Staff Satisfaction Evaluation for the City of North St. Paul

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PROJECT A: PROCESS DESCRIPTION

Boasting safe neighborhoods, a charming downtown and passionate residents, the city of North St. Paul (NSP) has plenty to offer. However, as a first ring suburb of St. Paul surrounded by upscale communities, competition for new residents and talented employees is an increasing concern. In order to remain a competitive, attractive and relevant member of the metropolitan area, the city has expressed interest in creating “progressive infrastructure improvements and more compact development” (read: webpage). These improvements require the work of a high-quality city staff. Recruiting new talented staff members while working to retain satisfied existing staff members is a critical step in providing community cohesion and helping North St. Paul work in a unified fashion towards its goal of increased sustainability. Addressing the concerns of existing staff members will help retainment and will lower costs and resources associated with training new workers. However, recruiting new highly skilled workers will help to improve efficiency and productivity within the city. By developing dedicated and effective city staff members, North St. Paul hopes to remain a progressive community that its residents will be proud to call home for generations to come.

Nestled within the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, the city of North St. Paul is a small community of 11,460 residents. Represented by four city council members, progressive values have become an integral part of the community’s development and growth. Technological improvements have remained at the forefront of this development, with a municipally owned and operated utility network. Recent efforts were made to offer fiber optic internet service to all homes in the city, but were defeated in a referendum (read: personal communication).
As North St. Paul’s website states,

*With an abundance of city parks, schools, churches, a quaint downtown district, and peaceful neighborhoods, North St. Paul is a town with a great quality of life. It is connected to a thriving metropolitan region, and appreciates how this enhances residents’ access to a diversity of jobs, cultural and recreational opportunities, quality healthcare, and higher education opportunities.*

The City of North St. Paul aims to improve residents’ quality of life without compromising its small-town character. One component of this goal is the retainment of high-quality city staff members. Without a consistent team, utilities, public safety and finance procedures in North St. Paul will not work efficiently. Recently, a decline in staff satisfaction has occurred due to the perception that some city council members want to eliminate city staff positions. Even though the city has little control over this, it is important to address low employee morale. Therefore, department heads determined that staff should have the opportunity to voice their concerns via a staff satisfaction evaluation. This project will gather current staff members’ opinions on whether their day-to-day needs are being met, what might convince them to continue working for the city, and whether they think more opportunities for professional development and training are necessary. Short-term goals include staff retention, increased morale, the development of new young talent, and for employees to feel more secure and connected to their positions. Long-term goals include a sustained high quality of life for residents, efficient and effective city services, the advancement of employees to higher positions, and a reputation for staff satisfaction (read: personal communication).
There is currently no staff development program in place in North St. Paul. The city has commissioned this evaluation to assess staff satisfaction in order to create a formal staff development program, in the hope that it will help increase staff retention and the efficiency of city services. This potential program involves all staff employed by the City of North St. Paul and will take place within City Hall and all other city facilities. The program will be implemented across all departments: city administration, finance, community development, park and recreation, public works and public safety/police. North St. Paul employs 60 people in these departments. The city is governed by a council made up of the mayor, Mike Kuehn, and four council members. Current council members include Terry Furlong, Candy Petersen, Scott Thorsen, and Jan Walczak (read: webpage). City manager Jason Ziemer, a former member of a High-Performance Organization (HPO), was appointed six months ago. The city manager is responsible for administering all policies and instructions of the city council (read: personal communication). Police sergeants, police officers, and public works employees are unionized into three bargaining units. Because the city council has stated their desire to eliminate some city positions, department heads are worried that non-union employees lack adequate job protection. There may soon be a vote on unionization of all city employees (read: personal communication).

