Failure to Connect: Identifying Human Relations Skills Training for the Southern Platte Fire Protection District Career Development Plan

David J. Rierson

Southern Platte Fire Protection District

Kansas City, Missouri

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

Signed: _____

Abstract

The problem was that the Southern Platte Fire Protection District's career development plan did not include a human relations skills training component, which was improperly preparing fire officers for leading and developing the District's human resources. The current career development plan addressed the technical skills needed to be a fire officer. While developing technical skills are an important and necessary part of career development, they do not prepare an officer to effectively communicate, motivate, coach, or develop subordinates.

The purpose of this research project was to identify the human relations skills training components that need to be added to the District career development plan in order to make it a complete, comprehensive development tool.

In conducting this research the author utilized descriptive research methodologies to answer four research questions:

1. What human relations skills have been identified as a component of career development?
2. How are other fire departments measuring the human relations skills of their officers?
3. What are other fire departments doing to strengthen human relations skills?
4. What human relations skills should be a component of the Southern Platte Fire Protection District career development plan?

The procedures used in this research project included review of applicable literature, review of the District's requirements for officer promotion and values survey. Surveys were utilized to help determine what other fire departments are doing to measure and strengthen human relations skills, and to determine what human relations skills training was important to

District employees. Results indicated the need and importance of human relations skills training in a comprehensive career development plan.

Recommendations were made to complete assessment testing to determine the strengths and weaknesses for each officer, and to tailor a comprehensive development plan based on the results of the assessment testing.

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Introduction

The problem is the Southern Platte Fire Protection District's career development plan does not include a human relations skills training component, which could improperly prepare fire officers for leading and developing the District's human resources. In its current state the career development plan provides the technical training needed to be an officer, which includes incident management, building construction features, and company tactical operations. While these are important and necessary skills to be developed to ensure well run emergency scenes and safety of District personnel, they do not prepare an officer to effectively communicate, motivate, coach, or develop subordinates.

The purpose of this applied research project is to identify the human relations skills training components that should be added to the Southern Platte Fire Protection District career development plan. Four research questions were developed to assist the author in identifying these components. Descriptive research will be used to answer these research questions:

1. What human relations skills have been identified as a component of career development?
2. How are other departments measuring the human relations effectiveness of their officers?
3. What human relations skills training components do other fire departments include in career development?
4. What human relations skills should be included in the Southern Platte Fire Protection District career development plan?

Background and Significance

The Southern Platte Fire Protection District serves nearly 40,000 residents in 77 square miles of southern Platte County, Missouri. The District is comprised of four stations, 37 career and 10 volunteer members. The department provides numerous services to the community, including fire suppression, emergency medical services (EMS), hazardous materials response and mitigation, water rescue, fire code enforcement and inspection, and building plans review. Additionally, the District provides a variety of public safety education and training programs and operates a training center that provides fire and EMS training to both district members and area fire departments.

Prior to 1996, the District was an all volunteer agency. Rapid population growth and increased demand for services necessitated the hiring of full-time career personnel. By July 1997, the district had hired 10 career firefighters and determined there was a need for company officers. In 1997 there was no career development plan and the only requirements for promotion were a high school diploma and three consecutive years of fire service experience. As the demand for services continued to grow so did the District. In April 2000, the district created the positions Division Chief of Services and Division Chief of Operations. With the advent of these positions came the first formal education requirements. Division Chiefs were required to have a Bachelors Degree or equivalent college hours. There was, however, still no formal career development plan. In addition to creating the staff officers positions, the District hired an additional 12 firefighters between July 2001 and January 2002, followed by the hiring of another eight firefighters in January 2005 to allow the staffing of additional stations. Recognizing the need for additional supervision, the District created the position of Battalion Chief and promoted an additional six company officers. In 2005, the first formal career development plans were

initiated. Officers were required to complete the University of Missouri Fire and Rescue Training Institute's Fire Officer Certificate program. The certificate program covered primarily technical skills, which included managing company tactical operations, Fire Instructor I, building construction features, and incident management. The courses that did cover human relations skills, which includes Fire Officer I and II, and the National Fire Academy Leadership Series, only provided a brief overview of the subject. So with the exception of courses in sociology and psychology obtained by those attending college, the vast majority of the District career development plan was technical in nature.

While this type of training is effective in preparing an individual for the emergency setting, it is less than effective in preparing officers to build teams, coach and counsel for performance, effectively solve problems, or develop subordinates. Furthermore, none of the training currently given teaches officers effective skills in dealing with the public.

> The fire service is one of the few remaining industries that promotes first and then prepares people for promotion. Newly promoted and unprepared officers may be prepared for the five percent of the job that involves emergency responses, but may be totally unprepared for the 95 percent of the job that involves leading people (Dahms, Mueller, & Peterson, 2008, p. 87).

