STRATEGIC PLANNING: A COURSE FOR THE MERCER ISLAND FIRE DIVISION

EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

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An applied research project submitted to the National Fire Academy
as part of the Executive Fire Officer Program

January 1999

ABSTRACT

The City of Mercer Island utilizes a biennial budget program to administer the collection and expenditures of revenue for providing municipal services to its community. Each department of the city is allocated limited funding to fulfill the mission of its organization. The efficient use of limited resources requires a mechanism to prioritize the allocation of those limited funds. The problem is that the Mercer Island Fire Division has no formalized, systematic process to prioritize the allocation of the limited funds in achieving its mission.

The purpose of this applied research project is to determine the value of initiating a strategic planning process for the Mercer Island Fire Division, and to forward a recommendation to the Fire Division Commander. Descriptive research methods, questionnaires and interviews were used to answer the following questions:

- What is strategic planning and is there more than one type?
- Is there consensus regarding the best strategic planning model?
- What is the purpose of a strategic plan?
- What are the components of a strategic plan?

The literature review and questionnaire results showed that there is no single definition for strategic planning and there are numerous models available. While there is currently no consensus regarding the best strategic planning process, Chief Wallace of the Golden Fire Department suggests that the fire service is in need of a model designed with its unique dynamics in mind. He has spent several years researching this field and has created a model he believes will work for the fire service.

The purpose for strategic planning is equally elusive to define universally. It can be simply summarized by stating that it is for the survival of an organization; however, even that definition does not adequately describe the numerous purposes of strategic planning.

The components of strategic planning are varied, depending on the model chosen. The singular theme carried through each review is the inclusion of mission and vision statements, and some form of external and internal analysis.

The recommendation includes the next steps for the Mercer Island Fire Division, and additional research of strategic planning with an emphasis on the fire service perspective.

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INTRODUCTION

The City of Mercer Island is a residential community, located between the cities of Seattle and Bellevue, Washington. Regionally, it is recognized as an affluent community. It is well known for its excellent schools and low property tax rates. Mercer Island's municipal government provides numerous services to the local community. The types and levels of services have been authorized by a city manager–council form of government.

Mercer Island has experienced the same types of funding issues that many government agencies have encountered, which is primarily the desire of taxpayers to reduce taxes and utilize tax revenues more efficiently. As the City of Mercer Island has a relatively small commercial base, the largest source of revenue in this community of 22,000 people is generated through property tax assessments. Property tax assessments comprise approximately 37.5% of Mercer Island's revenue. As with any municipal agency, the City of Mercer Island is challenged with the need to provide certain levels of service within the framework of limited revenues.

The City of Mercer Island utilizes a biennial budget program to administer the collection and expenditure of revenue for providing these services to the community. Each department of the city is allocated limited funding to fulfill the mission of its organization. The efficient use of limited resources requires a mechanism to prioritize the allocation of those limited funds. The problem is that the Mercer Island Fire Division has no formalized, systematic process to prioritize the allocation of the limited funds in order to achieve its mission. The Fire Division does not utilize any form of strategic or master planning.

The purpose of this applied research project is to determine the value of initiating a strategic planning process for the Mercer Island Fire Division, and to forward a recommendation

to the Fire Division Commander. Descriptive research methods, questionnaires and interviews were used to answer the following questions:

1. What is strategic planning and is there more than one type?
2. Is there consensus regarding the best strategic planning model?
3. What is the purpose of a strategic plan?
4. What are the components of a strategic plan?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Prior to 1975, the Mercer Island City codes legislated separate Police and Fire Departments. Within the Fire Department, the organizational structure included an administrative branch of one fire chief, one assistant chief, and one secretary/receptionist. Administrative functions were not only fulfilled by administrative personnel, but were shared with certain levels of the suppression ranks. Master Planning was the long range planning process utilized by the Mercer Island Fire Department.

The first full-time fire chief retired in 1972 and the assistant chief filled his vacated position. The assistant chief's position was not filled, thereby creating a void in the organizational structure. During the second chief's tenure, his focus on long range planning shifted to other areas that were of a more pressing nature. As a result, long range planning was absent. In 1973, the assistant chief was terminated from the fire department due to criminal charges. A void now existed in upper management and therefore any form of planning was non-existent.

In 1975, the Mercer Island City Council authorized Ordinance 396, thereby creating a Department of Public Safety. Through discussions and planning, the City of Mercer Island opted

for what is known as an Administrative Department of Public Safety–that is a Department that combines the administrative tasks of both the police and fire divisions.

With the creation of this new organizational structure, it became apparent that many of the necessary administrative functions would need to be shared with other line personnel as well as with the company officers. Eventually numerous individuals would be responsible for creating annual program objectives and a corresponding budget proposal to meet those objectives. This process was conducted in the absence of, and without influence from a systematic master or organizational plan specific to the Fire Division. The budget priorities and long range planning occurred informally as a result of the budget decisions made by the Fire Division Commander and Director of Public Safety.

Today the administrative needs have increased and therefore more responsibilities have been shared with the line personnel. Many of the firefighters who have been hired in the last fifteen years have welcomed this opportunity and responsibility. However, the budget and programming process today is virtually unchanged from the past. Firefighters create their individual line item program objectives. The Fire Division Commander receives these objectives through the chain of command. He then approves, modifies, or denies the objective(s). Each program sets its objectives without input or influence from a formalized master plan or strategic planning process.

