

Reading Rodski: User Surveys Revisited

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Abstract:

The University of Queensland Cybrary is one of a number of Australian Libraries who have employed a customer satisfaction survey developed by the Rodski Research group. Known as the Rodski survey, this tool has enabled the Cybrary to identify opportunities for improvement and to better respond to the needs of their clients. The Rodski survey employs bivariate methodology and analyses both the *importance* and *performance* of a series of service related statements. The survey has been undertaken by the Cybrary in 1999, 2001 and 2003, allowing performance to be mapped over time. The Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) and the Australasian Group of Universitas 21 have also chosen to use this survey and therefore the results can be benchmarked in order to achieve the highest possible standards of service. This paper will detail the Cybrary's experience with the Rodski survey over the past five years and will outline the ways that the Cybrary has responded to user-identified priorities. The survey tool will also be positioned within the broader context of strategic planning and quality management processes at the University of Queensland Cybrary. Some observations will be made as to the relevance and suitability of this survey to the Library context in the light of other user surveys.

Keywords:

Rodski, user surveys, LibQUAL +, client perception, client satisfaction, Australian libraries, strategic planning, quality management.

1. Introduction

In a rapidly changing environment user surveys and studies provide an important tool for measuring customer perceptions, practices and satisfaction, thus improving the efficiency and effectiveness of services. Empirical methods such as these can assist in the strategic planning process, enabling decisions to be made about existing and future infrastructure, collection building and service delivery. By taking the time to find out how customers are using the library, a “best-fit” between client and services can be obtained, ensuring that maximum benefits are achieved.

User studies can assist with the improvement of library collections and services so that they best match the needs of the customer. They can help provide a better understanding of user needs. This will directly help libraries to ensure the optimal and appropriate use of resources by providing a close match between the collection and customer requirements. Client perceptions of library services can also be gauged, helping to identify areas of dissatisfaction, unmet needs or potential future requirements. User studies may also guide collection management and development, providing information that may assist with journal subscription cancellations or new monograph or serials purchases.

The University of Queensland Library uses the term “Cybrary” to describe its combination of physical space and cyberspace, real and virtual information resources and in-person and online assistance. At the University of Queensland Cybrary user studies and other performance measurement methods exist as part of a larger organisational approach to strategic planning and quality management processes. Quality is seen as a core value and is part of the culture of the Cybrary. There are three main elements involved in the quality management program. Firstly, key priority areas for the Cybrary have been identified and these are mapped to the priorities of the University as a whole. Secondly, benchmarking against other organisations both nationally and internationally provide comparative indicators of quality and “best-practice”. Thirdly, ongoing performance measurement provides qualitative and quantitative data to assist in performance improvement and ongoing service delivery. User surveys provide one method of gaining feedback from customers but other methods such as focus groups, online and paper suggestion forms, and informal and formal discussions with the University community also provide valuable information. Taken together these elements provide a comprehensive Quality Management Program that is integrated into the standard operating procedures. This paper will detail the Cybrary’s experience with one particular performance measurement tool, the Rodski survey and will outline the ways that the Cybrary has responded to user-identified priorities.

2. Background

The University of Queensland

The University of Queensland is a leader among Australian universities and is recognised internationally as a premier research institution. It is the largest and the oldest university in Queensland. It has over 30,000 students and 5, 000 staff. The main University campus is at St Lucia in the western suburbs of Brisbane. Other campuses include: Gatton, located 100 kilometres from Brisbane; Ipswich, which is a new campus located 40 kilometres from Brisbane; a medical school; a dental school as well as farms and research centres throughout Queensland.

The University’s teaching, learning and research activities have attracted numerous awards. In 1998 the University of Queensland was declared the University of the Year by the *Good Universities Guide to Australian Universities*. It received the maximum five-star rating for positive graduate outcomes, prestige, student demand, research performance, gender balance and staff qualifications. The University is consistently in the top three in Australia in the amounts of researching funding it receives and consistently performs well in teaching and learning awards nationally. The University of Queensland is a member of the Universitas 21 consortium, a network of seventeen research-intensive universities across nine countries. It is also part of the Group of Eight, a consortium of Australia’s leading Universities.