This describes the officers of the Southern Platte Fire Protection District. Rapid growth and demand for services forced the promotion of those who were not totally prepared and the lack of human relations skills is evident in its officers. Failure to develop direct reports, failure to continue self-development, and failure to address problem employees and performance are examples of situations that currently exist. These situations have led to bickering and infighting between shifts and those on the same shift, bad attitudes, and a lack of trust and respect between

the ranks. Moreover, a recent values survey conducted for the District by an outside company called The Leadership Project showed decreased employee satisfaction in the areas of communication, honesty, professionalism, and respect, all areas encompassed in human relations. Additionally, the historical view of the values survey shows decreases in communication and respect for more than one year. A copy of the combined survey totals is located in Appendix A.

This applied research project is relevant to the Executive Development course in the areas of professional and leadership development, and service quality. By identifying and developing a human relations skills training component for the career development plan, officers will be better prepared to lead and develop the districts human resources. Furthermore, they will be better prepared to interact with the citizens of the community, which will lead to better service quality.

Literature Review

As the world around us has changed, so has the traditional fire service. The demands placed on fire service organizations by fiscal constraints and homeland security is likely to continue for some time. These demands place added responsibility and accountability on fire service organizations and require the spreading of leadership responsibilities more broadly. O'Conner & Quinn (2004) wrote "the more versatility an organization has in how it can carry out leadership tasks, the more effective it will be" (p. 419).

> Although an organization may be influenced by environmental, culture, technology, and many other factors, organizations succeed or fail on the basis of the quality of leadership: organizations that teach leadership skills to all employees have more flexibility and a higher capacity for changing to meet market needs (Hart & Paulsgrove, 2002, p. 231).

Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson (2002) wrote “now, as perhaps never before, there is a growing awareness that the success of our organizations depends directly on effectively leading human resources” (p. 1). Dubrin (2009) agrees, stating that “soft-skills are often the differentiating factor between adequate and outstanding performance because dealing with people is part of so many jobs” (p. 4).

Researchers, consultants, and organizations, both public and private, have developed countless competency models for the purpose of identifying and developing human relations skills. While each model may take a unique approach or use different jargon, they generally classify the same skills sets and aptitudes and characteristically fall into two competence groupings, personal and social.

Personal competence, or managing yourself, deals with the aspects of self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-esteem. Van Velsor & McCauley (2004) define self-awareness as the influence a persons abilities, both good and bad, have on others. Being aware of and having the competence for self-management allows people to develop positive and trusting relationships. Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee (2002) believe self-awareness is not only about understanding one’s strengths and weaknesses, but having an instinctive understanding of their values, motives, and emotions, a concept they call emotional intelligence. Tobin & Pettingell (2008) also recognize the concept emotional intelligence and the importance it plays in self-awareness.

> An employee with good emotional intelligence can control his own emotions and related behaviors and can recognize the feelings of others and adjust his behavior to keep both himself and others calm in tense situations by expressing himself in a calm, collected manner and by helping others express their concerns similarly. This is an important

competency at all levels of an organization, perhaps becoming more important as the employee climbs the management ladder (Tobin & Pettingell, 2008, p. 51).

Self-Confidence, according to Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, means confidence in one's powers and abilities. Tobin & Pettingell (2008) define self-confidence as "acting on the basis of one's convictions rather than trying to please others; being confident in oneself; and having a healthy sense of one's capabilities without being arrogant" (p. 52). The self-confident employee understands they that they will not always be right and are willing to accept when someone else has a better idea. This willingness to change direction will help the individual gain respect from other employees and managers. Additionally, self-confident employees will challenge themselves and their abilities by taking on new or additional projects, and are confident enough in their abilities to ask for and handle criticism. Goleman et al. (2002) agree, stating that an employee who is in touch with his or her abilities will use their strengths and welcome difficult assignments.

Dubrin (2008) defines self-esteem as the "overall evaluation people make about themselves, whether positive or negative" (p. 45). Self-esteem develops through our relations with people and events, and evolves during our lifetime. Employees with positive self-esteem are able to find meaning in negative comments and benefit from them. Furthermore, employees with high self-esteem tend to have good mental health, which enables them to fend off feelings such as jealously and anxiety, are accountable for problems, take initiative to solve problems, and maintain positive work attitudes, which associate to high levels of performance. These types of behaviors help organizations succeed because employees are able to cope with changes and challenges in the workplace. Hissong (2002) takes the concept of self-esteem further to include recognizing the importance of the other person's self-esteem. He points out that people will take

the steps needed to find out what makes them feel good, yet it is equally important for the other person to feel valued. “A person’s view of himself is the key to his or her success and happiness” (p. 3).

Having the capacity for self-management allows an individual to understand their emotions, strengths and weaknesses, and attitudes. That understanding further allows them the ability to develop positive and trusting relationships. In addition, the individual will spend time updating his or her knowledge and skills and will learn from failures, as well as successes.

> Employees will not follow a leader who invests little of himself in his leadership behaviors. People want to be led by someone real. Our dissatisfaction with sleek, airbrushed leadership is what makes authenticity such a desirable quality in today’s corporations – a quality that, unfortunately, is in short supply. Leaders and followers both associate with sincerity, honesty, and integrity (Goffee & Jones, 2005, p. 1).