The Fire Division recently completed a mission statement process, but has not implemented a strategic planning process, or any other planning process that directly incorporates the mission statement.

Informal discussions within the Division's officer corps indicate rising frustration as a result of the lack of a planning process. There is also a consensus concerning the need to create a strategic plan.

This research project was completed as required by the National Fire Academy's Operational Policies and Procedures/Applied Research Guidelines manual. Implementing a strategic planning process for the Mercer Island Fire Division relates to Unit 10 of the Executive Development course *Service Quality/Marketing*. Part of the service quality equation includes the ingredient of some form of long range planning; that is, the ability to determine the needs and level of service to be provided, and to match that with resources and current social-economic climates. It was anticipated that the findings of this report would become the basis for initiating a strategic planning process within the Mercer Island Fire Division, and to add to the body of knowledge for other agencies considering the implementation of a strategic planning process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of existing literature was performed at the National Fire Academy, utilizing the Learning Resource Center (LRC). Additional research was conducted using local library resources (King County Library System – Issaquah branch), and subscriptions and purchases made by the author. Interviews and questionnaires were utilized to provide additional information and insight.

Strategic Planning Defined

The research concluded that no single definition of strategic planning exists. Instead there are multiple definitions, with each author stating his or her own interpretation. There is

however, a theme that is consistent throughout each definition. That theme is that strategic planning is an organizational decision-making process. Implied and often specified within that theme is the assertion that it is an all-encompassing process, involving external and internal analysis, vision and mission identification, and the prioritization and the definition of methods to achieve goals in an ever changing environment. As a result, each author encapsulated this process in his or her own words.

"What is Strategic Planning? It is a process of developing a 'road map,' through the examination of your mission and vision, to obtain your goals" (Searing, 1995, p. 8). "A strategic plan is nothing more than an incident command system for the business end of emergency services organization" (Searing, 1995, p. 29).

"I define strategic planning as a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it" (Bryson, 1995, pp. 4 -5).

Bean (1993) offers his variation: "Strategic Planning is the process of determining from long-term vision and goals of an enterprise and how to fulfill them" (Bean, 1993, p. 11).

Ross (1995) notes a distinction, or a caution. Long-range planning is different from strategic planning in that one is based on events remaining static, and the other recognizes that events are dynamic. Strategic planning is a process that recognizes that events are dynamic and that it must match services with changes (Ross, 1995, p. 100). Bryson (1998) concurs: "The planning of a strategy involves the development of strategic alternatives that can be matched with the available resources and current situations to make effective decisions" (Bryson, 1998, p. 1).

Bryson (1995) offers another caution: "Far too many documents called strategic plans are actually operational plans, and no real strategies are ever developed" (Bryson, 1995, p. 40). He further warns the reader, "There is *no* substitute for effective leadership when it comes to planning. Instead, strategic planning is simply a set of concepts, procedures, and tools designed to help leaders, managers, and others think and act strategically on behalf of their organizations and their organizations' stakeholders" (Bryson, 1995, p. 211).

Searing (1995) also asserts that even if you don't have a strategic plan, you actually have a strategic plan (Searing, 1995, p. 8).

In summary, there is no single definition for strategic planning and Wallace (1998b) identifies eleven different strategic planning models (Wallace, 1998b, p. 40). See Appendix E for a compiled list.

Consensus Regarding the Best Strategic Planning Model

Organizations can be broadly divided into two types–profit and non-profit. Most of the literature reviewed was geared towards the profit type organization. The fire service is generally a non-profit type organization, and even within this category the fire service is regarded as unique. "…the fire service has many unique management problems, including the need for personnel to be constantly ready for instant changes from tranquil, routine duties to the sudden intensity of firefighting emergencies" (Carter and Rausch, 1993, p. 1).

In his article, *Strategic Planning: Creating Future Excellence, Part 1,* Wallace (1998b) identifies eleven different models of strategic planning. Most of these models are designed for and apply to the private sector. Wallace takes elements from these models that he believes are applicable to the fire service. He then has creates his own model that is tailored specifically for

the fire service. Wallace (1998a) pays homage to John Bryson, noting that he is the only author found in his research who has written strategic planning specifically for non-profit organizations–an important differentiation from the private sector. Wallace often draws on Bryson's works as both example and building blocks (Wallace, 1998a, pp. 4 -5)

None of the authors, other than Wallace, propose one model over another; rather, they stress the importance of having a plan and follow-through. However, most of the literature reviewed was written for the profit or private sector.

Wallace (1998b) suggests that his model, based on his experience as a fire officer and researcher, is designed specifically for the fire service. "So, for strategic planning to be successful in the fire service, we need a model specifically designed by us for us. The Fire Department Strategic Planning Model is such a plan. I reviewed, studied, tested, and tried the other 14 models and took the best parts of each to compile the 12-step model described here" (Wallace, 1998b, p. 40).

The Purpose of Strategic Planning

Bryson (1995) suggests that "Strategic planning can help facilitate communication and participation, accommodate divergent interests and values, foster wise and reasonable analytic decision making, and promote successful implementation. In short, at its best strategic planning can prompt in organizations the kind of imagination–and commitment-that psychotherapist and theologian Thomas Moore thinks are necessary to deal with individuals' life conundrums" (Bryson, 1995, p. 5). He further suggests that with the numerous events and trends of the past two decades, for shear survivability and prosperity of an organization, strategic planning is essential (Bryson, 1995, p. 3).

