Exploring Gap Analysis to Evaluate Participant Satisfaction Regarding Community Development Planning Programs

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Exploring Gap Analysis to Evaluate Participant Satisfaction Regarding Community Development Planning Programs

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This research examines the effect of participants' expectations on their satisfaction regarding community development planning programs. The marketing literature establishes that satisfaction depends on whether experiences meet or exceed expectations, a concept operationalized as "gap analysis," but studies have not previously considered that participants' expectations and experiences may drive their satisfaction regarding economic development planning programs. The authors apply the gap analysis concept to 3 communities in West Virginia and analyze three gaps: (a) intra-recipient gap comparing expectations and experiences, (b) recipient-provider gap between expectations, and (c) recipient-provider gap between experiences. Gap (a) was not pronounced; gaps (b) and (c) yielded the strongest results.

Keywords: gap analysis, evaluation, community development planning

A number of scholars have studied evaluation and measurement of community development programs and, as a result, have proposed various measures for measuring the success of such programs. For example, Youtie, Bozeman, and Shapira (1999) identified more than eight methodologies used in evaluating development programs: benchmarking, case studies, peer reviews, end user surveys, input–output analyses, cost benefits, outcome analyses, and return on investment analyses. However, no one has studied the concept of satisfaction in these initiatives from both the recipient and the provider viewpoints. When programs are implemented, recipient and provider satisfaction are important. If participants (recipients and providers) are not satisfied with the process of a community development initiative, the long-term success of the program is called into question. It is reasonable to assume that dissatisfied participants will lend less support and have less buy-in, both of which are essential to long-term success (Schaeffer & Loveridge, 2000).

This paper addresses this missing link by examining two elements that drive satisfaction: expectations and outcomes. Through a case study of three communities, a methodology is offered for studying satisfaction levels. The communities included in...
the case study were served by a community development program led by West Virginia University. The methodology was developed and introduced because of several difficulties with other approaches. First, usually time must pass before the effects of community development efforts are felt and can be measured. Funding agencies, however, want some measure of impact included in the final grant report; thus members of advisory or governing boards or legislators may ask university administrators to evaluate the impacts of outreach activities early. Second, only rarely is a particular outreach program the sole contributor to community change. Without careful, time-consuming, and expensive study, determining how much of the change, if any, can be attributed to the program may be impossible. Third, impacts may be indirect and hard to measure. For example, a few years ago one effort yielded a recommendation to the community to purchase a historic downtown building and turn it into an antique shopping center. As it turned out, several community leaders had already thought of this idea and thus, in one sense, nothing new was contributed. However, the recommendation still had an effect. Because an outside team that enjoyed credibility arrived at the idea independently, their recommendation made it easier for city council to obtain political support to commit city funds when the building became available a short time later. Finally, the successes of many programs include the organizations and networks they establish and the leaders that emerge, developments that often lead to new tasks sometimes unrelated to the original programs. For these reasons, and maybe more, attributing and assessing the impacts of a program is difficult (for additional discussion, see Bartik & Bingham, 1997).

Previous approaches have measured impacts directly (e.g., Bartik, 1991; Bukenya, Gebremedhin, & Schaeffer, 2003; Gabe & Kraybill, 2002; Isserman & Rephann, 1995; McGrath & Vickroy, 2003; Saiz, 2001; Schaeffer & Millerick, 1991; Wrigley & Lewis, 2002). The authors of this paper propose instead an indirect method that measures the level of satisfaction that an action or program generated, not what was done or accomplished. This approach has several advantages, including that it can be administered repeatedly at different stages in the process. If the measure is done after a project has been completed and has been operational for awhile, it can be administered as an end user survey, though not all end user surveys aim to measure satisfaction. However, the measure can also be done very early in the process, in the conceptual phase. This phase is particularly critical because very early in the process, citizens may determine the success or failure of the implementation and therefore of the whole program. It seems reasonable to assume that if citizens feel satisfied with the conceptual phase, then probability of a successful implementation phase is higher than if they are not satisfied initially.

