily have any commitment to the same values as equal opportunity officers. Ideas of social justice or fairness were not easy to pitch to managers in this circumstance. Consequently, even if a project had some scope for advancing the equal opportunity agenda, erosion of the equity aspects of the agenda was a risk as the officer needed to align the agenda with that of management. The broad appeal to the idea of cultural diversity for example, was a site of particular dilemma. It may be pertinent for a senior university manager for reasons of income-generation because most directly fee-paying students in Australian universities come from overseas. The financial implications are obvious, but aligning the agenda in a way that emphasised the business advantages of diversity awareness could mean that aspects of social diversity that do not consort well with an improved bottom line may not be addressed with the same amount of vigour. In other words, there is a risk that the means may subvert the ends.

### 5.4.2 Influence: Individual Work

There was another type of influence work that was less proactive than pitching the agenda. It involved the equal opportunity officers' work in providing confidential advice to managers, students and staff, or to investigating claims of discrimination. This work was explicitly regarded by some participants as part of their cultural change work. In the course of this individual work they informed people about their rights,

suggested ways to negotiate rights, and tried to assist in the resolution of problems. Some believed that they were embodying a model for a preferred organisational culture.

The individual and confidential nature of this way of producing cultural change is consistent with the analysis of Goffman (1969, p.13), who described social interactions in terms of a dramatic exercise. From this followed the metaphors of 'stage management' and 'backstage work', in which specialists conceal the nature and evidence of their work. In the equal opportunity field, the work to be concealed was complaints and problems, and the backstage work was the work that equal opportunity officers did to resolve them without them being exposed, particularly outside the university. While concealment was not the aim of equal opportunity officers, it was frequently the result of this individual level of work.

Vaughan wrote that mistake, misconduct and disaster should not be regarded as 'anomalous events, but systemic products of complex structures and processes' (1999, pp.271-305). Universities are complex entities, so mistake, misconduct and disaster can therefore be expected. However, as Vaughan hypothesised, there were always efforts to keep these things from becoming public, as they conflicted with the general view that university staff had of universities as sites of rationality and collegiality. That universities are also sites of intense emotion is less often acknowledged. A consequence of this is that confidential handling of such events limits the scope of the cultural change that they engender. It does however provide scope for some role modelling to individuals on how mistakes can be dealt with. It also provided a source of information that could be used as a guide to equal opportunity officers' attempts to change culture in a more systemic way.

### 5.4.3 Representation

Another form of influence used by equal opportunity officers was through representation of others. One participant spoke of reminding others about who was not present, who was not sitting round the table, and this would sometimes result in changes to the composition of decision making bodies, which in turn brought about other kinds of cultural change.

The issue of speaking for others as a way of influencing cultural change is a source of dilemma for the role of equal opportunity officer. To speak of one's own disadvantage in an organisation can be read as a revelation of one's own weakness, or as a complaint. Either expression is not likely to lead to consideration for more senior roles, so it is not career-enhancing to speak of disadvantage. This type of problem in regard to women who are looking for a career track in organisations has been noted in the general press (*The Australian* 22/23 April 2000). Equal opportunity officers who seek to change culture through representing others thus find themselves in the bind of being unlikely to receive overt support from those on whose behalf they speak, and if they represent views of a group to which they belong, then they risk accusations of self-interested special pleading. This forms another limit to their power of influence.

All strategies of influence require constantly using one's personality as an instrument. As strategies for cultural change, strategies of influence are characterised by indirection, charisma, and persuasion by non-rational means. They constitute the hidden art of cultural change. They are also a source of emotional tension for those equal opportunity officers who have a preference for direct, Weberian rational-bureaucratic means of achieving cultural change.

### 5.4.4 Power

A more direct way to bring about organisational and cultural change, is to use the devices of power. The research provided an opportunity to determine whether equal opportunity officers used power to effect cultural change, and if so what were its sources, and where were its limitations.

A useful tool for analysing power was developed by French and Raven (1959), who described a typology of power that comprised five types. These were:

- Legitimate power: the right to prescribe or expect certain things of another because of role, status or situational circumstances
- Reward power: power over positive outcomes
- Coercive power: power over negative outcomes

- Expert power: special knowledge or expertise
- Referent power: the power from a person wanting to be like you

Of these five types of power, the value of legitimate power was clearly the strongest for equal opportunity officers. The importance of legitimate power was repeatedly emphasised by participants.

Without external legislation that legitimised the presence and work of the equal opportunity officers, most participants thought that their positions would not exist. This view was supported by Poiner and Wills (1991, p.84), who regarded it as a major effect of legislation. While compliance with legitimate power brings change, it does not necessarily result in cultural change, and while legislation provides a framework of rules, organisations may seek ways to minimise the effect of legislation if they decide that it limits their freedom of action.

In universities, this was sometimes expressed by research participants as a concern that universities were making concerted efforts to escape the requirements of various types of legitimate power through devices such as the creation of commercial entities, through outsourcing of tasks including staff selection, and through changes to governance that reduced the role of governing Councils and associated policy and decision-making bodies. In general, these moves would serve to enhance coercive and reward powers of organisations as they limited legislative powers. This in turn would impact on the amount of legitimate power that equal opportunity officers had.

With regard to coercive and reward types of power, equal opportunity officers were asked directly about whether they saw their work as involving reward or punishment. In terms of reward, some participants did not see themselves as having any power to reward. On the other hand, some had instituted internal equity awards as a way of rewarding good practice, and also as a way of changing the image of the section from one that had been perceived as punishing.

Some participants had discretionary funding, or the offer of places on training programs that they used as a reward. One participant, whose organisation had

received an external award said that she did not think much about reward as staff within her university were quite cynical about such awards. In other universities they were perceived as an important mark of senior recognition, and pursued vigorously. These internal cultural factors have thus an impact on the usefulness of power through reward.

The rewarding power of affirmation was used extensively by equal opportunity officers. This involved thanks, formal and informal; congratulation, and giving credit and publicity to others who demonstrated some change in the direction that was part of the equal opportunity officer's agenda.

In terms of punishment, or power over negative outcomes, it was clear that some equal opportunity officers thought that they were perceived as punishing, but they did not generally regard themselves as having the power to punish, nor did they seek it. Negative outcomes were seen as the consequences of a person's own actions, or was divested to other groups, such as the *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.* Sometimes when participants had to conduct an investigation, they observed that staff involved perceived the investigation process as in itself punishing.

The assertion of expert power for equal opportunity officers within universities was constrained by those in powerful positions. Expertise was challenged and attempts were made to circumvent it if the consequences were not palatable to those with positional power. One way in which this challenge was made manifest was in seeking external legal opinion after advice had been given based on an equal opportunity officer's knowledge of legislation. Because equal opportunity officers used their expertise in the interest of what they believed the legislation has been set up to do, their loyalty to the university was sometimes called into question.

In terms of referent power, equal opportunity officers did try to provide a role model by the ways in which they worked, for the type of organisational culture that they thought was consistent with equal opportunity and social justice. This source of power was most likely to be effective within the equal opportunity officers' own units.

### 5.4.5 The Academic Culture and Power

Academic freedom has been a long-standing central value to universities. The concept has been a much debated topic. At an idealistic level, it can be construed as the scholarly expert altruistically committed to high ideals of creation and transmission of knowledge, who should have unfettered freedom to pursue truth at all costs (Ramsden 1998, p.25). Allied to academic freedom is the concept of autonomy, or institutional self-determination.

These values do not consort well with the more coercive forms of power. For those universities that continued to articulate and attempted to order their organisation in terms of autonomy and academic freedom, they would be less amenable to coercive aspects of power. One participant in this study talked about not being able to make anyone do anything in her institution, and that because the sense of autonomy was still strong, change had to be effected by discussion and consensus. This strong sense of academic freedom and institutional autonomy is being eroded, though not without resistance (Prichard 2000, p.198), and much criticism, as staff in universities experience change to what is characterised as a more 'managerialist' or 'corporatist' way of operating (Vidovich and Currie 1998, p.197).

For equal opportunity officers, the concept of academic freedom provides the possibility of influence based on appeals to common values, but with limited power. The more 'managerialist' a university becomes, the more power can be brought to bear, but the greater the task for equal opportunity officers of persuading the powerful to incorporate equal opportunity into their agendas.

Of course, universities are not monolithic. They have been characterised as 'loosely-coupled' systems (Weick 1976, pp.1-9). In particular, strong differences between academic disciplines still exist and have implications for management and for cultural change. The strength of the academic discipline, the rupture and creation of new disciplines, has been part of the ongoing political enterprise within universities. It can make use of all of the power types in French and Raven's taxonomy, and presents a particular challenge for equal opportunity officers. As different disciplines use different language and sources and expertise, a culture with strong disciplines will

tend to be a culture with less acceptance of central power. For equal opportunity officers, this means the need to use strategies of influence, which in turn means knowing sufficient about the culture of the discipline to pick the right pitch.

Disciplinarity may itself be reducing in power. Coaldrake and Stedman (1999, p.5) assert that knowledge is becoming more problems and issues-based. Whether this supports a more managerialist style in universities, or whether the centres of power become based on problems and issues is yet to be seen.

In working to achieve cultural change, equal opportunity officers are constrained to working within an existing structure and a given set of power relationships in which their own power is relatively limited. Generally equal opportunity officers do not seek to subvert the principal power dimensions. Their own experience of having been part of a university as students may partly explain this, in that aspects of the university culture are congruent with their own. This both allows them to work within the culture and constrains the amount of change they are likely to want to make.

The existing power structures do not only constrain equal opportunity offices in the work they do. The central conceptual category of 'picking the pitch' identified in the Findings chapter demonstrates that in developing an equal opportunity agenda that is acceptable to the powerful, power can be observed to be making things work. For example, the anti-discrimination efforts of some participants in the research were crafted to take into account the interest of the senior managers in the university in international students. In addition, some terminology may have had to be included or excluded. For example, if the powerful do not like the use of the language of racism because of its negative meaning, then that usage may be abandoned by an equal opportunity officer in an effort to ensure that the challenge to racism can be continued, albeit with another name. This supports the analysis of power by Foucault (1980 pp.111-128, 130-133), raised in the Literature Review chapter that power is not only repressive, but it is also productive. It forms those things that can be known, and those things that can be reflected in discourse.

## 5.5 The Cultural Change Role and its Limitations

The roles of equal employment officers in universities have become clearer over the last ten years. In 1991, Wienecke reported that neither universities nor equal opportunity officers had a clear idea about what was wanted, and that equal opportunity officers tended to configure the tasks to fit their own expertise and skills.

