

# Equity and Me: My Life as an Employment Equity Practitioner

*Catherine Malone*

## ABSTRACT

The perspective of equity practitioners is distinct and offers unparalleled insight into the actual effectiveness of employment equity policy. As an employment equity practitioner within an engineering firm and its parent company, I achieved only marginal success for two main reasons. First, executives and managers refused to recognize and deal with employment equity, especially equity for women, as a business issue. Second, our efforts were hampered by the lack of effective equity legislation.

## RÉSUMÉ

La perspective des praticiens en matière d'équité est distincte et permet de pénétrer l'efficacité de la politique de l'équité en matière d'emploi de façon hors pair. En tant que praticien de l'équité en matière d'emploi dans une firme d'ingénieurs et de sa maison mère, je n'ai eu qu'un succès négligeable pour deux raisons principales. D'abord, les cadres et les gestionnaires ont refusé de reconnaître et de se charger de l'équité en matière d'emploi, surtout lorsqu'il s'agissait de l'équité pour les femmes, en tant que question d'affaire. Deuxièmement, nos efforts ont été entravés par le manque d'efficacité de la loi sur l'équité.

When I joined the workforce, nearly three decades ago, the office was a different place. Aside from the absence of computers, fax machines and voicemail, back then men and women seldom performed the same type of work. Thirty years ago, want ads were classified by gender. In the office, women's roles were usually supportive of those of men and were paid considerably less. Sexual harassment, as a legal concept, did not exist although those of us who experienced it knew what it was. I clearly remember my first job. A man with the power to grant me a promotion explained that in exchange for a raise he expected "a wife in the office." I felt angry, yet powerless to change things. At that time I had no other option but to quit.

Since then I have had the privilege of working with, and learning from, a number of outstanding women and men. Educated in the understanding of the various forms of discrimination, many have experienced sexism, racism, heterosexism and/or able-bodyism firsthand; they never hesitate to deal with it head on. Through the tireless efforts of many women and men who demanded changes by using various strategies, such as unionizing, confronting

harassers, and filing complaints with human rights organizations, the workplace has been improved. In addition to the dedication and hard work of individuals and lobby groups, the federal government instituted employment equity legislation.

Intended as a proactive strategy to deal with workplace discrimination, the Employment Equity Act (EEA) was proclaimed by the federal government in 1986. The EEA was established:

to achieve equality in the work place so that no person shall be denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons unrelated to ability and, in the fulfillment of that goal, to correct the conditions of disadvantage in employment experienced by women, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and persons who are, because of their race or colour, in a visible minority in Canada by giving effect to the principle that employment equity means more than treating persons in the same way but also requires special measures and the accommodation of difference.<sup>1</sup>

Lofty, praiseworthy ideals indeed. Yet from the inception of equity legislation, the federal government was more concerned about placating business than making real change in the economic lives of members of the groups designated in the Act. The Abella Commission, which was struck to investigate inequality in the workplace and whose work was largely responsible for the EEA, proposed the use of the term "employment equity" instead of the American phrase "affirmative action." The reason for the new term was that quotas, a part of the American Equal Employment Opportunity program, were considered potentially too divisive. Abella stated that, "In creating our own program in Canada, we may not wish to use quotas and we should therefore seriously consider calling it something else if we want to avoid ... intellectual resistance and confusion."<sup>2</sup> This recommendation was incorporated into the 1986 EEA and, as a result, instead of being accountable for filling quotas, employers covered by the act were encouraged simply to set goals and timetables.

As a companion to the EEA, but not included in the legislation, the federal government developed the Federal Contractors Program (FCP) "To ensure that the federal contractors who do business with the Government of Canada achieve and maintain a fair and representative workforce."<sup>3</sup> This program only affected suppliers who employed more than one hundred people and bid on federal contracts worth \$200,000 or more.<sup>4</sup> For suppliers meeting these criteria, the senior executive of the company had to certify in writing his or her commitment to implement employment equity measures, defined by the federal government as "the identification and removal of barriers to the selection, hiring, promotion and training of members of the [four] designated groups."<sup>5</sup> Under the FCP, suppliers were also encouraged to increase the representation of the designated groups throughout their organization.