The University of Queensland Cybrary

The University of Queensland Cybrary has one of the largest collections amongst academic libraries in Australia and by far the largest in Queensland. The collection comprises: over 2 million volumes; 13,400 print journals and over 19, 000 electronic journals; 600 networked databases; 296, 000 electronic books and 18, 500 videos. Over 20 service points deliver services up to 84 hours per week over 14 branch libraries located at the St Lucia, Gatton and Ipswich campuses and in the major teaching hospitals. Service delivery through branch libraries is supported by centralised processing and administrative services for the whole system. Personnel are recruited centrally and library materials are ordered and processed centrally. Policies are developed by the Library as a whole, by participation of as many staff as possible.

In 1998, the UQ Library was awarded joint first place in the institutional category of the prestigious Australian Awards for University Teaching for its development and implementation of the Cybrary concept. In 2000, the Library won the same award for its *AskIT* Computing Help and Training Service. UQ Library is the only Library in the country to have won this Teaching Award.

3. Types of User Surveys

Understanding how trends and changes in information services impact on library environments comes from collecting relevant and accurate data. While it is possible to anticipate and guess changes in user needs and expectations via simple observations of trends and behaviour, it is more accurate and preferable to apply a more scientific approach to the key issues determining the needs of users, current and potential.

There are many methods of listening to customers and these user surveys these can be broadly categorised as:

- Quantitative surveys such as transactional surveys capture service operating data and usage of electronic resources. They can also analyse log-ons of user online interactions and downloads to assess usage.
- Qualitative surveys including Rodski, LibQUAL+, focus group interviews, case studies, sampling, questionnaires, mystery shopping, customer advisory panels, service reviews, analysis of customer complaints, comments and feedback, employee field reporting and employee surveys.
- Disciplinary-based studies of specific user groups, for example architects, physicists or engineers.
- Surveys of specific user groups who share similar perspectives, motivations for using information or needs. For example, academic¹ staff, undergraduates, postgraduates, international students.
- Automated data analysis such as analysis of web page statistics or service usage.

Surveys and structured interviews are part of an extensive array of research methods available. Some surveys are simple enough to use and relatively easy and inexpensive to administer, but their limitations include the types of questions that are asked. Open-ended interview processes are sometimes used as well as in-depth interviewing to enhance the responses.

¹ Academic users can be vertically divided by disciplines or horizontally by age groups or gender.

Why conduct User surveys

All library professionals are aware that getting and staying close to our clients/users requires effort and time. Surveys are conducted to:

- Identify (unmet) needs
- Reveal service issues and opportunities
- Ensure that limited resources are more efficiently utilised
- Provide input for strategic planning.

There is increasing pressure for libraries to be more customer-focused, outcome-based and accountable for the purposes of ongoing funding. The need to find out what clients are thinking has never been greater. Libraries are faced with many challenges as to how to organise their collections and their services as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Libraries conduct surveys to learn about faculty and student use of, attitudes toward, and satisfaction with the libraries' collections, services, and facilities. The information gathered facilitates a better understanding of library use by our primary user populations. This information contributes to benchmarking, planning, and ultimately to service improvements. Libraries can use these findings to ensure that collections are matched to real client needs, ensure the optimal and appropriate use of resources, identify problems from the client's perspective and establish unmet needs. User surveys guide collection management and development decisions.

Results can also be used to influence suppliers of services and resources (such as vendors of online databases) to design systems which meet user needs or persuade publishers to create user-focussed resources.