Goleman et al. (2002) believes that the capacity for self-management leads to an “openness to others about one’s feelings, beliefs, and actions” (p. 47), which in turn shows that the leader can be trusted.

Social competence, or managing others, deals with the aspects of communication, team-building, motivating others, coaching, and conflict management, influencing, developing others, and building relationships.

> Communication is being able to convey ideas clearly to others. It includes projecting credibility, poise, and confidence, even under difficult or adversarial conditions. This competency requires the basic skills of considering the needs of the audience and how it is likely to react, talking to people in a way they can understand, listening attentively to others, and using appropriate grammar and vocabulary (Tobin & Pettingell, 2008, p. 77).

Hissong (2002) points out that a great deal of our communication is completed in a one-on-one fashion, and how well we conduct these exchanges is key to our success with others. Furthermore, he stresses the importance of using a suitable communication medium and how important it is to listen and to ask questions to clarify the message being sent. The International Association of Fire Chiefs ([IAFC] 2003) publication *Crew Resource Management Guide* cites communication breakdown as a factor in several fatality incidents over the past 20 years. "Interruptions in the communication flow process resulted in messages and orders being misinterpreted, not being properly conveyed, completely missed, or improperly carried out" (p. 13). Furthermore, the guide stresses the importance of understanding the communication process and the factors that affect it, as well as the significance of questioning for clarity and listening.

Team building is an important skill that is necessary at all levels of an organization. "An effective team builder acts on opportunities to collaborate, proactively helps team members, shares credit for successes with team members, and solicits and offers feedback on how to work effectively" (Tobin & Pettingell, 2008, p. 87). Goleman et al. (2002) have similar thoughts. A leader creates an environment of collaboration and includes others in the effort. Moreover, they model behavior that demonstrates respect and cooperation, which in turn helps form close relationships. The IAFC (2003) identified team building and teamwork as a necessary skill in the fire service. The *Officer Development Handbook*, in its self-development section for supervising, managing, and administrative fire officer, identified team building and teamwork as an interpersonal dynamic and skill for development. The *Crew Resource Management Guide* stresses teamwork in order to accomplish common goals. Furthermore, it identifies the need to understand leadership and followership, which is necessary to avoid the interruption of teamwork, an interruption that can have fatal consequences. "Any group that fails to perform as a

team is eventually doomed to fail. Failure in the emergency service field results in excessive damage, poor crew management, injury and death" (IAFC, *Crew Resource Management Guide*, 2003, p. 5).

> People in leadership roles need not only to develop their own relationships with others but also facilitate the development of positive relationships among others who work together. Effective leaders help create synergy, motivation, and a sense of empowerment in work groups (Van Velsor & McCauley, 2004, p. 14).

It is crucial for a leader to understand team dynamics, how team member's goals affect team goals, and how the attitude and emotions of the leader affect the overall attitude of the team. Failure to understand those parameters can be the determining factor in success or failure of a team.

Dubrin (2002) defines motivation as an "activity performed by one person to get another to accomplish work" (p. 201). One of the basic principles of motivation is that self-interest drives it. An individual can be either highly or slightly motivated, depending on how well their self-interests are being met. Therefore, developing and understanding motivational skills will help an officer accomplish more and keep employees motivated since their needs are being met. Another reason for why needs are central in understanding motivation is that needs lead to behavior. Good or bad behavior, or what people do, can be driven by motivation, or a lack thereof. The competency of motivation also requires the ability to communicate, because to find out what a person needs often requires talking to them.

> Employees feel good when a manager takes time to identify what appeals to them and taps into their needs and interests when assigning tasks. They like to be challenged to learn what will benefit them and to tackle tasks that help them grow. They appreciate

> realistic performance goals that help them meet their personal goals (Tobin & Pettingell, 2008, p. 110).

Supervisors and officers must be able to identify what best motivates each individual in their charge. Hissong (2002) agrees that it is important to understand what motivates people, but it is equally to understand what demotivates people. Employers spend time and money to hire motivated, hard working employees. Yet at sometime in their career they become skeptical and their performance drops. “The company officer can take the most enthusiastic and skilled firefighter and turn him into someone who has retired in place” (Dahms et al, 2008, p. 87). Understanding what demotivates a person can help prevent lulls in performance and attitude.

Goleman et al. (2002) views coaching as assisting an individual in identifying strengths and weaknesses, then tying them to personal goals. By linking daily work to personal goals, supervisors are able to keep employees motivated. But care must be taken. When a person lacks the skill or compassion needed to coach an employee, the approach may be viewed as micromanaging, resulting in a decrease in performance and possibly damaging the employee’s self-confidence. Done well, however, coaching can transform an employee into a self-confident and reliable high performer. Furthermore, it has a positive emotional impact. “A good coach communicates a belief in people’s potentials and an expectation that they can do their best” (Goleman et al, 2002, p. 62). The end result is an employee senses that the leader cares, so they feel motivated to maintain their own performance and feel responsible for how well they do. Dubrin (2008) agrees that coaching employees requires skill and that effective coaches display certain traits and behaviors. Those traits include empathy, listening skills, tact, self-confidence, concern for others, and leading by example. While some people are more adept at coaching others, the skills needed to be an effective coach can be learned. Dubrin disagrees, however, with

the contention that offering too much coaching can be perceived as micromanaging. “In reality, the majority of workers believe that they do not receive enough coaching and guidance on the job” (p. 227). Hissong (2002) mirrors this thinking. He believes that companies in general do a poor job of coaching employees. Companies’ hire the best employees they can, and then let them sink or swim. If it is determined that an employee is a keeper, then they take the time to coach them. It may require a commitment of time and energy to coach an employee, but the end result is worth it.