Though North St. Paul does not have a formal program in place to increase staff retention and satisfaction, department heads occasionally promote training opportunities for their staff and are in charge of hiring people when positions are open. The standard process is to advertise open positions on popular online job boards, interview potential candidates, and hire them if they are qualified.
North St. Paul city staff are responsible for the management and maintenance of city services. All city staff positions require onsite work. Approximately seventy percent of employees work in the field as utility workers and public safety officials. The remaining thirty percent of employees work in city administration and finance. A standard workday for employees begins at 8 a.m. and ends at 4:30 p.m. Staff meetings take place once a week under the direction of a leadership team. Department heads meet once a month, depending on the department. Updates for all departments are communicated by a city management newsletter. Birthdays, anniversaries, and other information is available on a SharePoint site. However, there is currently no standard system in place for evaluating staff performance or satisfaction. In the past, employees have received a performance review only if they requested one (read: personal communication).

North St. Paul’s budget for all city departments in 2013 is $5,671,300 (read: webpage). Individual salaries range from $10 per hour to $106,000 annually. Pay varies depending on the position and each department is in charge of hiring its own staff. Departmental budgets are public information.
LOGIC MODEL

**Inputs (what is invested)**
Approximately 60 city workers, department heads, approximately $5 million city budget, and time to implement staff satisfaction and development systems and practices.

**Outputs (activities, participants)**
Activities: all city staff complete performance reviews and attend professional development
Participants: department heads and city workers.

**Outcomes (what will happen as a result)**
**Short-term**: increased morale, addition of new talented workers, retaining current workers.

**Outcomes**

**Short-term**

The desired outcomes of this evaluation involves several aspects of satisfaction of city staff workers. This includes increased levels of morale and job desirability among city staff workers, the addition of new and young staff to the city, and community cohesion of staff accountability. Programs which allow for career advancement, allow for employees to feel more connected and secure within their positions, and increased levels of data on
employee performance available to report to city manager, city council, and public can help achieve these results.

**Long-term**

Long-term outcomes of this project include the completion of an organizational structure and decision-making process that is viewed as satisfactory; a culture of performance reviews within the city of North St. Paul; an increase in job mobility within city departments; and an agreed upon city-wide standard for regularly reviewing staff performance and satisfaction.
PROJECT B: EVALUATION CONTEXT

The City of North St. Paul currently has no formal staff development, recruitment or retention program in place. The purpose of this evaluation is to inform the creation of a cohesive staff development program. Russ-Eft and Preskill (2009) list many reasons why evaluation is necessary to a smoothly functioning organization, several of which directly relate to this project. This evaluation will help improve the quality of staff development activities, build capacity within the City of North St. Paul in order to increase their knowledge of staff needs and staff development activities, increase the organization’s accountability to its staff and to residents of North St. Paul, and help convince the city council and other city leaders of the importance of staff satisfaction.

The project will be a form of developmental evaluation, described by Patton (1994) as “certain long-term, partnering relationships with clients who are, themselves, engaged in ongoing program development”. As this is a class project, the evaluation will not be as long-term as the city and we might like, but it is a relationship based on developing a nascent program. We will help the City of North St. Paul answer key developmental questions, such as what activities and strategies will work best for the program, whose needs the program will address, and what processes should be in place to make implementation effective (Russ-Eft and Preskill, 2009).

As the purpose of this evaluation is to help the City of North St. Paul improve its current staff development, recruitment and retention programs by determining staff satisfaction, it could also be considered a formative evaluation. Scriven (1991) explains that formative evaluation is conducted for the purpose of program improvement, and is part of an ongoing process wherein the program is continuously examined and refined.
We see some overlap in the concepts of developmental and formative evaluation in our project, as we are helping to develop a formal staff development program out of the scattered components of one that currently exist. As described in Project Part A, the City of North St. Paul has attempted to create greater staff cohesion and commitment by introducing a newsletter and SharePoint site, the effectiveness of which we plan to evaluate in our project. This project can be seen as an important step in the fluid, circular process of evaluation and improvement.

