

The value of corporate libraries

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Following on from a similar survey in 1990, on the perceived value of corporate libraries, James Matarazzo and Laurence Prusak surveyed 103 corporate managers with direct responsibility for libraries. The survey, chosen from a large and diverse sample of corporate libraries in America, included approximately seventy-five per cent of the firms surveyed in 1990.

The 1995 survey was influenced by the changes that have occurred within business since 1990 and the influences these changes have had on information professionals. The three most important of these changes were identified as:

- the growth of computing power and expansion of network capabilities, including the Internet and the world wide web.
- a dramatic increase in target-marketing and sales of on-line products and services directly to end-users, and
- massive corporate downsizing and re-engineering.

Matarazzo and Prusak comment that the first two developments are of 'questionable advantage to librarians'. The rapid expansion in network services has led to a widespread dispersal of information technology expertise and experience, described as the gospel that exposes 'that every man and woman is a knowledge worker, and that all one needs to access the knowledge of the world is a computer and modem'.

It is this environment, which has the potential to leave out libraries, that library managers need to reinforce their role and reassert their critical mission. This point, made strongly in the 1990 survey is a repeated theme in the 1995 survey.

Of particular interest is that still, no single standard of measurement has emerged which provides a gauge for the value of library activities

to corporations. While thirty-six per cent of managers commented the library's worth was based on annual surveys and informal feedback, less than twenty-five per cent relate the library's value to direct savings for the firm.

Of interest too, is the rating managers gave to 'retrieval of information from on-line products' as the library service, which provides the highest values to firms — while seventy-eight per cent nominated this as the most important service in 1990, the figure had dropped to forty-eight per cent in 1995. This is clearly a reflection of the increase in end-user networked services and can work for and against library managers. The remainder of managers

rated general reference services and current awareness services (twenty-two per cent and eleven per cent respectively), as their most important service.

Perhaps more positively, corporate managers overwhelmingly recognised that libraries are broadening their traditional focus to encompass more value added service, particularly as libraries take a more proactive role in the dissemination and analysis of information. As indicated in the 1990 survey, it is how services such as these are 'tied to company goals and evaluated on the basis of proven contributions to corporate success' that will determine the role of the corporate library in the future. ■

Providing management education

The Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers (APESMA) is one of Australia's largest professional employee organisations which offers a wide range of professional services to its members.

In 1989, APESMA entered the field of providing management education and training because of the perception that professional engineers, while possessing strong technology skills, were lacking in the area of personal, interpersonal, business and management skills.

Since 1989, APESMA has developed its management education program to provide a range of management education and training opportunities. It consists of an accredited distance-education MBA (technology management) program incorporating a Graduate Diploma of Management (technology management); and a program of short courses addressing management issues. The MBA and Graduate Diploma are conducted in conjunction with Deakin University, are jointly awarded by the University and APESMA, are listed on the Statutes of the University and afforded international recognition.

Experts from universities and industry prepare the study material for the courses, write and mark the assignments and examinations and provide academic assistance to the participants.

As a measure of the success of the courses, the Graduate Diploma of Management (Technology Management) was described in an Australian Government report to the OECD in 1990 as a model quality, innovative adult education program. Continuous review, improvement, innovation and implementation of best practice feature in the courses.

New communications and educational technology is being examined with a view to its introduction to the courses, the first priority being the staged introduction of an electronic bulletin board and e-mail to facilitate communication between participants and academic and administrative staff.

The need to concurrently develop both technology and managerial skills of technology professionals represents a major challenge for those professionals and APESMA — a challenge which APESMA will continue to address.