

## DOCUMENT RESUME

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Development of a National Productivity Clearinghouse.  
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Report to James T. McIntyre, Jr., Director, Office of Management and Budget; by D. L. Scantlebury, Director, Financial and General Management Studies Div.

Issue Area: National Productivity: Evaluation of actions of National Center for Productivity and Quality of Working Life under Public Law 94-136 (2903).

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One of the major recommendations in a recent report on national productivity was the establishment of a productivity clearinghouse to provide national and international data and knowledge on various aspects of productivity. This would include effective methods, their costs, and how long it takes to provide results. It would benefit all sectors of the economy.

Findings/Conclusions: Currently, no unified system exists for the collection, processing, analysis, and dissemination of information, documents, or materials in the field of productivity. Although the National Center for Productivity and Quality of Working Life established a clearinghouse, it was not effective in reaching wide audiences. A clearinghouse should be equipped to provide the following: copies of reports and publications from its own or outside collections, information about new findings and events, special information analysis, general publications on various aspects of the field, special handbooks and guides, responses to telephone or mail requests for actual statistics or information, and assistance in locating information outside the clearinghouse. The clearinghouse should also: set standards for communications within the field; review, index, and abstract its collection; and monitor current research, produce state-of-the-art reports, and research reviews. Recommendations: The Director of the Office of Management and Budget, in his capacity as Chairman of the National Productivity Council, should assign responsibility for the development and operation of a productivity clearinghouse. Adequate funding should be provided to the organization given responsibility for the development and implementation of the clearinghouse. (RRS)

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REPORT BY THE U.S.

# General Accounting Office

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## Development Of A National Productivity Clearinghouse

There is a need for a national productivity clearinghouse to provide information to all sectors of the economy on various aspects of productivity.

A Federal productivity clearinghouse should be mandated to play an active role in helping to improve national productivity. To be effective, it must be adequately funded and must go beyond simply maintaining and distributing information.

The establishment of a clearinghouse would help provide decisionmakers with the necessary tools to improve the productivity of their organizations.





UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

DIVISION OF FINANCIAL AND  
GENERAL MANAGEMENT STUDIES

B-163762

The Honorable James T. McIntyre, Jr.  
Director, Office of  
Management and Budget

Dear Mr. McIntyre:

In our recent report, "The Federal Role in Improving National Productivity--Is the National Center for Productivity and Quality of Working Life the Proper Mechanism?" (FGMSD-78-26, May 23, 1978), we stated that the Federal Government must provide the framework and incentives for improving private sector productivity through a consensus among business, labor, and government regarding the best policies and procedures to be pursued. We emphasized that regardless of where the productivity improvement effort is located, it must be undertaken in partnership with the private sector.

As we stated in our report, we believe the Federal focus for the private sector productivity effort should be limited to five functions.

- Develop periodic needs assessments to determine the nature and extent of private sector productivity problems, and refer identified labor-management and regulatory problems to the proper agencies for consideration.
- Promote a better understanding of all the factors affecting productivity, including human resources, quality of working life, capital, technology, research and development, transformation of knowledge into practical terms, and the importance of productivity to our national economy.
- Interact with the Joint Economic Committee of the Congress, the Council of Economic Advisers to the President, and the Federal Reserve Board to assess the productivity effect of fiscal, monetary, tax, and regulatory policies on the private sector.

- Act as a facilitator in bringing together various groups on neutral ground to discuss widespread industry productivity problems.
- Operate a productivity clearinghouse to provide national and international data and knowledge on various aspects of productivity--effective methods, their costs, how long they take to provide results, etc. This would benefit all sectors of the economy.

In this report, we address the last of these functions--the development and operation of a productivity clearinghouse to serve both the private and public sectors. We will discuss (1) the need for a national productivity clearinghouse, (2) a description of the functions we believe such a clearinghouse should perform, (3) an operational concept of a national productivity clearinghouse, and (4) conclusions. A strategy for the development of a clearinghouse is provided as appendix I.

#### NEED FOR A NATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY CLEARINGHOUSE

Currently no unified system exists for the collection, processing, analysis, and dissemination of information, documents, and materials in the field of productivity. Although the National Center for Productivity and Quality of Working Life established a clearinghouse, it was not effective in reaching wide audiences.

Federal agency and department officials with whom we have discussed the operation of the Center's clearinghouse felt that it was not meeting the needs of the public and private sectors of the economy in adequately providing productivity information. They believed that the reason for this was that the clearinghouse lacked resources, infrastructure, and sufficient authority to carry out the mission called for in Public Law 94-136.