Both Wienecke (1991) and Poiner and Wills (1991, p.viii) thought that equal opportunity officers had been employed consequent on the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation, and associated reporting requirement. The current research supported this opinion, as participants reported that the legitimacy continued to flow from legislation, and they continued to believe that without the legislation, their role would not exist. The role was therefore initially directly linked to the requirements upon organisations to comply with legislation.

### 5.5.1 Role aspects

There were aspects of the role of equal opportunity officer identified in this research that were common to all general staff roles at a similar level of remuneration in universities. Among these, participants in this research identified: managing; role modelling; planning; facilitating; mediating, and negotiating. All of these are aspects of a supervisory staff role.

Less common or unique aspects of the role identified in this research were those that challenged and sought to change the status quo, or those that sought to deal with the consequences of university cultures that were not in accord with the requirements of equal opportunity as conceptualised by equal opportunity officers. These undesirable cultural aspects sometimes encompassed what Vaughan described as mistakes, misconduct and disaster (1999, pp.271-305). Participants described these role aspects as comprising: challenging; providing a loyal opposition; investigating, and cleaning.

The university culture has been described as a place where challenge is a cultural norm. Tight (1988, pps.2, 119) asserted that the nature of academics and academic life was:

> ...an area of endeavour which does not rate agreement very highly...

and that:

> … we have to accept that academic life is not about agreement. Whether you express its underlying aim as being the search for truth or the development and sharing of individual understanding, the processes involved are intrinsically concerned with conflict.

If this were the case, then one might expect this aspect of the equal opportunity officer's role in cultural change would be acceptable within the university context. However, this norm of challenge is generally based in the academic disciplines (Sharrock 1997, pp.87-101), and equal opportunity officers as general staff members may not be accorded the same space for challenge. Participants in this research made observations that indicated this. One participant spoke of the limitations of not being an academic, and reported that as she did not know the experience directly, consequently she did not think she was in a position to challenge academic practice. There was also an indication that an equal opportunity officer with a doctorate was sometimes in a stronger position in this regard. The impact of equal opportunity officers on university cultures is affected by their ability to use the norm of challenge to overcome the power and hegemonic effect of discipline-based cultures.

Providing a loyal opposition was one characterisation of the aspect of being an internal critic in an institution that was provided by one participant in this study. Some participants reported that this aspect was valued by some staff within the university, but it was clear that other staff, some of them senior managers, did not find this a valid role aspect at all. There are analogous roles in the university but they are few. The roles of internal audit and occupational health and safety officers have similar aspects. The impact that can be made in these roles depends on the political and communication skills of the incumbents, as well as their position in the university hierarchy.

There was a role aspect described by one of the research participants as cleaning work, which comprised dealing the mistakes, misconduct and disaster that Vaughan

(1999, pp.271-305) regarded as an inevitable feature of complex systems. This part of their work contributed to their informal analysis of culture, and they gained insights through this role aspect that were sometimes very revealing. It also provided a source of stories that senior managers sometimes responded to better than to statistics. This role aspect sometimes had only a small impact on the university culture, but had the potential, either through the increased support of senior managers, or through the success of initiatives based on informal analysis, to have rapid and significant effect.

For many equal opportunity officers, cultural change was an almost implicit consequence of dealing with equal opportunity. In addition, for Shoemark (1996, pp.129-131), who was an equal opportunity officer, it was a necessary condition to devolution of equity programs from the centre to accountable managers. However, only one or two participants in this research had cultural change as part of their role description, and so it was a somewhat obscured or at least unacknowledged objective.

### 5.5.2 Comparison Over Time

The Findings chapter demonstrated that the role of equal opportunity officer had changed over time. Wienecke's 1991 paper provided some insight into the characteristics of the role as it had been performed at that time, and a contrast for this research.

Her paper made clear that some universities were perceived as more, and some as less, willing or able, to come to terms with the changes necessary to achieve equality of opportunity in employment. The paper also emphasised awareness that the university was a different setting from that of the New South Wales Public Service, which had been required to comply with planning and reporting sections of the State Act and had centralised the compliance process to a state department. University staff needed to be able to steer change through internal university decision making processes in order for them to have any effect.

Appointees to the positions in 1991 described themselves as naïve, as not knowing what they were expected to do, as expecting change to be easy and to be able to be introduced because they were reasonable. The equal opportunity officers interviewed

for this research did not describe themselves as naïve, they knew about how change could be made or ignored, that change was a long term process, and that the resulting achievements were vulnerable as they experienced restructuring of the higher education system from within and without.

The need for strong communication and organisational skills was evident to equal opportunity officers at the time of the 1991 research. But the political skills of influencing change, pitching an agenda to various managers, and aligning it to their interests, all of which was identified in this research, were not part of the past role as described by Wienecke. It is evident from this contrast that the role has become more subtle and complex.

The initial role, though, was difficult enough, and was described in Wienecke's paper with several quotations illustrating that it was experienced as stressful. The paper emphasised the rational and bureaucratic processes used by equal opportunity officers, through concentrating on structures, policies, and training. This emphasis was also noted elsewhere (Noble and Mears 1995, pp.161-168).

The role has always been undertaken on contested ground. Evidence of this appears in the reports of sometimes 'anonymous abusive phone calls and abusive letters and so on' (Wienecke 1991), through to the death threat reported by a participant in this research. Being on the ground of contest caused equal opportunity officers stress as reported by Wienecke. There was however, a different tone and emphasis evident in this research. Tension was reported, and its various sources identified, but the participants have learned from their own past experience or that of their predecessors, or from other contexts, to be 'realistic' about power, and so the level of stress reported was less than it was for the earlier equal opportunity officers.

In 1991, the challenge was couched in terms of enemies and friends, in the current research it was in terms of the realities of power. An earlier emphasis was on 'battles', on things being 'hard won'. While this was not contradicted by the current research, there was less of the combativeness, and a more analytical approach and a nuanced appreciation of the complexity of their task. There was evidence that equal

opportunity officers took a long-term view of their goals and did not assume that the task was straightforward.

The need for emotional support in the role was identified in 1991, and remains an issue. For some participants in the current research, talking to other equal opportunity officers and the e-mail network assisted in providing support. One equal opportunity officer reported debriefing with the university counsellors as this provided a confidential and accessible source of assistance. For a small group of staff attempting to make long-term changes to a university culture, their potential success depends on finding sources of support if they are to continue to make an impact.

A question posed by Wienecke concerned the degree to which one could make social change from within an organisation. Some equal opportunity officers in her research said that they didn't feel then they really belonged in the university, and the same was reported in this research. Participants maintained points of reference outside the organisation, particularly through reporting to the state or federal governments. This provides support for the idea raised in the Literature Review chapter that these roles are 'boundary spanners' (Vecchio et al. 1992, p.510, Pepper 1995, p.180). These boundary spanning positions have been acknowledged to be stressful (Katz and Kahn 1966, p.61).

Another general shift in the role was away from attempting to ensure compliance and tackling systemic and indirect discrimination on behalf of equity target groups towards what was described as a consultative mode or client focus. The client was sometimes constructed as the academics and managers within the university, rather than as the equity groups. The emphasis on cultural change took place within this construction of client focus that occurred at behest of management, or at least as a sympathetic response to management.

There was evidence in this research that the corporatist style of client focus was accompanied by a shift in the construction of the task of equity from the specific (dealing with unlawful discrimination) to the diffuse (consulting with faculties about their corporate priorities) or, for some participants in this study at least, of shifting between one and the other.

The question of how to construct priorities in the role is a complex one, as participants were aware as they tried to balance and prioritise among the myriad of useful things that they could do. The dilemma is highlighted by a comment of Bourdieu's (1992, p.199) about priorities:

> Of course we must keep at all times in mind that the social conditions of access to this form of tolerance are not universally granted…It is all well and good to be an antiracist, for instance, but it amounts to pure pharisaism when you are not simultaneously pushing for equal access to the social conditions - in housing, education, employment, etc. - that make antiracism possible.

The challenges of equity and the opportunities for equal opportunity officers would indeed be everywhere, and participants in this research had to overlay this ubiquity of challenge with a set of management or academic agendas that did not necessarily emphasise equity.

### 5.5.3 Uncertainty

Among the characteristics of the equal opportunity role identified by Wienecke (1991) was role uncertainty. She wrote:

> …nobody knew what an EEO coordinator had to do, except through the state public services. There were no qualifications. No experience that would equip anybody that was recognised as suitable.

The qualifications of the practitioners in 1991 were broad, and most of them had university degrees. As can be seen from the Findings chapter, the extent and breadth of qualifications remained the case. This in itself is an indicator of a continuing level of uncertainty about the role, as it has not been incorporated into a particular professional space.

While uncertainty can be a source of stress, certainty may serve to create similarities of approach that reduce creativity. The researcher examined the Internet pages of

twenty-five universities, and found a great deal of commonality in both content and approach. The Internet sites showed equal opportunity offices dealt in the writing of rules and policies, and the promulgating of plans. This similarity demonstrates that even though participants reported that they had a great deal of autonomy in their work, it was bounded by a number of factors, including the response to legislation and reporting requirements, networking and isomorphism.

### 5.5.4 What Has Not Changed Over Time

In contrasting the experience of equal opportunity officers a decade ago with that which emerged from the current research, there were elements of the role that remained the same.

There remained a commitment from values. Their values placed emphasis on equality and respect for diversity, which has been characterised by Chen and Eastman (1997, pp.454-470), as the focus of a civic culture. Attempting to foster a civic culture meets similar resistance from those with different value sets as equal opportunity officers encountered when they attempted to ensure compliance with legislation. From the current research there was an added tension identified above as participants worked within both an ethic of rights and an ethic of care. The earlier emphasis of equal opportunity officers had been more clearly rights-based.

Socialisation into role remained problematic for the participants in the current research, so that values and skills had to be imported into the job, rather than developed through it.

The relative amount of autonomy, coupled with a small amount of resources, continued to be a feature for the work of equal opportunity officers. In general participants continued to lack positional power, and often lacked sponsorship from senior managers who often had direct responsibility for equal opportunity, but who (with some exceptions), did not appear to take this responsibility with the same level of seriousness as their other areas. Autonomy did not of itself provide an impetus for their work in the university; at most it allowed a space where they could work to impact on culture.

It remained difficult for participants to remember positive experiences, though they noted the personal development that accompanied fulfilling a challenging job. The question of their level of success was integral to this issue. It had been difficult to measure impact of equal opportunity, either positive or negative, in general. This difficulty was exacerbated when attempting to judge the efficacy of an equal opportunity officer, especially as the role included giving credit for ideas and success away and maintaining confidentiality on individual successes.