Has the federal employment equity program been successful? Based on my experience, and those of five colleagues in the engineering industry, only marginally. The principle obstacle we commonly experienced was the refusal of executives and managers to

recognize and deal with employment equity as a business issue. The lack of executive and managerial commitment to employment equity was not improved by the FCP because one of the major weaknesses of the program is that it is the intent to implement employment equity, and not the improvement in representation for designated group members, on which employers were audited. Finally, the FCP did not address socialization factors, such as the male dominance of the engineering profession, educational systems which channel young girls away from studying mathematics and science and university engineering faculties which were not "women friendly."

I personally became involved with employment equity in 1990. During this time, I was hired as a human resources practitioner for a newly established high tech company which I will refer to as "NewCo." Several days into my new job, I was reviewing files left by my predecessor. One of the files was entitled "Employment Equity." The more I read the information in this file, the more excited I became. Finally, the government had recognized the inequalities women and members of other groups experience in the Canadian workplace, and here was legislation designed to address this issue. I thought I had found the golden key. This legislation was going to improve the working lives of those who, although skilled, hard-working and motivated, had difficulty in achieving rewarding and well-paying work.

First, I spent time developing a better understanding of the meaning of "employment equity." It was the FCP which impacted NewCo. The government provided a wealth of written material. I was later to discover that was basically all the government provided. What resulted was primarily an exercise in administrative record keeping. Over the years, a tremendous amount of research had been completed, reports written, statistics collected, all of which proved the inequality and discrimination members of the designated groups experienced in the workplace. But real change was not desired by organizations, including government, and so business continued unabated by ineffectual equity legislation.

However, the ineffectiveness of this legislation was not readily apparent to me, and it would take some time working with it before I was able to clearly see it for what it was - a ruse. Without changing the status quo, the government could point to this act as a means of showing its recognition of the discrimination many voters experienced.

Late in 1990, NewCo embarked on a recruitment strategy that would almost double its workforce over the next four years. Because representation of the four designated groups throughout the organization was low, I thought it an opportune time to convince the company's executive to implement employment equity initiatives.

In January 1991, I presented a business case in support of the implementation of employment equity to the Manager, and Vice President, of Human Resources. The Vice President then discussed what I had prepared with the company's President.

The business case I developed was based on the following points:

- 1) As NewCo employed over one hundred people and would probably bid on contracts for the federal government worth \$200,000 or more, the company should start to implement employment equity immediately, rather than waiting until a contract was bid on. The amount of work required to implement employment equity initiatives was extensive.
- 2) NewCo provided substantial amounts of services to the Ontario government, as well as having two offices in Ontario. The (then) new NDP government had published its intention to implement employment equity legislation, and NewCo should be ready to meet the resulting requirements.
- 3) NewCo also provided services in the United States and had already been requested by several US cities and states to supply information on equity initiatives within the company.
- 4) As NewCo was embarking on a period

of significant recruitment, primarily for engineers and software developers, it should position itself as an employer of choice so that it could attract the best graduates which were increasingly men who were members of visible minorities.

5) As NewCo expanded its market internationally, this expansion could be facilitated by a greater understanding of, and responsiveness to, other cultures which would be made possible if those cultures were represented within NewCo's workforce.

The President of NewCo agreed to support employment equity primarily in response to government requirements. Following my suggestion, the President issued a letter to all NewCo's employees outlining his support. Although four of the five points outlined in the business case I had developed had the potential of directly affecting the company's success (attracting top talent, improving the global sales strategy), the viewpoint adopted by NewCo's executive was that employment equity was merely a government requirement that should be met without significantly changing the way its business was done. I was given responsibility for employment equity, but without much in the way of support or resources. The letter was essentially the end of the President's involvement and interest in employment equity. The only other direction I received from the executive was to "keep us out of trouble."

