THE INTRODUCTION OF A BUSINESS UNIT STRUCTURE WITHIN A FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICE.

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

The Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board has been challenged to demonstrate a cost effective service. The problem facing Zone Commands, was the effective introduction of a business unit structure as an alternative to contracting out labour.

The purpose of this research project was to identify a strategic path to introduce the business unit structure. Historical research reviewed relevant management literature. Action research, determined station personnel's understanding, and implementation and review issues. The research questions were:

1. What business unit introduction, or similar change, models are documented in literature?
2. What is fire station personnel's understanding and concerns regarding the concept of business units?
3. What methods should the Zone Commander adopt to promote this change at Zone level?
4. How does a Zone Commander determine if Zone business units are operating effectively at station level ?

The procedure used was to review relevant literature, survey Zone personnel for data regarding research questions three and four, and determine station personnel's concerns through Station Officer meetings.

Results identified actions for the best possible change condition, and an implementation model. Station personnel indicated on one hand a level of mistrust and anxiety, and on the other hand a reasonable understanding of business units. Zone personnel provided a basis for implementation and review.

Recommendations:

Stock's (1993) six actions to move the project toward the best possible change condition be used in conjunction with Bawden's (1997) SWOT analysis data.

Carr's (1994) seven step model for implement of Zone business units. Station personnel's concerns be used to address the burden or challenge question of Step 1, and their understanding of business units be used to assist with Step 3. The methods indicated in the Zone personnel survey be adopted to promote the change, and also assist with Step 7.

That a review process include the six methods identified in the survey.

Observe trust building rather than trust reducing behaviours in all facets of the implementation.

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INTRODUCTION

The Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFESB) Melbourne is facing a common situation in today's political and economic environment, the demand to demonstrate a cost effective service. External pressure from potential private providers, also a common situation, may ultimately present MFESB with arguably two choices; to either contract out the provision of labour to operate a group of stations through a competitive tendering process; or implement an effective business unit structure across its four operational zones incorporating a community and financial benefit focused benchmarking process.

Such a benchmarking process is well documented in literature and MFESB has the financial, systems, and personnel expertise to design such a process. The problem facing the organisation, or more particularly the four Zone Commands, concerns the effective introduction of the business unit structure and its adoption by the 300 to 350 personnel operating out of each Zone's 7 to 13 fire stations. The process must be a viable alternative to outsourcing.

The purpose of this applied research project is to identify an appropriate strategic path to manage the introduction of a business unit structure to Western Zone Command through historical research by reviewing relevant management literature. And also, through action research, determine the current level of understanding by the station personnel of Western Zone as to what a business unit is, how it would work, and what were their concerns. This form of research should also determine appropriate implementation and review methods.

The following research questions will be answered to assist achieving this purpose:

Question 1. What business unit introduction, or similar change, models are documented in literature?

Question 2. What is fire station personnel's understanding and concerns regarding the

concept of business units?

Question 3. What methods should the Zone Commander adopt to promote this change at Zone level?

Question 4. How does a Zone Commander determine if Zone business units are operating effectively at station level ?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Nicholson (1995, pg. 18-19) determined from the results of a survey of MFESB (then Metropolitan Fire Brigade) fire station personnel that, as a result of the organisational change experience between 1993 and 1995, the personnel's perception of MFESB management's values and ethics had been negatively affected. Part of that change experience was the introduction of the current Zone Management structure (see Appendix A), which is now being reviewed and modified, it is also being extended into a business unit level of autonomy and responsibility.

It is perceived that the current structure, by its design, has contributed to the results of Nicholson's survey.

KPMG Management Consulting (1997, pg. 1-2) published a review of MFESB. The review was commissioned by the MFESB Board of Management and recommended a "public safety model" to broaden the services and value of MFESB. The report also recommended, as part of the pathway to change, to contract out the operation of up to eight fire stations to private sector providers. At its April 1997 meeting, the Board recommended the Public Safety Model to the government of the State of Victoria with one variation, the review and modification of the Zone management structure and the use of a business unit focus within the existing operational structure as an alternative to contracting out. The failure of this variation would potentially lead to the contracting out of operations. The

successful introduction is therefore crucial to the future of the current employees, but as indicated earlier the perception held by station personnel is a challenge to the level of trust required for such an undertaking.

Why is the MFESB at this 'do more at the same cost or do the same at less cost' crossroad? Rue and Holland (1989, pg. 161) provide an answer from a product life cycle point of view. Looking at factors such as growth rate, technological change in service delivery, technological change in process, and major functional concern, straight forward urban fire rescue services are at the maturity stage or even in the saturation stage. That is, demand for the product (fire & rescue) is flat or even declining.

