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As the focus for industrial negotiation shifts more and more to the individual enterprise, productivity and efficiency measurement is playing an increasingly important role. Mutually acceptable methods for assessing just how efficiency should be demonstrated are crucial if agreement is to be reached on productivity based determination of terms and conditions of employment, including wage fixing.

A technique currently attracting much interest is *Benchmarking*. I have received a number of enquiries from members who are beginning to encounter the term in the context of restructuring inside their organisations. Some have found themselves involved in a negotiating process which is emphasising the use of benchmarking, without having received any information or training on what the concept involves.

Benchmarking is a process which organisations can use to compare their performance with that of other relevant bodies. As such, it is an important element of broader productivity improvement policies often described as *Best Practice Programs*. Put simply, this involves identification of national or international performance leaders, study of their methods to highlight the practices which contribute to their success and monitoring of organisational

results against those of the best performing companies. This provides simultaneously for clear strategic goals, performance standards through which to pursue objectives and an easily accessible yardstick for continuous review of progress toward their achievement. As well, benchmarking can play a significant part in establishing the habit of learning from others which is a central feature of the developing commitment to 'the learning organisation'.

Aspects of benchmarking can include measuring of staff error rates, customer response times, time taken to complete particular operations, levels of customer and employee satisfaction, output per employee, unit cost per employee and the cost of each phase of the work process. In fact, most elements of organisational activity can be benchmarked. The key to gaining maximum value, of course, is to identify those which have the greatest effect on overall performance.

While organisations vary widely and should therefore tailor practices to their individual circumstances, there are nevertheless several basic steps which should be common to any decision to introduce benchmarking. Commitment and involvement at all levels of the organisation are essential. A discrete and widely representative group to oversee the process and do much of the day to day work is a good

idea. Establishing accurate measurement of current performance is an obvious prerequisite for comparing the organisation with other bodies. Careful planning and information gathering is vital to selecting appropriate comparisons and clear targets and monitoring processes should be made available throughout the organisation.

Some factors are absolutely fundamental for successful use of benchmarking. Most importantly, there is a need for genuine communication to staff of objectives and reasons for adopting the process. As ever in times of rapid change there can be a tendency for fashionable concepts to be introduced hurriedly and without sufficient consideration of local factors—what some management commentators have called the 'plug-in, easy solution' approach to organisational change.

If benchmarking is introduced in this way success will obviously be much harder to achieve. And the fact that ALIA members are already being asked to take part in benchmarking with virtually no orientation to the process suggests that this problem is a real one. Members put in this position should ask management to provide benchmarking awareness training before they agree to take part. In addition, I will be pleased to provide further advice if you call me at the National Office. ■

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## Mobile libraries at the IFLA Conference

**Robert Pestell reports on a most successful meeting**

The IFLA Conference in Barcelona saw the Round Table on Mobile Libraries hold its most successful meeting to date. This year over 50 delegates from 16 different countries attended the session. The Executive Committee, which includes Australia, has expanded to promote mobile library development particularly in developing countries.

The *Mobile Library Guidelines* (IFLA Professional Report No 28, 1991) were published in Spanish in 1992 and will appear in French during 1993-94, and perhaps in Malay in 1994-95. Ms Dawn Springett of Australia, suggested the need for a resource kit, and this will be the next major objective of the Round Table. The kit will serve as a teaching aid for library educators,

a conference promotional package, and an introduction to mobile services in countries with embryonic or no mobile library services.

The Round Table is joining with the IFLA Section on Library Services to Multicultural Populations to hold a pre-conference seminar in Cuba in 1994, on the subject of mobile libraries serving multicultural populations. ■