Other business initiatives, such as new product development, recruitment, and opening up new global markets, were clearly initiated and directed by NewCo's executive. Such initiatives were treated by the executive as business issues critical to the success of NewCo. Employment equity, by contrast, was viewed as a government program, and not as an initiative to be integrated with other business concerns, such as recruitment and the opening of new global markets. From the start, then, employment equity was marginalized within NewCo and viewed by the executive and managers as a separate and less significant responsibility of the Human Resources

Department: more specifically, me.

Aside from the President's concern for government requirements, there was an additional reason why his letter of support was issued so quickly. The parent company of NewCo, which I will refer to as BDI, was at this same time in the process of resurrecting its attempts at implementing employment equity. Because the President of NewCo reported directly to one of the senior executives of BDI, the latter company often determined the programs, policies and procedures which NewCo was expected to follow. Employment equity was not one of the initiatives that BDI specifically directed NewCo to implement, but because BDI was doing some work on employment equity, the President of NewCo asked me to work with those in the parent company who were also trying to establish employment equity.

BDI had dealt with employment equity in a sporadic way. In 1986, shortly after the federal bill on employment equity was enacted, BDI issued a memo supporting employment equity. The President, it said, would develop the "overall philosophy of Employment Equity by establishing affirmative action as a major company objective and assigning accountability for those objectives at all levels and in all groups." BDI then moved to the next step of the process outlined by the FCP, a self-identification survey of all its Canadian divisions. After this initial burst of activity, however, employment equity was virtually forgotten for the next four years. The survey data was not updated and quickly lost its validity.

It was not until 1990, when BDI was experiencing strong competition in the hiring of new engineering graduates, that it created an "Employer of Choice" initiative in order to attract top engineering graduates from universities across North America. As well as going to many university campuses for recruitment interviews, and offering multi-year contracts of guaranteed employment, part of the Employer of Choice initiative was a renewal of BDI's commitment to employment equity. This was viewed as a strategy which would attract recent graduates, whose makeup was becoming increasingly more diverse. That year, BDI gave a white, non-disabled male

responsibility for reactivating employment equity; several months later, he resigned.

The position was then given to a white, non-disabled woman, "Wilma," who would also be responsible for employee relations. Reporting to a Vice President, her new title was Manager of Employee Relations. Wilma's office was located in BDI's headquarters. Her first task was the development of a network (in April 1991) of employment equity representatives. The network was comprised of regional representatives and location-specific representatives. I was both a regional and location-specific representative. Although Wilma nominally headed the network, because its members were appointed by managers from the regions and locations, we did not report directly to her; and since the reporting structure tended to undercut Wilma's authority, it was an effective marginalization strategy.

From the beginning, we had trouble obtaining executive and senior management level support for employment equity. When we proposed a plan for implementation of employment equity initiatives, with the goal of winning an award from the federal government that could be used as part of the publicity developed for the "Employer of Choice" initiative, the Vice President responsible for employment equity informed Wilma that it was "corny to try and win an award in employment equity."

Even amongst those of us assigned to participate in the network, there were problems. Two of our colleagues immediately informed us that they did not support employment equity and that they were only involved because they had been assigned to this project by their managers. We had no authority over who was assigned to work on employment equity, so they were left in place. Those of us who did support employment equity found that, because our employment equity responsibilities were not given priority by our management, we had little worktime to devote to the development of initiatives.

One of the first initiatives completed by the network was to create and publish, near the end of 1991, a four-page bulletin announcing the establishment of employment equity, explaining why it was necessary, and introducing the people

who could be contacted for additional information. Part of the information supporting the need for employment equity in this bulletin was statistical information drawn from the 1986 self-identification survey. This statistical data showed unambiguously the low representation of the four designated groups within BDI. Although this bulletin was only intended for employees, one of BDI's lawyers argued against the release of the statistics. Her concern was that "our dirty laundry" would become public when employees took these bulletins home. The bulletin was published anyway, and there were no negative repercussions. Although these concerns were proven to be groundless, the fact that they were referred to as "dirty laundry" indicated to us that at least some executives within BDI recognized the company's poor record in creating a diverse workforce.