Thus, the authors hypothesized that the probability of success and the level of satisfaction are positively related, and the research reported here is the first phase of a larger project to test the approach, collect data, and then test the hypothesis. Although satisfaction is a desirable outcome in and by itself, it is an interim measure; ultimately the authors are interested in measurable changes in local and/or regional economic data, such as income, employment, tax base, tax revenues, business revenues, building permits, number of businesses, storefront restorations, number of visitors or clients, and number and assets of community foundations. The authors present and analyze satisfaction measures. The remainder of this article is organized as follows: a brief overview of gap analysis is first provided followed by a description of the case studies outreach program and communities, and a description of the study design and methodology. A summary and conclusion are then provided.

**Background on Gap Analysis**

The methodology was based on research and practice in marketing. Individuals,
whether consuming a product or experiencing some activity, evaluate their experiences; they judge whether the encounter brought them satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Whether individuals are satisfied or dissatisfied depends on their perceptions of the relation between their expectations and the outcomes of the experience (Oliver, 1979). Satisfaction is thought to occur when the outcome of the experience meets or exceeds an individual’s expectations, whereas dissatisfaction occurs when the experience falls below the expected outcome. This concept has been operationalized as a “gap analysis”—where the differences between experiences and expectations are measured and analyzed to understand satisfaction.

Serving as the case study to illustrate and test the methodology is an outreach program that provides expertise to rural communities to address community and economic development issues by providing recommendations, ideas, and plans. Ultimately, the community is responsible for implementing recommendations, but the outreach program is highly interactive. Providers typically include experts in design, economic development, and civil engineering, although members of other disciplines may also be represented, whereas recipients typically include elected officials and health, business, religious, and other community leaders. Provider expectations directly affect the design and delivery of their services. Correspondingly, recipients’ expectations directly affect the evaluation of services they consume. Thus it is helpful to examine both party’s expectations and experiences if a more thorough understanding of satisfaction is to be gained. This concept has been validated in the consumer services arena by a number of researchers, including Brown and Schwartz (1989) and Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985).

As originally developed by Brown and Schwartz (1989), three potential gaps are related to the expected and service outcome on both sides of the service:

- Gap one: An intra-recipient gap between recipient expectations and recipient experiences.
- Gap two: An inter-recipient-provider gap between expectations, and
- Gap three: An inter-recipient-provider gap between experiences.

Gap one reflects a standard approach to determining satisfaction and evaluating a service encounter. The difference between expectations and experiences is expected to be negative in positive evaluations of services.

Gaps two and three reflect differences between providers’ perception of recipient expectations and experiences. A gap is presumed to exist between provider and recipient expectations (especially where providers underestimate recipient expectations) that will likely have deleteriously affect outcomes. The differences between recipient and provider expectations are expected to be negative in positive evaluations of services. Likewise, whether experiences meet, exceed, or are below recipient expectations will influence the future of the relationship. When a provider significantly exceeds the recipient’s expectations, satisfaction should develop, followed by loyalty. The differences between recipient and provider experiences are expected to be positive in positive evaluations of services.

Community Design Team Program

Community development and empowerment seeks to help communities accumulate assets and improve their economic well-being. A strong community development program ensures a community is well financed, can grow, and is able to increase their assets and successfully compete in the years ahead. Universities and colleges and their faculties are increasingly asked on to utilize their expertise to assist communities with community development activities. One approach that has emerged is university-led community development programs. A U.S. Chamber of Commerce (2006) publication estimated the U.S. Chamber alone funds 69 community development programs at universities across 45 states.
Most programs, however, are self-funded and rely substantially on the volunteer participation of faculty and students. This is the case of the program used in this case study.

The program is known as the West Virginia University Community Design Team (CDT). Since this program was started in 1997, 34 West Virginia communities and one Pennsylvania community have participated. The West Virginia communities represent 28 of the state’s 55 counties.

