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A Roadmap for an Effective Quality of Service and User Satisfaction.

An Example of the Polish Academic Libraries

*(Podnoszenie jakości usług i satysfakcji użytkowników.
Wskazówki na przykładzie polskich bibliotek akademickich)*

Słowa kluczowe: jakość usług, biblioteki akademickie, satysfakcja użytkowników, przewodnik.

Abstrakt: Użytkownicy bibliotek mają znaczący wpływ na jakość zarówno struktury administracyjnej, jak i usług świadczonych w bibliotece. Ich opinie służą jako podstawowy miernik jakości oferowanych przez biblioteki usług. Biblioteki stale powinny zbierać opinie od swoich użytkowników. W literaturze fachowej określa się to mianem satysfakcji użytkowników. Rzeczywiście brak satysfakcji użytkowników jest dowodem, że biblioteki nie utrzymują właściwej jakości usług. Niniejsze opracowanie przedstawia przewodnik jak biblioteki mogą efektywnie poprawiać jakość swoich usług by osiągnąć satysfakcję użytkowników.

Keywords: service quality, academic libraries, user satisfaction, roadmap.

Abstract: Library users make an important contribution to the quality of both the administrative and service structure of the library. Their opinions serve as a basic measure of the service quality offered by libraries and libraries constantly need to look for evaluation from their users. In specialist literature this is referred to as user satisfaction. And indeed, the lack of user satisfaction is the evidence of the library not maintaining the proper service quality. This study presents a roadmap of how libraries can effectively improve their service quality drawing on user satisfaction.

Introduction

The change in users' approach to acquiring information is directly related to the change in communication technology. The changes in technology with new applications and processes bring about new expectations and needs.

At this stage, the most important thing to do is to analyse the ways users obtain information. This means determining the sources and pathways by means of

²⁵ Polskie przykłady przygotowała Małgorzata Kwaśnik.

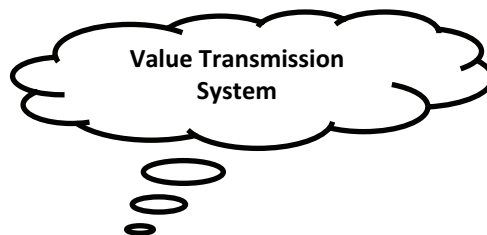
which the user attempts to access the information required. It is thought that this knowledge is best obtained by the analysis of user-satisfaction. In fact, there is a parallel between this analysis and the analysis of the user needs and expectations.

In connection with these, the information services which will develop will both provide suitable services for accessing information, and also provide user-satisfaction. As a result of these needs and expectations, it is important to analyse the contents and the competencies of the library collection. At this stage, it is important to produce a map of the collection. In this way, the existing resources will be evaluated by the user, and a policy of developing the collection, by adding new resources, can be then formulated. At this stage, it is necessary to compare the library to other similar libraries in order to make a benchmark and a plan for strategic cooperation [4].

In this study, a roadmap is recommended so to achieve an effective service quality in the libraries and to ensure user-satisfaction and presents the examples in reality of the academic libraries in Poland.

Create Value

To develop a strategy in line with the needs and expectations of the users, it is necessary to make a difference from any rivals and create a value in the eyes of the users. "Create a value " here means to increase your strengths in the area of using the resources in the best possible way and to define a policy according to this. Therefore, if the system of creating a value works well, then that will both form a strategy and will also create a difference from other libraries. In this instance, it seems as if the concept of value must be considered to be part of the management strategy and must include values which are meaningful to the users.



Sloution

This system analyses the main needs of the users. It should be accepted that the most guarenteed key to success is to define the value system which will satisfy the user and develop a process of analyses and, according to the results obtained, outline the steps to take.

The research of academic library users' needs in the Library of Warsaw School of Econimics shows that the use of free access to the commonly used collections is a great convenience for users. 92% of respondents indicated that this is

a more convenient form of access on the grounds of saving time – 47%, quick access – 41% and possibility evaluate the utility of publication on the site – 33% [9].

Step 1 – Choose a value: The first link of the value transmission system is a value-choosing process, based on the information gathered from the users about what things are meaningful to them. In other words, this is a process which will encourage the users to use that library, or value the suggestion process. The value of the library services depends on being meaningfully useful to the user so, in this sense, the value will be defined by the user.

However, for the value to be appreciated, the users must be very carefully analysed. Therefore, the first link of the value transmission system consist of evaluating the situation and analysing it thoroughly.

Things to do:

- An analysis of user needs,
- User-satisfaction questionnaires,
- Measurement of user satisfaction.