In late 1991, we requested that the President of BDI sign a statement in support of employment equity similar to the letter issued earlier in the year by the President of its subsidiary, NewCo, which would then be distributed to all BDI and NewCo employees. The intent of the statement was to demonstrate top-level support for this initiative and, thereby, increase the support and participation of the various levels of management within both companies. The President refused to sign, demanding instead to know why employment equity was necessary. Wilma explained the necessity to the President and, although he then stated he understood the necessity for employment equity, he still refused to sign the statement. In the end, we had to settle for the Vice President of Human Resources signing the statement. When the President did not support employment equity, it was further marginalized because his refusal reinforced the perception held by many of the company's managers and employees that, rather than a business issue which could improve business viability, employment equity was just another government administrative requirement which would best be handled by the Human Resources Department as this is where the information required by the FCP resided.

Wilma soon experienced the same workload problems the rest of us were facing, in

that other responsibilities, such as overseeing a world-wide employee satisfaction survey, prevented her from giving the start-up of the equity initiative her full attention. Eventually Wilma asked for and obtained another position outside employment equity because of her frustrations in trying to implement employment equity with so little support from the executive and senior management of BDI.

Her experience of lack of support led Wilma to recommend that her replacement be a white, non-disabled man. She believed that a white man would more easily gain credibility in the white, male-dominated headquarters of BDI. Her belief appeared to be justified. Not only was her replacement, "John," given a higher grade, salary and title (Director), than she had had, but when he proposed that BDI develop an employment equity plan which would win a federal government award, the Vice President who had previously called this "corny" now thought it was a wonderful idea.

John was able to push the administrative aspects of employment equity a bit further along. He successfully obtained the signatures of BDI's President and Vice President of Human Resources on a statement of support which appeared on the redesigned self-identification survey forms. The value of this commitment became apparent in the wake of BDI's winning (in January 1992) a \$5 million contract with the federal government. Under the FCP, the contract meant that BDI's employment equity program would be audited. Nevertheless, four months later when the President of BDI sent his business objective <sup>6</sup> for the year to the President of NewCo, there was no mention of employment equity or the fact that the company needed to prepare for a federal government audit, something which involves a significant amount of work, especially when very little had yet been done in regard to employment equity initiatives. (The insensitivity to equity issues was evident in a detail of the memo outlining the organization's objectives: it used only male pronouns.)

But the chief obstacle to further progress was the absence of funding. The network Wilma had earlier established still, a year and a half later, had no budget and dedicated human resources, and

those of us who had been assigned this additional role were finding it increasingly more difficult to dedicate any of our paid working time to equity initiatives. Prior to John taking over responsibility for employment equity, we had presented a budget to senior executives estimating the financial and human resources needed to successfully jump-start the employment equity program BDI had committed itself to under FCP. The budget request was denied.

John decided that a budget was crucial to the success of the employment equity program and invited a well-known, external consultant, one specializing in employment equity issues, to speak to the two Vice Presidents of Human Resources. John's plan was that, once these men realized the need for resources, they would convince BDI's President to allocate funds. (The President had also been invited to the consultant's presentation, but did not attend.) When the consultant started the meeting by asking the senior Vice President, Human Resources what the status of employment equity was within BDI, we were surprised to hear from the Vice President about all the work BDI was doing in regard to employment equity. After a few minutes, however, it was clear that the only solid example he had was some past work John had done in an aboriginal community prior to his taking the employment equity position. I and an equally frustrated colleague finally interrupted the Vice President and said that, in reality, very little had been accomplished within BDI in regard to employment equity. We cited the main reason: equity initiatives did not get the funding, promotion and dedicated human resources which other initiatives had received. We also stated that the discriminatory hiring and promotion practices within BDI sent a clear message that the company was not genuinely interested in changing the way it did business. The Vice President recovered quickly and said that employment equity was important, that it had to be implemented. He said it was the network's responsibility to get the job done: "don't worry about the costs." The meeting broke up.