Further, the Center did not attempt to take advantage of the other sources of productivity information inside and outside of government. These sources could have been used to develop a productivity information network.

Now, especially with the Center's termination September 30, 1978, there remains a need for an effective productivity clearinghouse.

This need for a clearinghouse was documented in the questionnaires, surveys, and interviews conducted during our overall evaluation of the Center. Sixty-three percent of the respondents to our private sector survey stated that potential exists for improving productivity through the efforts of a clearinghouse. Ninety-seven percent of the respondents to our State and local government survey stated a Federal productivity clearinghouse would be useful. Finally, 80 percent of the labor unions responding to our questionnaire stated that the Federal Government should serve as an information clearinghouse for information on the quality of working life and its relation to productivity.

#### FUNCTIONS OF A CLEARINGHOUSE

A clearinghouse is a complex information facility that can serve a wide audience of users with many special needs. Based on our surveys, questionnaires, and interviews with officials from the public and private sectors, as well as visits to existing clearinghouses such as the National Clearinghouse for the Aging, the National Technical Information Service, and the Education Research Information Center, we believe a clearinghouse should be equipped to provide the following:

- Copies of reports and other publications from its own or outside collections to users who have requested them.
- Information about new findings and events. This is called "current awareness services" and may include journals or newsletters which contain brief abstracts of all recent publications in an area. Normally the document will be divided by sub-area which allows individuals to keep abreast of areas of special interests.
- Special information analysis. For example, when an individual needs to determine what information has been published in an area, a clearinghouse can provide an up-to-date, yet inexpensive, annotated bibliography.
- General publications on various aspects of the field.

- Special handbooks and guides. A clearinghouse is not limited to published reports. It can include data on available resources, profiles of operating service programs, and descriptions of program models.
- Responses to telephone or mail requests for actual statistics or information. These responses supply facts rather than the documents containing the information. This is just one way in which a clearinghouse can give advice and consultation on problems that libraries cannot handle.
- Assistance in locating documents, collections, and other sources of information outside the clearinghouse.
- Data on ongoing research, demonstration, and model projects, as well as information on completed research.

In addition, we believe a clearinghouse should:

- Set standards for communications within the field. For example, a clearinghouse may develop a thesaurus of terms--an organized, interrelated network of concepts which cover all the available topics of research and investigation. The thesaurus is an aid in the consistent organization of individual collections in the field. The clearinghouse could also organize formal interagency panels to assist in the maintenance of Federal level communications.
- Review, index, and abstract its collection. Normally a clearinghouse reviews each item in its collection upon receipt and determines if it is appropriate for the collection, indexes it, and prepares an abstract.
- Monitor current research, produce state-of-the-art reports, and research reviews. This is made possible by maintaining a file on all research (historic and current). The clearinghouse is thus an invaluable resource for supplying the latest and best knowledge in the field, and informing people of where such knowledge is available.

As the above list indicates, clearinghouses (unlike libraries) are designed to supply much of their information by mail or phone. Their activity also includes evaluation of the completeness of knowledge in their field so that new

research can be undertaken to fill gaps. Clearinghouses also serve as the focal point for people interested in the field and, as such, may sponsor conferences and meetings between researchers.

The extent and nature of the activities in which a clearinghouse must involve itself necessitates that it be administered by individuals who not only maintain a collection, but who are also technically proficient in the subject area. Its staff should make it their business to know the important issues and sources of information in a field, and they must have the facilities to obtain and subsequently make the information quickly available to people who need it.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY CLEARINGHOUSE

In order to insure that the clearinghouse will provide the information and materials most useful to users, it should be developed under the guidance of a National Productivity Council, such as we recommended in our report on the National Center, consisting of representatives of selected Federal agencies having productivity related missions. An external advisory group made up of representatives of industry, labor, and the general public should also be established to recommend to the Council specific issues for the clearinghouse to address. The Council, with input from the advisory group, should develop a plan for the clearinghouse based upon

- a survey of user needs,
- the development of specifications for alternative clearinghouse structures, and
- cost-benefit analyses of the alternative structures.

This approach will provide decisionmakers in the executive and legislative branches of government with the ability to make sound and prudent fiscal and technical decisions on the development of the clearinghouse with a minimum initial investment of time and money.