Step 2 – Ensure value: This is a very comprehensive process to test whether the resources of the library are being turned into a service. In order to be successful, it will be necessary to gain the cooperation of all the sections of the library.

Things to do:

- Allocate the money necessary for the investment,
- Search for sources for the investment,
- Financially analyse the service,
- Plan how it will be presented.

Step 3 – Transmit value: Even if the value has been defined and transformed into a service, it can not be said to be meaningful until it has been announced to the users.

Things to do:

- Advertisement,
- Publicity,
- Public relations.

Value the User

Profit-making organisations, rather than attempting to attract new customers, aim to keep their old customers and superiority is seen as the best tool of rivalry. There is a point of view that it is important to know the users well and user-oriented marketing is seen as an important principle. Although the libraries are not profit-making, they need to be managed like a business.

The practice of profit-making organisations displays that the most of the purchase transactions are done by a narrow group of customers. The result of research carried out in three academic libraries in a group of 4 000 users in 2010 shows that the most of them visit the library once, twice or three times (2166 users).

They are energy consuming because they need librarian involvement. On the contrary, the readers which regularly borrow the books make up a narrow group of users. There were 279 users which visited the library from 10 to 20 times, 75 users – from 21 to 30 times and 14 users – from 31 to 40 times. The mechanisms occurring in the profit-making organisations are parallel to the service processes provided by the libraries [14, s. 89-90].

In fact, it is not enough for university libraries to satisfy the existing users. To ensure a continual success, and to be better than the other university libraries, they need to be future-oriented and act accordingly. For this reason, all the library strategies must concentrate both on preserving what already exists and also gaining potential new library users.

Just as the satisfied customer is very important for an institution, to the same degree, the unhappy customer is a danger. In fact, for every three customers who speak positively about a service, there are apparently 11 other customers who are critical of the same service. If we consider that these 11 unsatisfied customers, in turn, may influence 11 others it is easy to guess that the chain of dissatisfaction will reach big proportions.

It is thought that the subject of the customer value management could also apply to libraries, as the basic principle is the same, that is, to value the customer.



Solution

Step 1– Pre-Value Management: At this stage, before beginning, it is necessary to make some preparations. The quality of the studies undertaken at a pre-value management stage will prepare the ground for the later stages. Therefore, it is important to obtain good and clear results at this stage.

Things to do:

- Gather information from the user,
- Find out how the users obtain information,
- Discover the reasons the users have for using libraries.

Step 2 – User value management study: This means analysing the data collected during the first stage and obtaining some information from the results.

Things to do:

- Analyse the ways in which the users obtain information,
- Analyse the reasons for using the library,
- Define the value axis,

- Select the functions that need to be emphasised,
- Make definite decisions concerning the procedures.

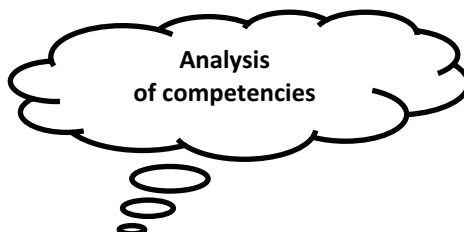
Step 3 – Post – user value management study: After the data has been collected and analysed, it is decided whether a difference (a distinguishing factor) has been created or not and which changes need to be made. This stage, the stage of application, completes the user value management study.

Things to do:

- Allow a complete change,
- Apply the change.

Define the Competencies

In the management literature competency is a concept which is used to represent those working for the institution, that is, the human resources and their both professional and individual competencies. However, here the library is considered as a living organism and the competencies are defined within this whole. Therefore, here, the definition of competency includes all the services and functions of the library.



Solution

Step 1 – Carry out a competency analysis: At this stage it will be necessary to make a competency analysis for all the factors which make up the library. The competencies are knowledge, skills and activities consistent with the aims and values of the library, that is, all the activities outlined by the organisation in terms of how effective they are.

Things to do:

- Test and analyse the competencies of the librarians,
- Test the effectiveness of the management,
- Analyse the effectiveness of the services,
- Analyse the effectiveness of the technological capacity.

Step 2 – Pinpoint the strong points: The library is analysed according to the external environment, the existing situation and situations which are likely to affect it in the future. The internal conditions which can be controlled and tendencies are examined and strong points are identified and evaluated. The strong points are the positive aspects which can help the institution to reach its goals.

Things to do:

- Develop strategies and tactics for providing services which emphasize strong points.

Step 3 – Discovering weak points: Analyzing the external environment, identify and evaluate weak points which are part of the internal structure of the institution and can be brought under control. The weak points are the deficiencies which will prevent the organisation from becoming successful. In other words they are hurdles to overcome.