But nothing changed. The network received neither a financial nor a human resources budget. In September 1992, we attempted, once

again, to secure a budget for employment equity, but we were not successful.

By this time, those of us still committed to employment equity felt like we were swimming against a very strong current. The most significant indicator of the lack of support for employment equity was the response by BDI's executive to the notification that the federal government would audit BDI in August 1992. BDI was not prepared for an audit, and John immediately requested, and received, a four-week postponement from the auditor. When it became clear to John that the additional four weeks would not be enough time to prepare for the audit, he negotiated with the auditor to extend the audit date to February 1993. In spite of the obvious problems with meeting the requirements of the FCP audit, no budget was allotted to employment equity. However, in early 1993, John established the Diversity Steering Committee. Comprised of eight senior human resources and line managers, they were expected to become employment equity "champions" in their respective divisions. The Diversity Steering Committee met several times, but was disbanded shortly after it was created as a result of changing priorities within BDI.

Having successfully postponed the audit by six months, John contracted two studies from different consultants, an employment systems review and a study of BDI's "culture." The first was a review and evaluation of BDI's documents and practices in regard to human resource management. Completed in February 1993, the study was to identify systems and procedures which were weak, over-emphasized, misused or non-existent, and which, as a result, might have an adverse impact on designated group members. This study produced thirty-four recommendations to improve BDI's management of its human resources. The consultant noted that no evidence of an employment equity policy was found, and the employees interviewed for the study were unaware of any employment equity initiatives.

The second study grew out of John's (and his US counterpart's) concern about the failure of the company's executive to view employment equity as a business issue. The purpose of this study was to identify BDI's culture and its

implications for diversity. The study approached this by identifying who succeeded, how people were promoted and developed, by comparing diversity policies with practices, and by finding out what BDI's employees thought the company should be doing about diversity. John, my other equity colleagues, and I hoped that the results of this study in particular would finally convince BDI's executive of the need for employment equity by redefining it as a business issue which, if ignored, would negatively impact on the business. The Canadian portion of the study consisted of interviews with thirty-one senior managers across Canada, twenty-eight focus groups and a review of various BDI data (including the employment systems review study noted above).

The study was completed in the spring of 1994, and it identified a number of strengths in regard to diversity issues within BDI. One of the more significant findings was a recognition that diversity was getting onto the corporate agenda despite business challenges, as a result of pockets of interest, concern and activity around diversity which existed within the company. Many of the survey and interview respondents felt that the company had made some advances in employment equity. For example, entry level hiring was fairly representative of the diversity within the population, the sexual harassment awareness training was successful, and the extension of benefits without regard to sexual orientation was seen as progressive.

The study also identified some major weaknesses in BDI, highlighting them as the primary obstacles to employment equity; they were the same obstacles which the network had been unsuccessfully presenting to BDI's executive for years. One of the main weaknesses was a hard-nosed, tough, aggressive, macho culture which was not conducive to diversity. Also identified was that employment equity had few executive champions or open supporters and was treated as an issue for the human resources department, not a line management issue. As a result, employment equity was not given priority or treated as a valid business issue. In support of their identifying these obstacles, respondents referred to the lack of an articulated, coordinated diversity strategy, and the

lackadaisical approach to assigning resources to work on employment equity. Respondents further indicated that the inflexible management style, the ambivalence and resentment regarding employment equity and the "glass ceiling" for women and minorities also provided obstacles to diversity within BDI. The report noted also that there was a general skepticism among respondents that BDI would embrace diversity and act on the findings of this study. In short, the study amply confirmed the perceptions of those of us who had worked on employment equity at BDI of the status of diversity issues within the organization.