This is supported by KPMG Management Consulting (1997, pg. 12-14) "the number of calls attended by the (then MFB) has declined 29% over the last seven years, largely due to a decline in false alarms. The number of calls to fires and other incidents, rescues, hazardous conditions and service/salvage calls have remained relatively static …. If the number of calls and/or firefighter hours is related to dwelling growth (in the MFESB jurisdiction), it could be expected that firefighter activity may increase by less than 10% over the next 15 years."

The evidence justifying this study is the gravity of the task as illustrated by the above background, and the decision by the Board of Management to develop and implement a business unit structure and benchmarking process. Western Zone must contribute to the introduction of a business unit structure within a fire and emergency service for both its own success and the success of the organisation.

The relevance of this applied research project to the Executive Leadership subject of the Executive Fire Officer Program is in the following areas. Labor relations (Federal Emergency Management Agency. 1996, pg. SM 9-7), although business units inherently means that each of the

four Zones will be trying to implement change on a more independent basis, they will all remain part of the organisation and must act in accordance with agreements, policies and procedures. This will present a delicate balance to each Zone. Managing change (Federal Emergency Management Agency. 1996, pg. SM 11-2) is also relevant. There is "the need to be proactive in the management of change", both in the introduction of business units and their ongoing effective operation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Lawson (The Australian Financial Review. 1997, pg. 20) reported that a survey just released indicates that the majority of Australian workers do not trust their leaders. The survey listed trust building behaviours as open and honest communication, showing confidence in an employee and listening to what they have to say. It also listed trust reducing behaviours as leaders looking after their own welfare ahead of the employees', sending mixed messages so employees never know where they stand, refusing to take responsibility for their actions, passing the blame onto others, and jumping to conclusions without checking the facts.

Nicholson's (1995,) survey results of MFESB fire station personnel tends to indicate that some of the trust building and trust reducing behaviours identified in Lawson's article occurred or were perceived to occur in the organisational change experience between 1993 and 1995 adversely affecting the personnel's view of MFESB management's values and ethics. If the organisation is now going to again take up the change process in the management structure of the Zones then it must be very aware of trust building and trust reducing behaviours and the results of past efforts in the same area. The introduction of a business unit structure in itself could be a trust reducing behaviour because it may be read as preparing the organisation for outsourcing or privatisation. On the other hand if the

current structure is considered not to be working then fixing the problem could be a trust building behaviour.

Carr (1994, pg. 55-60) proposes a seven step model to help understand the factors that matter in change and what impact they have on the people we expect to change. These factors will vary from situation to situation. The seven steps are the key factors posed as questions.

Step 1. Is this change a burden or a challenge?

The way the change is designed and presented will heavily influence the answer. A change with a clear pay off for those who must do the changing will feel like a challenge. If it lacks a clear pay off it will feel like a burden. This is the "what's in it for me" question.

Step 2. Is the change worthwhile and real?

If the benefits of the change appear unclear, trivial or highly unlikely to materialise, the change almost certainly will be seen as a burden. On the other hand, when the change promises clear, worthwhile and believable benefits, it will look desirable.

Step 3. Will the benefits of the change begin to appear quickly?

The longer it takes for a change to bear fruit, the more difficult it is to maintain the concentration and enthusiasm. This doesn't mean that only quick changes can be successful, rather that it is best to introduce them so that people can begin to see positive results quickly. It also helps to avoid shotgun - style programs that aim at everyone simultaneously and instead provide more narrowly targeted programs to particular groups.

Step 4. Is the change limited to one function or a few closely related functions?

Organisational resistance is just as dangerous as individual resistance. Does the change threaten the functional integrity of departments.

Step 5. What will be the impact on existing power and status relationships?

Many organisational players work assiduously to accumulate power and status. If a change directly attacks this power or status it will almost certainly be opposed. Only when time passes and nothing changes is it realised that the change effort has died of a thousand cuts in the meantime. The more that it is proposed to change existing power and status relationships, the more difficult it will be to change. And the more the change can accommodate these relationships (and remain effective), the greater the chance of success.

Step 6. Will the change fit the existing organisational culture?

It is extremely difficult to change an organisation's core values or its basic culture. Never propose to change the culture one whit more than necessary to achieve the goals of a project. Robbins & Mukerji, (1990, pg.16) call this a system shared meaning that constrains choices by conveying which practices are effective in introducing change and which are not.

Any program attempting to introduce change to the strong station level culture, now "us and them" (Drysdale, 1995,pg. 5), must be aware of the nature of the station culture.