Bean (1993) agrees. "Then what is the remedy for a malady that has reached epidemic proportions in the United States in the 1960's through 1980's? A strong dose of *'strategic, proactive, teamwork.'* Indeed, there is no inoculation or corrective power in its 'slogan' form. Its power is contained in its realization, achieved first through strategic planning and then through strategic implementation of the plan in a disciplined, systematic manner" (Bean, 1993, p. 7).

It appears that there are misperceptions concerning the purpose of strategic planning. A lack of understanding of the nature of strategic plans results in a dysfunctional view of its purpose. "A plan is not something to use just in order to defend operating budgets. A strategic plan is developed so that the organization can continue to be successful by producing products for which there is a demand or providing necessary services in an effective and efficient manner" (Ross, 1995, p. 100). Bryson (1995) agrees and offers his caution, "At its best, strategic planning helps leaders pursue virtuous ends in desirable ways so that the common good is advanced. At its worst, strategic planning drives out strategic thought and action, makes it more difficult for leaders to do their jobs, and keeps organizations from meeting their mandates and fulfilling their missions" (Bryson, 1995, p. 211)

In his report, Julihn (1993) lists multiple benefits of strategic planning. They include: a) the ability to think strategically and develop effective strategies, b) the clarification of future direction, c) the establishment of priorities, d) the formulation of today's decisions in light of future consequences, e) the development of a coherent and defensible basis for decisions, f) the exercise of maximum discretion in areas under organizational control, g) the execution of decisions across levels and functions, h) the resolution of major organizational problems, i) the

improvement of organizational performance, j) the ability to deal effectively with rapidly changing circumstances, k) and the creation of teamwork and team expertise (Julihn, 1993, p. 5).

Wallace (1998c) summarizes the fire service perspective: "The Fire Department Strategic Planning Process, if carried through from start to finish, will allow department members to understand that the future of the department and their personal rewards and positions within it depend on the development of operational plans that maintain a strategic perspective." (Wallace, 1998c, p. 92).

In support of the individual, Cannici (1993) states, "The results of the planning process is [sic] a clear direction for the organization with everyone aware of their individual contributions to a successful journey" (Cannici, 1993, p.ii).

"The value to the community lies in the areas of mission, budget preparation, program development, and management of resources. As the vision of the organization is further defined into a mission statement, the public can know what to expect from the fire department" (Brown, 1996, p. 15).

Melcher (1988) proposes seven advantages of strategic planning. They are: a) the survival of the firm, b) the chance to improve profitability, c) the provision of consistency of action, d) the creation of a vehicle for communication, e) the provision of a vertical feedback loop, f) the reduction of the resistance to change, g)the formation of an ordered thinking process (Melcher, 1988, p. 6).

Bryson (1995) suggests that strategic planning: a) promotes strategic thought and action, b) improves decision making, c) enhances organizational responsiveness and improves performance, d) and benefits people by better fulfilling leadership and teamwork roles and responsibilities (Bryson, 1995, p. 7). "Strategic Planning can help facilitate communication and

participation, accommodate divergent interests and values, foster wise and reasonable analytic decision making, and promote successful implementation" (Bryson, 1995, p. 5).

"The concept of managing with goals, whether it is called Management by Objectives (MBO), management by results, or some other name, can be a central strategy in achieving the desired balance between needs of organizations and their staffs" (Carter and Rausch, 1993, p. 103).

Planning provides a mechanism for the expenditure of revenues with a planned purpose. "A plan is not something to use just in order to defend operating budgets. A strategic plan is developed so that the organization can continue to be successful by producing products for which there is a demand or providing necessary services in an effective and efficient manner. If this is not happening, senior officials–and hopefully through them, planners–need to be aware of what isn't working, where and why" (Ross, 1995, p. 100).

Strategic planning is not only important for accountability, it is equally important for the morale of the organization. Change is an inevitable part of life, both for people and organizations. In order for either to survive and prosper, some form of future planning is necessary. People need a sense of where they are going, how they are going to get there, and why they are going there.

In his research paper, Wallace (1993) cites his department as an example of the effective of implementation of strategic planning. The Sheridan Fire Department was an agency that looked only to the immediate future. The organization had no long term vision or goals. He described it as a "reactionary organization". He noted that it was comprised of excellent individuals, capable of doing great things, but only expected to perform at a mediocre level. No planning existed for budgets. The department culture centered on spending all of the existing

revenue so that it could ask for more the next year. In summary, there was no thought or planning given beyond the present. There was also no questioning in regards to the purpose of the organization. What did the customers expect? What services did they want? Tradition was the norm. Chief Wallace (1993) believes that people within the fire service, by their very nature, are capable of great things. Therefore he sought to change the course of his organization through the implementation of a strategic planning process. His goal was to create an effective and highly productive organization (Wallace, 1993, p. 2–4).

The benefits of strategic planning are significant and are like a pebble tossed into the water. The initial impact starts a series of waves that move outward and become larger and affect a greater area. When the people of an organization can be involved in the process of strategic planning, it allows them a sense of value as their input is considered and their voice is heard. An organization that utilizes a strategic planning process has taken the time to identify those forces inside and outside the organization that affect it. The organization's members identify how they are impacted as well as by whom. "At its best, strategic planning helps leaders pursue virtuous ends in desirable ways so that the common good is advanced. At its worst, strategic planning drives out strategic thought and action, makes it more difficult for leaders to do their job, and keeps organizations from meeting their mandates and fulfilling their missions" (Bryson, 1995, p. 211).