Things to do:

- Carry out studies to discover deficiencies and weak points,
- In every relevant area set up teams to overcome weak points.

Create a Difference

If institutions have similar material possessions and attributes, then users / customers need to have a reason to prefer one of them to another. A reason for making the choice is what distinguishes a particular company from its competitors. The thing which makes a difference is the capacities of this organisation and its ability to make good use of the resources available. First, the abilities of the company must be analysed and then they should be identified and transformed into basic capacities. It is only then that a sustainable sense of rival superiority can be developed.

The process that provides an implementation of innovation, thus gain the advantage over the rivals, is a benchmarking. An important Polish project, which can be useful in the introduction of benchmarking, is The Analysis of Functioning of the Academic Libraries in Poland (AFBN – Analiza Funkcjonowania Bibliotek Naukowych w Polsce). The primary aim of the AFBN is introduction of standards for Polish scientific libraries. The data collected in the database and published in the reports and tables are a good source to start a comparative study of libraries. The lists of indicators and research reports can be found on the website (ssk2.bu.amu.edu.pl/standaryzacja) [3, s. 73].



Solution

Step 1 – Benchmarking: Two types of benchmarking can be used. The first is the digital data of the library performance, which benchmarks it against other

libraries. In this way, the most important performance criteria become evident, and it shows where you are compared to other libraries.

The other type is the assessment of the library's own performance in particular areas of activity. We answer the questions what the best practice in this area is, who are the best practitioners, and what we can learn from them.

Things to do:

- Examine other libraries in the services offered,
- Compare similar library services to yours.

Step 2 – Analysis: Comparing your library to others will give you an idea of the current situation. However, to obtain the important information the data must be given a detailed analysis.

Things to do:

- Analyze the capabilities of the library.

Step 3 – Prioritization: Working on the improvements begins after all the functions and activities that make up the library have been analyzed.

Things to do:

- Make the prioritization of capabilities.

Step 4 – Create a Difference: The main purpose of the library service is to improve the level and quality of its performance so that it makes a difference in comparison to other libraries.

Things to do:

- Instead of *we have this too* develop an understanding of *and we have this as well*.

Marketing of Services And Activities

Marketing is one of the most important issues of business management. Therefore, with regard to libraries this concept may be new or underestimated. However, as the economists consistently maintain, competition is good, useful, and constructive for progress to be made in a given institution. Therefore, it makes sense for the libraries to create their own competition, in the marketing of services and in the activities required.

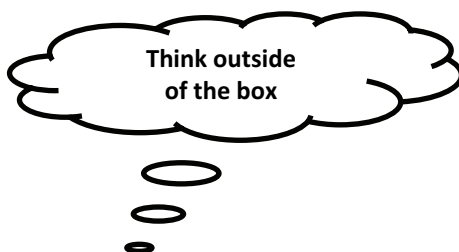
Marketing is energy consuming both in terms of time and money. However, its benefits outweigh the costs. What is more, marketing applications for the library do not have to be of extremely high quality.

The marketing activities in the academic libraries in Poland are carried out by:

- use of new technologies/instruments (e.g. the Library of the University of Lodz runs the website, communicates with users by e-mail and Gadu-Gadu messenger, has a profile on the Facebook, informs the users of the events in library by 'biBULa' bulletin which has been published on their website since 2007, sends weekly Newsletter to the users by e-mail, advertises its services

in a university press – ‘Kronika’ and publishes the brochures and leaflets in a paper and electronic version [7, s. 260-261]);

- improvement of the local conditions (e.g. at modern building of the Library of The University of Gdansk was organized a free access to the collections, the rooms for individual and group work in which the users can study in silence or talk together without disturbing the other students, the Internet reading rooms, the multimedia training rooms, the exhibition and conference halls and the positions for the disabled [1, s. 161-162]);
- organization of the exhibitions and events (e.g. e-exhibition in the Library of the University of Gdansk dedicated to Stefan Banach – kielich.amu.edu.pl/Stefan_Banach/ [1, s. 163]).



Solution

Step 1 – Prepare a Marketing Plan: Marketing plans should consider and address all the positive and negative factors that may affect the library such as competitive forces, technological changes, and cultural changes.

Things to do:

- Designate however small share of the annual budget for marketing activities,
- Clarify the objectives,
- Create feedback mechanism.

Step 2 – Improve Marketing Strategies: At this stage, a strategy to achieve the goals set is determined. In order to do this the objectives must be defined. Marketing strategy is adopted to achieve the objectives according to the logic of marketing. In terms of librarianship, library services and activities meeting user needs can be defined as a set of actions that will create high satisfaction.