The Rodski Survey

The Cybrary has chosen to use a survey tool developed by the Rodski group² called the Rodski Customer Satisfaction Survey. The Rodski Research group is an Australian behavioural research company. For the last five years the Cybrary has undertaken the Rodski survey biennially, conducting surveys in 1999, 2001 and 2003. The survey was initially used by the University of Melbourne Library and then adopted by other members of the Australasian Universitas 21 Libraries group. The Australasian group consists of: The University of Melbourne, The University of New South Wales, The University of Queensland and The University of Auckland.³

The survey instrument was adopted by the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL)⁴ in 1999. Since that time CAUL has worked with the Rodski Research Group to assist members to develop, administer and analyse the customer satisfaction survey. Almost all of the 39 CAUL members have undertaken or will undertake the survey (either in its full format or basic format) in 2003 or 2004. A CAUL portal has been established by Rodski and members are able to benchmark results against other participating institutions. The ability for such a large group of university libraries to measure their performance against each other is an important method of ensuring optimum service delivery and performance for the individual libraries involved. More importantly, there was perceived value in adopting a common framework to encourage internally and externally directed dialogue on

² <http://www.rodski.com.au/>

³ Details of the groups experience with collectively using the Rodski survey have been published in an article by Isabella Trahn. et al.

⁴ <http://www.caul.edu.au>

what constitutes excellent library performance by the primary clients to drive continuous improvement.

The CAUL Best Practice Working Group is currently surveying top performing libraries in the five main areas of the survey to identify good and best practices which will be shared with CAUL members. CAUL members have also used their Rodski results to introduce a range of improvements and some of these have been reported on the Best Practice web pages. CAUL is also undertaking a comparison between Rodski and LibQUAL+ this year and may review their continued participation in Rodski.

4. The Survey Process

For the University of Queensland Cybrary the main objectives of the survey have been to assist with the identification of key client concerns. The survey also allows the Cybrary to identify, prioritise and manage key issues affecting clients. Optional or tailored questions can also be added to the core set to meet individual needs. It provides a tool to allow the Cybrary to measure and monitor its performance over time and provides clients with the opportunity to communicate openly and honestly with the Cybrary.

At the University of Queensland the survey has consisted of between 41 to 43 statements known as *variables* that clients must respond to. The survey uses a bivariate methodology, which measures *importance* against *performance*. Accordingly, clients must rate each statement twice. The survey focuses on five distinct categories. These are: *Communication, Facilities and Equipment, Library Staff, Service Delivery* and *Service Quality*.

The Rodski survey provides the Cybrary with a “snapshot” analysis of the *10 most important variables* for customers, their perceptions of the *10 highest performing variables* and the *10 lowest performing variables* and the *top 10 improvements or gaps*. These gaps represent areas where there is a perceived difference between the importance and performance score for each variable. Areas of possible client frustration or dissatisfaction and improvement opportunities are identified. The Rodski group advises that gaps of two or more are considered significant, with gaps of three or more indicating increased dissatisfaction. This paper will concentrate on looking at gap areas for the three surveys run by the Cybrary.

The Rodski survey was run for the first time in 1999. Paper copies of the survey were sent to 3,500 randomly selected staff and students. Copies were also available from the Information Desk at branch libraries. A web version of the survey was also hosted on the Cybrary’s website. Overall 1,308 responses were received. Approximately 62% of the surveys completed were paper versions and 38% were web surveys. Of the responses: 64% were submitted by undergraduate students, 24% by postgraduates, 8% by academic or research staff and 4% by general staff members.

The table below shows the Top 10 Improvements list, which is the ten areas where there was the largest gap between customer service expectations and Library performance.