In summary, the purpose of strategic planning is to benefit the organization, the customer, and the employee.

The Components of Strategic Planning

The components that are required for strategic planning are dependent on the model chosen. Each model suggests its own process and steps. The research found that there are similarities between most of the models.

A component that is an integral part of each model reviewed, is the need for a vision statement. Each author underscores the importance and value of this component. To paraphrase Shellhammer (1996), vision is important because it gives people a foundation that doesn't change, during periods of change (Shellhammer, 1996, p. 15). Searing (1995) adds, "The vision must be detailed enough to be broken down into discreet pieces which can be analyzed" (Searing, 1995, p. 9).

Another component consistently within each publication reviewed is a mission statement. Each author stresses the need and importance of creating a mission statement.

"The mission statement provides a sense of purpose to the entire department, giving the members reason to excel. A clearly defined purpose provides a basis for everything from productivity to how conflicts are resolved" (Wallace, 1998a, p. 73).

The remaining components depend on the model reviewed. The common theme is some form of an internal and external analysis or audit. The methods and descriptions for these stages vary from author to author.

Wallace (1998a) identifies the external analysis as, "… other factors beyond the ability of a fire department to control" (Wallace, 1998a, p. 102). Conversely he describes the internal analysis as, "…the part of the environment that the organization itself can control, at least in part" (Wallace, 1998a, p. 111).

Bean (1993) cautions those interested in the strategic planning process. He suggests that strategic planning is a discipline and as such has failed. Many who enter the strategic planning process lack the necessary level of commitment. Often the reason for failure has been due to lack of implementation. He proposes that sometimes the effort to implement does not see the same level of commitment and dedication that the planning process does (Bean, 1993, p. 5).

PROCEDURES

Definition of Terms

King County Fire Resource Plan. A plan created in the mid-1980's to address a regional sharing of resources. Within the plan, zone boundaries are identified. Each fire agency within a zone is assigned a number series for their stations and apparatus. The sharing of resources occurs through a predetermined response plan. East King County is identified as Zone 1.

King County Zone 1. A boundary defined within the King County Fire Resource Plan. It is within the eastern portion of King County, and includes 10 fire agencies. There are a total of 5 zones within the King County Fire Resource Plan, encompassing all of King County.

Research Methodology

The desired outcome of this research is to initiate a strategic planning process for the Mercer Island Fire Division. This research utilizes the descriptive methodology to answer fundamental questions about the strategic planning process, and thereby to become the basis for creating a recommendation for the Mercer Island Fire Division.

The process to determine the answers to the research questions included researching materials available through the National Fire Academy's Learning Resource Center, the King County Library System, trade journals and other relevant literary sources.

Interviews and questionnaires were also a resource used both to provide further explanation of question results and historical data that would provide a background with which to identify the need for strategic planning within the Mercer Island Fire Division. Additionally, a questionnaire was created to provide a database of regional experiences regarding strategic planning.

Literature Review

The literature review took place at the National Fire Academy's Learning Resource Center, during the weeks of July 1998 and August 1998. Several applied research projects were also photocopied at a local printer and brought back to Redmond, Washington for further review and research.

During the months of August, September, and October, the initial research materials were used to answer the research questions. Utilizing the methods recommended by the Instructors from the Executive Development class, each excerpt, paraphrase, or quotation of relevance to the research questions was transcribed to a card, which was numbered with the individual reference source.

In September 1998, *Fire Engineering Magazine* published an article on Strategic Planning. Information was extracted from this article and added to the database of research information. Additionally, the publication included an advertisement for the book*, Fire*

Department Strategic Planning: Creating Future Excellence (Wallace, 1998a). This book was purchased and added to the reference material used for this applied research project.

Additional literature was researched in Redmond, Washington, utilizing the local library system. Conducting a search on library computers for strategic planning materials, a reference list was created and relevant materials were borrowed from the library. The author also utilized the National Fire Academy's Interlibrary Loan Program for additional strategic planning literature that was unavailable during the initial Learning Resource Center research.

While there is a tremendous amount of material available relating to strategic planning, very few of the sources related specifically to the fire service or other non-profit organizations. However, the research utilized all the reference sources that were relevant to the research questions, regardless of its relevance to the fire service.

Interviews & Questionnaires

A personal interview with Chief Alan Provost of the Mercer Island Fire Division was conducted and two questionnaires were designed for this research project.

The first questionnaire was created to solicit input from Senior Fire Officers in the King County region regarding their experiences with the strategic planning process. The questionnaire was created in November 1998, after the primary research was completed. The questionnaire contained eight questions (see Appendix B). The purpose of the questionnaire was to provide a perspective on several local fire agencies' experiences with strategic planning, and to add to the data retrieved during literary reviews. The questionnaires were then mailed to the respective individuals. Responses were received from 6 of the 8 departments by December 1, 1998. The

results of these questions were compiled into a spreadsheet and are listed in Appendix F. A summary of the results was included in the Results section of this report.