Step 7. Is the change certain to happen?

Any significant change requires effort, is disruptive, and takes time away from the daily job. If you want something to change, line up enough organisational horsepower to ensure it will before starting the change.

Stock (1993, pg. 48-50) identifies the need to design the change to improve its success. He lists six possible actions to move the project toward the best possible change condition.

- Raising dissatisfaction; gather and share data that highlight the problems with the existing situation. For example, the inadequacy of the existing tools to do the job.
- Make the future look good; if the future state is not clear to the stakeholders, talk with them and listen for ideas that will make the vision clearer and more desirable. Use what is learnt. Build on

similarities to the current situation. Identify and highlight values that the current situation and future have in common.

- Advertise the benefits; it is sometimes difficult to separate for the stakeholders, statements about the future state and about its benefits (what's in it for me)? Know the relevant advantages and disadvantages of the future state: Highlight the advantages.
- Take the right steps; stakeholders must believe that the action steps proposed represent viable options for reaching the desired future state. Talk with the stakeholders to identify any inadequacies they perceive in the implementation or content of the project. Then make changes that the stakeholders can accept.
- Assess needed resources; determine what effort and resources will be needed from the stakeholders.
- Estimate your time: it is important to estimate the time that stakeholders will have to commit to make the change. Acknowledge high commitment areas and relate payoffs. Involve the stakeholders to identify steps that can be added or eliminated. But as Bridges (1992, pg. 11) points out, don't turn the whole thing over to the individual contributors as a group and ask them to come up with a plan for the change. Involvement is fine, but it has to be carefully prepared and framed within realistic constraints.

A SWOT analysis of the current Zone management system was undertaken by Bawden (1997) from 33 submissions written by individuals, work groups and work sites a total of 143 comments were received and consolidated into 60 statements that were then categorised. Key statements were identified after consideration was given to whether or not the issue raised was directly related to the management structure of Zones. The key statements as listed in their relevant category were:

Strengths

- The Human Resources and Administrative functions conducted at Zone Command are highly regarded by fire station personnel.
- New initiatives are introduced more efficiently and effectively.
- Zone autonomy is creating initiative and creativity through interaction with other agencies, the business community and the public.
- Specialist advice is always available to the stations.

Weaknesses

- The present zone structure is not autonomous and another model should be examined.
- Station personnel perceive that there is no accountability because the Zone Command is too remote.
- Four portfolios covered by the Inspectors allow confusion about work instructions and priorities and reduce accountability.
- Zone Command staff and fire station personnel have not coped with the 1993 restructure.
- The zone structure does not allow for succession planning form station level to zone level.
- The absence of a station management system causes the Inspector rank to become checkers and overseers rather than managers.

Opportunities

- Establishing an environment of independence within each Zone may lead to a more creative and organisationally supportive approach at station level.
- Current reconsideration of alternative Zone structures.
- Review of Inspector roles (operations, training, fire safety, and administration).
- Further devolution of administrative functions to clerical staff.

- Clarification of line authority and resources; eg “one Boss”.
- Enhancing communication and reporting technology to minimise clerical component of the Inspectors role.
- Further decentralisation of specialist departments.
- Introduction of program budgeting and planning to enable a process visible to all levels of the organisation.

Threats.

- Failure to objectively evaluate the relative effectiveness of the current Zone structure may result in the introduction of a less effective alternative.
- Inappropriate timing of changes or process for change may fatally damage the credibility of any new Zone structure.
- The perception that Zones are not working is erroneous and any significant change will only lead to further harm being done to MFESB.

There appears to be two main elements in this problem the effectiveness of the structure and its implementation. While the two are separate issues they are intrinsically linked. The more effective the structure is seen to be the easier it will be to implement and the more effective the implementation the more credible will the structure be seen to be. Therefore the Zone management model adopted by the Board of Management is important to this paper, without losing sight of the objective of providing the most effective implementation at Zone level.

To that end careful attention must be given to building trust and not reducing trust in recognition that this may not have been given as much attention as it should have been in 1993. Using Carr’s seven step model for change will assist in successful change while paying attention to trust.

Before commencing change in earnest it is important to get people ready for change, and Stock provides six actions that assists in opening people's mind to the problem and the solution.

The key information contained in Bawden's SWOT analysis is an ideal starting point for discussion on the problem and possible solutions.

PROCEDURES

Research methodology

Through reviewing current and relevant literature as historical research, data was obtained to answer research question one and also provide background in the Discussion and Recommendation sections of this applied research project.

