Quality assessment program as contribution for the SIBi/USP management.

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Quality Assessment Program as a Contribution to the SIBi/USP Management

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Abstract

It addresses the relevance of the quality assessment processes as instruments of support for managing information services. It describes the implementation of the Product and Service Quality Assessment Program (PAQ) of University of São Paulo’s Integrated Library System (SIBi/USP), reporting two phases performed so far. Phase one, performed in 2002, assessed products and services of SIBi’ libraries by means of questionnaires and interview for data collection. Five electronic questionnaires were applied comprising the SERVQUAL – tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy dimensions and an interview was applied to library users, using three questions. Phase two of PAQ was performed in 2005 by means of electronic form with a view to detecting the users’ needs as to SIBi Service Network resources - SIBiNet (http://www.usp.br/sibi). The methodology adopted included the critical incident method for data collection and SERVQUAL dimensions for result categorization. The analysis has taken into account USP users, non-USP users and the System’s technical team. Results indicate the need of immediate improvement implementation in SIBi’s site and reassert the importance of the Program in adjusting SIBi/USP services to the users’ needs as a System’s managerial tool.

Keywords: Quality in Services; Satisfaction of the User; University Libraries.

1 Introduction

Numerous are the papers that focus on the “users’ studies” showing that their needs and perceptions regarding the services rendering provided by libraries and information services have been arousing the interest of Library and Information Science professionals for a long time.

This concern is authentic, for the quality search must be present, making the offer suitable to the community’s expectations, mainly in such fast-moving environments as libraries have been lately.

Information systems can better meet their users’ needs if they implement services that are more suitable and useful to their demands; requiring, quite often, the intervention and redesign of the system. According to Dervin and Nilan [2] information systems cannot use technology completely for improvements such as services enhancement strategy. Meeting users’ needs requires complex actions, oriented by a list of solutions that vary according to the context and with each community’s specificity.

Regardless of the technique applied to obtain the user’s opinion on what is offered to him/her, the most important is to use the results of these opinion polls in the information system management.

It was from this perspective that, in 2002, the University of São Paulo’s Integrated Library System (SIBi/USP) structured
a continuous assessment program called PAQ - Product and Service Quality Assessment Program of the SIBi/USP, based on from the previous study [7], in 2000, focused on the users’ perception.

2 PAQ: First Phase

The study of experiences in the use of assessment models in libraries and information systems, both national and international, served as support for the outline of a proposal which would consider the SIBi/USP specificities. Parasuraman, Zeitham and Berry [5] were the first ones to establish a model for quality assessment in services, based on criteria or dimensions. They also concluded that gaps can take place as a result of the difference between users’ expectations and what is really provided. They proposed, for the qualitative and quantitative analyses of users’ satisfaction level, the use of a scale called SERVQUAL, making use of dimensions considered crucial in services quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. SERVQUAL had a wide application, being one of the most used in several productive segments, even in information services such as libraries (Hernon and Altmann [4]; Vergueiro and Carvalho [9]). In the structuring of PAQ, the model used as inspiration was LibQual+™ (http://www.libqual.org), the assessment system of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and Texas A&M University Libraries (EUA), which aims at providing a culture of excellence in services rendering, assisting libraries to better understand the users’ perception regarding the quality of services rendered; collecting and interpreting users’ perceptions in a systematic way; disseminating the best practices among libraries, developing in librarian teams the ability to interpret research data.

Such PAQ phase, performed in 2002, made use of electronic questionnaires and personal interview as instruments to record user’s opinion regarding the products and services provided by the libraries of the System.

The electronic questionnaire was created based on SERVQUAL’s methodology and comprised the five dimensions, namely:

Tangibles
- Physical appearance of the premises (overall condition of the building, cleanliness, lighting, acoustics), equipment (IT equipment, photocopier), personnel (attitude, ability to use the equipment, ease of communication), visual communication (posters, flyers, bulletin boards, signaling, notices via e-mail).

Reliability
- Reliability and confidence from the employees and information provided by them;
- Reliability and confidence in the products and services available.

