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*Manager, personnel
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In April the long-awaited report of the Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills, otherwise known as the *Karpin report* or *Enterprising nation*, was released (see Virginia Walsh's *Direct Line*). Hard on its heels comes another government-sponsored report, which in my view, is possibly even more significant for Australian employees and their working lives in the next decade.

Human resource management and workplace change, Economic Planning and Advisory Commission Paper No 8, Commonwealth of Australia May 1995, ISBN 0644451343 is a major review of just what is (and isn't) being done in Australian organisations to pursue successful 'workplace reform'. The results are worrying, but not surprising.

The report is made up of a major commissioned paper by Professor Russell Lansbury and Dr Jim Kitay of Sydney University and the proceedings of a roundtable conference to discuss their findings. It is an indictment of Australian approaches to workplace reform. Specifically, its authors strongly support the view (espoused consistently in this column) that a preoccupation with narrow cost-cutting measures, such as 'downsizing' the workforce, is not only failing to achieve desired gains in productivity and quality, but is, of itself, introducing further unnecessary barriers to improvement. The report emphatically calls for a productivity enhancement (as opposed to cost minimisation) focus and a managed, jointly-accepted process as the basis for securing the sustainable improvements Australia needs.

Using international comparisons gleaned from 20 OECD countries, on all five key human resource management criteria the paper finds Australia lagging behind. On *work organisation*, Australia is judged well behind countries such as Japan, Germany, France and Norway, in introducing flexible, co-operative or team-based work systems. On *skill formation*, despite the

enormous emphasis given to the training reform agenda, Australia is rated well short of OECD best performers. On *remuneration*, Australia is seen as slow to adopt innovative pay strategies and incentives. On *enterprise governance*, our managements are characterised (as in *Enterprising nation*) as reluctant to tap the ideas of employees and trailing far behind Germany and Japan, in particular, in this regard. Finally, and in my view most importantly, Australia's performance in the critical area of *job security* is rated especially poorly. And here what I have always regarded as a self-evident point is emphasised: that productivity improvement, co-operation and employee innovation will come, not when workers are continually in fear of arbitrary loss of their jobs, but when they are encouraged to have some confidence in their longer term future with the organisation.

So much for 'best practice'! — these findings show clearly that Australian organisations are far more familiar with the term than with its constituent parts.

Supporting the findings, Professors Dexter Dunphy, AGSM and Ed Davis, Macquarie University raised interesting additional points in the roundtable conference. Dunphy felt that the fashion for short term executive employment contracts had much to do with managerial neglect of strategic human resource management in Australian organisations. He argued that investments in human capital should be treated in the same way as other major investment programs—that is, with a long term perspective. Clearly, this will not happen if key senior managers have a short term focus. Professor Davis supported the view (again, often put in this column) that there are very many organisations not genuinely committed to positive workplace reform or participative employee relations, even though they profess to be in their corporate plans and mission statements. Davis argues that effective outcomes from workplace re-

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form programs will be highly dependent on proper utilisation of enterprise bargaining opportunities. In his view, the primary emphasis of enterprise agreements should be on improved communication and consultation systems inside organisations, as a basis for improving productivity. It was pointed out that, to date, less than 10 per cent of agreements contain clauses for firm measurement of productivity.

Summarising both the commissioned paper and the roundtable discussion of it, Dr John Matthews (University of NSW) demonstrated that, based on international comparisons, there should be little disagreement on what constitutes 'best practice'. Analysis of the success stories of Japan, Germany and East Asia consistently shows teamwork, effective communication, mutual trust and a willingness to try innovative experimentation as characteristics of the star performance organisations. These must be the goals, he says, of Australian workplace reform.

Perhaps above all, these extensive international comparisons demonstrate that, in an effective workplace, equity and efficiency considerations need not be competing paradigms for reform. Frequently, what are seen as equity issues for the workforce (access to training, job security, employee participation in organisational development and provision of information on company policy, for example), can also be efficiency measures for management, since handled positively they can provide major impetus to efficiency and productivity improvement.

Clearly then, this major study confirms once more that it will be the *form* of enterprise bargaining and workplace reform which is adopted that largely determines whether libraries and librarians prosper in a changing world of work. In pursuing the more positive, expansive and inclusive model, ALIA members can draw strong support from reports such as *Enterprising nation* and this latest EPAC paper. ■