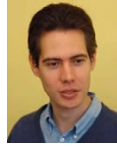


Still not satisfied?



Oliver James
Exeter

Background

Performance management data for local government in England has been developing for over 20 years in purportedly 'objective' forms, such as school exam pass rates and reported levels of recycling. In recent years, many of these 'objective' measures suggest that local government in England has been improving. Yet public satisfaction – arguably a more important measure for incumbent politicians, since a satisfied public might be expected to vote them back in – has been declining (see Figure 1) Are citizens simply impossible to satisfy, or is something more complex at work?

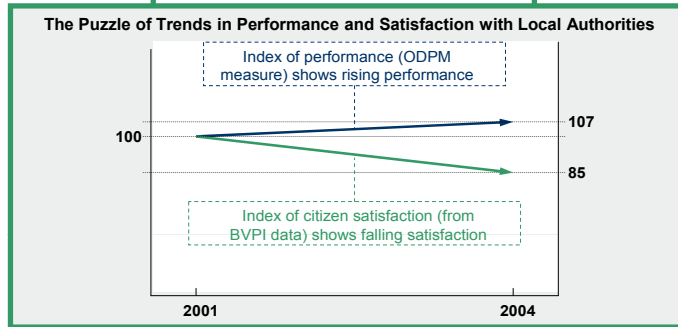


Figure 1

What I Did

- Given the paucity of data on expectations, I conducted an online panel survey (a group of individuals polled on two successive occasions, first in 2005 and then in 2006) of over 4000 households to analyse satisfaction both with 'overall' services provided by local authorities in England and satisfaction with household refuse collection, (chosen as a case of a specific service that is near universal).
- From this data I developed and tested a statistical model of the relationship between satisfaction and performance.

Aims

I aimed to:

- explore the relationship between performance, satisfaction and expectations for local government in England;
- start an assessment of whether rising expectations are one of the reasons why rising 'objective' performance is sometimes coupled with decreasing citizen satisfaction;
- form datasets on expectations that were previously not available and integrate them with data on objective performance and satisfaction

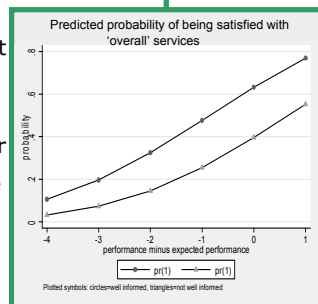


Figure 2

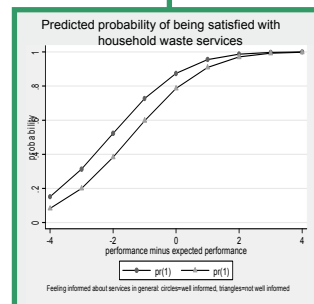


Figure 3

Findings

- The results of this study give strong support to a 'disconfirmation' model that performance minus expectations sets satisfaction (see Figures 2 and 3).
- Satisfaction with overall services was less directly related to service expectations and performance than was the case for specific waste services. Broader political attitudes were found to influence these judgements.
- Satisfaction was affected by frequency of use; heavy users of public services were more likely to be satisfied, but contrary to prevailing thought, age and income were not influential.

Find out more...



For more information contact Oliver James
(O.James@exeter.ac.uk)

www.publicservices.ac.uk