The second questionnaire was created to solicit input and clarification from Chief Mark Wallace of the Golden, Colorado, Fire Department. Chief Wallace was the only author found who addressed strategic planning for the Fire Service specifically. Due to the nature of the research questions, and information provided by Chief Wallace in his publications, it became necessary to follow up on certain points. The purpose of the questionnaire was to clarify and provide greater detail to questions addressed in this report, and to determine if there was new data to provide since the publication of his book. The questionnaire contained six questions. The results of the questionnaire were summarized and included in the Results section of this report. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix C. The questionnaire was created in early November 1998 and mailed to the author in Golden, Colorado. Chief Wallace responded on December 2, 1998. A copy of his response can be found in Appendix G.

The interview with Chief Alan Provost occurred on December 10, 1998. A list of questions was drafted in mid-November, 1998. The questions for Chief Provost were designed primarily to provide historical background information regarding prior planning processes within the Mercer Island Fire Division. The results of the interview were summarized and included in the Background and Significance section of this report. A copy of the interview questions can be found in Appendix D of this report.

Assumptions

The author, for purposes of this research, assumed that the answers given by the Senior Fire Officers and Chief Wallace in response to the questionnaires were thorough and complete.

Limitations

The limitations of this project include time and material reviewed. The National Fire Academy imposes a six-month time limit to the applied research project process. The period allowed for this project began on August 7, 1998, and was completed on February 7, 1999. In order to allow time for completion of all phases of this project, research was allotted approximately four months of the six-month window.

During the time allotted for research, very few materials were located that specifically addressed fire service strategic planning. The research questions are generic in composition, but the answers to the questions will be applied to a fire service agency. The majority of research material was directed towards the private sector.

The questionnaire was sent to eight local fire agencies. This represents a small cross-section of area fire departments and an even smaller representation of the fire service nationally. Its purpose was to enhance the results of the research questions by providing experiences from a local fire service perspective.

RESULTS

1. What is strategic planning and is there more than one type?

The literature review concluded that there is no single definition for strategic planning. Each author proposes his or her own explanation of the term "strategic planning." There is, however a common theme which runs through the definitions found during the literature research. This theme focuses on the development of a plan that is flexible to change as the organization changed, and reflected the values and mission of the organization. All

definitions involve some sort of external and internal review as part of the process. "Strategic Planning is the process of formulating and implementing decisions about an organization's future direction" (Melcher & Kerzner, 1988, p.1).

Surveys from King County fire agencies confirmed that there are several models of strategic planning. Of the six departments that responded to the questionnaire, only three were actively using a strategic planning process. Each of those departments was using a different model (Appendix F).

In his response to the questionnaire, Chief Wallace stated that his own research has found numerous strategic planning models, most of which are designed for the private sector. His initial introduction to strategic planning occurred at the National Fire Academy. The process offered by the Academy contained roadblocks, and Chief Wallace began to research this field (M. Wallace, personal communication, December 2, 1998).

2. Is there a consensus regarding the best strategic planning model?

In each publication reviewed, the author addressed the issue of strategic planning. The author explained the definition, the purpose and need, and addressed various other issues. However, only one author approached the issue of comparison. In his publications, Wallace not only offers a listing of the different models (Wallace, 1998b), but additionally suggests his model of strategic planning is better suited for the fire service (Wallace, 1998b, p. 40).

Only two publications reviewed were designed with the fire service in mind. One addressed the non-profit sector (Bryson, 1995), and the other addressed the fire service specifically (Wallace, 1998a).

In the survey results, none of the responses utilized the same strategic planning model. They did, however indicate benefits and limitations with the model they had chosen. None of the responding departments was utilizing the model designed by Mark Wallace (Appendix F). The response to the benefits and limitations of various models were based more on strategic planning in general, than on a specific model (Appendix F).

In his response to the questionnaire, Wallace (1998) continues to offer his model for the fire service. He has worked with other models and has incorporated those experiences into the formation of the Fire Department Strategic Planning Model. He responded that he used his department as the "guinea pig" in creation of a fire service model. This model is the compilation of 13 other models, designed with the fire service perspective. His research supports the theory that most of the models available are designed for private businesses that are interested in making a profit. This was the reason for the creation of his model. His research concluded that the strategic planning models that utilized the fundamentals of profit and strategic issues did not work well with the fire service (M. Wallace, personal communication, December 2, 1998).

Responses to both his book and articles have been positive. Some respondents have apparently shared their failures with non-fire service models, indicating they have had marginal results (M. Wallace, personal communication, December 2, 1998).

Other responses have indicated, "Been there, done that," but Chief Wallace seems unconvinced: "I've had lots of feedback from other departments. Most have 'been there and done that' so they say. However, many departments have a plan but that plan has no impact on the future success of the department." He also adds, "If I had to give one single frustration it would be that most people have difficulty conceptually distinguishing between an operational plan and a strategic plan" (M. Wallace, personal communication, December 2, 1998).

3. What is the purpose of a strategic plan?

The literary review indicated that the purpose of strategic planning is multifaceted, but can be encapsulated by simply stating that it is for the survival of an organization. Within that definition, numerous themes can be extrapolated. Each agency will need to answer those questions in the strategic planning process by creating their own mission & vision statements. The research concluded that there are many purposes, or reasons, for strategic planning. Each author researched offered his or her perceptions regarding the purpose. But as with the search for a singular definition, no single purpose or definition could be found; rather, there is a singular theme in each of the writers' descriptions.