Conflict within an organization is bound to happen. The IAFC (2002) states that conflict can be healthy or unhealthy and that “resolving unhealthy conflict quickly and positively promotes harmony and goal accomplishment” (p. 8). Because of this, leaders must cultivate successful conflict resolution skills. Realizing that people will have differing opinions and providing them a legitimate avenue for complaint will go along way towards resolving conflict. Furthermore, focusing on cause identification and not becoming emotionally involved can assist the supervisor in identifying the core issue. Tobin & Pettingell (2008), McCauley & Van Velsor (2004), and Goleman et al. (2002) all compliment the IAFC keys to effective conflict resolution. Tobin & Pettingell (2008) goes further to point out the importance of having this competency at all levels of an organization. Conflict can be used to drive innovation or change, or if managed improperly can be a disruptive force that damages relationships and demotivates people. Dubrin (2009) differs by stressing the importance of knowing the major sources and causes of conflict and knowing the different conflict management styles used to resolve conflict. Conflict management styles are not a one style fits all. Differing causes and sources of conflict require differing management styles.

Tobin & Pettingell (2008) wrote that:

> Influencing is using techniques that appeal to reason, values, or emotion to generate enthusiasm for the work, commitment to a task objective, or compliance with a request. This includes using appropriate tactics to change a person's attitude, beliefs, or behaviors (p. 96).

Influencing requires the ability to communicate a task in a clear, concise, and persuasive manner. Additionally, one must understand how to adapt one's delivery style or approach to meet the needs of the audience, exhibit an eagerness to listen and include input from others, and show the reluctance to use position power to persuade others. Maxwell (2002) states that "the true measure of leadership is influence – nothing more, nothing less" (p. 61). To be a leader you need followers. To increase influence requires an understanding of the levels of influence and leadership. Maxwell believes people follow because:

1. They have to.
2. They want to.
3. Because of what you have done for an organization.
4. Because of what you have done for them.
5. Because of what you are and what you represent.

By understanding these levels, everyone has the potential to become a better leader. The leader must, however, remember that as you climb the ranks, your level of influence must be redeveloped within your new group.

Mentoring, coaching, and challenging are all considered components of developing others. "Leadership roles often call for the ability to develop others in ways that allow people to work together in increasingly productive and meaningful ways (Van Velsor & McCauley, 2004,

p. 14). People tend to operate using comfortable ways of acting and thinking. Challenging people forces them out of their comfort zone, requiring them to develop new ways of thinking. Additionally, challenging people serves to motivate and provide opportunity for growth. Tobin & Pettingell (2008) acknowledge the importance of challenging people. Those operating at a high level of performance constantly need new challenges to succeed in continued development. Effective managers continually raise the bar by setting challenging objectives and providing people with the opportunity to develop new skills. Dubrin (2009) points out that mentoring is designed to help others grow and is important to both the individual and the organization. To be good at developing others requires that a leader to be positive and nurturing. “To be a mentor, a person engages in a wide range of helping behaviors, all related to being a trusted friend, coach, and teacher” (p. 222).

Having the ability to build and maintain relationships is a key component of managing others. Goleman et al. (2002) defines relationship management as “friendliness with a purpose” (p. 51). Managers proficient at social skills have quality relationships with a wide range of people and have a capacity for finding common ground and building bonds. McCauley & Van Velsor (2008) echoes Goleman and adds that leaders need to not only build their own relationships, but also make possible relationship building among those who work together. “The foundation of this ability is the capacity to respect people from varying backgrounds and to understand the perspectives that they bring to an organization” (p. 14). Tobin & Pettingell (2008) believe that a person skilled in relationship building displays a compassion and sympathy for others when they are facing a challenging task. Furthermore, they stress the importance of leaders at every level of an organization having this skill. Relationship building requires one to be proactive, not reactionary. Being willing to openly communicate and responding promptly to

others sends a message that you care and helps to establish an open and friendly atmosphere in the workplace.

> While leadership is not always easy, it can be very rewarding. Developing maintaining and building strong relationships is the first step to being the type of leader who inspires respect while getting the job of firefighting accomplished through others who feel like they're a part of a winning team (Dahms et al, 2008, p. 115).

In order to determine what human relations skills an individual has or needs to develop, some type of assessment tool must be used. Tobin & Pettingell (2008) identified four assessment methods.