A survey was developed to provide data regarding research questions three and four, see Appendix B for an example of the survey form . Further data was provided through raising the issue of zone business units at Station Officer meetings regarding the concerns and understanding of those present. The responses to the issue were noted and this assisted in answering research question two. These data was obtained through action research.

The survey was sent to all Inspectors and Commanders operating in the Zone management structure of MFESB, except those on leave at that time. This means that there was 23 personnel eligible, less seven unavailable, leaving 16 total possible responses. Total responses received was 13, representing 81.25% of the available sample group.

The Station Officer meetings spanned two of the four platoons, 12 officers of a possible16 attended each meeting. Of the total possible sample group of 64 officers (16 x 4 platoons) 24 had the opportunity to express their concerns and provide their knowledge regarding zone business units, representing 37.5% of the total possible sample group.

Limitations

The survey for this research paper has been limited to Zone management staff (Commanders and Inspectors) due to the timing of an organisational change process and industrial (labour) negotiations. The decision to limit the survey to only the management side of the equation was taken after discussion with key personnel in the organisation. It is recognised that the station personnel have much to contribute to this subject, but the risk of the intent of the survey being misconstrued, at this time, put the valuable data beyond this paper.

Input from station personnel was obtained in the form of an open forum at two Western Zone Station Officer meetings. Two of the four platoons therefore had the opportunity to speak. These meetings were attended by most of the officers from those platoon in Western Zone. They were encouraged to express their concerns and validate their understandings of the business unit proposal in broad principle.

The perspective of this paper is limited by the lack of input from fire station personnel in the survey, and their limited input in identifying concerns and validating understanding of the business unit concept.

Definition of terms

Board of management; the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board, established under the Metropolitan Fire Brigades Act 1958, and responsible for the management of the fire service protecting the City of Melbourne and 24 other surrounding cities as defined by the Metropolitan Fire District.

Commander; rank responsible for the management of a Zone.

Inspector; the first level or rank in the organisation whose role spans more than one fire station.

Work out of a Zone Headquarters. In the US the equivalent would generally be the rank of Battalion Chief.

Senior Station Officer; highest level or rank in the organisation who is responsible for one platoon or shift at a fire station that has two or more appliances (apparatus), crew numbers being the final determinant.

Station Officer; highest level or rank in the organisation who is responsible for one platoon or shift at a fire station that has one or two appliances (apparatus), crew numbers being the final determinant.

Zone; the organisation is divided into four operational zones, which are geographically based and approximately equal in number of personnel, but can vary from 8 to 13 stations.

RESULTS

Question one wanted to know what business unit introduction, or similar change, models are documented in literature.

Discussed earlier in the Literature Review, Carr (1994, pg. 55-60) proposed a seven step model to help understand the factors that matter in change and what impact they have on the people we expect to change. The seven steps are the key factors posed as questions.

Step 1. Is this change a burden or a challenge?

The way the change is designed and presented will heavily influence the answer. A change with a clear pay off for those who must do the changing will feel like a challenge. If it lacks a clear pay-off it will feel like a burden. This is the "what's in it for me" question. A difficult one if the "what's in it for me" is more easily put as a threat (to avoid privatisation) than a perceived improvement on the way things used to be done (before the 1993 changes).

Step 2. Is the change worthwhile and real?

If the benefits of the change appear unclear, trivial or highly unlikely to materialise, the change almost certainly will be seen as a burden. On the other hand, when the change promises clear, worthwhile and believable benefits, it will look desirable. If the change involves, say, benchmarking, then visiting a workplace where it is working successfully will do more than any amount of motivational speeches.

Step 3. Will the benefits of the change begin to appear quickly?

The longer it takes for a change to bear fruit, the more difficult it is to maintain the concentration and enthusiasm. This doesn't mean that only quick changes can be successful, rather that it is best to introduce them so that people can begin to see positive results quickly. It also helps to avoid shotgun - style programs that aim at everyone simultaneously and instead provide more narrowly targeted programs to particular groups.

Step 4. Is the change limited to one function or a few closely related functions?

Organisational resistance is just as dangerous as individual resistance. Does the change threaten the functional integrity of departments. In this instance the change must be across all four Zones, but success and performance will be benchmarked between each Zone.

Step 5. What will be the impact on existing power and status relationships?

Many organisational players work assiduously to accumulate power and status. If a change directly attacks this power or status it will almost certainly be opposed. Only when time passes and nothing changes is it realised that the change effort has died of a thousand cuts in the meantime. The more that it is proposed to change existing power and status relationships, the more difficult it will be to change. And the more the change can accommodate these relationships (and remain effective), the greater the chance of success. This is a critical question when considering the introduction of a new Zone management structure. Some personnel may feel that their rank is being asked to be responsible

for more while others may feel that they are losing responsibility. Of even more importance in this case is the danger of existing of Inspector and Senior Station Officer ranks feeling threatened that any proposed change may make their rank redundant.