A community initiates a typical CDT program via an application process that must demonstrate community preparedness and broad community support. Following the application phase, CDT members and an organizing committee of community leaders conduct two pre-visits, normally during the three months before the visit. These pre-visits are intended to align expectations of the community with the CDT’s capabilities, identify expertise needed for the visit, define and limit the scope of the visit, and arrange logistical details, including housing for the team, publicity, meeting places, identification of those individuals the team should meet with for information gathering, and arrangements for two open meetings with the community. Typically site visitors serving as providers include professionals and students in marketing, regional economics, landscape architecture, civil and environmental engineering, and parks and tourism resources. Frequently teams also include faculty and/or students in historic preservation, public administration, rural health, interior design, and, occasionally, education. The typical team ranges from 12 to 20 individuals. Faculty and professionals outnumber students by a ratio of about two to one. The CDT is tasked with helping a community address such key issues as attracting new businesses, improving streets and roads, enhancing the town’s physical appearance, expanding youth programs and activities, and adding to or improving recreational facilities. The university team works with community leaders including elected and appointed officials, business owners or executives, and leaders of social and nonprofit organizations.

The CDT site visit team spends two to three days in the community. The visit normally starts on a Thursday evening with a get-acquainted reception with community leaders and interested community members. The first survey is administered in this session. Friday is spent in meetings and discussions, many featuring presentations by a variety of community members and interest groups, depending on the issues identified by the community for the CDT to investigate. The primary purpose of these meetings is for the CDT to learn of the community needs beyond the information provided in the application materials and pre-visits. Friday evening culminates with a community meeting that is aimed at learning how residents perceive their community and what vision they have for it.

On the following day, the CDT develops a series of recommendations based on this input and presents their findings to the community at large.

Some six months later, one to three CDT members conduct a follow-up visit. Additional follow-up activities are negotiated with the community. (For a more detailed discussion of the community design team process, see Schaeffer & Loveridge, 2000).

The West Virginia University (WVU) community design team program is similar to classic design charrettes in terms of basic structure (intense design exercise) and diverse range of participants. The length of community design charrettes range from 1 to 5 days, typically depending on the scope of the exercise (McLaughlin, 2002). The WVU program differs from classic design charrettes with the inclusion of efforts before and after the actual design exercise. The actual design exercise is roughly two days long but conducted over a three-day period.

The gap analysis methodology has been tried in three communities to date. The communities were not selected at random, but were chosen as communities that had applied and were accepted for a CDT visit. All three case-studies are in West Virginia: Mount Hope and Fayetteville, both in Fayette County, and Clay in Clay County. The visit to Mount Hope took place October 5–8, 2006. This community of some 1,450 inhabitants is part of the Oak...
Hill Micropolitan Area, which has a total population just under 50,000. Over the last 20 years the area has lost about 10,000 residents and has only recently started a slow recovery. Coal mining was once the major employer, and the mechanization of coal mining has devastated employment rates. The region has several major recreational amenities that are helping it come back. This is particularly evident in the case of Fayetteville, which was visited March 15–17, 2007. This community of some 2,700 inhabitants has a healthy economy and fairly quickly rising real estate prices, thanks to its proximity to the New River Gorge National River. Although Mount Hope is also close to this tourist attraction, unlike Fayetteville so far it has not been able to take advantage of its proximity. Both communities are located on a major divided highway, and are relatively close to an interstate highway (see Figure 1).

The third community is Clay, the county seat of Clay County, which was visited April 26–28, 2007. This small community of some 570 residents is located north of Kanawha County, which includes West Virginia's capital Charleston. However, although straight line distances are comparatively short, the topography and roads render Clay a relatively isolated community. Like the other two communities, it has been slowly losing population, partly because of changes in the mining and timber industry. One of its major assets is a school system whose students perform among the top five in reading and writing in the West Virginia State Testing Program and among the top third in mathematics. Among the issues that are holding it back, the community suffers from a shortage of land that is available, suitable, and ready to be developed. See Table 1 for selected demographic, geographic, and economic data on these communities and Figure 1 for a map of West Virginia that shows their location.

