

The value of corporate libraries

Sharon Greenshields, project co-ordinator

ALIA has embarked on a major research project which examines the perceived value of libraries and information professionals to Australia's top one-hundred companies.

The recently completed first stage of the project is documented in a report which examines the body of literature relevant to the value of corporate library services. In particular, it analyses the extent to which any Australian studies test the following hypotheses which relate to the 'perceived' value of library and information services:

1. That the value of the library staff and information services is directly related to the qualifications, experience and perceived expertise of the library staff and in particular of the chief librarian.
2. That the value of the library is linked to the importance that the company places on using information for strategic decision making.
3. That companies do not have strategies for valuing library and information services.

Perceived value is based on the subjective evaluation of users and can only be measured through research techniques such as survey or interview. It does not attempt to make an objective assessment of value. Any research which considers the concept must therefore be based on empirical data. On the basis of this argument, the literature search failed to identify any large scale Australian research which sought to test these hypotheses.

In recognising this paucity of Australian empirical data, the first stage of the study also considered international research. The search results have been published in the form of an annotated bibliography in the May 1997 edition of the *Australian Library Journal*.

The study identified a plethora of theoretical and methodological studies emanating from the library and information science sector worldwide, yet noted that few empirical studies attempt to examine the value of library services or information professionals.

One exception is the work of American academics James Matarazzo and Laurence Prusak, who surveyed the corporate managers of American libraries and information centres in 1990 and

1995, to assess the value placed by senior level executives on the libraries of their companies.

The American studies reveal that many companies have no formal procedure for measuring the role of the library. Similarly, they indicate that senior corporate management appears unfamiliar with the library's role in determining the success of the company.

The empirical data which emerged from these studies supports the theory that a lack of appreciation or understanding of the value of the library to the organisation, leads to corporate management neglect of information services.

The ALIA project recognises that a major threat to corporate libraries in the 1990s is the ignorance of their role in the corporate structure and the contribution they make towards the achievement of company goals. The project will therefore seek to gather empirical data which will illustrate the extent of this widely supported postulation.

A survey of Australia's top one-hundred companies will form the second stage of the ALIA project. It is anticipated that the survey will be conducted in late 1997.

While the survey is still in the developmental stage, questions for inclusion in the survey will be aimed at gauging the extent of each company's library resources, the actual, perceived and potential role of the library or information professional within the company, and the value accorded both by the company's senior level executives.

The ALIA study is being managed by a committee comprising Julie Dow, Department of Library and Information Management, University of South Australia; Virginia Walsh, executive director, Australian Library and Information Association; Margaret Findlay, library consultant, Melbourne; and Marion Nicholson, director, Library Locums.

The management committee gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance provided by the University of South Australia in establishing the study.

Further information regarding the study can be obtained from the project co-ordinator, Sharon Greenshields, telephone (06) 254 3903, or via e-mail at pearce_greenshields@msn.com ■

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