1. Personal assessment
2. Manager assessment
3. 360-degree assessment
4. Reflected best self.

Personal assessment is typically completed when an individual decides to change employment. The individual determines what they believe to be their personal strengths and presents them to a prospective employer. Manager assessment, which can be an annual performance appraisal, is an assessment of an employee's competency based on observation and may or may not include interpersonal skills. A 360-degree assessment involves input from the individual, their manager, and the individual's subordinates and peers. The information gleaned from this assessment can be valuable to the individual, but if not applied to improve performance is useless. There should be an individual development plan focusing on improving weaknesses, and a follow-up assessment to determine improvement. Reflected best self assessment follows along the lines of the 360-degree assessment, but the individual seeks the feedback themselves and the assessment

focuses only on strengths. They ask those in the workplace to identify their strengths and give examples of when they used those skills in a way that was meaningful to them. This assessment can then be used to change the way you work so it plays to your strengths. Chappelow (2004) also recognizes 360-degree assessment as a tool to develop leaders. They point out that receiving information from different groups, including bosses, peers, and direct reports, provides the individual a more complete picture than that of just a single group. Furthermore, peers and subordinates are in a better position to evaluate particular competencies, specifically interpersonal skills.

> The 360-degree feedback process forces managers to examine the perspectives that other people hold of them. For some participants, taking part in such a process is the first opportunity they have had to seriously examine their strengths and weaknesses (Chappelow, 2004, p. 63).

Like Tobin & Pettingell and Chappelow, Guthrie & King (2004) recognize 360-degree feedback, but as a part of a program that combines different methodologies called feedback-intensive program. “Feedback-intensive programs combine assessment for development, experiential interactions, direct teaching, and peer and staff coaching to provide a comprehensive assessment of an individuals leadership” (p. 26). Furthermore, they recommend this style of assessment when an organization has recognized an individual with high-potential for development, when an individual assumes additional job responsibilities, and when an individual shows signs of declining performance.

In summary, the literature review has identified specific human relations skills to be considered for inclusion in a career development program, and demonstrated there is a need for the development of those skills in our officers. Moreover, it has shown that there cannot be a one

size fits all development plan. There must be some type of individual assessment completed to identify strengths and weaknesses in order to build a comprehensive development plan.

Procedures

Research began in October 2008 with a search of periodicals at the Learning Resource Center (LRC) at the National Fire Academy (NFA) in Emmitsburg, MD. The search provided the author with recent articles pertaining to leadership skills and the nurturing of those skills.

Further research was conducted at the Mid-Continent Library in Kansas City, MO. in November 2008. This search provided the authors and titles of books dealing with leadership, leadership skills, management development, and interpersonal skills. While this search was helpful in identifying applicable literature, the library did not posses these books, nor could they provide the author with a time frame for receipt. With a list of applicable literature obtained from the library the search continued at Borders Books and Barnes and Noble Bookstore. Here the author was able to locate and purchase the relevant literature. In addition, the author's personal collection of human relations management books was reviewed for pertinent information.

Internet research was conducted with mixed results. Most of the material was not useful as it was posted by consulting firms advertising their services for a fee. Relevant literature was retrieved from websites for the *Harvard Business Review* and the *International Association of Fire Chiefs.* These sites provided articles on leadership, teamwork and communication, and educational standards for fire officers.

Two survey instruments were developed by the author using the internet company Survey Monkey. The first survey was sent via e-mail to the training officers of the 72 departments that comprise the Heart of America Metro Fire Chiefs Council. This group was selected because of the proximity to the author's organization and availability to similar training entities. The e-mail

contained an explanation for the survey and a link to Survey Monkey for completion of the survey. A list of the departments is contained in Appendix B. The respondents were asked to answer three yes or no questions that would provide answers to research questions 1, 2, and 3. The purpose of survey question 1 was to determine if the departments surveyed included human relations skills training as a part of career development. Survey question 2 was intended to identify how the surveyed departments measure human relations skills effectiveness of their officers. The categories used for this question were those identified during literature review. Because the reflected best assessment and feedback-intensive program were not known to the author, the category of other was used. Survey question 4 was designed to identify what human relations skills training is being offered to fire officers in the greater Kansas City, Missouri area as a part of their career development plans. The skills identified in this question were the 11 skills identified in the literature review. In addition to the yes or no questions, respondents were given the opportunity to identify measurement tools used to evaluate human relations skills effectiveness and specific human relations skills training that were not identified in the survey.

The second survey was sent internally to the 37 uniformed personnel of Southern Platte Fire Protection District. This group was selected because any changes to the current development plan would directly affect them, and to solicit input as to which humans relations skills members felt were important to career development. An internal e-mail was sent with an explanation of the survey and a link to Survey Monkey for completion of the survey. The respondents were asked to answer two yes or no questions and to rate in order of importance the human relations skills they felt were important. The responses would help provide answers to research question 4. The purpose of survey question 1 was to determine how many members felt human relations skills training was important to their career development. Survey question 2 was intended to find out

how many members felt human relations skills training should be added to the district career development plan. Survey question 3 asked members to rate in order if importance, with 1 being the most and 11 being the least, the human relations skills they felt were most important in a career development plan. The skills listed were those identified during literature review. Additionally, members were provided the opportunity to write in any human relations skills they felt important that were not listed included in survey question 3.