As a professional role, it remained weak in universities compared with the strong professional ethos of academic staff. In addition there was some evidence that it had been pushed down the hierarchy in some universities as restructuring had brought in more senior managers. The impact of the equal opportunity role on the culture in these universities was reported to have diminished.

### 5.6 Usefulness of the Concept of Culture

An important question for this research project was whether the concept of culture was useful in organisational contexts, and in particular whether it was useable by equal opportunity officers, whose roles included making certain kinds of change in an organisation.

During interviews with participants in this research, the word ‘culture’ was used, and most participants responded to it as an unproblematic term. However, one or two participants questioned whether what they were doing was cultural change. One definitely disassociated her practice from the concept and she described her work as dealing with behaviour. Another participant who was wary of the concept emphasised the parts of the role that dealt with developing policies and preventing unlawful behaviour.

It was clear from this research that equal opportunity officers were all attempting organisational change. Sometimes this was at the level of the whole university, or sometimes of groups within the university, or sometimes at the individual level. It was also clear that the change was underpinned by legal, moral and social values. To what

degree then, would it matter whether this organisational change was conceptualised as cultural change?

Some organisational theorists have taken the view that in spite of the difficulties, for instance the one hundred and sixty-four definitions of culture identified by Kroeber and Kluckhohn (Ott 1989, p.51), that the concept of organisational culture was nevertheless a powerful lever for guiding organisational behaviour, and that it functioned as a control mechanism that informally approves or prohibits some patterns of behaviour (Ott 1989, pp.50-52). Some organisational culture theorists have taken a different path, and sought to distinguish between behavioural change and cultural change. Pepper (1995, p.41), for instance wrote:

> A person may change behaviour simply to avoid management's intervention. True cultural change involves the workers to exhibit the changed behaviour without thinking about it, because it becomes part of the way they do things.

Whether equal opportunity officers thought they were doing cultural change or not would be likely to affect the way in which their work of bringing about organisational change was done; in other words, the means employed. It could also affect what was done, that is what actions and which techniques were employed.

### 5.6.1 Did they do cultural change?

In terms of what equal opportunity officers did, and whether what they did amounted to cultural change, Schein's taxonomy of culture (1990, p.14), identified in the Literature Review chapter provided a framework for analysis.

Schein's taxonomy ordered organisational culture into three levels: artefacts and creations, which includes observable behaviour; values, and basic assumptions. If equal opportunity officers worked at all levels of Schein's taxonomy, it was assumed that this would be a good indication that they were dealing with culture.

In reviewing the techniques and ways of working used by participants, as described in the Findings chapter, there was evidence that all of the levels of Schein's taxonomy were used, although not all participants used all of the levels of the taxonomy.

The cultural level of observable behaviour included artefacts and creations. According to Schein, some of these may be visible, but were often not decipherable. Participants used this level of culture in their work of bringing about organisational change. Their techniques included: conducting surveys that focussed on behaviour and perceptions; creating policies and procedures (which are artefacts); constructing Internet web sites; producing posters and brochures, and organising events (which are creations). In addition, participants reported that they often observed and analysed the behaviours and creations of those within their universities. The insights that they obtained from these observations then contributed to the employment of their various techniques to bring about change. Ways in which these observations were made included: interactions with leaders and managers; networking with groups; confidential grievance work, and responding to drafts of policies and procedures developed in other sections of the university.

It would be possible for equal employment opportunity to work entirely within this level of Schein's taxonomy and bring about behavioural change in the university without dealing at all with Schein's other two levels.

The second of Schein's levels of culture was that of values. Schein characterised values as observable in the physical environment, but as testable only by social consensus. Social consensus can be tested through the use of research instruments such as surveys or focus groups.

One such survey was a major survey of values, conducted by Rokeach in 1973, which identified 'equality' as a value. Rokeach defined a value as a belief either prescriptive or proscriptive, which was enduring though not necessarily unchangeable. Rokeach identified thirty-six values (Rokeach 1973, p.28). The survey results also indicated that values operated in clusters, and were rarely employed one at a time for any length of time. While it was a large-scale piece of research, it was based on North American culture and is thus subject to the criticism that it is culturally limited in the values

identified as well as the clusterings that were discovered (Silver and Dowley 2000, pp.517-550). There was also a general problem of whether the list of values identified was complete.

While it was interesting that the value of equality was identified as of central importance, the complexity of meanings possibly contained by the word and identified above in this chapter were not explored.

This research conducted with equal opportunity officers demonstrated that certain values were of importance to all of them. For some, the reason they decided to move into the work was based in their values. It also provided a motivation for their continuation in the work, in the face of difficulty of the task. The values that they identified concerned with their work included: equality; fairness; social justice, and transparency.

The strong sense of values that the participants articulated, and which motivated and supported them, also created some dilemmas. One difficulty concerned the way in which their sense of values was perceived within the university. The Findings chapter demonstrates that there was an awareness among some equal opportunity officers that they had to support the values that they thought were important without being, or even appearing to be, a 'moral crusader'. There was an awareness that they could be ineffectual if they could not work within the university and its political realities. It was evident that they could even be perceived as punitive, rather than assisting others in the university.

The self-perceived need for participants to behave in a way congruent with their values also caused them difficulties. They sought to align their espoused values and their values in use, though sometimes it appeared that they did not succeed. They said that they wanted to be a role model for practices that they advocated to others. This may have caused them difficulties of which it was evidently hard for them to speak. One example given of this was of an internal power play between two parts of an equity office that illustrated the self-interest, power plays, subversion and other forms of organisational politicking that they would critique if they had observed it in the university at large.

Their values also delimited the means which they would use to achieve their ends. This may be in contrast with other managers for whom these values may be less salient, and who would have consequently greater freedom of action with regard to the means they could use to achieve their goals.

The strong, though generally undefined values of the participants in the research both motivated and limited them. They also identified the prevailing values in their university, or the sections that they were working with, and attempted to use these to align with their equal opportunity agendas.

The third level of Schein's taxonomy, that of basic assumptions, comprised those matters that are taken for granted, and to that extent, are not usually conscious. This level included for instance: the nature of reality; the nature of truth; the nature of time and space; the nature of human relationships, and the nature of nature.

In some instances it was clear in the research that there were basic assumptions that were shared by the participants and their universities, such as the strong assumption within the field of education about the desirability and possibility of progress. This sharing of some basic assumptions, achieved partly through a level of shared experience of education, assisted equal opportunity officers in their work.

Some assumptions could not be regarded as shared. Underlying the ways of working and some of the techniques used by participants, for example, was an assumption about human relationships that concerned the possibility of respect for difference. It was clear that this was not a universally-held assumption, and that part of the work of some participants was concerned with advocating the merits of diversity and respect for difference. Among the techniques that they used to bring about change in the university were: training about cultural diversity that sought to encourage respect for cultural difference; the employment of language guidelines that demonstrated respect for certain sorts of difference; projects to develop curricula that would give consideration to cultural difference, and guidelines for the teaching and learning process.

While by their nature, basic assumptions are imprecise and often incompletely articulated, it can be seen from the examples above that some participants at least were working at the level of assumptions. 'Awareness raising' was a technique for raising assumptions into consciousness for critique that was adopted particularly by feminists from the 1960's onward. Consequently women who had come into equal opportunity work from a feminist background brought with them understandings about the way in which basic assumptions worked, and could be amenable to change.

### 5.6.2 Issues with Techniques for Analysis of Culture

Schein's taxonomy has provided support for the view that equal opportunity officers, at least some of them, some of the time, were engaged in cultural change. Flowing from this arose questions about how equal opportunity officers analysed culture prior to considering making change.

The formal techniques used by research participants included: collection and analysis of statistics; formal consultation, and research projects. Statistical analyses provided data from which cultural factors could be inferred, for example the absence of racial diversity in a section.

There were survey instruments used by participants that were designed to analyse an organisation's culture from an equal opportunity perspective. In New South Wales, for instance, the Office of the Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment had commissioned a survey for use in public service departments that was also available to universities. Some of the questions dealt with both behaviours and values.

There are more general analyses of culture in organisations available, for example, the Organisational Culture Inventory, based on the work of Kotter and Heskett (1992), which comprises a survey of 96 items that aims to identify shared beliefs, values and expectations, and is based on the concept of cultural 'style' or behavioural norms, that are thought to more or less useful from an organisational viewpoint.

Student surveys of equal opportunity climate are less common, although students are participants in increasing numbers of surveys. One survey was adapted from a North American instrument (Black-Gutman, Chesterton and Landis 1998, pp.72-77).

Survey instruments have been subject to criticism and have caused equal opportunity officers some difficulty. One participant said that her Vice Chancellor had very little faith in climate surveys as he thought they created false expectations of change. In another university, the results did not accord with senior managers' ideas about what was going on in the university, so the results were buried and not used again. While this may seem to be burying one's head in the sand, survey results are clearly available for political exploitation. As universities have been encouraged or driven to compete with one another, they become increasingly part of the world of public relations management and spin, so dealing with the results of analyses that indicate all may not be well in an organisation clearly is likely to cause significant organisational anxiety. Nevertheless, some universities have conducted surveys, and gone on record about the results. For example the Vice Chancellor of the University of South Australia (*Campus Review* 3-9 May 2000) reported on a staff opinion survey that indicated areas of the university that were working well, for instance a harassment-free working environment, and areas of concern, such as being listened to by senior managers.

Universities may be critical of surveys, but they can be a useful tool if they are regarded as credible within the organisation. In particular, they allow the university to access opinion that would otherwise not surface, but which could be a factor militating against its success.

Formal consultation was used by participants in this study to gather qualitative information about aspects of the university's culture, and sometimes this was done within a formal research framework.

Even if survey and formal cultural analysis work had been done within universities to analyse culture, there remained questions about how well these types of formal analysis fitted with equal opportunity officers' informal analyses of culture, which

they collected in talking and listening to staff and students or by observing the way in which things were achieved within the university.

It is clear that universities, like many complex organisations, have more than one prevailing culture. In addition to the differences of hierarchy, there is the difference between academic staff and general staff, differences of discipline and professional grouping, and differences of historical association, for instance, length of service, (whether as a student as well as staff member). The research demonstrated that equal opportunity officers were aware of these differences, and their potential impact on the culture within a group. For the most part, their analysis at this level of detail was informal. This gave them understanding and insights, though there remained the limitation that they had less persuasive data.

It appeared from the research that, although culture was important to equal opportunity officers, and many regarded themselves as undertaking cultural change, that the tools and techniques that they used tended towards informality. They also tended to give greater emphasis to judgements arrived at through informal means. Some of this was because of their workloads. It was also because their own perceived need to make change was considered more urgent than the requirement to ensure that each change effort was fully supported by research results.