Responsiveness
- Promptness in services rendering: lending service, user services, reprography, and flexibility in interlibrary loan (ILL).
- Collections: updating, material storage on the shelves, organization.
- Services provided: online services, service hours.

Assurance
- Qualification, accessibility, courtesy, command of information sources, ability in the use of equipment and communication by the employees rendering services to users.

Empathy
- Attention and customization of services provided to users.

The interview, based on the Benevox® Public Satisfaction System [4] program, consisted of only three open questions with a view to obtain data on what the user likes least, likes most, and what he/she would like to change in the library.

The survey data were reverted on behalf of the users immediately after the first results and they subsidized the SIBi/USP strategic planning from 2003 on. The complete report of this program’s phase was published and is available online [8].

At the end of this first phase it could be verified that PAQ has proven to be an efficient and suitable system to capture the user’s opinion on the rendering of the services provided by the libraries of the System (Sampaio et al.[6]). The program success culminated with the effectiveness of libraries’ assessment process, which led to the proposal of a new Program’s phase.

3 PAQ: Second Phase

The second PAQ phase aimed at the identification of users’ needs regarding SIBi’s site (SIBiNet) information and resources, contributing to the improvement of relationship between users and this important information retrieval feature.

Established in 1997, SIBiNet provides the use of computer features to access the system’s main products and services: USP Bibliographic Database (DEDALUS Global and Local); regulated or public access databases; electronic periodicals; indicators for other catalogs and repositories etc. With SIBiNet, we aim at efforts-saving and the extension of the bibliographic universe to active users and library professionals.

As to the interface for information retrieval, the last site updating was in 2000, when some improvements, idealized without the effective user participation, were implemented.

For this program phase the Critical Incident Technique was elected as the data collection tool. According to Flanagan [3], the Critical Incident Technique

“(…) consists of a set of procedures for collection of direct observations of human behavior, aiming at
facilitating its potential use in the solution of practical issues and development of broad psychological principles, besides outlining procedures for the collection of incidents observed, which present special significance and to reach systematically defined criteria”.

According to Caminada Netto et al. [1]:

“A valid critical incident that can define customers’ needs shall consider two characteristics: be specific and able to describe either the service provider in behavioral terms, or the product and services, with particular adjectives”.

After determining the scope of the survey methodology, definition of target audience, sampling and application period, the phases for proposal execution were set and performed in 2005. The first step was the interview planning, with the elaboration of the questions for the survey of critical incidents, guiding forms and scripts. The interviewees were the users of libraries in which PAQ participants work. After that came the interview results analysis and selection of the main critical incidents for the elaboration of the questionnaire. Critical incidents were categorized according to SERVQUAL five dimensions, in line with the first PAQ’s phase. The Table 1 shows the incidents categorization.

Based on the categorized information, the first questionnaire was designed for the application of a pre-test for the users of the libraries where PAQ participants worked. Afterwards, the pre-test result was discussed and the questionnaire redesigned. For the data collection phase a database was generated to store the results obtained with the use of graphics that allowed the monitoring of the evolution of data input by the users, and the visualization of the community opinion. The electronic form remained available over November until early December, 2005.

For the purpose of organizing the items identified as relevant by the interviewees in the definition of critical incidents, these incidents were divided into four blocks. Therefore, the questionnaire presented the following structure:

- Access to the site – a block that analyzed items referring to network speed and compatibility with the browsers used for site access.
- Contents – it considered the ease of information search on databases, digital theses and magazines in electronic format.
- Services – questions were made on the ease of identifying portals of other universities in Brazil and abroad, tutorials, ease of joint queries with other databases of São Paulo state universities and the interlibrary loans.
- DEDALUS – questions on the main instrument for USP libraries information registration and retrieval.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSIONS</th>
<th>INDICATORS</th>
<th>INCIDENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TANGIBLES</td>
<td>Broken links</td>
<td>• Broken links</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technical area</td>
<td>• Technical area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Periodical Portal</td>
<td>• Periodical Portal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow/Fast Network</td>
<td>Slow network</td>
<td>• Slow network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dial-up/broadband access</td>
<td>• Dial-up/broadband access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fast network</td>
<td>• Fast network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Access difficulty</td>
<td>• Access difficulty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Full-time network</td>
<td>• Full-time network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incompatibility with some browsers</td>
<td>• Incompatibility with some browsers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment</td>
<td>Suitable</td>
<td>• Suitable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension of Services</td>
<td>Online theses</td>
<td>• Online theses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Online reservations</td>
<td>• Online reservations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>List of abbreviated periodical titles</td>
<td>• List of abbreviated periodical titles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Online ILL</td>
<td>• Online ILL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accessibility to visually and hearing impaired</td>
<td>• Accessibility to visually and hearing impaired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contents</td>
<td>Lack of full theses</td>
<td>• Lack of full theses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Periodicals, Portal Saber [Knowledge Portal], UNIBIBLI)</td>
<td>Lack of electronic annals</td>
<td>• Lack of electronic annals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acquisition of other titles</td>
<td>• Acquisition of other titles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suitable content</td>
<td>• Suitable content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insufficient content</td>
<td>• Insufficient content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suitable periodicals</td>
<td>• Suitable periodicals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Database integration</td>
<td>• Database integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Back Issues”</td>
<td>• “Back Issues”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>• Consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information accuracy</td>
<td>• Information accuracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Result uncertainty</td>
<td>• Result uncertainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training need</td>
<td>Learn how to search in periodicals</td>
<td>• Learn how to search in periodicals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Training on SIBiNet</td>
<td>• Training on SIBiNet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Available</td>
<td>• Available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Incidents classification (continued on next page)
For a better definition of the community needs, an option was made for the segmentation of users’ categories in: USP community (students, professors and researchers), non-USP community (all users that use the SIBi’s site, without having an effective link with the university) and SIBi/USP technical team (employees who work in the libraries).

### 3.1 Results

This survey comprised a universe of 2,304 users, being 1805 from the USP community, 245 from the non-USP community and 249 from the SIBi/USP technical team. The individual analysis of each of the three categories’ opinion has shown that the level of dissatisfaction of the three groups remains stable, that is, the level of disagreement in regards to the assertions on the good performance of SIBiNet is a constant for the three groups of site users. Therefore, a global analysis of these groups has been made.

Starting from the objective proposed in the study, that is, identify users’ needs regarding SIBi’s information and resources, an option was made for the elaboration of a chart to illustrate the non-conformance of the service provided, according to the opinion of the survey participants.

The Pareto analysis method enables the highlighting of the relative significance of different aspects of the problem. It also allows the prioritization of projects and breaking down issues into vital and trivial aspects. Therefore, an option was made for the representation of issues stated by the interviewees in the Pareto chart represented by the opinion of the three users’ categories surveyed.

![Pareto Chart: Disagree + Totally Disagree](image)

For a better definition of the community needs, an option was made for the segmentation of users’ categories in: USP community (students, professors and researchers), non-USP community (all users that use the SIBi’s site, without having an effective link with the university) and SIBi/USP technical team (employees who work in the libraries).

Table 1: Incidents classification (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSIONS</th>
<th>INDICATORS</th>
<th>INCIDENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **DEDALUS** | • Full DEDALUS  
• Updating  
• Training  
• Layout  
• “Serials” base name unfamiliar  
• Boolean operators  
• Table of Contents (Books)  
• Collections availability  
• Accurate results  
• Free access  
• Extension of controlled vocabulary  
• Full text (Scientific Production) | **ASSURANCE** |
| Broadcast | • Marketing need  
• Password-protected access | **Design** |
| Number of Services (Tutorial, Collection) | • Enough databases  
• Periodicals collection  
• Enough services  
• Accessible tutorial | **Layout** |
| Improvement of search tools | • Suitable layout  
• Number of clicks  
• Well-defined site  
• Unclear, polluted site  
• Unpleasant scroll bar  
• Easy-access periodicals | **EMPATHY** |
| • Navigation difficulties  
• Site in other languages | **DIMENSIONS** | **INDICATORS** | **INCIDENT** |
| **ASSURANCE** | **DEDALUS** | **Number of Services (Tutorial, Collection)** | **Layout** |
| Broadcast | • Marketing need  
• Password-protected access | Number of Services (Tutorial, Collection) | • Enough databases  
• Periodicals collection  
• Enough services  
• Accessible tutorial |
| Design | • User-friendly  
• Small letters  
• Little attractive | **Design** | • Suitable layout  
• Number of clicks  
• Well-defined site  
• Unclear, polluted site  
• Unpleasant scroll bar  
• Easy-access periodicals |
| Improvement of search tools | • Navigation difficulties  
• Site in other languages | **Layout** | • Suitable layout  
• Number of clicks  
• Well-defined site  
• Unclear, polluted site  
• Unpleasant scroll bar  
• Easy-access periodicals |