Table 1. Select Demographic and Economic Data, 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mount Hope</th>
<th>Fayetteville</th>
<th>Clay</th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>People</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>1,487</td>
<td>2,754</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>281,421,906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change vs. 1990</td>
<td>-5.5</td>
<td>+26.1</td>
<td>-2.2</td>
<td>+13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Size</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>73.8%</td>
<td>94.9%</td>
<td>98.8%</td>
<td>75.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>60.3%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>54.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Div./Sep.</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Rate</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>$18,375</td>
<td>$35,043</td>
<td>$14,712</td>
<td>$41,994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Home Value</td>
<td>$36,600</td>
<td>$69,600</td>
<td>$59,600</td>
<td>$119,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Units</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>884</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>55,212,108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Study Design/Methodology

Community participants (recipients) and CDT participants (providers) completed two surveys—one given at the start and the other given at the conclusion of the session. Across the three communities, 45 recipients and 34 providers participated in the initial survey. The survey was distributed and completed during the initial kickoff session, and everyone present for the session (community participants as well as CDT participants) completed the survey. The second survey was administered at the conclusion of the community visit. Overall, 71 recipients and 31 providers participated in the follow-up survey. Everyone present for the concluding meeting participated in the survey. See Table 2 for individual town details.

Table 2. Select Demographic and Economic Data, 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Mount Hope</th>
<th>Fayetteville</th>
<th>Clay</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre survey</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post survey</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDT Participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre survey</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post survey</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to note that survey participants completed the surveys anonymously. Thus gap scores were calculated for mean survey date from the entire sample. Although the bulk of gap analysis research has calculated a gap score through pre- and post-surveys linked
to the same person, the literature provides evidence for calculating gap scores on mean pre- and post-survey data and not linking pre- and post-surveys to an individual. This would include, for example, work in the healthcare industry (Silvestro, 2005), higher education (LaBay & Comm, 2003) and the housing industry (Pheng & Nguan, 2004). The decision to use this methodological approach reflected IRB constraints regarding the anonymity of respondents, which prevented us from using an identification scheme for linking pre- and post-surveys that was also acceptable to the survey respondents. Other authors have dealt with this problem by combining the pre- and post-survey into one instrument given at the end of the product/service experience (e.g., Brown & Schwartz, 1989; Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 1991); however, this approach introduces the potential for intervention effects on internal validity because respondents are asked about their expectations after their experience occurred. The authors argue that the methodological approach used in this study is acceptable given that the goals of this research were exploratory.

An additional concern is the possibility of intervention effects that might arise from the initial survey on the final survey given at the end of the session. This concern will be addressed in an upcoming community design team initiative scheduled in mid-2009 by conducting a split sample survey with recipients. One split sample will receive the standard pre- and post-surveys. The remaining split sample will be given a filler task for the pre-survey and the regular post-survey. Overall satisfaction means between the two samples will be compared to hopefully rule out this intervention effects.

Measures: A total of 19 7-point Likert scales (anchored by strongly agree/strongly disagree) were developed to measure expectations and experiences of the community planning process. The expectation survey featured 14 items, and the experience survey featured 15 items.

In published case studies of community planning efforts, a community development plan tends to comprise six elements:

- A determination of community capacity. Capacity is defined as the human, social, physical, and environmental assets used to increase community well being (Chaskin, 2001; Flora & Luther, 2000). Community capacity has been recognized as a driver of public health (Poole, 1997), education (Seddon & Billett, 2004), and community safety (Chavis, 1995).

- Identification of community needs. Undergirding any planning activity is the articulation of needs and goals. The identification of community needs and/or goals provides direction to a community planning effort (Murphy & Cunningham, 2003).

- An understanding of the roles of public versus private organizations. Because the private sector is responsible for most of the activities that contribute to job growth, close public and private cooperation is needed (Schaeffer, 2003). Public-private relationships have been identified as critical to community planning (Osborne, 2000).

- Recommendations regarding geography and land use. Consideration of land use as part of community planning process comes from research that identified land utilization as a source of change in communities (Chapin & Kaiser, 1979). In fact, some authors have considered land use planning the cornerstone of community development planning (Kaiser, Godshall, & Chapin, 1995; Patton and Sawicki, 1993).