### 5.6.3 Some Problems in Using the Concept of Culture

One phenomenon that is noticeable with the use of the concept of culture in organisations is that it now appears everywhere. It is in the currency of organisational analysis and is reported in the general press. For example radio reports of the enquiry into the Granville train disaster highlighted 'a culture of on time running' rather than 'a culture of safety', and criticisms of the safety record of Ansett airlines were reported in terms of a 'culture of cost cutting', and in higher education, there was a reference to 'The culture of working unpaid overtime' (*Campus Review* 13 June 2001).

There is the possibility that culture as a general concept is overdetermined and thus of decreasing utility, as some analysts, for example Eagleton have thought. He wrote;

…we are trapped at the moment between disablingly wide and discomfortingly rigid notions of culture (Eagleton 2000, p.32).

The ubiquity of the term 'culture', and the multi-faceted definitions of culture, some of them identified in the Literature Review chapter, are both factors that present problems for those who wish to analyse and affect culture. One consequence of this observed by research participants was that culture could not any longer be defined through singularities of nation, class or gender. Some of them found, like some other analysts of culture, that there was a:

> …need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural difference (Bhabha 1994, p.1).

There are traces of postmodernist thinking in the argument that the world has moved on from the master narrative (Hassard and Parker 1993, pp.9-10), and that the old, structured certainties of class and ethnic self-definitions have lapsed into various hybrid identity options (Spencer-Oatey 2000, p.208). The equal opportunity officers who participated in the research acknowledged the issue of competing, possibly antagonistic claims to representation and empowerment. However, this simply created more complexity for them as they continued to attempt to redress the effects of discrimination for specified identity groups.

In addition to the complexities of cultural hybridity, there was the added difficulty for equal opportunity officers in trying to balance claims to representation and empowerment, while of course at the same time inescapably involved with their own cultural positioning. Reflexivity in practice can be of assistance in demonstrating that the dilemmas of practice are a shared and inevitable effect of critical and process-oriented approaches to culture. However, there still remain questions about what agents of change are trying to do and for whom.

For Bhabha (1994, p.20), even the later critiques of culture (semiotic, poststucturalist, deconstructive) were argued to provide merely another power ploy of the culturally

privileged Western elite 'to produce a discourse of the Other that reinforces its own power: knowledge equation'.

There are also other critiques of the use of the term 'culture' that concern its relation to power. Some participants in this research characterised themselves as realistic and acknowledging of power relations. They used strategies of influence and pitching an agenda, particularly to the powerful. They worked within hierarchy, and in some ways their own cultural dispositions accorded with those of the powerful in the hierarchy. Without this concordance, their work would have been even more difficult and disputed than it was. Nevertheless, most of the equal opportunity officers interviewed were trying to change culture from within so that it was more accepting of certain sorts of difference, including difference from what they were themselves.

The use of terms such as 'climate' or 'culture' was criticised by Ramsay (1995, p.95) for political reasons. Her concern was that concepts framed in a neutral way rendered the organisation neutral or benign, so that those who did not fit in became the problem. She also described such terms as being of 'mind-numbing generality', and wrote that these abstractions distracted attention away from questions of distributive justice, of who prospers under particular set of behaviours, attitudes and activities, and on whom do the same behaviours, attitudes and activities have a negative impact. The analyses of equal opportunity officers did ask questions about distributive justice within the university, but they also sought to identify issues of symbolic justice that were embedded in normal university practices, and through these activities, to affect culture.

There is an analysis of domination that rejects the idea of the dichotomy of submission or resistance that has traditionally framed the question of dominated cultures. According to Wacquant (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.23), there is an '…intrinsically doubled, skewed nature' for those who do not thrive or benefit under a particular cultural situation. He regarded analyses of dominance and submission as preventing adequate understanding of the practices or situations involved. He wrote:

> If, to resist, I have no means other than to make mine and to claim aloud those very properties that mark me as dominated (according to the paradigm 'black

> is beautiful')…is that resistance? If, on the other hand, I work to efface everything that is likely to reveal my origins, or to trap me in my social position (an accent, physical composure, family relations), should we then speak of submission? This, in Bourdieu's view, is an 'unresolvable contradiction' inscribed in the very logic of symbolic domination. 'Resistance can be alienating and submission can be liberating. Such is the paradox of the dominated and there is no way out of it' .

This analysis did not seek to blame the resistant or the submissive, but to understand that these ways of behaving are part of the effects of domination.

> It is fitting to recall that the dominated always contribute to their own domination, it is necessary at once to be reminded that the dispositions which incline them to this complicity are the effect, embodied, of domination. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.24).

Some cultural change makes a change to the relations of power, or at least to the freedoms of power. A straightforward example concerns the question of what one can say or joke about. Bourdieu (1992, p.142) was clear that, 'Linguistic relations are always relations of power and contain the potentiality of an act of power'. Equal opportunity officers know this and have experienced the power of naming behaviour, such as achieving a naming of sexual harassment, and the impact it has had on culture and the power relations within it.

Bourdieu's approach to the question of culture was to describe it as a set of dispositions in a field. Dispositions contain the state or quality of being disposed to, or to do, that is it is not action in itself, but a set of tendencies and likelihoods in terms of which the world is ordered, made sense of and acted within. In this approach, culture is not necessarily only fulfilled as processes, it also has the power to analyse the ways in which one considers process, including what terms are possible in this consideration, and what alternatives are available, as well as how it might become discourse or process.

This approach makes it possible to define, or at any rate to describe for analytical purposes, the field, in an analogous way to the way in which an ecosystem is defined, and then to consider the dispositions that arise and how they may lead to action and in what terms they may be challenged. In the research, equal opportunity officers were often seeking tools with which to grasp the complexities of culture they dealt in, while at the same time being to some extent part of that culture. Bourdieu's analysis facilitates cultural change for those who, like equal opportunity officers, realise their own cultural situatedness while wishing to make change.

The field is not one fixed place, but, like an ecosystem, it is a definitional space with boundaries that are to some extent porous and interpenetrated by others. It forms the place in which one's view, for a time or for a purpose is focussed, and the processes that occur within one's field of vision. Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.97) asserted that, 'To think in terms of field is to think relationally'.

Bourdieu's analysis also provides a different way to analyse culture than through the lens only of power or hegemony. Power is itself a field, though in some ways unlike others in that it mediates relations between different kinds of social capital (Bourdieu 1998, p.31). The dispositions in a field, while they may be purposively hegemonic, are not necessarily so, as it may not require '… manufacturing or deliberate and purposive action, it is simply imposed by the order of things' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.168).

This analysis also takes one beyond the potentially value-free realms of contingency theory, much used in organisational and management training, and university management (Prichard 2000, p.6) in which everything is situational and so organisation responses depend on a systems-based accurate analysis of any situation (Ott 1989, p.163, Reed and Hughes 1992, pp1-3). Bourdieu's work does not contradict contingency theory, but as dispositions may be open, at least to an extent, the theory allows for change and learning. It also provides a fuller theoretical framework than has been provided by power political approaches, such as Pfeffer's (1992) to change for equal opportunity officers and others whose job requires promoting and facilitating cultural change.

Bourdieu's approach also provides a combination of analysis and critical force that is more useful for workers attempting to make cultural change from within organisations than approaches based solely on critical and emancipation theorists. As an example, Freire's work describes the Third World and First World as antagonists, with no possibility of dialogue (1972, p.7). His work was situated in Latin America and based on liberation theology, and was mainly concerned with a struggle against manifest oppression. In some ways however, his work consorts well with Bourdieu's analysis, in particular the emphasis on praxis (1972, pp.8-10), and the insights that the oppressed internalise their own oppression (1985, p.xix). Also helpful for equal opportunity officers is Freire's belief in the need for critical reflection, communication, creativity and collaboration (1985, p.39).

Bourdieu allows, through consideration of the concept of 'habitus' the inclusion of the unconscious and unthought naturalness that accompanies certain positions in the field. Following Bourdieu, this concept of habitus is what one can propose to account for the fact that, '…without being rational, social agents are reasonable…'(Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.129).

While the concept of culture requires considerable reflection before it can be used by equal opportunity officers in the course of their work, a taxonomic framework can help to guide equal opportunity officers as to where to give their attention, what kinds of things can be subject to analysis, and at what points change may be required and observed. The demonstrated usefulness of the taxonomy of Schein in this study is illustrative. In addition Bourdieu's analytical approach provides a framework that meets the realities that participants reported in this research, for understanding and analysis of the ways in which culture inevitably bears on all people, including themselves. It also allows for the possibilities for self-examination and then both personal and cultural change.

The term culture has moved out of anthropology and notions about civilised behaviour and has become more ubiquitous, not only through sociological and literary terminology, but also as a term in general use. Nevertheless, it has its roots in culture as growth, and in culture as civilisation, as identified in the Literature Review chapter, and traces of these meanings may remain. It has become a more dynamic concept, that

can be described in terms of interactions between people who have their own cultural dispositions and mental schemas, partly determined and characterised in terms of their belonging to some specified groups, but also somewhat and variously open to change. The term remains ambiguous, and there is the possibility of using it in a romantic and relativistic way to privilege certain cultural manifestations or practices that risks ignoring power and subjugation. This was a difficulty for some participants in this research who were committed to establishing the value of cultural difference, and then were dealing with aspects of that difference which disrupted their other value positions.

### 5.7 From Cultural Analysis to Cultural Change

Equal opportunity officers need tools to analyse culture while they are part of it, and this thesis has argued that Schein's (1990) taxonomy provides a means that is flexible, as well as providing for a more formal basis for analysis than may currently be generally in use. It is also a sufficiently open framework, so that, while it is based in the organisational theory and leadership literature, it does not confine equal opportunity officers to this basis for their work to impact on university culture.

The task of the analysis of culture is parallel to Bourdieu's (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.7) description of the task of sociology as:

> To uncover buried structures of social worlds and mechanisms which ensure their reproduction or transformation.

The possibilities that arise from a sociologically-based analysis of culture could potentially leave the practitioner wondering how these structures and mechanisms worked themselves out in individuals, and so how equal opportunity officers, (or others concerned with cultural change) could effect change in these structures and mechanisms.

While social structures are not psychological matters, Bourdieu proposed a bridge between them. His view was that:

> There exists a correspondence between social structures and mental structures, between the objective divisions of the social world - particularly into dominant and dominated in the various fields - and the principles of vision and division that agents apply to it (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.12).