Survey Monkey collected the data from the two surveys separately, and the results were grouped and organized to answer the corresponding research question. Both surveys can be found in Appendix C.

Limitations

Several limitations occurred during the development of this applied research project. Of the 72 training officers solicited in the external survey only 20, or 28 percent, completed the survey. This limited the representation of the survey. Additionally, the external survey was limited to those agencies that make up the Heart of America Metro Fire Chiefs Council, which comprises career and combination departments in the greater Kansas City, Missouri area and includes some departments from the State of Kansas. This is a small sampling of fire departments in Missouri and Kansas, and across the United States. The results could vary with a larger sampling.

The internal survey was also limited in that only 27, or 73 percent, of the 37 uniformed personnel of Southern Platte Fire Protection District responded. Additional responses could have changed the overall results.

The author experienced difficulty in obtaining most of the identified current literature through the Mid-Continent Library of Kansas City. This unavailability forced the author to

purchase most of the referenced literature, which required the author to limit the number of texts used. Much of the literature the author was able to locate in the local library system was published outside the time frame established for current literature by the National Fire Academy. Additional human relations skills and measurement devices could exist and change the overall result of the paper.

Lastly, the author's instructions for questions 2 and 4 of the external survey were worded poorly, which affected responses. The response counts for questions 2 and 4 do not equal the total number of respondents to the survey. Better worded questions and instructions could have provided better statistical data.

Results

Research Question 1: What human relations skills have been identified as a component of career development?

The literature review revealed that numerous public and private organizations have developed competence models for the purpose of identifying and developing human relations skills. Though each model may be different to varying degrees, they generally identify the same skill sets and aptitudes, which fall into two competency groupings, personal and social.

Personal competence deals with managing ones self and includes the following skills:

1. Self-awareness
2. Self-confidence
3. Self-esteem

Social competence deals with managing others and includes the following skills:

1. Communication skills
2. Team building skills

3. Motivating skills
4. Coaching skills
5. Conflict management skills
6. Influencing skills
7. Developing others
8. Relationship building

The results of the internal and external surveys identified three additional human relations skills that respondents felt should be included in career development, and these additional skills would fall into the “managing others competence”. They include:

1. Diversity skills
2. Recognizing and understanding personality types
3. Understanding generational differences

Research Question 2: How are other fire departments measuring the human relations skills of their officers?

The external survey was utilized to identify how other fire departments in the greater Kansas City, Missouri area measure the human relations skills effectiveness of their officers. Those answering the survey question were asked to identify which measurement tools their departments used from a list that included:

1. From self-assessment
2. From manager assessment
3. From 360-degree assessment
4. From other method
5. Do not measure

Additionally, departments were allowed to write in any measurement tools they use that were not listed in the survey. Only 20 of the 72 departments surveyed, or 27.7 percent, responded. Based on the responses to the survey, there is no single method being used. The summarized results are as follows:

1. From self-assessment: 8 of 16 respondents, or 50 percent, identified self-assessment as a measurement tool used.
2. From manager assessment: 15 of 18 respondents, or 83.3 percent, identified manager assessment as a measurement tool used.
3. From 360-degree assessment: 3 of 15 respondents, or 20 percent, identified 360-degree assessment as a measurement tool used.
4. From other method: 4 of 13 respondents, or 30.8 percent, use some other method to measure human relations skills effectiveness.
5. Do not measure: 3 of 11 respondents, or 27.3 percent, do not measure human relations skills effectiveness.

Four survey respondents wrote in measurement tools that were not included in the survey. They included:

1. Annual performance evaluation
2. Supervisory and officer training courses and Human Resources training and evaluation.
3. Tests administered by a psychologist.
4. Not a formal tool, the candidate is assessed on a daily basis regarding interaction.

Research Question 3: What are other fire departments doing to strengthen human relations skills?

The external survey was used to identify which human relations skills were being strengthened through career development. 11 skills were identified in the literature and included in the survey. While all 11 skills listed in the survey were identified as being provided in career development, six particular skills were identified as being provided in career development by 50 percent or more of the departments. Additionally, those six skills all fell into the social competence or managing others category. The summarized results are as follows:

1. Self-awareness: 8 of 19 respondents, or 42 percent, include self-awareness training.
2. Self-confidence: 7 of 18 respondents, or 38.9 percent, include self-confidence training.
3. Self-esteem: 2 of 18 respondents, or 11.1 percent, include self-confidence training.
4. Communication skills: 14 of 20 respondents, or 70 percent, include communication skills training.
5. Team-building skills: 14 of 20 respondents, or 70 percent, include team-building skills training.
6. Motivating skills: 10 of 20 respondents, or 50 percent, include motivating skills training.
7. Coaching skills: 13 of 20 respondents, or 65 percent, include coaching skills training.
8. Conflict management skills: 12 of 20 respondents, or 60 percent, provide conflict management skills training.
9. Influencing skills: 9 of 20 respondents, or 45 percent, provide influencing skills training.
10. Developing others: 10 of 18 respondents, or 55.6 percent, provide training on developing others.