The findings in the literary research were confirmed with the questionnaire sent to King County Fire Agencies. The survey results indicated various views of the purpose, or benefits, of strategic planning. One department indicated its benefit has been an improvement in labor and management relations. A second agency indicated strategic planning has been used as a long-range planning tool. The other agencies did not respond to this question because they do not utilize a strategic planning process at this time (Appendix F).

In his response, Chief Wallace adds, "The biggest things to remember with strategic planning is that it is a process that provides direction and a wonderful target (although a moving target). It's not a goal with an end point. It can't be a process that ever gets completely done. Thinking and acting strategically is far more important that [sic] writing a beautiful document that you call a strategic plan" (M. Wallace, personal communication, December 2, 1998).

4. What are the components of a strategic plan?

The components of a strategic planning process are dependent on which model is chosen and implemented. There are, however common themes and components throughout these plans. They all involve the creation of a corporate vision and mission. From that evolves some sort of external and internal evaluation. The organization reviews those forces that impact, or are impacted by it, which become the foundation for planning. As the organization completes the process of review, it can then overlay its vision and mission to shape, prioritize, and develop strategies and goals.

The surveys sent to local fire agencies addressed the issue of what benefits and limitations were represented by particular components of the strategic planning process. Of the 6 agencies who returned surveys, 1 responded that the component of strategic planning they found especially important was the need to establish standards of performance and measurement, i.e. response times. A second agency indicated that the need to simply start the process, was the most important component. The remaining agencies did not respond to this question. It was interesting to note that none of the departments who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they found any component as being unimportant (Appendix F).

Additional information from the surveys indicated a strong need on the part of agencies embarking on strategic planning, to provide commitment of time and personnel. Five agencies indicated this as a recommendation for agencies that are engaged in strategic planning. Additionally, three agencies also responded to the importance of educating all of the participants of the process (Appendix F).

Chief Wallace underscored the importance of a mission statement: “Mission statements are really the teller of successful strategic planning in many cases. How many people were

involved in writing it? Who was involved? How many members of the department can recite it? Does the mission statement just make everyone feel good because it is the right words, or do the members of the department live and breath [sic] it every day?" (M. Wallace, personal communication, December 2, 1998).

DISCUSSION

Study Results versus Specific Findings

The literary research indicated no single answer to the four questions of this research paper. The questionnaire sent to area fire agencies and the questionnaire sent to Chief Wallace confirms these findings.

Chief Wallace offers a compelling argument as to the need for a strategic plan process designed for the fire service. His research has indicated numerous fire departments that have tried other models and have had marginal results. He also indicated that there is a need for the fire service to become educated concerning the differences between operational plans and strategic planning.

In both the literary review process and the questionnaire process, the importance and value of the preparation phase to strategic planning became apparent. This includes identifying and communicating with the "players" of the process. It is important to outline the types of commitments and discipline that will be needed to initiate the strategic planning process. As Chief Wallace affirms, the process is never complete.

Interpretations

The purpose of this research project is to educate the author about the strategic planning process, and to provide the author of this research paper with information to be incorporated into a proposal. While the Mercer Island Fire Division has been successful in achieving its perceived mission, this success has been based more on reactive decision making utilizing the interpretation of anecdotal information, then on quantifiable measurable methods using a formalized planning process. Additionally, prior to 1997, the Mercer Island Fire Division had not created a Mission Statement, and as such could not corporately identify what the members distinguished as the organization's purpose. Currently the Mercer Island Fire Division's decision-making processes are done in the absence of a formalized method of long range planning.

Although no single definition of strategic planning exists, the greater question is to extrapolate the spirit of what strategic planning is. Based on the findings of the research, strategic planning is a process that involves many internal and external components. One of the most basic and important components of this process is to identify who the "players" are–that is, what persons and/or groups have a vested interest in the organization. It is then critical to confirm their commitment to the strategic planning process. This point was reinforced in each authors manuscript. Strategic Planning is reported as a long-term commitment of time and resources, and as such mandates a total dedication to the final project.

Once an organization has a commitment from the identified groups and individuals who are involved and affected by this organizational process, the organization needs to learn about itself. Another foundational block of this process is the identification of a mission statement and

a vision statement. These elements are key to the strategic planning process. In order for any organization to plan and prioritize, it must determine what is important and what its values are.

Organizational Implications

A strategic planning process can bring numerous benefits if that organization is committed to the process. One author went so far as to even imply that it is even to the survivability of the organization.

A road map is always an excellent gauge to measure our progress towards a given point of destination. All parties who view the map know where they are and how much farther they must travel. If there are unpredicted events on this journey, the group then looks for solutions which will keep them on track to reach their point of destination. Sometimes these events are roadblocks or detours, or they may be something that merely slows their progress. But everyone is aware of the destination, progress, and the encumbrances that occur and affect their journey. There are no questions, since all are participating. This analogy can be applied to the strategic planning process. In Mazlow's "Hierarchy of Needs", self-actualization is the highest achievement for an individual. There is no greater satisfaction for an individual than the sense that he or she has value within the organization, individuals need to know that what they have to say is important. They need to know that they can have an impact on the direction of an organization. The strategic planning process is a mechanism designed to acknowledge and accommodate this theory.

With limited resources available to provide services, a planning process will enable identification of needs, resources, and priorities, as well as how best to dispense the resources.

Strategic Planning provides a mechanism which enhances efficiency with limited resources by allowing a more organized and methodical approach.