Bourdieu acknowledged that this was a reformulation of an idea of Durkheim and Mauss, that categories of understanding are collective representations, and the underlying mental schemata are patterned after the social structure of the group.

Equal opportunity officers, if they are embarked on cultural change, need to have an understanding of how such mental schemas might operate in an individual. They need to find the correspondences between social structures and mental structures and elucidate them if their action in cultural change is to be well-founded.

Strauss and Quinn (1997, pp.8-9) produced a work that took understandings from Bourdieu, and found a way to describe the link by developing a cognitive theory of cultural meaning. They took the view that cultural meanings could be thought of as the interaction between the extrapersonal and interpersonal realms.

Strauss and Quinn agreed with Bourdieu in giving importance to internalisation, and they quoted with approval that:

> …we are always constrained by the dispositions learned from our experiences, but our habitual responses rest on knowledge that is not learned from or cognitively represented as hard-and-fast rules. Our internalised (in his words 'incorporated' or 'embodied') knowledge is less specific than rules because it is learned through everyday practice. Everyday practice is somewhat variable from one day to the next but still tends to remain within the boundaries of what is culturally acceptable (1997, p.44).

Their account is similar to Bourdieu's in several respects. They agree with Bourdieu that a close examination of internalisation is the key to explaining what they describe as the centrifugal and centripetal forces of culture, as well as advancing beyond the old dichotomies of structure and agency. Internalisation leads to everyday practice

that is somewhat variable and flexible, while within boundaries, and that is learned through apprenticeship by familiarisation. They regard social life as constituting a process of interaction between the imprecise private understandings achieved in this way and the public objects and events which are both their source and product (Strauss and Quinn, 1997, pp.45-46).

Strauss and Quinn depart from Bourdieu at several points. One crucial point of departure is the way in which social practices are acquired, which is a central issue for equal opportunity officers seeking to shape and change social practices. They wrote:

> He seems to assume that familiarity with social practices is sufficient for acquisition of their regularly associated features. We will argue, on the basis of psychological and neurological findings that the process is more complicated than that: not all regularities in practices are remembered equally well because the learner's motivational state makes a difference in what learners pay attention to and how well their experience 'sticks' (1997, p.47).

Strauss and Quinn's work puts together schema theory and connectionist models of cognition, in which mental states are shaped by the learner's specific life experiences and are sensitive to activity in a specific context, so they are relatively stable, but can vary and change.

Strauss and Quinn (1997, p.59) thought that connectionist models of cognition could:

> …help us sort out what is likely to be stable, what changeable in our knowledge and meanings. They are thus a very promising foundation for a solution to the problems of cultural meaning.

Strauss and Quinn (1997, p.85) described five centripetal tendencies of cultural understandings. First, they can be relatively stable in individuals. Secondly, cultural understandings can have emotional and motivational force, prompting those who hold them to act on them. Thirdly, they can be relatively stable historically, being reproduced from generation to generation. Fourthly, they can be relatively thematic,

in the sense that certain understandings may be repeatedly applied in a wide variety of contexts. Finally, they can be more or less widely shared.

According to Strauss and Quinn's (1997) theory, there are factors which lead to the durability of mental schemas in the individual and the tendency of schemas to fill in for one and also to block discomfirming evidence. From this it follows that those who seek to bring about cultural change are required to have techniques to shift schemas. For workers in total institutions, the institution as a whole living environment can support the change (Goffman 1961). Outside of total institutions, those that aim to shift schemas in a radical way may do it through techniques that break the links with existing schemas and replace them totally with another, integrated set. Examples of these totalising techniques can be found in some religious institutions, or the 're-education' processes of some political regimes. The indications from this research are that, the support of organisations for the work of equal opportunity officers, while desirable, was always limited. The ideologically-based type of total change to schemas was not an option for them: neither did it accord with their ways of working, which emphasised learning and persuasion. The emphasis on learning in organisations aligns their ways of working in some ways with the organisational learning approach to change (Lundberg 1989, Popper and Lipshitz 1998).

The techniques used by equal opportunity officers with individuals were based more on general processes of teaching and learning. Teaching is itself a process that is concerned with developing durable schemas. Teaching uses several interpersonal mechanisms: getting attention; rewarding and punishing; conveying general evaluations of the person as a good or bad person, and giving or withholding of love (Strauss and Quinn 1997, p.93). Equal opportunity officers used some of these processes, though this research indicated that punishment was not a mechanism that they wanted to use, or generally regarded as part of their role.

Another factor that contributes to the durability of cultural schemas is the themacity of culture, that is, its tendency to be invoked in a wide variety of contexts. An example used by Strauss and Quinn was 'self reliance' with respect to North Americans. Another example could be found in Bourdieu, who identified 'honour' among the Kabyle society of North Africa (1977, p.15). In this research, for Australian society,

participants and much general comment in the media identified ‘the fair go’, and in universities the concepts of ‘collegiality’ and ‘academic freedom’ were invoked in a variety of contexts. The themes identified serve to provide a basis for the alignment of equal opportunity work to an existing set of cultural schemas, and the informal analysis that participants undertook was thus a valuable way of tapping into cultural factors that tended to durability. An awareness of these themes alerts equal opportunity officers of potential sources of resistance if change is proposed that runs counter to the theme. The strong resistance within universities of what has been called ‘managerialism’ is a relevant example.

Strauss and Quinn also identified that there were forces that worked against the durability of cultural schemas. As can be demonstrated through the processes of teaching and learning into adult life, schemas do not necessarily screen out new knowledge, they do not necessarily form a perceptual ‘veil’. Strauss and Quinn adduced evidence that under some circumstances, schema-inconsistent behaviour would be especially noticeable and likely to change a stereotype, and also that there were individual differences in the cognitive ability or emotional responsiveness that would lead a person to ‘break set’ and alter a schema in the face of schema contradictory information (Strauss and Quinn 1997, pp.98-99).

An appreciation of the ways in which social fields are established, and how sets of dispositions act within organisations, and are embodied in cultural schemas of individuals, provides the basis for the social, emotional, and cognitive methods for handling discrepant ideas.

One of the questions addressed through this research concerned the meanings of culture, and its use by equal opportunity officers in bringing about change in universities. Schein’s taxonomy provided a source for analysing the responses of participants to questions about cultural change, in particular, whether they meant behavioural change, values change or changes in assumptions. From the analysis which was grounded in the data, it was clear that most equal opportunity officers used elements of all three, though the point at which they considered they had effected real cultural change was indeterminate.

In spite of the definitional difficulties, analysis of culture assists in awareness-raising and reflexivity for equal opportunity officers. The analysis requires a framework and then both formal techniques and informal processes of analysis. In universities the formal research into its own cultural practices is likely to be contested by some powerful forces if the experience of some officers in attempting to use climate survey is typical.

The informal techniques told a slightly different, more holistic, and often more critical story. In 1952, Kurt Lewin stated that if you wanted to understand a culture, you should try to change it (Schein 1990, p.135). Equal opportunity officers did try and the difficulties that they experienced illustrate the fact that every change of practice is likely to benefit someone, and is also a challenge to someone's current practices. This causes an endless possibility of dispute for those such as equal opportunity officers, with the role of changing practice, and sets the scene for cultural change to be experienced as an endless task.

For all workers dealing in cultural change, knowledge of the mechanisms that might link the personal changes to cultural change in organisations is of great assistance, and the sociology of Bourdieu, developed into a cognitive theory of cultural meaning by Strauss and Quinn, can provide a theoretical framework that is accessible to equal opportunity officers, with their backgrounds in fields such teaching or psychology.

### 5.8 Enlightenment or Romance?

One of the questions raised in the Literature chapter about the practice of equal opportunity officers concerned their own ideas about the mind of humanity, and how this may have had an impact on what they sought to do in changing the culture of organisations.

Shweder and LeVine's (1990) analysis was used in the literature review to provide theoretical sensitivity about the ways in which equal opportunity officers might conceptualise the mind of humanity. They characterised two major contrasting perspectives about the mind of humanity. The two views were given labels based in the history of philosophy. One was described as the 'enlightenment' view, which was

a view which regarded reason as universal, and as the standard for judging validity and worth. From this came the expectation of discovering universals. They then divided the enlightenment views into those that were universalist, and those that were developmentalist. The universalist view treated questions about, for instance what the moral virtues are, as not only dictated by reason, but also as obvious to reason. The developmentalist by contrast regarded normative standards as something that could undergo development.

In contrast to both these aspects of the enlightenment view, Shweder and LeVine proposed the 'romanticist' world view. This viewpoint emphasised the history of ideas as a history of a sequence of ideational fashions rather than as one of development. For the romanticist, according to Shweder and LeVine (1990, pp. 27-36), frameworks for understanding experience did not lend themselves to normative-comparative questions.

The research with equal opportunity officers illustrated that they held elements of all of these underlying frameworks, for instance there was evidence of universalism in their use of the United Nations *Declaration of Human Rights*, and some of the training that they conducted was developmentalist, in that it provided information, which it was assumed would simply be adopted, once known. Evidence of romantic views was found in aspects of the discussion about cultural diversity, where different practices the resulted from cultural differences were regarded by some equal opportunity officers as a given. There were also indications of the tensions between them that were evident to the participants themselves. These dialectical oppositions provided did aid theoretical sensitivity, but did not provide a way of examining the role and impact of equal opportunity officers in this research.

### 5.8.1 What Was Regarded as Universal

Shweder and LeVine (1990, p.27) described the central tenets of the enlightenment view of humanity in terms of the dictates of reason being equally binding for all regardless of time, place, culture, race, personal desire or individual endowment, and that in reason could be found a universally-applicable standard for judging validity and worth. In terms of social justice, this fits well with the social contractarian

approach of Rawls (1971, pp.4-5). There were signs of the enlightenment view in the work of equal opportunity officers. The acceptance within universities of anti-discrimination legislation, based on the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* provided the central example. They acknowledged this as an underpinning of their work and their presence which was at the same time a tacit acknowledgment of universally applicable standards, and also an acknowledgment about the limits of power in their positions.

While the universal value of rationality was not referred to explicitly by participants in interviews, there were signs that rationality was an accepted basis for their work that were identifiable in the interviews and were also illustrated through an analysis of equal opportunity Internet web sites for all universities. The Internet sites showed equal opportunity sections dealt in the writing of rules and policies, and the promulgating of plans. They also tended to use the same techniques as one another. These same techniques could be characterised as a rationally-based organisational planning model. The contents of the plans were also sufficiently similar to one another to indicate that generic standards had been adopted about what had to be dealt with, and how it would be done.