TABLE 1: Top 10 Improvements List - 1999

Largest Gaps (Service expectation – Performance)	Mean Gap
<i>Number of computer workstations adequate*</i>	2.21
<i>Photocopying facilities adequate *</i>	1.95
<i>Prompt corrective action taken regarding missing books and journals</i>	1.92
<i>The library collection is adequate to my needs</i>	1.7
<i>Email facilities adequate</i>	1.47
<i>Information resources (books, electronic etc) easily accessed *</i>	1.42
<i>Opening hours meet my needs*</i>	1.35
<i>Access to electronic databases easily available</i>	1.24
<i>Books and journals reshelved quickly*</i>	1.24
<i>Materials are processed rapidly for inclusion in the collection</i>	1.21
<i>(NB. Factors marked * were also identified as top 10 importance variables)</i>	

In 2001, a similar process was undertaken. Again the survey ran over a four-week period and paper copies were sent to 3,500 randomly selected staff and students with copies also available in branch libraries and from the Cybrary website. 1,464 responses were received. Of these 67% (997) were paper versions and 33% (487) were web versions. 54% of the responses were received from undergraduate students, 25% from postgraduate students, 13% from academic or research staff and 8% from general staff.

Perceptions of service quality levels varied across the Cybrary's branch libraries, however, for all branches clients were more satisfied than they were dissatisfied. In over half of the branches more than 50% of customers noted a perception of high quality service (6 or 7 out of 7). There was also a high degree of similarity in the areas where customers perceived a lower level of service. Clients were most concerned with computer workstation numbers, photocopying facilities, email facilities and functioning electronic equipment.

TABLE 2: Top 10 Improvements List – 2001

Largest Gaps (Service expectation – Performance)	Mean Gap
<i>Number of computer workstations is adequate *</i>	2.28
<i>Photocopying Facilities are adequate *</i>	1.81
<i>Email facilities are adequate</i>	1.55
<i>Electronic equipment is in working order</i>	1.54
<i>Materials are processed rapidly for inclusion in the collection</i>	1.36

<i>Information resources (books, electronic, etc) are easily accessed*</i>	1.30
<i>Access to electronic databases is easily available *</i>	1.20
<i>Library catalogue provides clear and useful information *</i>	1.17
<i>The Library's website makes it easy for me to find information I need*</i>	1.07
<i>Library staff are focussed on meeting my needs</i>	1.04
<i>(NB. Factors marked * were also identified as top 10 importance variables)</i>	

The survey was run most recently in 2003. Again the survey was conducted over a four-week period with 3,500 forms sent to randomly selected staff and students. The survey was publicised more extensively. Fliers and posters were available in branch libraries and surveys were handed out to clients in the branches. Broadcast emails were sent to all staff and students. The survey was also publicised on both the Cybrary homepage and the University of Queensland staff and student portal. Advertisements were placed in the student newspaper, *Semper*, and articles were included in publications produced by the University and the Cybrary. As a result, 3,471 responses were received, over 1,000 more than in the previous time the survey was run of these 39% (1,361) were paper responses⁵ and 32% were electronic (1,110). 59.5% of responses came from undergraduate students, 27.3% from postgraduates, 5% from academic or research staff, 2% from general staff and 6% from other user categories.

TABLE 3: Top 10 Improvements List – 2003

Largest Gaps (Service expectation – Performance)	Mean Gap
Number of computer workstations is adequate	2.14
<i>Photocopying and printing facilities are adequate</i>	1.97
<i>Computer facilities and electronic equipment are adequate*</i>	1.77
<i>Opening hours meet my needs*</i>	1.30
<i>Prompt corrective action is taken regarding missing journals and books</i>	1.30
<i>Library collection is adequate for my needs*</i>	1.28
<i>Information resources (books, electronic, etc) are easily accessed*</i>	1.13
<i>Library space is adequate</i>	0.98
<i>Individual seating is adequate</i>	0.97
<i>The Library catalogue provides clear and useful information*</i>	0.85
<i>(NB. Factors marked * were also identified as top 10 importance variables)</i>	

⁵ Of these 1,361 responses 492 were received from those randomly mailed out, 858 were from surveys handed out in branches and only 11 were received as a result of advertising placed in the student newspaper.

The survey process also enabled a better understanding of how clients use the Library. 49% (1211) or nearly half of those surveyed visited the Library 2 – 4 days per week. Many users (21%) visited every day and 5% rarely visited either the campus or the Library. A sizeable proportion (38%) visited the Library online 2 – 4 times per week and 23% visited the Library online daily.