Strategic Planning incorporates the participation of numerous groups. Not only are fire department personnel involved in the planning process, but other groups such as city council members; city administrators; and varied citizen groups. If all these people are part of the planning process, then it stands to reason that more people will be aware of how decisions are made, why they are made, and why they need to be supported. Organizationally this can be highly advantageous.

In summary, strategic planning can be highly beneficial to the health and existence of an organization. It is in an organization's best interest to seize every opportunity to maximize the tools available to it, thereby providing those services that it is charged to provide.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Mercer Island Fire Division should pursue the implementation of a strategic planning process. In a dynamic environment with ever-changing demands, budget constraints, and organizational culture, strategic planning will bring a sense of organization and direction.

2. The Mercer Island Fire Division should initiate an educational campaign with the intent to advise potential participants of the plan to implement a strategic planning process, and to solicit their support prior to embarking into the strategic planning process.

3. The Mercer Island Fire Division should create a committee with the express purpose of facilitating the initial phases of the strategic planning process. The committee should establish a clear set of objectives and timelines. The committee's primary objective should be a

recommendation of the elements necessary for implementation of a strategic planning process that would also included timelines and economic impacts.

4. Additional research should be conducted by the Mercer Island Fire Division to determine local assets and resources available to assist in the strategic planning process.

5. Finally, it is recommended that future research in related to strategic planning place greater emphasis on the fire service. Due to the unique parameters of emergency services, the models offered by the private sector include limitations and inadequacies.

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APPENDIX A

MEMO OF RECOMMENDATION

MERCER ISLAND FIRE
Memo

To: Chief Provost
From: Capt. Tubbs – Operations
Re: Applied Research Project
Date: December 9, 1998

Chief,

As you know, this year I attended the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. One of the requirements for successful completion of this course, is an applied research project, (ARP) – a written report that affects the students department. This report is evaluated and given a grade by adjunct members of the NFA Staff.

During my instruction I chose the subject of strategic planning. With the assistance of my instructors, I began to lay the foundation of a research project that I hope will be beneficial to our organization and community.

Please find attached a copy of my ARP for your review. Within this report you will find information about strategic planning, and several recommendations for our Department, based on this research.

It is my sincere hope that you will find this document meaningful and educational and that it would be the basis for initiating such a process in our organization. As always, I would happily respond to any questions, concerns or comments you may have after reading this document.

Furthermore, if in conclusion of reading this report you agree with the findings, I would gladly offer my energies to the process of following the recommendations made in the ARP.

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONS FOR SENIOR FIRE OFFICERS
NATIONAL FIRE ACADEMY EXECUTIVE FIRE OFFICER PROGRAM
APPLIED RESEARCH PROJECT

1. Does your Department have / use a strategic planning process?
2. What Strategic Planning model do you use?
3. What benefits / limitations did strategic planning bring to your organization?
4. Was your strategic planning process facilitated by using a member of your organization, or an outside professional?
5. What were the benefits / limitations of using that type of individual?
6. What steps of your strategic planning model did you find to be especially important? Why?
7. Were there any steps of your strategic planning model that you found to have little or no value to your organization? Why?
8. What recommendations would you offer to a Department embarking on the strategic planning process?

APPENDIX C

Questions for Chief Mark Wallace
Applied Research Project
Strategic Planning

1. In your research, what specifically led you to the conclusion that the fire service needed a strategic planning process for itself? (What parts of other models did you find to be ineffective and why?)

2. Do you know of any Fire Departments who are using your Strategic Planning Process model?

3. Have you received any feedback regarding the implementation of your model from other fire departments?

4. Since the publication of your book, do you have any new thoughts that you would add to a Department embarking on the Strategic Planning Process?

5. Have you had any feedback from other fire departments that have tried other strategic planning models other than yours?

6. What have been their frustrations / concerns with those other models?

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions
Chief Alan Provost
Background and Significance Information
National Fire Academy
Applied Research Project

1. How long have you been with the Fire Division?
2. How long have you been in your current position?
3. What year did you start with the organization?
4. What type of organization were we at that time?
5. Describe that organization.
6. Who was the Fire Chief at your date of hire?
7. What year did he leave and under what circumstances?
8. Who was the next Chief and when did he start?
9. What year did he leave and under what circumstances?
10. In your words, describe the when, why, how, and who of our organization becoming a Department of Public Safety.
11. Has our Department, to your knowledge, ever had a long term or strategic planning process?
12. If so, please describe.

APPENDIX E

RECOGNIZED MODELS FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING

AS IDENTIFIED BY MARK WALLACE

1. Harvard Policy Model.
2. Strategic Planning Systems
3. Stakeholder Management Approaches
4. Content Approaches/Portfolio Methods
5. Competitive Analysis
6. Strategic Issues Management
7. Strategic Negotiations
8. Logical Incrementalism
9. Strategic Planning as a Model for Innovation
10. Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations
11. Fire Department Strategic Planning Model

APPENDIX F
SENIOR FIRE OFFICER RESPONSES
STRATEGIC PLANNING QUESTIONNAIRE

Total Departments Receiving Questionnaire	8
Total Responses	6

1. Does your Department have / use a strategic planning process?

YES	NO
3	3

2. What Strategic Planning Model do you use?

SLR 3 Phase	1
Modified NFA	1
Mixed	1
None / NA	3

3. What benefits / limitations did strategic planning bring to your organization?

Improve labor / management relations (+)	1
Just Starting / NA	1
Long Range Planning Tool	1
None / NA	3