Step 6. Will the change fit the existing organisational culture?

It is extremely difficult to change an organization's core values or its basic culture. Never propose to change the culture one whit more than necessary to achieve the goals of a project. Also a critical question in the introduction of a new Zone management structure. The MFESB's *system shared meaning* (Robbins & Mukerji, 1990, pg. 16) at station level is now a significant block to introducing change. Culture constrains choices by conveying which practices are effective in introducing change and which are not.

Any program attempting to introduce change to the strong station level culture, now "us and them" (Drysdale, 1995,pg. 5), must be aware of the nature of the station culture it must communicate within.

Step 7. Is the change certain to happen?

Any significant change requires effort, is disruptive, and takes time away from the daily job. If you want something to change, line up enough organisational horsepower to ensure it will before starting the change. In this case the Board of Management has driven the change from the top and the need for change has been identified at all levels of the organisation, although station personnel are likely to prefer reverting to the pre-1993 structure and management arrangements, while for the senior officers the solution must be within the constraints of existing work and cost regimes and retaining the productivity gains of having Inspectors and Commanders on business hours.

Preparatory work must be done to ensure that the environment is right for the personnel to identify the problems clearly and be open to the potential solutions. Stock (1993, pg. 48-50) identified

the need to design the change to improve its success. He listed six possible actions to move the project toward the best possible change condition.

- Raising dissatisfaction; gather and share data that highlight the problems with the existing situation. For example, the inadequacy of the existing tools to do the job. Probably the most agreed point across the organisation at this time is the apparent ineffectiveness of the current Zone structure at station level. Bawden's (1997) weaknesses and threats would assist in this action.
- Make the future look good; if the future state is not clear to the stakeholders, talk with them and listen for ideas that will make the vision clearer and more desirable. Use what is learnt. Build on similarities to the current situation. Identify and highlight values that the current situation and future have in common. Bawden's (1997) strengths and opportunities would assist in this action.
- Advertise the benefits; it is sometimes difficult to separate for the stakeholders, statements about the future state and about its benefits (what's in it for me)? Know the relevant advantages and disadvantages of the future state: Highlight the advantages.
- Take the right steps; stakeholders must believe that the action steps proposed represent viable options for reaching the desired future state. Talk with the stakeholders to identify any inadequacies they perceive in the implementation or content of the project. Then make changes that the stakeholders can accept.
- Assess needed resources; determine what effort and resources will be needed from the stakeholders.
- Estimate your time: it is important to estimate the time that stakeholders will have to commit to make the change. Acknowledge high commitment areas and relate payoffs. Involve the stakeholders to identify steps that can be added or eliminated. But as Bridges (1992, pg. 11 points out, don't turn the whole thing over to the individual contributors as a group and ask them to come

up with a plan for the change. Involvement is fine, but it has to be carefully prepared and framed within realistic constraints.

Question two wanted to know what fire station personnel's understanding and concerns were regarding the concept of business units?

Two Station Officer meeting were scheduled during the period this paper was being written. The opportunity was taken to raise the topic of business units with the personnel present. The first meeting was held on Tuesday 14 Sept 1997 involving D Platoon and the second meeting was held on 20 October 1997 involving A Platoon. Attendance was :

Station Personnel	**First Meeting**	**Second Meeting**	**Total**
Senior Station Officers	2	2	4
Station Officers	10	10	20
Total	12	12	24

In an open discussion the concerns raised could be broadly categorised into five questions:

1. Was this just a process to set up the organization for privatisation?
2. Would the Zones be set against each other and break the organization into competitive units?
3. Where did the proposed changes leave the existing ranks?
4. What likelihood is there of returning Inspectors to on-shift roles?
5. Wasn't there a danger of the organization being fragmented down to four zones each by four platoons?

Business units were voiced as generally being understood to be:

- More autonomous operation of each of the four operational zones.
- Greater budget responsibility, perhaps even down to station officer level.

- Greater accountability of the Zone Office.
- A way to create ownership of local problems. Although this was disputed as already existing, with welfare efforts being cited.

Both the concerns expressed and the understanding displayed indicated, on one hand the level of mistrust and anxiety surrounding this change, and on the other hand the level of general understanding regarding business units.

Question three wanted to know what methods should be adopted by the Zone Commander should adopt to promote this change at Zone level.

