

Community Capacity Scoring

Introduction

Following the successful trialing of the community trust survey in two rural Victorian towns, an analysis of the results yielded a set of questions that would indicate a community's capacity according to a series of variables¹. The modified community capacity survey will be trialed by CRLRA using smaller samples from several regional centres in Tasmania, in late 2000.

Capacity variables and dimensions

The capacity variables measured are:

- Leadership
- Associational networks
- Feelings of security
- Civic participation

The reason for using these variables is that has been shown that where all of these are strong in a community, it has a greater capacity for development and sustainability in terms of social, economic, environmental outcomes. Where one or all are lacking, outcomes will be suppressed.

A number of dimensions that run across these capacity variables have also been identified and measured. These dimensions include:

- Information sharing
- Externality (bridges and linkages)
- Historicity / bonding
- Reciprocity
- Norms and values

The dimensions provide a reason why the capacity variables are either high or low. Both the capacity variables and the dimensions can be represented graphically to provide a profile of a community that identifies relative strengths and weaknesses.

Data collection

The data is collected using a simple self-administered survey that can be completed without assistance within 10 minutes. A random mail out could be used to distribute the surveys. Alternatively, a 5 to 10 minute telephone survey could be used for faster results.

Data input

Depending on the size of the sample, data can be inputted via a scannable form or manually, directly into a customised database. Even using manual input, the results for 200 or more respondents could be entered within 8 hours by a competent data entry operator.

¹ Guenther and Falk, "Measuring trust and community capacity" CRLRA Discussion paper, 2000

Presentation of results

The database is linked to an output spreadsheet that summarises the results and prepares appropriate charts. Once the data is inputted into the database, no further manipulation of the data is required to produce the output charts and tables. The database and spreadsheet would be designed with inexperienced users in mind. Microsoft Access and Excel would be the preferred software applications for data input and results output.

The output tables and charts show the relative strength of each variable, and can be broken into individual components. Sample charts are shown in Figure 1, using results obtained from the two trust survey towns.

Interpretation of results

The results shown here provide an indication of how the data might be used. The charts show that while the profile of the two towns is similar, there is a relatively higher score for town A in than Town B in the security and civic participation variables. The similarity is not surprising as the two towns are within the same geographic and municipal region. That town B scores lower than Town A is also not surprising as it has suffered more in recent years from population loss and loss of government and financial services, than Town A. The charts show that the reasons for Town A's higher capacity lie in its lower civic participation and its residents' lower feelings of security. Note also that the charts show that both towns score relatively low on the leadership variable. An examination of the dimension charts shows that the lowest scores relate to externality, or bridges and linkages, therefore suggesting that the cause of the low leadership scores is not a *lack* of leadership, but rather a lack of appropriate links and bridges between the community and state / national networks. By contrast, the dimensions charts show that the strengths of the two communities are found in the communities' propensity to share information and the reciprocity that exists among members of the communities.

The two charts demonstrate quite clearly that what is needed in the communities is leadership that promotes the bridges and linkages that are required for the towns to get ahead and give them an advantage in the region and within the state.

Further use

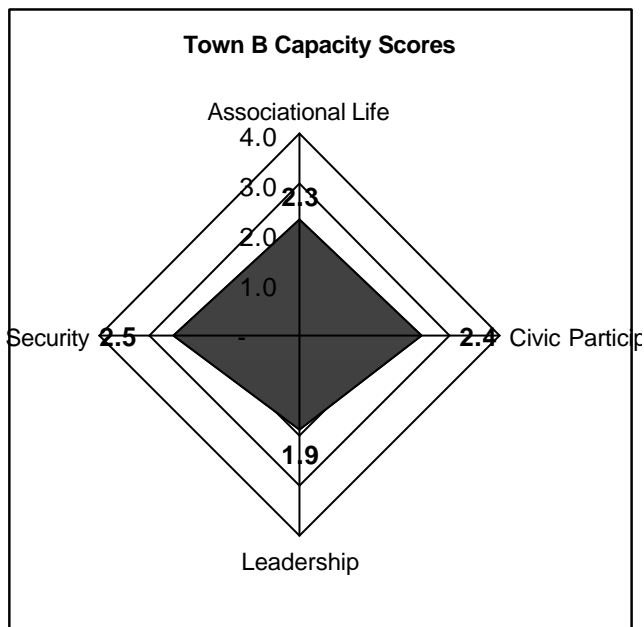
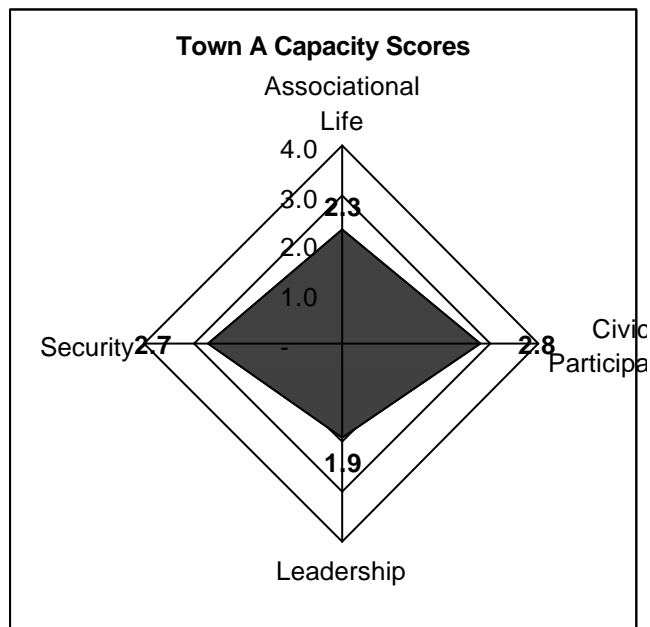
The capacity measurement will provide more 'absolute' and definitive indications of community capacity once it has been trialed.

The instrument can also be used longitudinally, for example, to determine the impact of program interventions.

A further use for the instrument could be to compare the relative capacities of several towns within a region, to determine relative strengths and weaknesses among communities.

Figure 1 - output charts from community capacity analysis

Comparison of 'Capacity' scores for two towns



Comparison of Dimension scores for two towns