Another indication gained from the research about the underlying assumptions that equal opportunity officers held about the mind of humanity, was in the characterisation by some of them of certain values as ‘taken for granted’. In the course of interviews, participants were asked about how they got into equal opportunity work. The answers revealed several sources, but strong values-based interest was evident among most of them. Some values were described as immutable or as ‘taken for granted’ for all equal opportunity officers. The values mentioned by participants were fairness, human rights and social justice. While these ‘taken for granted’ agreements among practitioners may be indicative of universalist views, participants indicated that they were formed through particular life experiences and education. There were three major sources given by participants. One source was early childhood experience, through which their attitudes had been formed by an adult in a way that emphasised empathy and differentiation from the stereotyping of a peer group. Another common source was in their educational background, and particularly mentioned was university education, in which new ideas about society were formed.

A third source was found in the assumptions in the professional ground of equal employment opportunity around which dilemmas are framed. So for example, the 2001 Equal Opportunity Officers in Higher Education conference contained topics such as: the lack of senior women in universities; academic promotion policies, and career paths for women into information technology. These all indicate a common concern with progression through a hierarchy, as well as strategies of presence that denote shared values about equality of outcomes, and also a value on policies and processes that contribute to fairness.

It can thus be seen from this research that equal opportunity officers' work in cultural change was predicated on some underlying universals and some 'taken for granted' values.

### 5.8.2 Endless Task

One participant in the research described the equal opportunity work as an 'endless task.' The reason for this illuminates in part the question about what they thought about the underlying mind of humanity.

Changes in the context of the work of equal employment opportunity meant that participants had to reconsider their cultural change work dynamically and adjust to contextual change. There have been changes in both universities and in the broader society that have impacted on the task of equal opportunity officers. Some examples of these changes have been: the increased cultural diversity of the Australian population; the increased access to higher education from the expansion of the system since the middle of the twentieth century; the increase in women's participation in higher education, the increase in non-school leaver students, and the increase in international students in Australian higher education. Each of these has impacted on the culture of Australian universities, and each has required equal opportunity officers to adapt and shift their focus in adaptation to the changed context. Sometimes this has resulted in some uncomfortable recognition that what they had understood as universal was in fact relative, including their own presence as relatively advantaged people representing others who were relatively disadvantaged.

The changes to context and the increased diversity of the student and staff population in universities leads to questions about the central roles of equal opportunity within this diversity, which challenges universalistic assumptions.

Hopkins (1997, p.25), in his book on the effect of increased workforce diversity on ethics, proposed that increased workforce diversity created greater communication style and value differences, and he gave examples of them in organisations. This would inevitably affect the organisation's culture. There is also some indication that different aspects of diversity have different effects on the workplace, so, for example, while social category diversity has a positive effect on work groups, value diversity has a negative effect (Jehn, Northcraft and Neale, 1999).

There is a tension for equal opportunity officers in the degree to which the role should be constructed within a developmentalist framework, in which all are led to the expert or correct view, which some would criticise as an assimilationist goal. Alternatively, to what extent should it be constructed within a romanticist world view, in which the differences are acknowledged, and the organisation then finds ways to adjust policies and practices within a framework of values that can contain them all? An additional tension is that in universities all this is played out in an environment that is increasingly imitative of corporate models, and the values of diversity were observed to be required to be yoked to increasingly business-oriented outcomes. There is also the question of whether cultural diversity can be accommodated within corporate objectives in ways that are both productive and equitable (Peters 1999, p.170).

Adjusting a values framework in response to cultural difference implies no particular moral or ethical system. It can be a pragmatic adjustment to what works, and could as easily deal with cultural adjustment within the world of organised crime as within business or university organisations. This point was made by Eagleton (2000, p.15) in a general review of the idea of culture. He wrote:

> Those who regard plurality as a value in itself are pure formalists and have obviously not noticed the astonishingly imaginative variety of forms which say, racism can assume.

As well as being morally neutral, Shweder and LeVine (1990, p.46), described as a significant feature of the romantic or symbolic view of culture that it had a non-rational basis. If this were so, then the use of rational means in attempts to make cultural change would be likely to limit its effectiveness. In this study, equal opportunity officers used predominantly rationally-based means to make cultural change. However they also adopted some non-rational means such as praise and approbation.

Many equal opportunity officers used the device of awareness-raising. This is predicated on a developmentalist view of the mind, in which one does not now know that which if one knew, it is assumed that one would seek to change.

The developmentalist view of expertise is in accord to some extent with equal opportunity officers' view of themselves. They regarded themselves in some ways as experts passing on expertise, or as a source of expert advice.

The existence and increasing acknowledgment of cultural diversity contributed to the sense of an endless task for equal opportunity officers in recognising change, and then responding to it. The existence and acknowledgment of cultural difference also contributes to a tension between a respect for difference and a respect for values that equal opportunity officers may have regarded as taken for granted; for example, transparency, fairness, and harmony. There is a balance that has to be found between the extent to which these are treated as developmental matters and the extent to which they are treated within a romanticist or relativistic framework, and so the work is one of constant adjustment. This contributes to the tension and complexity of the role. This was noted by Vidich and Lyman (1994, p.26):

> To-day, despite or perhaps because of the new recognition of cultural diversity, the tension between the universalistic and relativistic values remain an unsolved conundrum for the western ethnographer.

If this tension exists for an ethnographer, it will be more serious for equal opportunity officers working through the practical implications of both value sets.

Another part of Shweder and LeVine's analysis was that most normal adults did not conform to the 'enlightenment' model, and that human beings are not good at the disciplines of applied science. This may also apply to equal opportunity officers. Their analytical strategies tended to mix the formal and scientific with the anecdotal. Some tended to concentrate in areas of work in which they had an emotional investment, and so they were committed. This underscores a need for reflexiveness about practice in equal opportunity officers, and a need for skill enhancement in developing theoretical sensitivity .

### 5.8.3 Romanticists

In opposition to the enlightenment view about mind was what was characterised as the 'romanticist' view. Those who fitted within this world view thought that ideas and practices fell beyond the scope of reason, and could not be characterised as right or wrong, only as more or less useful to those who used them. From those views, flowed concepts of cultural arbitrariness and cultural frame. This was characterised as anti-normative, and anti-developmental, and the social order was regarded as a self-contained framework for understanding experience.

For equal opportunity officers, the shift from equal opportunity to cultural diversity agendas illustrates something of this world view. Participants in the research talked about respect for difference, and inclusiveness. There was among some officers an unease about cultural diversity framework. Part of the unease stemmed from the pursuit of the framework by those who emphasised the business and entrepreneurial activities of the university. There was also tension about the degree to which the cultural relativism implied by the romanticist framework agreed with their other frameworks, about for instance treating women and men as equals. They were confronted as part of their practice with, for instance, sexist behaviour that may be acceptable within a person's own cultural framework.

There was an acknowledgment among participants in this research that culture is dynamic and relativistic. Within this framework, equal opportunity officers then need to find conceptual tools for considering what aspects of culture are valid for critique, or what aspects requires adjustment to their own value positions.

### 5.8.4 What warrant did they have for cultural change?

The formation of some of the values and assumptions that informed the practice of equal opportunity officers in this research was based in their early childhood experiences, in education and ongoing professional relations. This forms a sketch of the history of the practitioners, but it leaves unaddressed the question of what warrant they thought they had for cultural change. Whether they were universalists or developmentalists, or had elements of both, by what right did they try to change culture?

#### 5.8.4.1 Bureaucratic Warrants

There was a set of warrants that were bureaucratic, in the Weberian sense (Shafritz and Ott 1987, pp.183). In particular, these warrants were characterised by official jurisdictional areas ordered within a set of legal frameworks. For equal opportunity officers this comprised both the framework of university legislation, anti-discrimination legislation and general administrative law. Another bureaucratic feature that they exemplified was that they required a level of expert training. This set of warrants established a rational/bureaucratic universality to their work, and also limited their ways of working, while at the same time giving them a degree of autonomy within these limits.

#### 5.8.4.2 Normative warrants

The framework of what is expected within universities provided a set of normative warrants for cultural change work. In the course of any change process, equal opportunity officers acted to fulfil some expectations of what is generally held within the university. Some of their work in articulating and gaining agreement to changes of policy and procedures was done by dealing in this normative way.

Some of their analysis of culture within universities dealt with the degree to which the existing university culture provided agreement about matters that were relevant to equal employment opportunity officers. For example, whether the university had a commitment to social justice. Some of the cultural analysis work done by research

participants had the aim of providing insights into the current culture, for example through surveys and focus groups.

There is a limitation to the power of normative warrants within universities because they provide, as part of their traditional ethos of autonomy and academic freedom, a site for disagreement. To the extent that this norm is still applicable, it is a force that works against some forms of normative warrant.

As well, research participants were aware that their views did not necessarily fit with current normative standards within their own universities, and their work was developmental in the sense of arguing rationally and expertly for change. Universities are regarded as homes of rationality, so incredible practices or unbelievable beliefs are capable of being challenged through rational argument.

Staff in universities know that rationality, and academic freedom are partly a lived value and partly a myth, and that the interests of power and emotion are sometimes cloaked by the appearance of rationality. The force of emotion was particularly evident to equal opportunity officers who undertook grievance work. Also their own cultural change efforts used the light side of emotion, through rapport-enhancing communication, to assist in effecting change.

#### 5.8.4.3 Theoretical Warrants

The participants in the current research provided information that indicated some theoretical warrants that they used in their cultural change work. These included concepts such as structural disadvantage, social justice, and some theoretical bases from the feminist movement. This theoretical basis was not overtly examined or explicated in the course of the research. Some participants shared a view that they did insufficient thinking about this aspect of their work, due to their heavy workloads.

In considering the work of equal opportunity officers in the context of the two major philosophical frameworks provided by Shweder and LeVine (1990), it became evident that they worked within a tension that existed because their practices exemplified different views of the mind of humanity, the enlightenment, and the romanticist view.

This exhibited both their operational flexibility, and also perhaps that they, in common with the rest of humanity, did not consistently do applied science in their daily practice.

### 5.9 Implications for Professional Practice

This research with equal opportunity officers described a group of workers in an organisation, who worked with a great deal of autonomy, though to an agenda that was based within anti-discrimination legislation and their own values. It was evident from the Findings chapter that holders of the role required high levels of sensitivity, interpersonal and communication skill, emotional intelligence, planning and organisational skills, energy and flexibility.

A question for professional practice is how such workers may fit into universities, now and in the future, which the Literature Review chapter revealed are likely to be characterised by highly centralised power elites, increasing numbers of staff on short-term contracts, and global competition.