When the report from the consultant was finalized, however, BDI's executive informed the senior managers that the study would remain confidential. It would not be released to BDI as a whole. There has been no indication that either the executive or senior management of BDI has used the information from the study in any way.

John himself had already moved out of employment equity before the study was completed. He was concerned that his career would be seriously hampered if he spent too much time working with such an unpopular issue. At the time he left, although BDI had still not been able to prepare for the audit, the executive decided that John would not be immediately replaced. The employment equity network was disbanded, although some of us continued, on our own initiative, to work on employment equity within our locations. Responsibility for employment equity was eventually given to another white, non-disabled male whose main responsibilities lay elsewhere.

Due to his additional responsibilities, the person responsible for employment equity was not happy that he was given responsibility for employment equity and indicated to me that he was only prepared to do "the bare minimum in order to pass the audit." When this individual left BDI in February 1994, he was not immediately replaced.

Still facing the audit in the fall of 1994, BDI resurrected employment equity. This time, responsibility was given to a recently hired, white, non-disabled, male Human Resources trainee with no experience in employment equity. By early

1995, the status of employment equity within BDI and NewCo remained the same, and the audit, though now begun, was still incomplete. BDI received no penalty in spite of the fact that, after two and a half years, they were still not prepared to have the federal government audit their employment equity program.

By this time, all of us involved in the original network moved on to other positions. Although the attempt to implement employment equity was often a frustrating experience, my colleagues and I did make some in-roads. For example, we established a comprehensive sexual harassment program. We were able to raise the awareness of diversity issues amongst a number of individuals. Representation of some of the designated groups, primarily visible minority men, was increased within entry level positions. However, this increase had more to do with business necessity than with employment equity initiatives.

As a way of dealing with the frustration, I decided to use my work as the basis for an MA thesis. After discovering that my experiences were similar to those of five colleagues in the high tech industry, my thesis concluded that those of us assigned the task of implementing employment equity initiatives within engineering companies have been only marginally successful. The main barrier to our success was the refusal of executives and managers to recognize and deal with employment equity, especially equity for women, as an issue intrinsic to the success of their business. Of course, this was not logical because these companies all faced a serious shortfall in the supply of needed technical employees. Management's refusal to recognize equality in employment as a business issue was reinforced both by the institutional and systemic structure of the male-dominated engineering profession and the lack of substantial legislation to enforce employment equity.

The requirement to implement employment equity through the Federal Contractors Program (FCP) generated similar responses from executives within all the engineering companies in my study. For example, one of the employment equity practitioners told of

a senior executive who expressed concern that a "customer" - the federal government - was telling him how to run his business. Another practitioner was asked by members of the executive what the minimum effort necessary would be in order to meet the requirements of the FCP. A third practitioner noted that, because the work the company was doing for the federal government was coming to an end, the executives said, "Well, why should we worry about it?" The executives in this company seemed unconcerned over the possibility that discontinuing work on employment equity could easily jeopardize their being awarded government contracts in the future.

The overriding goal for the majority of companies in my study, in regard to employment equity, was to meet compliance of the FCP in order to pass a potential audit. What this meant was that employment equity was not viewed as a business issue. In other words, they did not see employment equity as a strategic process which, if properly implemented, could positively impact the success of the business. Management in most of these companies regarded employment equity as an additional cost of doing business, rather than an aid to competitiveness.

The lack of any genuine involvement, interest and support on the part of executives of the majority of these companies indicated that employment equity stalled because it is not considered a business issue. The executives in several of the companies said that employment equity had already been achieved, pointing to the increased representation of males of Asian ancestry as proof. However, this particular increase resulted not from equity initiatives, but simply because this group comprised a growing percentage of engineering graduates. They hired who was available. The employment equity practitioners who worked with these executives had to continually remind them that, yes, there has been an increase in the hiring of visible minority males, but they were not proportionally represented in management. The practitioners also reminded the executives that visible minority males were only part of one of the designated groups; there were three other groups under the FCP whose representation needed to be addressed.