- Recommendations regarding economic development. As part of any community design plan, communities seek to improve their economic, wealth, and employment bases (Blakely & Bradshaw, 2002). One route to achieving these goals is economic development planning.
The personal commitment of community stakeholders to the process. Participation and commitment by all community stakeholders has been recognized as critical to successful community planning (Murphy & Cunningham, 2003). In an extensive study, Berry et al. (2003) linked participation to more active contributions to community involvement. Based on this, it is logical to assume personal commitment of community stakeholders is important to overall success of a community plan.

Using the above elements, survey questions were designed to measure expectations and experiences of the above components. In addition, other contributors to the formation of expectations included issues relating the acceptance and trust of the outside experts (providers) charged with accessing a town’s needs and developing recommendations. This would include perceptions regarding the provider’s intent, trustworthiness, and skills and experience. Finally, a recipient’s personal needs, past experience with similar efforts, awareness of similar efforts (word of mouth), and perception of the uniqueness of their problems were considered additional factors influencing the setting of expectations. Single-item measures were developed to measure each of these facets in terms of expectations and experiences. Given the number of dimensions that needed to be measured, and in consideration of respondent fatigue, it was decided to limit the survey to single-item measures. Four versions of each question were developed reflecting expectations versus experience and a provider-versus-recipient point of view. For the experience surveys, three additional measures were added to measure experience outcomes. This included recipient evaluation of whether recommendations were realistic and helpful, whether community problems were addressed, and whether a recipient would recommend the providers to another community. Refer to Table 3 for a complete listing of community design team concepts and corresponding expectation and experience survey questions.

Table 3. Details of community design team concepts and corresponding expectation and experience survey questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component of Small Town Economic Development Planning</th>
<th>Expectation (Pre) Survey Questions (Community version)</th>
<th>Experience (Post) Survey Questions (Community version)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A determination of community capacity</td>
<td>It is important for all parties to identify capacity—that is the human, social, physical, environmental assets available.</td>
<td>Our capacities—that is the human, social, physical, environmental assets were identified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of community needs</td>
<td>I expect these sessions to identify my/their community needs</td>
<td>Our problems were addressed in a satisfactory way. Our (their) needs were addressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An understanding of the roles of public versus private organizations</td>
<td>There is confusion over the roles of public and private organizations in my (their) city</td>
<td>The roles of public and private organizations in my city are identified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations regarding geography and land use</td>
<td>Examining geography, our (their) current use of land and potential future uses of land is important</td>
<td>The recommendations for our current use of land and potential future uses of land is satisfactory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations regarding economic development</td>
<td>Part of the success of this program is to develop plans to enhance our (their) economic base</td>
<td>I am satisfied with the recommendations to enhance our economic base.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The personal commitment of community stakeholders to the process.

I believe success of the program depends on my contributions/involvement

I am satisfied with the level of my involvement in this project

Table 3. Cont’d.

Perceptions regarding the CDT Leader’s skills and experience, trustworthiness and intent.

I am confident the team from West Virginia University has the skill and experience to help Mt. Hope/Fayetteville/Clay

It is unrealistic to expect the team from West Virginia University to have our (their) best interests at heart

I trust the team from West Virginia University

The team from West Virginia University understood our needs

The team from West Virginia University had our best interests at heart

I trust the recommendations by the team at West Virginia University

The team from West Virginia University had the skill and experience relevant to our situation

Participant’s personal needs

I believe my (their) personal needs will be acknowledged and addressed in the sessions

My personal needs were addressed in the sessions

Participant’s past experience with similar efforts (Expectation survey only)

I have had prior experience in developing economic development plans

I have a good idea of how to measure success for this program

Participant’s awareness of similar efforts (Expectation survey only)

I have heard from others about economic development efforts

n/a

Participant’s perception of the uniqueness of their community’s problems (Expectation Survey Only)

Our (their) problems are truly unique and unlike other cities with economic development problems.

n/a

Participant’s perception of CDT experience and outcomes (Experience survey only)

n/a

Overall, I am satisfied with this experience

I believe the recommendations are realistic and will help us to achieve our economic development goals

I would recommend the team from West Virginia University to others in similar situations.

Results

Overall satisfaction. The three questions measuring satisfaction were consolidated into a single scale (.89 alpha). Overall, recipients in the three CDT initiatives evaluated the program very positively. (Mt. Hope mean score: 6.1, s.d.1.34; Fayetteville 5.52, s.d.1.32; Clay 6.21, s.d. 1.44, 7 maximum score).