The staff development program has several stakeholder groups that are primary, secondary or tertiary based on the nature of their involvement with the City of North St. Paul (Table 1). The primary stakeholders include city staff, city council members, the city management team, and commission members, as these groups would be most involved in decision-making for a staff development program. The secondary stakeholders are the residents of North St. Paul. Potential future residents or future workers are tertiary stakeholders.

The interests of these stakeholders vary according to their position within the City of North St. Paul. In fact, interests vary even among the primary stakeholders. The main desires of the management team and department heads in city hall are increased worker morale and lower worker turnover. City workers in non-management positions care about having a work environment that meets their needs, where they feel valued, and where they have opportunities for advancement. An effective staff development program can address those concerns. With their needs met or exceeded, city staff morale will increase and they may decide to stay at their jobs, which in turn will satisfy management and department heads’ concerns.
The city council members, city management team and commission members are interested in a staff development program that makes workers feel more connected to the City of North St. Paul and more engaged with their work. This way, they are ensured that staff can be entrusted with decision-making. In addition, city management wants to create opportunities for personnel growth and advancement, including grooming commission members to eventually become city council members.

The residents of North St. Paul want engaged city workers that care about their jobs and the city and serve residents efficiently and effectively. Residents are also concerned about the productivity of city workers and how they are being held accountable for taxpayer money. Research has shown that happy workers are more productive workers, and dissatisfied staff can affect an organization’s bottom line (Harter, 2010). In addition, future residents and future city workers might be attracted to the city’s high worker morale and low turnover, because it shows that the city is a sustainable, satisfying place to live or work.

**Table 1. Stakeholders and their Concerns**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Group</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Concern(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City staff (non-management)</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Work environment that meets needs; feeling valued in the workplace; opportunities for advancement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City management</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Increased worker morale; lower worker turnover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City council</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>More productive, satisfied city staff; city residents satisfied with workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commission members</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Opportunities for advancement to city council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North St. Paul residents</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Engaged city workers that serve residents efficiently, effectively; productive city workers held accountable for taxpayer money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future North St. Paul residents</td>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>Sustainable city with satisfied workers who serve residents well is attractive to future residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future North St. Paul staff</td>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>Sustainable workplace with happy, productive worker environment is attractive to potential future staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An advisory group will assist the evaluators as they work within the North St. Paul community. The group will consist of five to seven members, including the city manager, city workers selected to represent staff interests, and city residents who have an in-depth understanding of the community. With their help, the evaluators will have deeper knowledge of stakeholder concerns, what questions to ask on a survey, how best to phrase survey questions, possible sources of data, and how to maximize the completion of the survey. An advisory group will help us to better serve the City of North St. Paul.

The advisory group will help finalize the staff development program’s primary, secondary and tertiary stakeholders. While we have already identified a number of stakeholders, the advisors, being more familiar with North St. Paul, may point out individuals we overlooked. Once all stakeholders are determined, the advisors will provide insight into the general character of the stakeholders, particularly those we know little about or have little access to, like city council members, North St. Paul residents, and potential future workers and residents. For city council members, the advisory group could inform us of their political leanings, fiscal policy, family history, and overall demeanor, or could direct us to sources of this information. Perhaps they know someone who works with the city council who would be willing to answer questions. Identifying sources of data and possible informants like this is the secondary role of the advisory group.

The advisory group can also help determine the most salient questions to include in a questionnaire. With a better grasp of the issues most employees of North St. Paul care about, the evaluation can avoid dwelling on inconsequential or less important matters. For example, if we wanted to include a question about the food service in the
cafeteria at City Hall as an indicator of staff satisfaction, the advisory group might inform us that the food in the cafeteria has never been an issue. They might instead recommend investigating complaints about communication between the different departments. In this hypothetical case, we would forego questions about food in favor of questions about inter-departmental communication.

The advisory group will also be asked to participate in a think-aloud evaluation of a survey to help develop the wording of the questions. If they do not participate themselves, they may help recruit individuals to participate. Finally, the advisory group can help us receive a greater number of completed surveys. By providing information from previous surveys, we will have a better idea of what methods lead to a greater response.