#### Use of existing sources of productivity information

The former National Center for Productivity and Quality of Working Life was not the sole repository of productivity

information. Other Federal agencies have staffs which address various aspects of productivity. In addition to these, many private and quasi-public organizations address productivity from a particular viewpoint or for a particular clientele or interest group. Some of these organizations have launched major efforts in productivity and have clearinghouse information activities. Some of the more prominent organizations are as follows:

The Work In America Institute	Provides information on human resources and working life perspective of productivity.
The American Productivity Center	Assists industry in improving productivity.
U. S. Civil Service Commission	Maintains an interest in the human resources aspect of productivity.
International City Management Association	Works at helping cities to improve their productivity.
National Technical Information Service	Maintains job and industrial related productivity studies-- primarily technical in nature.

A national productivity clearinghouse should make use of these existing sources of productivity information and could tie its operations to those of an existing information system, such as the National Technical Information System of the Department of Commerce (see app. I for a suggested operational concept). Such a clearinghouse would be able to draw from a comprehensive information base and minimize both start-up and operating costs. In addition, by charging for services, the productivity clearinghouse could easily become self-sufficient.

#### CONCLUSION

It is important that a productivity clearinghouse be established and equipped to play an active role to help



improve national productivity. It would not be sufficient for the clearinghouse to simply maintain a collection of productivity information. To be effective, the clearinghouse should conduct user needs assessments, review and analyze its collection, and publicize the services it can provide users.

The experience of other Federal clearinghouses suggests that a productivity clearinghouse need not be costly and, after initial funding, can become self-sufficient by charging for services.

Feedback we received during our review of the National Center suggests that public and private sector organizations will take advantage of the services provided by a clearinghouse.

The establishment of a productivity clearinghouse, such as we have described, would go a long way toward providing decisionmakers with necessary tools to improve the productivity of their organizations and, consequently, the productivity of the Nation.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that you, in your capacity as Chairman of the National Productivity Council, assign responsibility for the development and operation of a productivity clearinghouse. We believe a logical organization for assuming this responsibility is the Department of Commerce. The clearinghouse should provide national and international data and knowledge on various aspects of productivity to all sectors of the economy.

We also recommend that adequate funding be provided to the organization given responsibility for the development and implementation of the clearinghouse.


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As you know, section 236 of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970 requires the head of a Federal agency to submit a written statement on actions taken on our recommendations to the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs and the House Committee on Government Operations not later than 60 days after the date of the report and to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations with the agency's first request for appropriations made more than 60 days after the date of the report. We would appreciate receiving a copy of those statements.

B-163762

A copy of this report has been sent to the Secretary of Commerce since her Department would be a likely candidate to operate a productivity clearinghouse. Copies are also being sent to the Chairmen, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, House Committee on Government Operations, and House and Senate Committees on Appropriations.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. L. Scantlebury". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

