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MRC Unsolicited Research Grant Scheme:

Benchmarking for Continuous Improvement – A Project to encourage the Private Sector and the Higher Education Sector to Identify and Monitor Benchmarks for Key Areas of Performance

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Industries in Mauritius are very successful in adopting a Benchmarking framework to compare their performance against world class standards. The framework used for assessment is the Malcolm Balridge Framework for excellence (MBQA)*, which consists of seven criteria namely Leadership, Information analysis, Planning, People Satisfaction, Processes, Performance Results, and Customer Satisfaction. Over the years participation in the Mauritian National Quality Award (MNQA) provided companies in Mauritius with a better opportunity to compare results and experiences and to improve on their performance. The MNQA criteria is adapted from the MBQA framework. Even after participation for the Award, companies still kept on using the criteria of the framework as indicators to continuously improve on their systems and processes. However the low participation rate of the Education Sector for the MNQA raised the concerns of assessors. Hence the purpose of this project was to study the main factors that make the criteria of the MBQA framework more suitable for the service and manufacturing industries rather than for the educational sector.

The objectives of Study were:

1. To identify areas that can be benchmarked for local industries and to enable benchmarking results to be disseminated. This part was carried out in collaboration with the Mauritius Quality Institute.
2. To identify areas that can be benchmarked for the educational and other foreign universities. For example a similar kind of research is being carried out in the UK (HEFCE 2000) to develop a benchmarking methodology for UK universities in collaboration with the private sector.
3. To compare results from the educational sector with results of the private sector in order to develop a more productive and competitive approach in the tertiary sector.

In the first phase of the study a list of industries drawn from the membership list of the Mauritius Quality Institute were contacted. The MBQA framework was used as a model for assessment. Overall

* MBQA: Malcolm Balridge Quality Award

it was observed that most companies which have won and participated for the MNQA award in the past, are still running several quality and benchmarking projects to be up to date with modern management concepts methods and to continuously improve on the quality of their processes, products and services.

The investigation carried out was to establish how companies are leading their quality projects and how benchmarking is being implemented in the service and manufacturing sector in Mauritius. Also what new initiatives are being undertaken which would help companies play a key role in the global marketplace.

Some constraints were encountered in Phase II of the project. These were attributed to the different mission, objectives, customers and stakeholders of the Secondary Education and the Higher Education sectors. The study was therefore limited to the University of Mauritius.

Some questions for which answers were sought for

- Is there a benchmarking programme at the UOM?
- Can the MBQA criteria for Education meet the needs for the University or vice-versa?
- Does the University of Mauritius benchmark its internal processes against other universities?
- Does the University compare itself with local industries?
- How can the university benefit from such an exercise?
- What are the Benchmarking best practices identified during the study?
- How can local results be compared with universities abroad?
- What would be the constraints?

Results obtained were very interesting given that the University has been implementing a quality assurance system across Faculties and Departments for five years. Good practices have been established for key academic processes such as programme assessment, programme review, student feedback, project assessment and supervision which are excellent indicators for continuous improvement. It is to be pointed out that Key performance measures can further be identified in other interacting departments such as Finance, Purchasing and Library. Results should align with the mission and goals of the University to satisfy the needs of the local and International community. By constantly reviewing and benchmarking its academic, research and administrative processes with the local and other comparable International Standards, the University of Mauritius will thus be able to maintain its position in the International scene and perform better.

It is noteworthy that the target for an academic is 270 lecturing hours per year and moreover there is constant demand to increase student intake, to develop more flexible programmes per year as well as to research in areas of specialisation. Key performance Indicators for teaching and research for the university should be well understood and should be in line with the strategic planning, mission and objectives of the University to achieve good results.