ACCOUNTABILITY AND DEMONSTRATION OF THE VALUE OF INFORMATION SERVICES IN SOUTH AFRICAN LAW FIRMS

ABSTRACT

Corporate library and information services were typically created in order to further the operational objectives of a parent organisation. The continued existence of corporate libraries was seen to be subject to management perceptions of value of its services. This study investigated strategies to measure the value of information services in the specialised environment of the South African incorporated law firm. Methodologies were developed to arrive at the unit cost of information and of the information services in an organisation at a particular period. A cost per practitioner value was calculated in order to correlate data relating to the information spending at seven South African law firms. Attempts were made to relate the unit cost of the information services at one law firm to the use that was made of the services. The potential for cost recovery and determination of return on capital employed were also investigated. These strategies were seen to have value as management tools for the information services but they failed to demonstrate the value of the investment. The study thereafter approached the problem of evaluation from the perspective of accountability. Certain accepted business practices were investigated with regard to their relevance to corporate support services. An information services audit was proposed in accordance with a recognised management process.