11. Relationship building skills: 9 of 19 respondents, or 47.4 percent, provide training on building relationships.

Research Question 4: What human relations skills should be a component of the Southern Platte Fire Protection District career development plan?

Literature review identified 11 human relations skills that should be developed. The internal survey was used to identify the views of personnel at Southern Platte Fire Protection District in regards to human relations skills and career development, and to rank which of the 11 human relations skills, from most to least important, should be included as a part of officer development. The summarized results are as follows:

Survey Question 1: 96.3 percent of all respondents answered yes, that human relations skills training is an important part of career development.

Survey Question 2: 96.3 percent of all respondents answered yes, that Southern Platte Fire Protection District should include human relations skills training as a part of career development.

Survey Question 3: The employees ranked the importance of the 11 human relations skills, from most to least important, as follows:

1. Communication skills
2. Motivating skills
3. Team-building skills
4. Coaching skills
5. Self-confidence skills
6. Conflict management skills
7. Self-awareness skills

8. Developing others skills
9. Self-esteem skills
10. Relationship building skills
11. Influencing others skills

Copies of the summarized surveys are located in Appendix D.

Discussion

The results of this study clearly indicate there is a need for human relations skills training as a part of career development in the Southern Platte Fire Protection District. To date, career development has been aimed at the technical skills, such as incident management and strategy and tactics. “Effective interpersonal relations must be combined with technical knowledge and good work habits to achieve success in any job involving interaction with people” (Dubrin, 2009, p. 3). “Professional development is the planned, progressive life-long process of education, training, self-development, and experience” (IAFC, *Officer Development Handbook*, 2003, p. 4).

> Great leadership works through the emotions. No matter what a leader sets out to do-whether it’s creating strategy or mobilizing teams to action-their success depends on how they do it. Even if they get everything else just right, if leaders fail to drive emotions in the right direction, nothing they do will work as well as it could or should. (Goleman et al, 2002, p. 3).

The respondents to the internal survey indicated that human relations skills training is an important part of career development and it should be included as a part of officer development. This reinforced the author’s belief that the current career development plan was too directed towards technical skills. Results from the external survey revealed that only 50 percent of fire departments responding to the survey incorporate human relations skills training as a part of

career development. This also confirmed the author's beliefs that human relations skills training is lacking in other departments as well. It should be noted, however, that due to the small number of responses to the external survey, the number of departments actually providing this training may be higher. Hersey, et al. (2002) and Dubrin (2009) point out that organizational success and outstanding performance are linked directly to having adequate interpersonal skills, yet we are not providing this type of training.

In addition to identifying the importance of human relations skills training, respondents of both the internal and external surveys provided rankings for which human relations skills should be and are being provided in career development. Responses from both surveys indicated that skills involving social competence, or managing others, are the skills most provided by external agencies and the ones thought to be most important by internal members. These results contradicted the author's belief that self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-esteem, or managing self, was the starting point for developing good human relations skills.

> Every person, at every level of the organization, has an inherent style of interacting with people. By learning your own style and recognizing the styles of others with whom you work, you can better understand the effects of your style on others, and their styles on you, and work to flex your style to improve working relationships. This is an important competency at all levels of the organization (Tobin & Pettingell, 2008, p. 51).

It seems logical that being aware of who you are, your strengths and weaknesses, would allow you to work more effectively with others. "Self-aware leaders understand their values, goals, and dreams. They know where they are heading and why. A person lacking in self-awareness will likely make decisions that trigger inner turmoil by treading on buried values" (Goleman, et al, 2002, p. 40). Furthermore, managing self includes self-development, or the willingness to spend

time to improve on weaknesses and update knowledge. Why should an employee spend time trying to develop if their officer is not willing to do the same? “An employee interested in his or her own development regularly seeks feedback and information on how to improve performance in their current job and to prepare for career advancement” (Tobin & Pettingell, 2008, p. 55)

> Leaders with high self-awareness typically know their limitations and strengths. They exhibit a gracefulness in learning where they need to improve, and welcome constructive criticism and feedback. Accurate self-assessment lets a leader know when to ask for help and where to focus in cultivating new leadership strengths (Goleman et al, 2002, p. 254).

These are the employees we want to identify and develop for promotion, yet both surveys identified the skill of managing others as more important then managing self. The IAFC recognizes the importance of self-development. Self-development “deal with your awareness, personal attributes, and attitudes, which are individually developed and refined. It depends on your physical, mental, and emotional health, which are driven by your values. You are encouraged to foster your development in this area” (IAFC, *Officer Development Handbook*, 2003, p. 8).