Solution

Things to do:

- Prepare some activities to attract attention of library users,

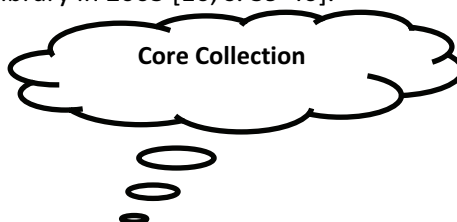
- Write the library services on color cards and leave in the canteen, the dining hall or whichever place frequented by students,
- Market services using electronic media (e-mails to students and academics, a library monthly e-newsletters, etc.),
- Install within the library an electronic screen for current announcements,
- Publicize educational seminars,
- Change the colours used in the library (use colours such as blue, lilac, etc.),
- Find a place in the library serving as a meeting point or a mini-cafeteria, especially for students,
- Distribute among users the library's name / logo or file bracket-style materials,
- Make efforts to organize exhibitions in the library e.g. getting the fine arts faculty involved.

Define The Collection Map of Library

Some library services should be given preference over the others in order to determine the status of the collection (the ACAS service of OCLC, etc.). Indeed, electronic / digital library practices are continuing to increase and are being preferred to the access to the library as a space-based structures. Thus, this tendency should be reflected in electronic versus printed purchases.

As a result, the *core collection* of the library may very soon be of electronic kind. An access to the electronic publications and use them outside the library with personal computers becomes more and more important.

The new forms of purchases are a result of making available collections by electronic. The e-books were entered to the resources of the Main Library of the Warsaw University of Technology in 2007. The e-books which have a basic meaning in the field of science and are designed for a large groups of the users are bought for the ownership. Moreover the digital library, in which the handbooks and scripts are placed, was created in this library in 2005 [10, s. 39-40].



Solution

Step 1 – Collection Policy: This process depends on the purpose and use of the library collection and needs to be revised.

Things to do:

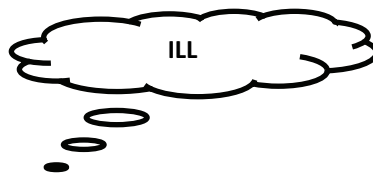
- Determine the collection status,
- Create collection development.

Accept Access Model Instead of Having

For a single library it is impossible to provide access to all the information for everyone. In this regard, libraries cooperate with one another exchanging their resources. These developments require libraries to create joint development and cooperation policies. In the past, as it is also happening to some extent now, libraries used to purchase and are purchasing the necessary resources so as to provide the materials needed by the user and also joined in the Inter-Library Loan service. This may often have led to high costs and low performance on the part of the library.

For libraries of today, it is much more important to have on the spot information access. This has been made possible by a change in the electronic environment. Today, the wealth of the library's resources is measured together with the resources available through the data access which the library can provide.

There are some ways of co-operation between academic libraries in Poland. Firstly academic libraries offer the Inter-Library Loan service payable on the mutual terms with the other Polish and foreign libraries. The documents (books, copies of papers, electronic files) which the local libraries do not possess can be imported from the other Polish libraries. However those materials that none of the libraries in Poland has in its resources are imported from foreign libraries. Secondly the academic libraries perform the orders for the copies of articles from the foreign periodicals by the Subito service. The service provides search the catalogs of periodicals which are subscribed by German, Australian and Swiss libraries (11 mln of the articles). An ordering of the copies of articles in electronic version is payable but they are quickly delivered to the users (up to 72 hours) [11]. The University Library in Torun, in turn, offers 'Order a copy' service. By this service, users can order copies of materials from the collections of The University Library or a copy of digital file which already exists in its resources. The service is realized in the interlibrary orders and directly from the users [12].



Solution

Step 1 – Give importance to ILL:ILL, which means co-operation between libraries when a user of one library can borrow materials owned by another library. This process is meant to ensure the user satisfaction, which is achieved by an improved inter-library related service.

Things to do:

- Increase cooperation with other libraries,

- Join International ILL units / groups such as RLG (the Research Libraries Group), OCLC (The Online Computer Library Center), TLC (The Library Corporation).

Result

A library service to be effective must be a combination of many various factors which, in turn, should be in harmony with each other. In this study, the most important factor in the library is the library users and their satisfaction with the service.

As never before, the key factor in the communication process and information exchange of this day and age is Speed. The speed of information exchange and the changes in communication technologies have transformed the user's needs and expectations.

All these influences and changes cannot be ignored by the library infrastructure and must be effectively implemented in order to meet the modern user's needs and expectations. To achieve this all the factors contributing to the quality of an effective library service should be well analyzed.

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