Chapter 15
Alignment of Perceptions in Information Technology Service Quality

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ABSTRACT
The chapter explains the importance of taking the expectations of customers and service providers into account with regard to IT service quality management. To do this, the author uses the SERVPERF method, which identifies expectations regarding service performance from the point of view of both the customer and the provider. Based on an empirical study, the author demonstrates the importance of aligning IT staff with staff from the customer company as far as quality management is concerned.

INTRODUCTION
Analyzing the effectiveness of IT service components is becoming increasingly important (Jiang et al., 2000). To meet growing user demands organizations allocate high investments toward IT. However, the measures generally analyze IT effectiveness based on products rather than on services. Thus, they provide inconsistent information for decision-making (Pitt et al., 1995; DeLone and McLean, 2003).

IT products like hardware, software, and information system (IS) applications are part of a process of services (development and maintenance of IS applications, management of operational systems, and maintenance of hardware and software), which determine client perceptions about quality (Gronroos, 2000). Quality may result in a competitive advantage for organizations (Porter, 1980), due to differentiation characteristics. Nevertheless, the competitive advantage of an organization starts in its internal processes, which are also the management of intraorganizational demands (Greenhalgh, 2001; Bhatt and Grover, 2005), such as those of IT services.

Therefore, an effective service analysis of the services produced by IT division for other organizational divisions, or IT client divisions, should take into consideration how these clients perceive IT services. According to Gronroos (1988, p. 10),

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“when the service provider understands how the clients evaluate its services, it can identify how to manage these evaluations and how to influence them in a desired direction.” This situation requires “a model of how the customers perceive the service quality” (p. 10).

In this sense, Seth et al. (2005) analyze 19 models that evaluate customer satisfaction with services. They considered SERVQUAL model as the most influential of them, although not for IT services purpose. SERVQUAL has its origin in marketing discipline for services in general, but its applicability in IT discipline for IT services is increasing (Jiang et al., 2000; Carr, 2002).

DeLone and McLean (1992) developed an information system (IS) model that has been the base of different models with the aim to evaluate user satisfaction with IS services. Ten years after, DeLone and McLean (2003) revised the model to insert a functional dimension (how the service is delivered) based on SERVQUAL dimensions.

SERVQUAL evaluates service quality using a questionnaire containing 22 items divided into five dimensions, namely tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. These elements evaluate both the expectations for agreed services and the perceptions of services previously provided. Both clients and suppliers respond this questionnaire (Parasuraman et al., 1991).

Thus, the applicability of the SERVQUAL model to the Brazilian banking sector as an instrument for IT service quality improvement is especially interesting, considering the intensive use of IT and the large amounts invested in technology. In 2004, Brazilian banks invested approximately $1.44 billion in IT, or in other words, 30% of their total investments (FEBRABAN, 2006). In 2006, the number of accounts in Brazilian banks totaled 102.6 million, with clients independently operating over 12 billion electronic transactions using devices like Internet Banking and Automated Teller Machines (FEBRABAN, 2008). The site of this research is one of the top five Brazilian banks that invest in IT. This investment is partly responsible for the bank achieving one of the largest net profits of the sector in 2004, besides being one of the 10 largest American banks in terms of assets. Consequently, its IT Division (ITD) receives, on average, over 250 IT service requests per month from its client divisions, which requires a complex infrastructure of physical and human assets. Based on this situation, managing the relationship between ITD and its clients raises the following question: How is the alignment of IT service quality perceptions between the ITD and its client divisions?

To answer this question, the main objective of this study is to evaluate the different perceptions of IT service quality by questioning ITD employees, here also identified as suppliers, and the employees of its client divisions, here also identified as clients, using the SERVQUAL model during a specific period of time. As secondary objectives, this research aims to analyze the perception gaps in the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model and identify opportunities for the management improvement of the client supplier relationship in IT services. Because the model is not a common sense, the findings add new ways to continue the validity discussion of SERVQUAL, this time based on a sample characterized by intense and strategic IT development, and exploring conceptual elements unpredicted in the original instrument.

Four main sections develop the objectives of this study. The first section briefly reviews previous research about service quality emphasizing IT context, followed by the presentation of the SERVQUAL model, including gap analysis and considerations about factor stability for IT services. The second section presents the method of the research. The third section develops the empirical results, through quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The last section highlights managerial implications and suggestions for future research.
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