

Using Historical Perspective to Enhance Understanding of the Relationship Between Equal Employment Opportunity, Affirmative Action and Diversity Management

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The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the value of considering Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), Affirmative Action (AA) and Diversity Management (DM) and the relationships between them from an historical perspective. By locating all three policies and/or strategies in the specific historical contexts in which they emerged, the paper considers analogous political, social and legal developments that emerged concurrently, and whether they had an impact on the way that EEO, AA and DM have been practised and represented. For our purposes, such developments include multicultural and productive diversity policies and anti-discrimination laws. This approach makes it possible to uncover the similarities and differences between these policies/practises and also patterns of change and continuity. On this basis, the paper indicates how ahistorical approaches to EEO/AA and DM have prevented understandings of and engagement with the workplace experiences of migrant workers from non-English speaking backgrounds, thereby contributing to a lack of insight into inter-cultural relations in organisations composed of women and men from a wide range of countries, linguistic groups and cultures.

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