#### 5.9.1 Managing/Leading Differently?

According to Schein, cultural change of organisations was a central task of leaders (1990, p.2). For most organisations, the leaders are predominantly men, and according to Sinclair's analysis (1998, pps.37, 50), they share several defining characteristics. These include: physical stamina as a mark of commitment; emotional toughness; stoicism, and self reliance. Sinclair described these characteristics as forming a masculine, heroic type of leadership as perpetual quest.

Equal opportunity officer positions are predominantly filled by women. Most of the participants in this research regarded their role as constituting cultural change, and many of them were managers of staff. Their experience offers possibilities for, to quote the title of Sinclair's book; *Doing Leadership Differently*.

The interviews with equal opportunity officers revealed that their identification with their role was based on certain values. These values guided both the goals and the means that they would be prepared to employ to achieve these goals. While for them,

the leadership in change that they were engaged in was not a perpetual quest, if the word quest implies a specified, (though difficult to obtain) goal. Their goals were diffuse and not well-defined, but they were based in values that were commonly held among them, such as fairness and social justice. As Callinicos (2000, p.24) observed, the concept of equality has proved capable of almost indefinite expansion and so it was unsurprising that the goal was unclear. In fact, the cultural change task was considered by some research participants to be an endless task.

While the goals were diffuse, there was a shared sense of values among the participants, though not defined by them. Values-based leadership allows for a great deal of organisational flexibility. However, it can subvert the goals by becoming a moral crusade. Some research participants were aware of this, and the deleterious effect that this could have on their objectives of cultural change, particularly if equal opportunity offices were regarded as a site of punishment. The strength of values-based leadership is that it provides consistency in terms of interpretation. This can be a source of both guidance and comfort in organisations that appear to be in continuous flux, or subject to some of the neuroses of leaders described by Kets de Vries and Miller (1984, p.1) that : '..often act to produce organizational outcomes that appear extremely irrational and dysfunctional'.

Values-based leadership allows an approach to action that is flexible but framing. It also allows for the engagement of emotion, and application of emotional intelligence (Goleman 1996, pp43-45) that harnesses all aspects of personality. It is potentially more powerful and more engaging than other approaches to leadership and management.

Partly because of their own values and partly perhaps because of the visibility of their practice, equal opportunity officers tried to lead by example. One participant spoke about practitioners being the embodiment and perpetual reminder of equity through their presence. This is consistent with Gardner's (1997, p.9) idea that leaders not only communicate stories, but also that they embody stories. Equal opportunity officers evidently tried to align their 'espoused values' with their 'values in use' (1990, p.17). Even if they did not always succeed, an honest attempt could provide a

counterbalance to the cynicism that is caused among organisational workers if they think their leaders want them to behave in ways which they do not themselves behave.

One feature of trying to practice in a way that is values-based, is that equal opportunity officers have the prospect within their practice of being self-critical and reflective, though with inevitable limitations. This possibility for openness is likely to be greater than for pure pragmatists, who would be seeking maximal personal gain, power or comfort, and so may miss the possibilities for change that will be transformative for an organisation. The limitations to self-criticism and reflectiveness are due to individual differences in 'habitus' and personality. There is a closure to reflection that sometimes arises from a perceived need to defend one's own intellectual or values positions, particularly as they may not fit in with the current organisational culture. In addition, being part of the culture that one criticises limits a person's ability to critique it.

Equal opportunity officers, like other leaders and internal managers, have to consider the balance between emphasis on their own team against an emphasis on external stakeholders as they shape and attempt to pitch their agenda for organisational change.

### 5.9.2 Managing in Knowledge-based Organisations

The question of power and the autonomy to act are as serious a consideration for equal opportunity officers as for managers, though within a narrower range of activities. The reason for this is that they were engaged in attempting to change the practices of others who they did not manage. Some also did have management responsibilities for their own, usually small staff.

Managing without direct power is a necessity for knowledge-based organisations, which include universities. Their forms of power were described by Etzioni (1975, p.14) as normative, and their forms of compliance as moral. Even though both governments and the leadership of universities have attempted in various ways to exert direct power over staff members of universities, it is still no easy matter when what is required of staff members, particularly the academics, is the willing use of their intellectual and knowledge resources. These are of course less easy to command

than those tasks that need physical effort, or that can easily be systematised. This is a site of resistance to some management in universities.

In any event, as Sinclair (1998, p.108) observed, one's formal authority is rarely enough to activate desired organisational outcomes. This was certainly true for equal opportunity officers in this study. Consequently, their knowledge of, and ability to employ, techniques of influence are likely to be the type of skills required increasingly in knowledge-based organisations, including universities.

For equal opportunity officers, there were two significant preconditions identified in the research that assisted them in their role in organisational change. These were legitimacy and trust. Legitimacy came from the legislation. It also came from the acceptance of their expertise. This acceptance was partial and was sometimes not acknowledged by senior managers. While legitimacy may be a necessary condition for their work, there was evidence that it was not sufficient in itself to produce an impact on the organisation. The research showed that equal opportunity officers also had to rely on personal trust which had been built up over years of interpersonal interactions, that was based in their values, and that was evident from their behaviour. Their sometimes disproportionate effect on a university culture could in part be attributed to this, and to the fact that they tried not to fall into what Kotter and Heskett (1992, p.56) described as '...the culture-destroying trap of saying one thing and doing another'.

The implications of engaging in tasks of influence, which create cultural change, including through the political task of negotiating consent, mandate the requirement to allow for relatively long time lines, though once consent has been negotiated, the relatively autonomous staff members will attend to implementation. One of the more managerialist reasons for engaging in the daunting task of cultural change was that, once achieved, surveillance of staff was less onerous and costly (Deal and Kennedy 1982, p.15).

The tasks undertaken by equal opportunity officers in their work to change culture included: awareness raising; building coalitions and networking; seeking sponsorship, and picking the pitch that resonated with senior managers and groups with whom they

were working. All of these tasks are necessary for operating successfully within knowledge-based organisations.

Interpersonal competence was highly necessary for equal opportunity officers, who reported continually using their personality in their role. This did not necessarily sit easily for those who came from organisations where the patterns of conformance were more coercive and structurally more hierarchical. This interpersonal competence was predicated on a level of 'emotional intelligence' (Goleman 1996) and awareness that was not necessarily a feature of a generalist manager or leader (Pfeffer 1992, p.48).

Mant (1997) developed a thesis about 'intelligent leadership' as based on building mature dependence, consensus, authority and quality. Some features of mature dependence were evident among research participants and came from understanding of the leaders and senior managers that was derived from working within the same milieu, and from communicating directly and often confidentially with managers. Consensus building was definitely a requirement for any degree of success in impacting on university culture, and the authority of research participants derived from a general level of trust, both in their personal values and their competence.

Evidence in support of Mant's thesis that 'intelligent leadership' was also based on quality is more difficult to ascertain with respect to equal opportunity officers. This is in part because of the disjuncture, or at any rate the difficulty of making causal links, between the individual efforts of equal opportunity officers and the organisational results. It was also reported in the course of the research that some practitioners paid insufficient attention to the quality of their analysis, or even occasionally to the quality of their responses to requirements of their employer.

While it may be the case that equal opportunity officers exemplify in many ways a model for managing and leading productively in knowledge-based organisations, there remains the difficulty for those without direct hierarchical power about how to deal with the ongoing place of power and hierarchy in organisational life.

Another difficulty for the identification of equal opportunity officers as an example of leadership can be identified through the predominating presence of women in the role.

Women often have an ambivalence to power. Some analysts, including Sinclair (1998, pp.28,91), have ascribed this to their relationships with their mothers. Consequences of this ambivalence could be observed in the work of research participants, who did not seek personal power, gave away credit, and very decidedly did not want control over negative consequences. The implications of this ambivalence for the practice of equal opportunity officers would be that they allowed these powers to be taken by those who were prepared to use them. This is at least in part the consequence of working within a hierarchy and set of power relations, as well as trying to change them.

The practice of equal opportunity officers proved to be a balancing act between their values and their preferred ways of working, which may be highly congruent with the new knowledge-based industries, balanced with their need both personally and practically to work productively within their current organisational environment. This environment is likely to contain leaders who may be using organisational models and management practices that are congruent with earlier types of industry practices and masculinist approaches to leadership.

### 5.9.3 Development of Professional Practice

The practice of equal opportunity officers, while it is capable of aligning with new forms of leadership and management in knowledge-based organisations, requires some explication of what the professional practice entails.

It would be useful to have an audit of the skills that are necessary or useful for an effective equal opportunity officer. This research indicated that these would include: law as it intersects with administration; sociology; mediation and conflict resolution; psychology, and theories of organisations. The skills, knowledge and competencies should be drawn around the broad cultural or organisational change role, so that the field can be permeated from several disciplines, and also so that the practice of cultural change can be set into a general organisational context.

Practitioners, while clearly operating from within a strong values base, have no agreed set of ethics or code of practice. This is a requirement if they wish to be regarded as professionals, and also to establish some conditions for their action as moral agents.

Data from this research demonstrated that a considerable amount of the work of equal opportunity officers is done in confidential settings. Some participants reported that this work was stressful, and that they needed to be able to de-brief from time to time. There is therefore a need, both for the accountability of practitioners and for their own support, to establish appropriate approaches to professional and collegial supervision. There is a great deal of sharing with regard to policy and practices throughout the university sector, particularly through e-mail, but professional debriefing and advice appears to be done informally and within each institution, if at all.

The professional socialisation of equal opportunity officers was another area in which the practitioners had limited opportunity to develop in the same ways as other professionals might, through role modelling on more mature practitioners, and then trying out the role behaviours (Ibarra 1999, pp.764-791). There is a place for professional mentoring that could serve to induct new equal opportunity officers, which may save them dealing anew with dilemmas for which experienced practitioners have appropriate solutions.

In this study, the area of professionally-based research and enquiry has been identified by equal opportunity officers as in need of development. In general, each equal opportunity officer has little free time for this enquiry, and the research tends to be pragmatically focussed. This was evident also from the questions that practitioners asked of one another. For example, the agenda of the 2001 Equal Opportunity Practitioners in Higher Education conference dealt predominantly with techniques or domains of practice, for example, grievance processes, Indigenous employment strategies, training of staff in cross cultural competencies, and maternity leave research. These are appropriate topics, but there is also a need to take a longer-term and a broader approach to enquiry, for example by considering the effects in organisations of concepts such as grievance, considering in broader terms the ways in which cultural difference impact on universities as employers and places of teaching

and research, and the differential success of different types of affirmative action strategy.

