Chapter 14

Exploring the Role of Expectations in Defining Stakeholders' Evaluations of IS Quality

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"Consider your verdict," the King said to the jury.
"Not yet, not yet!" the Rabbit hastily interrupted.
"There is a great deal to come before that."
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll

Adding to the debate regarding use of the disconfirmation approach in assessment of IS effectiveness, this chapter explores the role that expectations play in defining stakeholders' evaluations. A trial was conducted with a diverse group of participants in a tertiary institution where each was required to complete two questionnaires that were derived from the SERVQUAL instrument. The first comprised statements pertaining solely to perceptions, while the second, administered a short interval later, contained both expectation and perception statements. Since expectations appear to have some impact, what this paper has done is raise a number of questions requiring further exploration.

INTRODUCTION

With the IT industry valued at almost US$2 trillion and growing more than 20% faster than the worldwide gross domestic product (Montgomery, 1998), one of the biggest challenges for information technology (IT) management is the

need to focus not only on assessing which forms of IS are effective, but also on understanding the measures and determinants of information system (IS) effectiveness.

MEANING AND EVALUATION OF QUALITY

Definition of Quality

With a myriad of measures to evaluate IS Effectiveness/Success (DeLone & McLean, 1992; Grover, Jeong & Segars, 1996; Seddon, Staples, Patnayakuni & Bowtell, 1998), the terms IS Effectiveness and IS Success can be used interchangeably providing the definition of IS Effectiveness as a "value judgement, made from the point of view of some stakeholders, about net benefits attributed to use of an information system" (Seddon, Graeser & Willcocks, 1999, p.1) is accepted. In this sense, it can be gauged in terms of the quality of such an information system.

Such interchangeability is possible because the meaning of quality has moved from conformance to product and production to specifications (Levitt, 1972; Crosby, 1979); fitness for use (Juran, Gryna & Bingham, 1974); to value (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Garvin, 1988); and meeting and/or exceeding customers' expectations (Gronroos, 1983, 1990; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1984; Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1990; Buzzell & Gale, 1987).

A change in the mix of industries in advanced economies in favour of service, especially information technology, has fostered this widespread movement away from the technical definitions of quality to the more service-oriented definitions of meeting and/or exceeding customers' expectations (Davis & Meyer, 1998).

Quality = Perceptions Minus Expectations

Given the elusive nature of quality and the absence of objective measures, "a useful and appropriate approach for assessing the quality of a firm's services is to measure customers' **perceptions** of quality. What we then need is a quantitative yardstick for gauging such **perceptions**" (Parasuraman et al., 1986).

According to many practitioners and researchers, there are two key variables in the measurement of quality: perceptions and expectations. For them, Service Quality (denoted G) is measured by taking Expectations (E) away from Perceptions (P), i.e., $G = P - E$. According to this definition, the higher G, the better the level of Service Quality, with a high negative score indicating low quality. Developers thought that capturing the level of service in this manner created a somewhat more sensitive measure than simply capturing the result using a single response (Perceptions only; Parasuraman et al., 1986; Pitt, Watson & Kavan, 1995; Wilkin & Hewett, 1997).

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