*Vilfredo Frederico Pareto, Italian engineer, philosopher, sociologist and economist, established a principle called Pareto Principle stating that 20% of the difficulties respond for 80% of the problems*
The target established by the PAQ group for the definition of non-conformance by the in regards to the agreement ratio (agree and totally agree) was equal to or higher than 80%, that is, the questionnaire items presenting a percentage below 80% need improvement. For the purpose of this study it is equivalent to say that items classified below 80%, in the ‘agree’ and ‘totally agree’ values must be improved in order to meet users’ information needs.

Items numbered 1 through 11 in the Graphic 1 were stated as dissatisfaction generators by a large part of the community; therefore, implementing enhancements for users’ complete satisfaction was vital:

- it’s easy to know when the database can be used at home or only at USP;
- it’s possible to easily identify portals/links of other universities abroad;
- From SIBiNet I get information on how to borrow books from other libraries;
- DEDALUS "help" is enough to perform queries;
- it’s easy to find a magazine article on the site;
- it’s possible to easily identify portals/links of other universities in Brazil;
- I can find tutorials (instructions) for the use of SIBiNet’s resources;
- it’s simple to know where to start a query;
- I easily recognize the databases of my area;
- I can identify the library that has the material located, by the acronym;
- site navigation is fast.

The data analyzed allowed the assessment that items numbered 12 through 16 in the Graphic 1, as listed below, were considered satisfactory by the users, that is, they did not demand enhancement:

- It is possible to make a simultaneous query on USP, UNICAMP and UNESP catalogs by means of the UNIBIBLIWeb;
- the web page opens quickly;
- the messages: "Web page not found" and/ or "Web page cannot be opened " are hardly displayed;
- it’s easy to find the information I need on DEDALUS;
- web pages open correctly.

The applied research instrument had an area for the free expression of the participating audience. The comments registered on this part of the form were analyzed and categorized. A summary of the weak points stated by users and the number of occurrences are presented as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weak Points</th>
<th>n.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change of software</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unified loan</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training failure for DEDALUS</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in finding call number</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library acronyms</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access problems</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show results in decreasing order of dates</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Production” name for the database</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access delay</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistent answers</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: DEDALUS – Weak Points