The two primary constraints on the staff development satisfaction evaluation are time and money. Time is often a constraint on evaluations and will be for this evaluation. It will be a challenge for staff to take time away from their busy work schedules to participate in focus groups and fill out surveys. In addition, the evaluator might have limited time to allocate to performing the evaluation and analyzing the data given other commitments he/she has. It has not been revealed to us what budget the City of North St. Paul has put aside for the evaluation or for a future formal staff development program, but they have indicated that funds might be a constraint.

In order to properly address the concerns and needs of staff members of the city of North St. Paul, the staff development satisfaction evaluation seeks to answer four key questions (Figure 1). These questions will provide a framework for addressing the goals of the evaluation and will allow the evaluation to be conducted as cost-efficiently and
timely as possible. First and foremost, the evaluation seeks to discover in what ways the City of North St. Paul staff are satisfied and dissatisfied with their jobs. Answering this question will give us an understanding of the frustrations and concerns of staff members, while also highlighting aspects of workplace satisfaction that should be promoted within city departments.

The second key question to ask is what professional/staff development activities currently take place, if any, and whether staff take advantage of these activities. This will inform us of the effectiveness of the city’s current efforts to promote professional development and staff satisfaction. This will also provide a context for why staff members choose to participate or not participate in these activities. An understanding of these reasons will allow stakeholders within city management to determine ways in which they can increase professional development participation among staff members.

The third key question to ask is to what extent do staff feel like they are valued in the workplace. This is an essential question to address in order to determine levels of morale among staff members. Feelings of value and worth are important components of worker productivity, as is a feeling of connectedness to one’s workplace. Addressing this question through the evaluation may help to identify potential measures that the City of North St. Paul can take to increase feelings of value and worth in city departments.

The final guiding question is what steps the City of North St. Paul should take to recruit and retain a talented workforce. This incorporates elements from the first three questions while remaining unique by focusing on potential solutions to improve staff satisfaction, and attempts to uncover feasible solutions and determine if available resources exist for implementation. By focusing on possibilities of recruiting and
retaining staff members, it will achieve the evaluation’s overall goal of improving the quality and satisfaction of staff within the City of North St. Paul.

These four key questions are essential to developing a successful evaluation and will help to identify critical components and stakeholders within the process. They will guide the evaluation and help to identify which aspects of staff satisfaction within the City of North St. Paul are of immediate concern. By addressing elements of staff satisfaction and dissatisfaction, workplace value, development activities, and possible steps for recruiting and retaining staff members, the evaluation will provide a useful framework for improving the quality of work and life in North St. Paul.

**Figure 1. Key Evaluation Questions**

1. In what ways are City of North St. Paul staff satisfied with their jobs? In what ways are they dissatisfied?

2. What professional/staff development activities currently take place, if any, and do staff take advantage of these activities? If not, why?

3. To what extent do staff feel like they are valued in the workplace?

4. What steps should the City of North St. Paul take to recruit and retain a talented workforce?
PROJECT C: EVALUATION DESIGN

Purpose of the Evaluation

The City of North St. Paul currently has no formal staff development, recruitment or retention program in place, nor any system for reviewing staff performance or assessing staff satisfaction. The purpose of this evaluation is to inform the creation of a cohesive staff development program, and will help improve the quality of staff development activities, build capacity within the City of North St. Paul in order to increase their knowledge of staff needs and staff development activities, increase the organization’s accountability to its staff and to residents of North St. Paul, and help convince the city council and other city leaders of the importance of staff satisfaction.

The project will be a form of developmental evaluation, described by Patton (1994) as “certain long-term, partnering relationships with clients who are, themselves, engaged in ongoing program development”. As this is a class project, the evaluation will not be as long-term as the city and we might like, but it is a relationship based on developing a nascent program. There are four key questions about staff satisfaction and feelings of value that we will answer by conducting the evaluation. Results from our evaluation may help the City of North St. Paul answer developmental questions, such as what activities and strategies will work best for the program, whose needs the program will address, and what processes should be in place to make implementation effective.