Given these findings, what reasons underlie these results? An examination of recipient expectations and experiences can shed light on this question.
In all communities, recipients rated their experiences higher than expectations, and this limited data suggested that the gap between expectations and experience was related to overall satisfaction. Likewise, providers had similar results. The obvious follow-up analysis would be to regress the expectations-experiences gap against satisfaction. However, the nature of the data collection—all recipients completed the surveys anonymously and it was not possible to match expectation and experience surveys done by one person—ruled out a regression analysis. The authors plan to address this problem in future CDT initiatives.

**Figure 2. Recipient's Satisfaction, Expectations & Experiences**

![Recipient's Satisfaction, Expectations & Experiences](image)

**Figure 3. Provider Satisfaction, Expectations & Experiences**

![Provider Satisfaction, Expectations & Experiences](image)

*Gap Analysis.* Because the dataset revealed no significant differences (ANOVA) between individual community results, data for the three communities were combined. Three gap scores were calculated in the following manner:

- Gap one: Recipient mean experiences–recipient mean expectations,
- Gap two: Recipient mean expectations–provider mean expectations,
- Gap three: Recipient mean experiences–provider mean experiences.

The intra-recipient gap (gap three) measures the difference between recipient expectations and experiences. Satisfaction occurs when outcome experience meets or exceeds expectations. Thus the difference between expectations and experiences is expected to be negative in positive evaluations of services. In seven of the ten dimensions where gap scores were calculated, mean expectations were less than or equal to mean experiences. The seven dimensions were identifying community needs, making a personal contribution, identifying personal needs, identifying public/private roles, keeping the community’s interest at heart, establishing trust, and utilizing skills of the team. Three dimensions did not
behave in the predicted fashion: addressing identifying capacity, land use, and economic plans. For these dimensions, expectations were higher than actual experience. In cases such as this, the authors expected a negative effect on overall satisfaction, and hypothesized that these dimensions where not strong enough to offset overall satisfaction. Interestingly, the largest gap was having the community’s interest at heart where participant expectations were significantly lower than experience. It was hypothesized that this result was to be expected because the community did not know the community design team prior to their arrival. Assuming the CDT initiative was successful, it would be expected that following the initiative, community participants would assess substantially higher the CDT’s having the community’s interest at heart.

Gaps two and three measured the differences between recipient expectations (experiences) and the provider’s perception of them. For well-received service offerings, providers must design their service offering on the basis of their perceptions of client expectations. Likewise, any modifications/adaptation of the service offering would depend, in part, on providers’ perception of the recipient experience.

Table 4. Gap Analysis Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gap1 Recipient Expectations-Recipient Experience</th>
<th>Gap2 Recipient Expectations-Provider Expectations</th>
<th>Gap 3 Recipient Experience- Provider Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ID Capacity</td>
<td>.61*</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID Community Needs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Contribution</td>
<td>-.1</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Use</td>
<td>.87*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Needs</td>
<td>-.96*</td>
<td>-.90*</td>
<td>-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public/Private Roles</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.18*</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Plans</td>
<td>.89*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest at Heart</td>
<td>-3.33*</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills of Team</td>
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<td>.30</td>
<td>-.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurement of Success</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique Needs</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word of Mouth</td>
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<td>-.42</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Experience</td>
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<td>-.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problems Addressed</td>
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<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic and Helpful</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommend Team</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
<td>-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied w/ exp.</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Difference in means is significant (p<.05, two tailed)

Results of recipient–provider gap for gap two measured the difference between
recipients versus provider expectations. Satisfaction is thought to occur when provider expectations meet or exceed recipient expectations. Results were more robust. Twelve of the 14 dimensions were in the predicted direction. The dimensions that did not behave in the predicted fashion were identifying public private roles and the perception of unique needs. In these two situations, the community had higher expectations compared with the CDT providers. More research is needed to further understand these results. However, it was hypothesized that this could be because of lesser importance afforded to these dimensions by the CDT team, resulting in comparatively lower scores.