4. Was your strategic planning process facilitated by using a member of your organization, or an outside professional?

Outside Professional	2
Department Member	0
Both	1
None / NA	3

5. What were the benefits / limitations of using that type of individual?

BENEFITS -EXTERNAL

Objectivity	2
Experience	1
Credibility	1
None / NA	2

LIMITATIONS - EXTERNAL

Not familiar with organization	2
None / NA	3

BENEFITS -INTERNAL

Technical Knowledge	1
None / NA	4

LIMITATIONS - INTERNAL

None / NA	5

6. What steps of your strategic planning model did you find to be especially important? Why?

Taking First Step	2
Performance and Measurement	1
None / NA	3

7. Where there any steps of your strategic planning model that you found to have little to no value to your organization?

None / NA	6

8. What recommendations would you offer to a Department embarking on the strategic planning process?

Objectivity	1
Time / personnel commitment	5
Patience	1
See project through	1
Education Players	3
No response	0

APPENDIX G

RESPONSE FROM CHIEF WALLACE

From: Mark Wallace <mwallace@sni.net>
To: 'cd_tubbs@msn.com' <cd_tubbs@msn.com>
Subject: Questions on Strategic Planning
Date: Wednesday, December 02, 1998 8:56 PM

Chris,

Thanks for your letter and questions. I'll try to answer them the best I can in the limited time I have. Many of the technical questions are in the book. But here's a stab at some answers for you.

1. I originally wasn't looking to find any solution for the fire service in general, just the dysfunctional department I was the new fire chief at. When I started looking for solutions, strategic planning and its components came up continually from a variety of viewpoints. So when I was at the NFA (teaching fire investigation) I started talking with faculty and students and doing research in the LRC in my free time. Strategic planning provided the answers I was looking for. When I tried to apply the Applied Strategic Planning Process the is taught at the NFA I got stuck in several steps. The biggest roadblock was the Strategic Business Model. This process and the others I researched had at least one commonality, they were designed for private business whose strategic objectives always included making a profit. Even with some extra efforts to get around the stumbling blocks by the NFA staff, it simply would not work. Then I started in the EFOP and had to do my own research papers. Strategic planning was a natural for me since I had already done much of the preliminary research. Once I completed my EFOP, I had a new system that was very close to the framework of a complete book. Friends, including John Dehaan and Cotton Thompson, encouraged me to take the next step and make my work into a book. Since the fire service had nothing that approached a strategic planning model designed for the fire service, I named my model The Fire Department Strategic Planning Model. It is however, a compilation of the best parts of the other 13 models. All the while, I was using my own department as my guinea pig and we worked on the system on until we eliminated the bugs and made it work. The main parts that didn't work on the other models dealt with the fundamentals of profit and strategic issues. The business of the fire service is completely different than the business of business. (If that makes any sense.) A section of the book covers this also.
2. The Greeley, Colorado Fire Department (Fire Chief Bill Martin) is my post-publication beta site. Anther good source of information and feedback is Mike Chard, Division Chief of Training of the Boulder Colorado Fire Department.
3. The feedback since the Fire Engineering Magazine articles and the publication of the book have been very positive. Several people have given feedback that they like the chapter on developing the mission of the department. These people had tried other models and even hired other consultants with marginal results. The Poudre Fire Authority in Ft. Collins Colorado (Chief

John Mulligan) is one of the benchmark fire departments in my mind concerning strategic planning efforts. They have been doing it for many years successfully.
4. I am learning more all of the time. Nothing real drastic has come to mind so far. I am in the process of reading a book, "The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning" now which has some interesting insights. So far, most post production thought has been minor issues. I've worked on this book for ten years, so it has gone through numerous iterations. I also used this project as my Master's Thesis topic in obtaining my Master's of Public Administration. Working with my mentor, Dr. Dail Neugarten, was very enlightening because she gave it a critical view from the educational considerations that I could not. So the short answer to this questions is basically not really anything significant.
5. I've had lots of feedback from other departments. Most have "been there and done that" so they say. However, many departments have a plan but that plan has no impact on the future success of the department. For example, most people complete their strategic planning in one or two days, maybe at a retreat. Mission statements are really the teller of successful strategic planning in many cases. How many people were involved in writing it? Who was involved? How many members of the department can recite it? Does the mission statement just make everyone feel good because it is the right words, or do the members of the department live and breath it every day?
6. Too many to really list. Bottom line has been that the fire service is not a for-profit business and we have to look at strategic issues rather than strategic goals. If I had to give one single frustration it would be that most people have difficulty conceptually distinguishing between an operational plan and a strategic plan. Most strategic plans out there on the shelves collecting dust may be called strategic plans but are really operational plans.

The biggest thing to remember with strategic planning is that it is a process that provides direction and a wonderful target (although a moving target). It's not a goal with an end point. It can't be a process that ever gets completely done. Thinking and acting strategically is far more important that writing a beautiful document that you call a strategic plan.

The book is really a "how to do it" sort of text. It walks you through each step and gives you almost everything except the answers that are true only for your organization. It certainly is not "the best" answer to strategic planning in the fire service, its just the best I know of today. You may find better methods, ideas or other things that improves the model. When you do, let me know. Good Luck
Mark