As the purpose of this evaluation is to help the City of North St. Paul improve its current staff development, recruitment and retention programs by determining staff satisfaction, it could also be considered a formative evaluation. Scriven (1991) explains that formative evaluation is conducted for the purpose of program improvement, and is
part of an ongoing process wherein the program is continuously examined and refined. We see some overlap in the concepts of developmental and formative evaluation in our project, as we are helping to develop a formal staff development program out of the scattered components of one that currently exist. This project can be seen as an important step in the fluid, circular process of evaluation and improvement.

**Evaluation Questions**

**Question 1: In what ways are staff satisfied with their salaries and opportunities for advancement? In what ways are they dissatisfied?**

Salaries and opportunities for advancement are important elements people consider when accepting an employment offer from an organization. For our purposes, salary refers to hourly wages as well as compensation for exempt employees who are not paid by the hour. Opportunities for advancement can include pay raises and promotions. These aspects are also important for workers when deciding whether or not to remain employed by a particular organization. For these reasons, we would like to focus the first evaluation question on discovering whether North St. Paul city staff satisfied with their salaries and opportunities for advancement, and in what ways.

We understand the importance of anonymity in an evaluation that seeks to gather sensitive information like satisfaction about salaries and opportunities for advancement. For this question, we plan to administer a survey to all city staff and conduct individual interviews with select staff. Using surveys, we will be able to gather the more sensitive information that people might feel uncomfortable saying in an interview. However,
individual interviews will provide us with in-depth information and allow us to ask probing questions.

We decided to use random sampling as a means to select staff to be interviewed. Since conducting interviews with all 60+ staff members in the City of North St. Paul would be costly in terms of staff and evaluator time, a reasonable approach is to interview a representative sample. In order to prevent possible tension between staff about why certain individuals are chosen for interviews instead of others, and to ensure every division within the city is represented, we decided to use random sampling. Using the city’s organizational chart and a list of staff members, we will assign each staff a number that will be randomly drawn.

Question 2: In what ways are staff satisfied with their work environment (office location, office layout, work hours, relationship with coworkers, etc.)?

The City of North St. Paul’s work environment consists of the material setting in which city staff works, including the office building (city hall), the building’s location, layout, furniture and lighting. Work environment also includes intangible aspects of the setting, such as worker morale, and the attitudes and conduct of employees. We believe that the work environment has a considerable impact on a worker’s overall job satisfaction. Even if employees are paid well and have ample opportunities for advancement, a job may be undesirable if the building is unsafe or unpleasant, or if the employees are offensive in their conduct. Thus, work environment is key to employee satisfaction.
The source of the information to answer this evaluation question will be current North St. Paul staff members. They are immersed in the work environment, and therefore are able to provide a wealth of information about its quality. While it would be desirable to survey former workers about the work environment and whether it was a factor in their departure, former staff may be difficult to locate, and the work environment may have changed since their employment ended. The information they would provide may be irrelevant.

We will collect staff perceptions of the city’s work environment by conducting an all-staff survey and individual interviews. The survey will be given to all staff, thus providing information from most, if not all, of the employees. The questions will address different elements of the work environment. Using the survey results, we will gauge the work environment satisfaction of North St. Paul’s employees. Additionally, randomly sampled employees from each department will be interviewed individually. These interviews will provide more detailed, in-depth information on the work environment, and may possibly reveal areas of satisfaction or dissatisfaction that we failed to include in the survey.

**Question 3: To what extent do employees value staff development efforts?**

Staff development is a critical component of any organization that values the continued improvement and education of its workers. This improvement can occur in various ways: through increased performance at the workplace, increased innovation, or educational opportunities. Professional development efforts can have a direct impact on
the morale of staff workers and should be an integral part of a staff satisfaction evaluation.