Finally, gap three measured the difference between recipients-versus-provider experiences. Satisfaction occurs when provider experiences meet or exceed recipient experiences. Gap three results show all dimensions were in the predicted direction. Refer to Table 4 for full gap details.

Additional Analysis

In addition to calculating gap scores for each dimension of expectations and experiences of community development programs, simple tests of differences in means for each dimension were performed to determine the extent to which the cells in Table 4 represent significant differences. The statistical significance of individual gap scores is indicated in Table 4. The results would indicate a number of dimensions of gap one (recipient expectations-recipient experiences) were statistically significant. Very few gap two and gap three dimensions were significant although this might be because of the extremely small samples used in this exploratory research.

As the early provider data (Mt. Hope and Fayetteville) was examined, the authors questioned whether survey responses for providers differed between students and professionals. Using the data from the Clay initiative, provider (six professionals, eight students) surveys were coded to identify the status of the respondent: student or professional. As shown in Figure 3, across satisfaction, expectations, and experiences, student scores were slightly higher (1-7%) than faculty and professional. The preliminary results indicated that students with less life and professional experience tended to have higher evaluations.

Limitations and Discussion

Do the results from the studies support a gap analysis approach to understanding participant satisfaction? With only the preliminary statistical results available, the conclusion at this time is that much work needs still to be done. Although this study had 100% participation by all participants and could be considered a census rather than sampling, it important to note the overall sample size is quite small. This research should
be considered exploratory and, although appropriate for theory building, caution must be taken in generalizing the results to a broader population. The goal of this research was to test an alternative methodology to evaluate community design programs. The results to date are encouraging; they suggest a relationship between satisfaction, expectation, and experience. Although gap analysis has been shown to be a potential tool, a significantly larger database must be built to allow for traditional statistical analysis and hypothesis testing. Once such a basis is built, future research could include factor analysis to find which factors influence each dimension and, maybe, a stepwise regression of the individual gaps in terms of their influence on overall satisfaction.

This research makes two potential contributions. First, examining participants' expectations and experiences as drivers of satisfaction of community development planning programs has not been done before. This study has demonstrated that this can work in one type of community development process—a community design team model. Other community design models could integrate this into their process. For example, the asset mapping model described by Pinkett (2003) utilized a survey given to the community prior to the actual asset mapping exercise. The purpose of this study was to gauge awareness of key community resources. It would be relatively easy to include this study's satisfaction measures into that survey. The strategic planning model is another model where a satisfaction measurement could be integrated into its processes. For example, the University of Illinois Laboratory for Community and Economic Development offers an online strategic planning tool (for details, see http://www.communitydevelopment.uiuc.edu/cdo/). Given the interactive online approach of this program, a survey assessment tool could be added relatively easily.

Secondly, the study contributes to the extant literature by examining satisfaction not only on an overall "macro" basis but also on a component level. Combined with the hypothesis stated in the introduction, namely that satisfaction is a predictor of project successes, such surveys could become a useful tool in the now obligatory impact analysis. Of course, confirming that hypothesis would have to become part of the agenda for future research. If successful, however, this would be a fairly major contribution, because assessing impacts in local community development is difficult for reasons such as (a) Time must pass before the impact makes itself felt. (b) Others are addressing the same problem at the same time, so who deserves the credit? (c) The impact is indirect. If satisfaction could serve as something equivalent to a "leading indicator" of successful impact, not only would it facilitate impact analysis, but it might in some instances allow intervention in projects where the predicted impact is poor, thus turning poor performances around.

All methods have limitations, and the suitability of gap analysis depends on the problem studied. Its use seems to be particularly promising for development projects with many contributors who often do not work simultaneously, for projects that take a long time to complete, and for projects with impacts that are likely to be slow to develop. In the case study program, the community design team always met the first of these three criteria, and many of its past projects met one or both of the other two criteria, as well. Because gap analysis is an indirect measure of impacts (assuming the current hypothesis is correct, which will still have to be tested in future research), it seems that direct measures are to be preferred where conditions permit timely impact analysis. That is of course unless satisfaction holds interest as a measure in and by itself.

References