There was a consensus amongst my equity colleagues that, without the FCP, their companies would never have implemented employment equity. However, all the practitioners recognized the limitations of the FCP, and most agreed that legislating employment equity would not necessarily make it a reality. The practitioners believed that the most significant obstacle was the view of the majority of executives and senior managers that employment equity was not a business issue, but rather a requirement from a customer (the government), to be met with as few resources as possible. Although the majority of the companies implemented some employment equity initiatives, the lack of executive commitment and the resulting structural obstacles within these organizations ensured that the success of equity initiatives was minimal.

In spite of the challenges and frustrations my colleagues and I experienced, we all believed that there was a need for employment equity and that, although slow, some improvement occurred for designated group members. Each of us agreed that, before employment equity could become a reality, fundamental changes would have to occur in the corporate culture of engineering companies. It would also require the active participation of people throughout the organization, and not just us. We recognized that this would involve slow change. Although the majority acknowledged that quotas would create more rapid change, all agreed that this would not be a strategy likely to have positive results in the engineering industry.

Based on my experience, and those of my colleagues in the engineering industry, equity legislation has had a minimal impact for a number of reasons. The FCP did not directly address the manifestations of sexism within the engineering workplace, nor did it have any authority to penalize companies who continued discriminatory practices. Further, because of weak design, lack of enforcement and limited coverage, the FCP was ineffective in making employment equity for women in engineering companies a reality. This is unfortunate as the only reason all the companies in my study implemented employment equity was to meet federal government requirements. The strong business lobby's influence on the federal

government resulted in a watered down, ineffective program which was excluded from the Employment Equity Act and, therefore, not legislated. Consequently, while the FCP increased administrative work, it created little substantial improvement to the designated groups' representation or treatment within the workplace.

The executives of the engineering companies in my study were aware both of the limitations of the FCP, and that there would be no penalty for their failure to comply with its guidelines. Therefore, those of us assigned responsibility for employment equity were not expected to achieve any greater success than meeting the administrative requirements of the program. In this way, both the companies and the federal government gave the appearance of addressing the unequal treatment of certain groups in the workplace, such as women, without changing the reality of working life within engineering.

My colleagues and I believed that legislation alone would not make employment equity a reality within engineering companies. Employment equity legislation could be more effective if it were made more substantial, enforceable, if it covered all employers and addressed the critical importance of areas leading up to employment, such as education and socialization. In light of attacks on employment equity and affirmative action programs in Ontario and the US, it is not likely that this will happen in the near future. However, even though working with limited resources, employment equity practitioners and others are committed to opening up the challenging and rewarding field of engineering to girls and women. The work of social activists, combined with a strong demand for engineers, will continue to lead to increasing numbers of engineers who are members of designated groups, not the executives and managers of engineering companies or the federal employment equity program.

**ENDNOTES**

1. Canada. *Bill C-62, An Act respecting Employment Equity*. Ottawa: Queen's Printer for Canada, First Session, Thirty-third Parliament, 33-34-35 Elizabeth II, 1984-85-86: paragraph 2.
2. Canada. *Report of the Commission on Equality in Employment*. Rosalie Silberman Abella, Commissioner. Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services Canada, 1984: 7.
3. Canada. Employment and Immigration Canada. *Federal Contractors Program*. Ottawa: Public Affairs, Employment and Immigration Canada, October 1990: 1.
4. Canada. *Federal Contractors*: 1.
5. Canada. *Federal Contractors*: 1.
6. The common practice for determining what business objectives needed to be achieved during the year was that the President of BDI would determine the business issues which needed to be addressed by the entire organization, and these objectives would trickle down throughout the various divisions. Theoretically, these objectives were to go from the President throughout the entire organization, including entry-level positions.