In order to properly determine the staff’s attitude towards development efforts, information will need to be collected from both non-management workers and department heads. It is critical to obtain information from each category due to each party’s direct involvement with these activities. Department heads play an important role in development efforts, ranging from helping with design of activities to the implementation of these efforts. Information from staff workers must also be collected due to the direct impact of development activities on these workers. It may only be practical to gain input from current department heads and staff workers, as individuals who no longer work for the city may be hard to locate.

Input regarding staff development efforts will be collected primarily through interviews and surveys. Interviews will be conducted with all department heads and conducted with randomly selected staff workers. Surveys will also be distributed to all staff workers to keep costs low while still allowing for representative information to be collected. The individual interviews will provide an opportunity to gain more in-depth information regarding current staff development efforts. They will also give workers the opportunity to suggest potential solutions for development activities.

**Question 4: To what extent do staff feel like they are valued in the workplace?**

The final question is essential to determining levels of morale among staff members. Feelings of value and worth are important components of worker productivity, as is a feeling of connectedness to one’s workplace. Addressing this question through the
evaluation may help to identify potential measures that the City of North St. Paul can take to increase feelings of value and worth in city departments.

To answer this question, we will determine the degree to which city staff feel valued in the workplace. Ideally, we would be able to determine the degree of current staff’s feelings of value as well as past staff members who no longer work for the city. It would be helpful to know how many people have left the organization in the recent past and why they left, to see if we could uncover any trends. To discover trends and other information about past employees, we would use archival data, including performance reviews and any other evaluative surveys that North St. Paul has conducted and kept on file. However, the city has indicated that it does not have any performance reviews or staff evaluation information on file.

Therefore, answering this question will rely on interviews and surveys of current staff and department heads. Likert-type questionnaire items provide the best strategy for determining degrees of feeling valued. To select interviewees from among the 60+ staff members in North St. Paul, we would use cluster sampling. We would randomly sample a few divisions and then randomly sample from within those divisions to determine who would be interviewed. We might also stratify the sampling, so we get a good representation of managers as well as non-management staff.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Question</th>
<th>Type of Data</th>
<th>Source of Data</th>
<th>Collection Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 1</strong>: In what ways are staff satisfied or dissatisfied with their salaries and opportunities for advancement?</td>
<td>Degree of job satisfaction/dissatisfaction.</td>
<td>Current city staff</td>
<td>All-staff survey; Individual interview with randomly selected staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aspects of job that are satisfying or dissatisfying.</td>
<td>Current city staff</td>
<td>All-staff survey; Individual interview with randomly selected staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 2</strong>: In what ways are staff satisfied or dissatisfied with their work environment (office location, office layout, work hours, work relationships, etc.)?</td>
<td>Degree of job satisfaction/dissatisfaction.</td>
<td>Current city staff</td>
<td>All-staff survey; Individual interview with randomly selected staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aspects of work environment that are satisfying or dissatisfying.</td>
<td>Current city staff</td>
<td>All-staff survey; Individual interview with randomly selected staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 3</strong>: To what extent do employees value staff development efforts?</td>
<td>Degree to which staff value staff development efforts.</td>
<td>Current city staff</td>
<td>All-staff survey; Individual interview with randomly selected staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Descriptions of types of professional development opportunities that exist and participation</td>
<td>Department heads and current city staff</td>
<td>Survey, interview, document review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Question</td>
<td>Type of Data</td>
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<td>Collection Method</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Question 4</strong>: To what extent do staff feel like they are valued in the workplace?</td>
<td>Degree of feeling valued in the workplace.</td>
<td>Current city staff</td>
<td>All-staff survey; Individual interview of randomly selected staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of staff members who have left their jobs in the past two years.</td>
<td>Department heads; personnel files.</td>
<td>Interview; document review.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