The survey form shown in Appendix B, was sent to all available Zone Command personnel in the four Zones. There are 23 eligible personnel within this group, of which 7 were unavailable at the time the survey was distributed. Of the 16 possible responses, 13 were received, representing 81.25 % of the total available sample group.

The results of the survey are shown in Appendix C. The two most overwhelming methods suggested to be adopted were:

- Thorough planning and understanding of the concepts and goals (of business units) by all personnel. This had a very strong emphasis on communication, and was put forward by 28.21% of respondents.
- Involvement by all levels in the organization, 20.51% of respondents.

These two issues accounted for nearly half of the responses to this question. An additional two issues were raised that were recognised as significant. Between them they accounted for nearly a quarter of the responses, they were:

- Zone management appropriately skilled and resourced, 12.82% of respondents.
- Clearly and unwaveringly supported by top management, 10.26% of respondents.

These four issues accounted for 71.8% of all responses from a total of nine issues. Taking an overall view of the nine issues, merit could be argued for all.

Question four wanted to know how a Zone Commander determined if Zone business units are operating effectively at station level.

This question was addressed by the second part of the survey (Appendix C). Eleven broad methods were derived from the responses, with six classified as being substantially supported. These six methods, representing 54.5% of all methods, accounted for 81.39% of all responses. They were:

- Setting goals and objectives for all personnel, and using an effective reporting system to determine progress, 16.28% of responses.
- High level of direct contact between Zone management and station personnel, 13.95% of responses.
- Benchmarking performance of all four Zones, 13.95% of responses.
- Use and external auditing and staff survey process, 13.95% of responses.
- Encourage feedback of Zone management performance from station personnel, 11.63% of responses.
- Responsibility and accountability at station level is being accepted and met, 11.63% of responses.

All methods reflect the difficulty of measuring performance of business units in an emergency response organisation, but overall provide a well rounded process for determining the effectiveness of the business unit environment.

DISCUSSION

It was identified in reviewing the literature that trust was a problem in the MFESB, and in industry in general. This was reinforced both in the survey participated in by members of senior management of the organization and in the open forum at the station officer's meetings. Comparing the concerns and understandings expressed at the station officer's meetings also confirmed the view that introducing further change with business units was potentially a trust reducing behaviour while, at the same time, fixing the Zone structure problem was potentially a trust building behaviour, it may be that its not what you do but the way that you do it.

Carr's (1994, pg. 55-60) seven step model for introducing change recognises this apparent contradiction with expressions such as burden or challenge (step 1), worthwhile and real (step 2), impact on existing power and status relationships (step 5), and fit the existing organisational culture (step 6). Stock (1993, pg. 48-50) also recognises this problem when providing six actions to create the best possible change condition. But in doing so a manager may fall into trust reducing behaviours if the attempt to create that condition is approached unethically. The SWOT analysis by Bawden (1997) provides ample data to support Carr's seven step model and allow Stock's six actions to be approached ethically.

Four of Carr's (1994, pg. 55-60) steps correlate very strongly with the results of the station officer meetings. In step one where it is asked whether the change is a burden or a challenge, the station personnel asked would Zones be set against each other and break the organisation into competitive units. In step two it was asked if the change was worthwhile and real, the station personnel asked if this was just a process to set the organisation up for privatisation. In step five it is asked about the impact on existing power and status relationships, the station personnel asked where did the proposed changes leave the existing ranks, they also asked if there was not a danger of the

organization being fragmented down to four zones each by four platoons. In step six it was asked if the change would fit the existing organisational culture, the station personnel raised the prospect of the Inspectors going back on to shift hours from business hours.

The results of the survey overall tend to reflect the fact that they were derived from only one side of the problem. All the major methods of planning, involvement, resourced and skilled management, and top management support are all appropriate considerations, but may not have been the emphasis of station personnel. The items in the second half of the responses to question one of the survey (Appendix C) would more likely be emphasised by station personnel. Particularly clarification of roles, industrial (labour) agreement, communication & understanding, and incentives. This has been confirmed in anecdotal information Consequently these methods should be taken more seriously than may be indicated by their score in the survey, without in any way devaluing the four main methods identified by the survey. Question two of the survey does not appear to suffer in the same way as question one. This is easy to understand, given that it relates to measurement and is therefore more to do with management information.

The implications for the organization are in the dangers of not following Carr's and Stock's methods. Also, while it may not be appropriate to survey station personnel at this time, it is appropriate to utilise all relevant forums to discuss the problems and listen to what is being said so that what is raised is appropriately utilised. Failure to communicate and provide suitable forums, and follow this up with the right actions will lead to further trust reducing outcomes. This would again expose the organisation to the alternative of contracting out the provision of labour and the management of groups of stations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The implementation of an effective business unit structure across the four Zones of the MFESB is a challenge that can only be met by paying attention to the needs of both fire station personnel and the management of each Zone.