As for DEDALUS (Table 2), the change of the database management software was mentioned as a requirement. The second most highlighted item was the need of implementing the Unified Loan, followed by the need of enhancing training courses for the use of this database. The difficulty in locating the call number was presented as one of the aspects to be improved, as well as issues related to the libraries acronyms (in the current system the “link” to the acronyms with the libraries’ complete name is not in the adequate area, which impairs the identification, besides causing delay to obtain this information, specially to non-USP community users). Lower scores were also given to: access problems, results presented in decreasing order of date and database inconsistent answers. Other highlighted aspect is the unsuitable nomination for the database containing the papers published by professors – USP Production, which raises doubts for users. In addition, it was also mentioned the access delay to bibliographic databases and inconsistent answers as result. Concerns corroborate the directive already adopted by SIBi/USP, which is the software change to better meet users’ needs, providing a more adequate technological platform for the database, in regards to the current System status.
Table 3: Site – Weak Points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weak Points</th>
<th>n.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigability</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfriendly Interface</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of training for the use of SIBiNet</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence of help, tutorials</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access delay</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access difficulty</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of information about access of sites out of USP</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in accessing periodicals</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impossibility to find the UNIBIBLI on the page</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unacquaintance with SIBiNet</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrupted access (abends)</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing need</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Portal</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for tutorials</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with browsers (Mozilla/Netscape)</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems of access to Theses Portal</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need of a bilingual portal</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties to access electronic Magazines</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Maintenance</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need of changes</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online contents</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of database directory per subject</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of periodical directory per subject</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services rendered</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Databases</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urgent updating</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility for the visually impaired</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signaling of new or canceled contents (periodicals)</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News running (bad)</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of site map</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the site itself (Table 3), improvement needs in the design, navigability and friendlier interface were pointed out. Other aspects deemed relevant were: lack of specific training courses, absence of helps and tutorials and access delay. A less representative answer scale presents: difficulty in accessing the site, lack of information on the access to the electronic contents out of USP campus and problems to access the electronic periodicals. In addition, the following items were mentioned: difficulty to find the catalog UNIBIBLI on the webpage, unacquaintance with the SIBiNet, need of greater broadcast and problems with interrupted access. With lower scoring, but deserving attention are the difficulties with the Research Portal (which is a product from a third-party), need of tutorials, problems with browsers (Mozilla/Netscape), problems of access to the Theses and Dissertations Portal, enhancement of the SIBiNet with a bilingual version, updating, difficulty in the access to electronic magazines, network maintenance, lack of database and periodicals directories per subject, implementation of interfaces for the visually impaired, highlighting of new contents (periodicals) added or canceled, review of the “SIBiNet news” area, implementation of a site map and increase of theses number available in the USP Theses and Dissertations - Portal Saber [Knowledge Portal].

The final analysis of this study was based on the assumption that, whatever the population, its members deserve special attention. This analysis is associated with the Pareto principle, which states that there is an unequal distribution of non-conformance, or bias, among predefined categories and that a small number of categories non-conformant with standards is responsible for most of the problems. Pareto’s analysis is used to manage quality-oriented processes and for decision-making concerning the setting of priorities. For the purpose of this study, Pareto’s analysis was used to define the urgency in the reconstruction of SIBi/USP site, based on the opinion of this service’s users.

4 Final Considerations

PAQ is presented as an element of proximity between the user and the libraries of the System, and it assures the user a possibility to be heard. The proposed continuous assessment program was proven feasible in the management of the SIBi/USP, and has been adopted as a managerial tool.

Many enhancements regarding products and services were implemented from the data obtained in the PAQ first phase, such as:

- Supplementation of the allocated budget for the acquisition of bibliographic material;
- renewal and updating of the libraries’ technological facilities;
- extension of service hours in some libraries;
- remodeling of physical spaces in the library;
- changes in the libraries access control systems;
grounds for the Project of replacement of the Libraries’ database management software (DEDALUS);  
• inclusion of new information sources in several knowledge areas;  
• definition of a continuous capacity building of the teams, focused on quality.

The second PAQ phase supported proposal for the overall change of the SIBi/USP site.

These are the main examples of how an effective quality assessment program can revert to immediate gains for users. Quite often, enhancements in service rendering do not require financial investments, but only the application of simple measures that bring satisfaction to the community. On the other hand, results from the opinion expressed by the users subsidize projects and requests of additional resources by the University management board.

Wall [10] states that after the analysis of the result from the users’ research some activities are recommended:

• “discuss the user expectations and current perceptions, get to the practical issues (include users if at all possible);  
• pay particular attention to differences in expectations between library staff an library users;  
• determine which expectations are feasible now, which are goals, and which (if any) cannot be accomplished;  
• create a service commitment statement that essentially outlines which services users can expect from the library.” (pp. 46).

Therefore, the need of a continuous maintenance of the assessment initiatives is reiterated. Referring to a broad system such as SIBi/USP, it is currently necessary to establish a permanent team for better fulfillment of these actions.

Libraries, documentation and information services must run assessment programs as management tools aimed at identifying services that require improvement, as well as the new ones to be implemented. The credibility and respect that the information system has before its community can only be certified by the actual system’s auditor: the user.

References