For equal employment opportunity the agenda is relatively fixed, from year to year, and the work is so busy that equal opportunity officers do not have the time to interrogate the theoretical basis of their own work, or to examine critically their own practice in depth. This interrogation and examination is an important project for equal opportunity officers, and for the field of their professional interest. It is also consistent with intellectual values that date back to Socrates:

> …to think critically about the social origins of apparently timeless moral norms, the distinction between convention and nature….and generally living the "examined life" (Nussbaum, 1986, p.1, p.9).

This is both an intellectual project, and an ethical one that concerns personal integrity (Almond 1998, pp116-117).

### 5.10 Implications for Organisations

Organisational change is endemic in Australia and the rest of the capitalist world. It has been regarded either as imposed by changing circumstance, or as a symptom of a system that responds to the internal needs of the powerful within organisations. This study has provided evidence of staff within universities who regard organisational and cultural change as central to their role, and who have considerable organisational, political and communication skills. While their impact on culture may be less than that of their senior leaders, they are nevertheless a considerable resource for universities if their agendas are purposefully aligned with the organisation's strategic directions.

#### 5.10.1 Changed Circumstances

In Australia, the sources of imposed changes have been analysed as: changes in the composition of the economy; increases in information technology and consequent changes to the way work is done; changes to the composition of the workforce;

increased diversity; changes in industrial relations, and globalisation (Vecchio et al. 1992, pp.5-6).

Universities have been subject to these external forces of change. In addition, the aims of a succession of Australian governments have been to reduce the public sector, which has included reduced funding to universities, while at the same time exerting control through 'steering at a distance' (Marginson and Considine 2000, p.20).

Among university responses to external change have been: changes in university governance; a new kind of executive power; structural change; enhanced flexibility of personnel and resources, and a move into the world of enterprise. At the same time, universities have seemed to be choosing from an increasingly restricted menu of commercial options and strategies and a surprising lack of diversity in educational programs (Marginson and Considine 2000, p.203).

There are other possibilities for the direction of change for universities. They would appear to be organisations that should be well-positioned for the development of a high-skill economy, and thus highly capable of being 'sustainable' organisations as characterised by Dunphy and Griffiths (1998 pp148-150).

### 5.10.2 Internal Reasons for Change

A significant internal driver of change within Australian universities has been the considerable changes to the ranks of senior leaders in recent years (Marginson and Considine 2000, p.17), and an expansion in the numbers of senior positions (2000, p.63). The number of changes in personalities at the top has inevitably added to the internal dimension of organisational change. It has become a piece of shared myth that each new Vice Chancellor heralds a new structure.

There have been analyses of the internal reasons for organisational change. In an integration of management practice and psychoanalytical theory, Kets de Vries and Miller (1984, p.18) described the psychological forces that often acted to produce irrational organisational outcomes. They took the view that the personality of the manager could influence strategy, structure and organisational culture. Mant (1997,

p.260), also reflected on the personalities of managers and change agents, and observed that some change agents appeared to need chaos in the organisation to reflect their own inner chaos. This analysis was supported by Marginson and Considine (2000, p.71), who observed in the new generation of Vice Chancellors that they were:

> …seeking novelty, either in their own creations or in the opportunities created by governments.

### 5.10.3 Resistance to Change

While organisational change appears to be a given for both external and internal reasons, an inevitable question it raises concerns the effectiveness of the changes. Evidence, based on a meta-analysis of a large number of change studies found that fewer than 40% of the change efforts produced positive changes in the dependent variable of interest, and another found that in one third of the major resource-intensive change initiatives, the efforts actually made the situation worse (Dent and Goldberg 1999). Even when organisations attempted to involve workers, there is research indicating that techniques of participative decision-making result in up to two thirds of staff choosing not to participate when given the chance (Neumann 1989). For staff in universities who have had the external change that other organisations have experienced, and change resulting from the political arena, and also a fair amount of change in senior leaders, it would not be surprising to find less than enthusiasm about supporting change.

Some recent research on Australian chief executive officers revealed that organisational change was having limited success, and workforces were described as being in turmoil. The lack of success was attributed to chief executive officer's concentration on the technical and financial side of change, which devalues people (Kingsley 1999).

This evidence of weak impact of organisational change strategies in general, even given the support of leaders, can be compared with the impact that equal opportunity officers in universities have had. While their analyses tended to be informal, there

were indications in this research that the long-term focus, persistence and flexibility in re-aligning the agendas of at least some equal opportunity officers had yielded results which shorter-term strategies may not. In addition, the strong focus on coalition building, communication and strategies of influence could be contrasted with Kingsley's analysis of chief executive officers.

For equal opportunity officers, what could be described as change fatigue from the sense of constant and ongoing change that creates extra work and pressure in universities will affect their ability to promote an agenda of change towards equal opportunity. There was some evidence of this given by research participants.

Those who do not like the changes made by leaders in organisations, have been characterised as resistant to change. The concept of resistance has been attributed to Kurt Lewin's work in force-field theory, and subsequently became a standard topic in management texts. More recently there has been literature (Kotter 1995, Dent and Goldberg 1999, Piderit 2000, Jansen 2000), which challenged this idea. Kotter suggested that employees often understood a new vision, and may even have wanted it to happen, but there may have been obstacles that prevented implementation, for instance a misalignment of a performance appraisal system, that led people to choose between the new vision and their self–interest. Dent and Goldberg (1999) asserted that people may resist, for example loss of status, loss of pay, or loss of comfort, rather than change *per se.* Piderit (2000) observed that some behaviour characterised as resistance might also be motivated by the worker's ethical principles, or a desire to protect the organisation's best interests. They questioned the use of the term resistance, and suggested that it contained a mental model that was counter-productive and even threatening to the survival of some organisations. This analysis is particularly relevant for universities that are characteristically concerned with prestige enhancement.

One aspect of the role of equal opportunity officers was identified in this research as being a 'loyal opponent'. This comprised providing internal criticism of people, policies and practices as they impacted on equal opportunity within a university. This aspect requires equal opportunity officers to find a balance between the organisational change proposed by senior staff members with the critique of the loyal opposition

role, while at the same time managing their own change fatigue and elements of resistance.

As power appears to be becoming ever more centralised in Australian universities, those at the centre are at risk of being ever more remote from what is actually going on in various parts of the university. Organisations therefore need to have ways of listening to internal critics. Evidence for this is provided by Kotter and Heskett (1992, p.70), who noted seventy features of 'unhealthy' cultures in low performing companies. One of them was that managers tended to be arrogant. According to them, there are three key managerial constituencies: customers, stakeholders and employees. Listening to internal critics who share an interest in the success of the university enables senior managers to gain insights about the other key constituencies.

The advantage of listening to multiple sources was advocated by Ashford (1998, pp.349-376), who argued that as business environments have become more complex, top-management groups are unable to fully monitor and represent the factors that must be accounted for in making effective decisions. Therefore, top management groups that obtained input from multiple sources were more likely to have an adaptive advantage over organisations that ignore such input, and 'issues selling', is therefore useful to management.

Within an environment of external and internal change that is characteristic of universities, equal opportunity officers have a role that is concerned with both cultural maintenance and with change. Their task includes scanning the external and the internal environment, in order to grasp opportunities to make changes that will be consistent with the university's response to some general internal or externally driven change, while at the same time attempting to resist those effects of the changes that were not regarded as consistent with the values that promote equal opportunity. For organisations, the relative clarity of values that equal opportunity officers have can support change, or can stiffen resistance. Their work matches the major political task for universities, but has a particular focus.

The work of equal opportunity officers examined in this research demonstrated that cultural change in universities require efforts in a plurality of ways, and over long

time-frames. In a sense they are internal specialists in organisational change, and their skills could be engaged by executive managers to assist in strategic change.

However, there is a tension in the role of equal opportunity officers between cultural innovation and cultural maintenance. To some extent, the study found that they were involved in both, but some theorists take the view that the leaders needed for cultural change are not the same as those needed for cultural maintenance (Trice and Beyer 1993, p.259). If this is the case then universities need to consider what type of role they expect their equal opportunity staff to play at any point in time.

As organisational change in universities appears to be endemic in the system, positive organisational response requires staff who are skilled in analysing and aligning to changed organisational requirements. Equal opportunity practitioners can be used as a resource by universities in the change process, as this study has demonstrated their skill and flexibility in initiating, promoting and managing both organisational change, and maintenance. This is predicated on a requirement to align the equal opportunity priorities with the broader organisational strategies.

# 6. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

There is a limitation to this research that is inherent in development of a study which has been based in practice. These limitations include the fact that the practitioner may have limited discipline expertise, and this study required reading over a number of discipline areas. The strong orientation to practice is consequently accompanied by a degree of superficiality in aspects of discipline-based reading.

The corollary difficulty is that of the knowing practitioner. While a study based in the problems of practice has the potential for depth, difficulties can arise. One is that the closeness to the experiences of practice can 'naturalise' cultural peculiarities. Access to literature, particularly of other professional practice, assisted in reducing this effect.

Another related limitation is that the study risks becoming autobiographical, which would be a limit to its utility. The design of the methodology was intended to reduce this risk, though the resonance of some of the participants' observations with the researcher's experience could have led to these observations being over-emphasised.

A great deal of this study was based on an analysis of interview data, though supported by other data in the ways described in the Methodology chapter. While the aim of grounding the study in the experience of practitioners was met, the strong self-presentation skills of participants indicated that caution was necessary in inferring that the grounded theory of the impact of equal opportunity officers could be considered as a general theory of cultural change. There would need to be other similar studies conducted to test its generalisability.

Goals and objectives achieved by participants in the research were usually described in terms of success in achieving project outcomes, even though they demonstrated awareness of higher level aims such as fairness, social justice, human rights, while one spoke of structural disadvantage. Their impact on the culture of universities was therefore described through these activities. The higher level aims were generally spoken of as unproblematic, one participant naming them as values with which all equal opportunity officers would agree, and they were not defined further. The

looseness of these meanings may very well be the way in which many practitioners deal with the values base for their work. Research that lifted out the various meanings and the ways in which equal opportunity officers employed terms would add significantly to this research.

For practitioners, particularly those who are new to equal opportunity work, a study that conducted a full audit of the skills and knowledge that are necessary or useful for an effective equal opportunity officer would be useful. However, this would inevitably be limited by the changing context in higher education.

Another source of further research that would build on this study would be examinations of its applicability in other settings. Also, research conducted with other staff who may be agents of change would provide comparison with the findings identified for equal opportunity officers through this research.

Another useful extension to this research would be to consider the impacts of equal opportunity officer's work through the perceptions of staff and students.

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# 8. APPENDICES

Appendix 1.  Letter of Consent

Appendix 2. Follow Up of Interview Participants

Appendix 3. Letter and Comment Page for Non-Interviewed Participants