It is recommended that preparatory work is done to ensure that the environment is right for the personnel to identify the problems clearly and be open to the potential solutions. This should be done using Stock's (1993) list of six actions to move the project toward the best possible change condition.

- Raising dissatisfaction by gathering and sharing data to highlight the problems with the existing situation
- Make the future look good and ensure that the future state is clear to the stakeholders
- Advertise the benefits (what's in it for me?).
- Take the right steps, steps that represent viable options for reaching the desired future state.
- Assess needed resources.
- Estimate your time, the time that stakeholders will have to commit to make the change.

Bawden's SWOT analysis data should be used to assist in pointing out weaknesses and threats - to raise dissatisfaction, and to point out strengths and opportunities to make the future look good.

It is further recommended that Carr's (1994) seven step model be used as a the implementation model for the introduction of Zone business units at zone and station level. The seven steps are:

Step 1. Is this change a burden or a challenge?

Step 2. Is the change worthwhile and real?

Step 3. Will the benefits of the change begin to appear quickly?

Step 4. Is the change limited to one function or a few closely related functions?

Step 5. What will be the impact on existing power and status relationships?

Step 6. Will the change fit the existing organisational culture?

Step 7. Is the change certain to happen?

The concerns expressed in the Station Officer meetings regarding business units should be used as a starting basis to address the burden or challenge question of Step 1.

Taking the data obtained from the Station Officer meetings, build on station personnel's understanding of business units in the MFESB context. This should be used to assist in addressing Step 3. Forums to gather and share additional data should be organised to facilitate this process.

As indicated in the survey, ensure that;

- zone personnel are appropriately skilled and resourced, and
- top management give, and are seen to be giving, clear and unwavering support to the change process, this will also assist Step 7.

Finally, it is recommended that the implementation process incorporates a feedback system. Six methods were identified in the survey, and they should be incorporated into this review process. The six methods are:

- Set goals and objectives for all personnel.
- Ensure a high level of direct contact between zone and station personnel.
- Benchmark performance of all Zones.
- Encourage a direct feedback of Zone performance process by station personnel.
- Ensure responsibility and accountability at station level is being accepted and met.

It must be noted that all of the recommendations in this paper are provided with consideration to Lawson (1997), Nicholson (1995), and Drysdale (1995). The perception of ethical behaviour leading

to building trust through open and honest communication, showing confidence in an employee, and listening to what they have to say. The trust reducing behaviours such as leaders looking after their own welfare ahead of the employees', sending mixed messages so employees never know where they stand, refusing to take responsibility for own actions, passing blame to others, and jumping to conclusions without checking the facts, should be stringently avoided.