Improving Client Satisfaction: Responding to Client Feedback

Over the last five years the gap areas identified in the Rodski survey have remained fairly consistent. Three of the gap areas are represented in all three surveys (these are related to computer workstations numbers, photocopying and printing facilities and Library collection.) A further five of the gap areas are represented in at least two surveys.

The Cybrary has responded to client feedback gained through the survey and targeted high gap areas as well as other areas that have been identified in the open comments section of the survey. Particular attention has been paid to areas (denoted above by an asteric “*”) where variables identified on the *Top 10 Improvement / Gap list overlap* with the *Top 10 Importance list*.

Computer workstations

For instance, in response to the 2001 survey findings where clients expressed frustration with computer facilities, 700 client computers were replaced and the standard operating environment was upgraded. Since then, additional public computers have been purchased each year, bringing the current number of computers across the Cybrary to approximately 1,300. More email terminals and “express” (shorter-use) workstations have also been made available. In order to address user-perceived issues with collection adequacy a number of measures were taken such as increasing subscriptions to electronic journals. In the year following the 2001 Rodski round 2,835 new electronic journals were added to the collection.⁶ Over 200 new ebooks, 17 new databases and 6,900 multimedia items were added to the collection. Arrangements were also made with the University of Queensland bookshop (a local book supplier) to improve the turn-around time for new book purchases.

Photocopying and printing facilities

Since the first Rodski survey in 1999, the adequacy of photocopying facilities has consistently featured as a *gap* area. Photocopiers have been continuously replaced and upgraded and the purchase of new equipment has been closely aligned with user needs. Over the past few years photocopying statistics have steadily decreased while online printing has increased. The purchase of new printers has therefore been a high priority. Currently there are over 86 photocopiers / printers available throughout the Cybrary.

Library catalogue

Over the past two years substantial changes have also been made to the design of the Cybrary webpage and the catalogue interface in order to improve user navigation and access to information. The changes have proven to be highly successful and as a result, the use of the catalogue dramatically increased. In 2003, 7.85 million searches were performed using the catalogue, which was a 27.8% increase on the previous year. The Cybrary website was accessed over 30,000,000 times in 2003. Modifications have continued during 2004, with new collection-

⁶ Today the number of electronic journals exceeds the number of print subscriptions.

specific searching enhanced and catalogue functionality improved. The design of the entire website has been further streamlined to improve user-accessibility.

Opening hours

Already, in response to the 2003 Rodski findings, initial responses to improving services, facilities and collections have been made. In response to user demands for longer opening hours the Architecture and Music Library and the Ipswich Library have increased their opening hours. Both the Economics and Business Library and the Gatton Library had increased their opening hours in response to previous survey responses.

Library space

The Cybrary has also increased the physical spaces available to users with a new postgraduate study facilities added at the Dorothy Hill Physical Sciences and Engineering Library. This facility includes nine additional computer workstations, and is also wireless-enabled, allowing users to use laptop computers to work more flexibly. Eight wireless laptops are available for users to loan for use within the Library. The facility includes group study spaces, private offices that can be booked by users and a conference room with a video-conferencing facility.

Other physical spaces have been added in response to previous survey results. The new Ipswich Library, which was officially opened in 2003, provides a dynamic and innovative library service for the UQ community. Services such as the Library, the Student Centre, Student Support Services, Information Technology Services, the Health Service, Student Union and Office of the Campus Manager are all integrated into one building in a setting which includes a garden, spaces for multiple learning styles and access to information technologies. In 2003 the Cybrary was presented with the inaugural Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) National Excellence Award for building design and service delivery. The Ipswich Library has provided flexible learning and study spaces for groups and individuals and seating for an additional 403 users. During 2004 - 2005, improvements to physical facilities within the Cybrary will continue with a major refurbishment of the Biological Sciences Library taking place, assisted extensively by the results from the Rodski surveys.