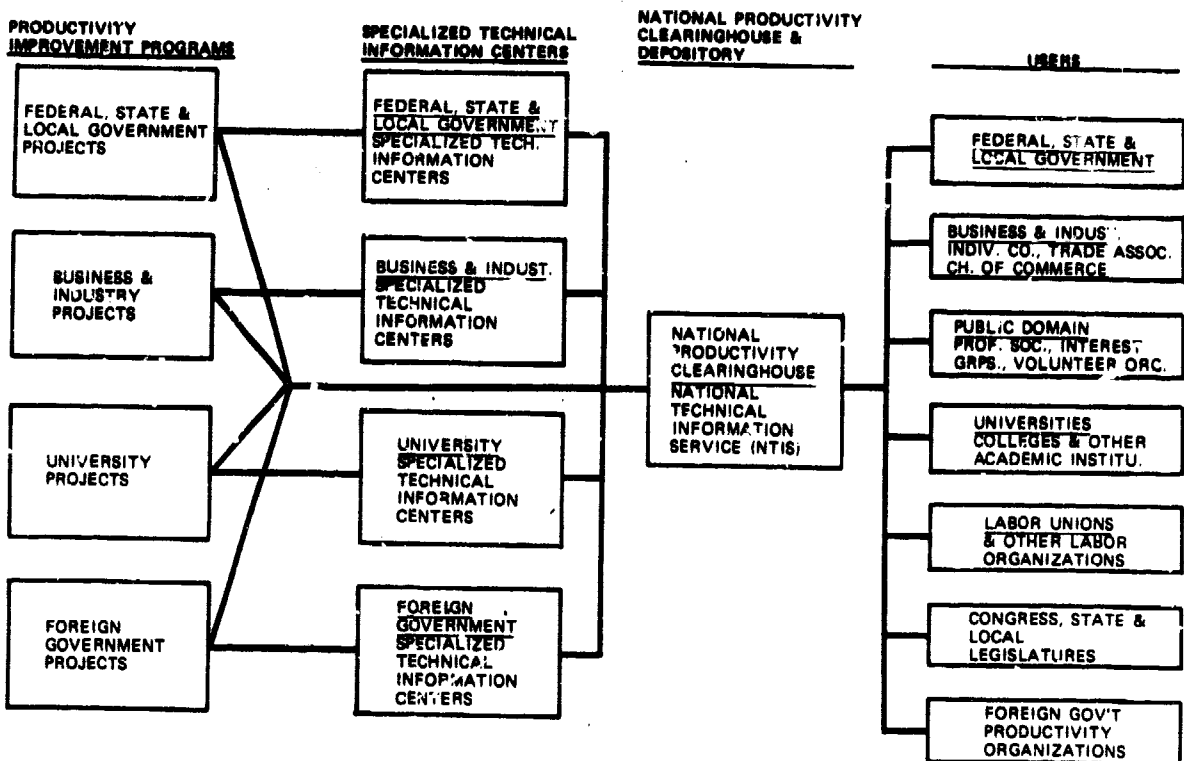
D. L. Scantlebury  
Director

Enclosure

A SUGGESTED OPERATIONAL CONCEPT FOR A  
NATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY CLEARINGHOUSE

Figure 1 depicts a national productivity clearinghouse and its attendant information network. This illustration represents our view on how a national productivity clearinghouse might be designed, developed, and implemented.

FIGURE 1  
NATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY CLEARINGHOUSE OPERATIONAL CONCEPT



The clearinghouse would function as follows:

Expand and increase funding of clearinghouse

The clearinghouse would be developed to operate as envisioned in Public Law 94-136 with adequate resources authorized and appropriated by the Congress.

Operated by small central staff and contractual agreements

It would be operated by a small highly capable professional staff who would perform the following functions:

- Fund, monitor, and set the operating policy for all segments of clearinghouse operations and its attendant information network.
- Operate through a series of contractual agreements with the Department of Commerce's National Technical Information Service and Specialized Technical Information Centers in the major subject areas as depicted in Figure 1.
- Manage clearinghouse operations overall.

National Technical Information Service

The National Technical Information Service under contract to the clearinghouse could act as its processing facility, depository, and dissemination vehicle for productivity information.

Under this arrangement it would maintain an automated (computerized) means of storing and retrieving the abstracted and indexed information and documents collected and prepared by the other components of the network.

National Technical  
Information Service  
(continued)

The Service would be responsible for the publication and distribution of clearinghouse products.

Specialized technical  
information centers  
functions

A network of specialized technical information centers would be established under contract to the clearinghouse. One center would be established for each major subject area in the field of productivity. Many of the other existing sources of productivity information could be utilized as specialized technical information centers chosen for their reliability and the strength of their collection in a major subject area, e.g., the American Productivity Center for private sector productivity.

The center would (1) be responsible for collecting, indexing, abstracting, and analyzing all documents in a major subject area, (2) perform special information analysis upon request from the clearinghouse, (3) provide a custom abstract service to productivity users utilizing the National Technical Information Service computer and its own capabilities, and (4) prepare state-of-the-art reviews and disseminate them.

Each center would produce a thesaurus by subject area and provide for the consistent organization of individual collections in the field.

Additional clearinghouse services

In addition to the above services, the clearinghouse, utilizing the National Technical Information Service and the specialized technical information centers, would supply the users illustrated in figure 1 with the following:

- Current Awareness Service - including journals or newsletters which contain brief abstracts of all recent publications by subject area.
- Special Information Analysis Bulletins - providing what information has been published in a subject area with an up-to-date inexpensive annotated bibliography.
- General Publications - on various aspects in the field of productivity.
- Special Handbooks and Guides - providing listings of recognized experts or centers of expertise in specific fields including funding, resources, profiles of operating service programs, and designation of program models.
- Review, Indexing, and Abstracting - allowing for automated searches for information of specific relevance.
- Monitoring of Current Research.
- Assistance in Locating Document Collection - for use in referring individuals and organizations to known sources of information outside of the clearinghouse.
- Telephone or Mail Responses to Requests for Statistics or Information.

Adoption of the operational concept (as shown in figure 1) and its description would, in our opinion, provide an operational, full-scale national productivity clearinghouse which meets a national need.