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# Sexual Orientation Diversity Programmes

## An Evaluation

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in Social Policy at  
Massey University, Albany Campus.

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## Abstract

Since the mid 1980s the American, like the New Zealand workplace has undergone significant changes, particularly in the composition of the workforce. Increasingly, the 'traditional' employee, a white male, able-bodied heterosexual is in the minority. The emergence of Diversity Programmes within the American workplace is a direct response to these changes. While Diversity Programmes emerged from Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Affirmative Action Programmes, the distinctions are significant. Diversity Programmes focus on productivity, profitability, inclusivity and organisational culture. In recent years a major area of growth has been the development of sexual orientation Diversity Programmes.

This research examines ten American organisations that have invested significant resources into sexual orientation Diversity Programmes with reported success, describes their key features and the reasons for this success. The findings clearly reflect the literature on the subject and show that when an organisation values and respects its gay, lesbian and bisexual employees the rewards to the company can be significant, both to the individual and the organisation.

The second component of the research was the examination of the response of New Zealand organisations to the implementation of sexual orientation Diversity Programmes. However, it became evident that this could not proceed as planned, primarily due to local lack of awareness of the concept of Diversity Programmes and the apparent lack of interest in addressing the issue of sexual orientation in the workplace. The local research then reviewed local human resource related policies and procedures, to determine the level of inclusivity of gay and lesbian employees, and found that of the 20 organisations sampled, while all subscribe to EEO, most exclude sexual orientation, and in many cases their policies and procedures are discriminatory against gay and lesbian employees.

The research highlighted significant differences between the American and the New Zealand organisations sampled. While American companies have embraced sexual orientation Diversity Programmes as being good for business, the local organisations remain focused on legislative requirements and moral obligation, a key criticism of EEO programmes in the literature. While the American workplace has demonstrated an ability to respond successfully to the changing nature and composition of the workplace, New Zealand organisations have been slow to adapt, with the result that gay and lesbian employees do not, in many cases, have equity within the workplace and organisations are not realising their potential level of profit and profitability.

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