LibQUAL+

LibQUAL +⁷ is a user survey sponsored through collaboration between the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and the Texas A & M University Libraries. LibQUAL+ is a web based survey tool that libraries use to solicit, track, understand, and act upon users' opinions of service quality to improve library services.

By 2003, LibQUAL+(TM) has more than 400 participating institutions, including colleges and universities, community colleges, health sciences libraries, law libraries, and public libraries – some through various consortia, others as independent participants. LibQUAL+(TM) has expanded internationally, with participating institutions in Canada, the U.K., and Europe. (LibQUAL+ website)

Library clients answer 25 questions that are evaluated over four dimensions:

- *Affect of Service* (customer service)
- *Personal control* (ability to find information independently and remotely)
- *Access to Information* (hours and collection scope)

⁷ <http://www.libqual.org/About/index.cfm>

- *Library as Place* (building amenities).

5. Rodski and LibQUAL+ Compared

The two surveys have similar aims in evaluating the quality of the library service and based on the analysis of results, enable improvements to be made. Both surveys enable clients to rate various aspects of library service on a scaled rating system and many of the questions lead to the same conclusion.

Some differences between the two surveys include:

- Some questions in LibQUAL+ survey are significantly different to those in the Rodski Survey. (These include two references to quiet study spaces (Q2&Q10) and complete run of journal titles (Q3).
- Some of the questions in LibQUAL+ are repetitive:
 - Reference to quiet study space (Q2 & Q10);
 - The library environment expressed in similar ways (Q13 23);
 - Locating things independently (Q6 & Q12).
- In the Rodski Survey clients are asked to indicate whether they are remote/external and or an international student.
 - LibQUAL+ provide little or no benchmarking comparisons against other institutions. Each participating library has access to data identifying the overall results of the groups in which they are members and for other participating libraries, and from that they can generate comparative data themselves. Rodski provide comparisons within the final report.
 - The Rodski survey is available in both the print and web formats. In 2001, the majority of responses received (two thirds) were in print. The LibQUAL + survey is available online and print copies are distributed upon request from ARL.
 - LibQUAL+ questions appear to be fixed, but if an institution conducts the survey as part of a consortium, five questions can be added in addition to the 25. With the Rodski survey, some questions can be tailored to the institution's needs.
 - In 2004 to participate in LibQUAL + the cost is US \$2,250 and if individual libraries within institutions wish to distinguish their findings by requesting separate handling and deliverables, then the fee will be US\$2,250 per unit of analysis. Training and conference attendance are additional costs.
 - For the Rodski Survey, the implementation and total analysis of the data, the cost is around AUD\$10,000. The Rodski survey report includes verbatim comment for each individual library, analysed results for each library branch and the library overall. They prepare a 550 page report on the results and outcomes of the survey.

Differences in Rating System

The Rodski survey uses *Importance* and *Performance* as the indicators to assess each best practice factor (on the scale of 1-7, with seven being the highest or extremely satisfied or excellent).

LibQUAL+ uses the scale of 1-9 with nine being the highest. Respondents assess the service according to *My Minimum Service Level is*; *My Desired Service Level is*; and *Perceived Service Performance is* (this being how the library is currently performing). There is also the option to reply *N/A (Not Applicable)* to all three.

6. CONCLUSION

The Cybrary has found its user surveys to be extremely useful and is committed to the use of the Rodski survey for another round, its fourth, in 2005. This will provide a longitudinal study outlining patterns and trends in use by our client group.

In conducting a user survey, any library must assess:

- Why survey users?
- What are the benefits of following national standard approach for the purposes of benchmarking?
- What implications are there for staff training and involvement?
- How are such surveys implemented and publicised?
- How do patterns of use differ across tiers of service and in different types of libraries?
- For what purposes are libraries used?

While planning, undertaking and responding to user surveys requires considerable expenditure of staff time and financial resources, they are essential in measuring customer satisfaction and assist libraries to make appropriate responses to changing user needs.

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