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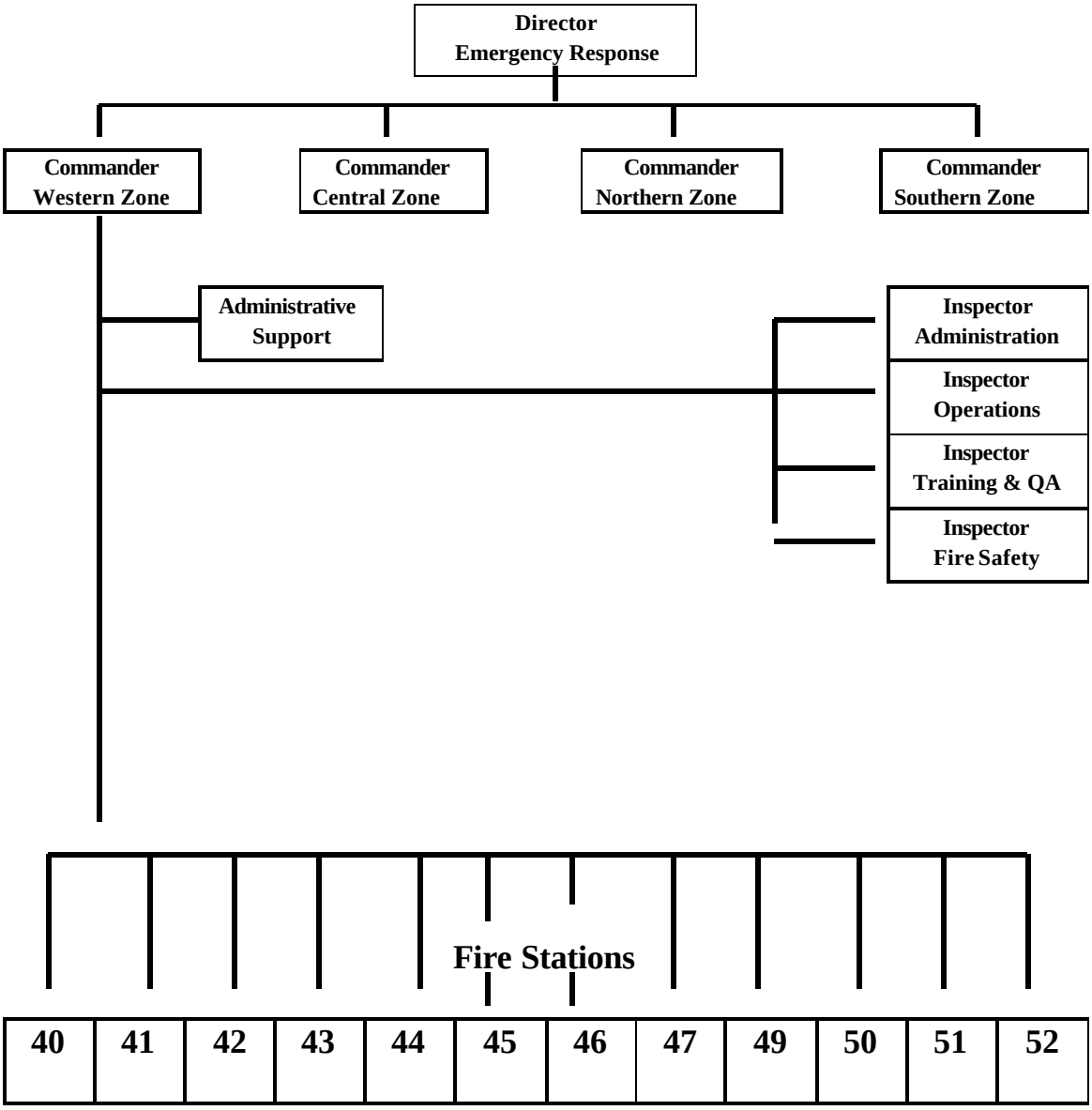
APPENDIX A

Current Zone management structure



APPENDIX B

Survey - Zone Business Unit implementation

This survey will help me to complete a research paper for the National Fire Academy, it is intended to answer two questions regarding the introduction of a business unit environment across the four Emergency Response Zone in the MFESBB.

Question 1. What methods should be adopted by a Zone Command to promote the successful introduction of this change in operation of Zone management? To assist in this question please list what you believe to be the three key or critical issues in the successful implementation of the business unit concept.

1……
……..
2……
……..
3……
……..

Question 2. Assuming Zone business units have been implemented, list the methods you believe are appropriate and would assist in determining whether the new business unit environment was operating effectively at station level.

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Please return to Rob Taylor at Western Zone Commander at your earliest convenience.

APPENDIX C

Zone business unit implementation survey results

Eligible personnel within the four Zone Commands: 23

Unavailable at the time the survey was distributed: 7

Total possible responses: 16

Total received: 13

Percentage of the total available sample group: 81.25 %.

Question 1. Methods Zone Command should adopt to promote successful introduction of Zone management change.

Methods	Total	%
Thorough planning and understanding of concepts and goals by all personnel - communication	11	28.21
Involvement by all levels in the organisation	8	20.51
Zone management appropriately skilled and resourced.	5	12.82
Clearly and unwaveringly supported by top management	4	10.26
Commitment to change by all personnel	3	7.69
Roles, responsibilities and authority in new system clearly defined	3	7.69
Industrial (labour) agreement negotiated where appropriate	2	5.13
Ensure need for change is clearly communicated, and understood by all	2	5.13
Incentives - sharing of gains	1	2.56
Total	39	100%

Question 2. Methods it is believed are appropriate in assisting to determine whether the new business unit environment was operating effectively at station level.

Methods	Total	%
Setting goals and objectives for all personnel, and using an effective reporting system to determine progress	7	16.28
High level of direct contact between Zone management and station personnel	6	13.95
Benchmarking performance of all four Zones	6	13.95
Use an external auditing and staff survey process	6	13.95
Encourage feedback on Zone management performance from station personnel	5	11.63
Responsibility and accountability at station level is being accepted and met	5	11.63
Tracking of station personnel absences (morale).	2	4.65
Evidence of genuine team management and leadership appropriate to each level in the organisation	2	4.65
Initiatives identified and implemented at station and zone levels	2	4.65
Customer surveys	1	2.33
Quality Assurance certification and auditing	1	2.33
Total	43	100%