Measuring human relations skills effectiveness was addressed by the literature review and external survey. Respondents to the survey identified manager assessment as the primary method of assessing human relations skills effectiveness. This was consistent with the author’s thoughts on how success was being measured, however, does not concur with the author’s beliefs on how it should be measured. Again, it should be noted that due to the small response to the external survey the results could be different. It seems reasonable that if you want to measure how effective someone is at relating to people, you should have a mechanism in place to solicit information from those people. “Generally, we are aware of our major areas of competence, but

often there are areas of competence that we have but don't recognize" (Tobin & Pettingell, 2008, p. 32). Guthrie & King (2004) recommend feedback intensive evaluation programs as a part of career development. "Guidelines for feedback intensive programs include the use of multiple assessment methodologies such as personality instruments, 360-degree assessments, peer assessments, self-ratings, and feedback from the boss and peers (p.57). While it can be an expensive program, the 360-degree assessment can be an effective tool, provided it is used correctly, as it incorporates feedback from the employee's manager, direct reports, peers, and the individual themselves.

> Whatever form of 360-degree assessment your organization may use, the results will often be enlightening to the individual, but enlightening is not sufficient as an end result. A 360-degree assessment will provide a lot of information, but this information has no value unless it is applied to improve individual performance (Tobin & Pettingell, 2008, p. 36).

The responses provided by Southern Platte Fire Protection District members to the internal survey overwhelmingly indicates they believe human relations skills training should be a part of and included in career development. While the internal survey indicated what human relations skills were believed to be most important to members of the district, and the external survey indicated what human relations skill training is being provided by outside agencies, the author believes you must first evaluate an employee to determine strengths and weaknesses before you build a plan to develop them. There cannot be a one size fits all career development plan. Secondly, the career development plan must incorporate a variety of learning experiences that continue throughout a person's career. "No single development event, no matter how powerful, is enough to create lasting change in an individual' approach to the tasks of leadership.

Leadership development is a lifelong, ongoing process" (Van Velsor, Moxley, & Bunker 2004, p. 205). Methods that can be used to develop human relations skills competency include "screening candidates for existing and innate competencies, self-study, formal instructor led training, coaching, and use of development assignments" (Tobin & Pettingell, 2008, p. 39). Another difficulty in determining what to include in career development is the generation of the employee. The fire service is no different than many companies in the private sector in that our employees span four different generations, all of which act, react, and learn differently. This may require the use of several different strategies to ensure competency development, and may require the training divisions to rethink their approach.

> In order to meet the ongoing need for management and leadership development, the role of the organizations training group must change. Rather than thinking of themselves as trainers whose responsibilities end once the student leaves the classroom, they must redefine themselves as learning facilitators. Successful learning facilitation is not measured by how many employees completed a class or how many training hours are provided to each employee, but whether employees at all levels are able to meet their individual, group, and organizational goals (Tobin & Pettingell, 2008, p.266).

It is our job as managers and leaders of the Southern Platte Fire Protection District to develop future leaders for our organization. By doing so, we will be ensuring and enhancing the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of the organization for years to come. The results of this study have provided the data and information to show that a comprehensive career development program must focus on human relations skills as well as technical skills.

Recommendations

The problem, as previously stated, was that the Southern Platte Fire Protection District's career development plan does not include a human relations skills training component, which could improperly prepare fire officers for leading and developing the District's human resources. The purpose of this applied research project was to identify what human relations skills have been identified as a component of career development, to find out how other fire departments are measuring the human relations skills of their officers, and what they are doing to strengthen human relations skills. In addition, determine what human relations skills training should be a component of the Southern Platte Fire Protection District career development plan.

The research presented in this study has indicated that human relations skills training is an important part of a comprehensive career development plan. It also indicated that individuals have differing levels of skill, and each job classification may have specific skill sets that are required. Because of this you need to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each individual, and identify any special skills needed in order to tailor a comprehensive development plan. Based on the literature review and results of the internal and external surveys, the following recommendations are made to assist in the development of a comprehensive development plan:

1. Obtain the support of the Fire Chief and department members for changing the current development plan.
2. Obtain the financial support of the Fire Chief for the purpose of conducting 360-degree assessments of all current fire officers.
3. Identify and select a company to assist in the development of a 360-degree assessment tool for the District. To assist in the development, it is recommended that the IAFC *Officer Development Handbook* be referenced to determine the skill

competencies for each level of fire officer, as well as the job requirements for each officer classification in the Southern Platte Fire Protection District Standard Operating Guidelines book.

4. Based on the results of the 360-degree assessment, customize a career development program for each fire officer based on the identified strengths and weaknesses from the assessment tool.
5. Once a development plan is completed for each officer, locate and schedule training programs based on the identified needs of the fire officers.
6. After completion of the first year, conduct a follow-up 360-degree assessment to determine the effectiveness of the training programs.
7. Review and update the individual career development plans on an annual basis.
8. It is recommended that implementation begin immediately.

The development and administration of a 360-degree assessment tool to all fire officers will be completed by spring of 2010. By spreading the assessments out over the course of a year, the financial impact on the district may be lessened. Additionally, as the results for each officer become available, the actual career development plan can be completed, with some officers beginning their plans before others have taken the assessment. This too should help alleviate the financial impact. By fall of 2010, all fire officers will have a completed comprehensive career development plan.

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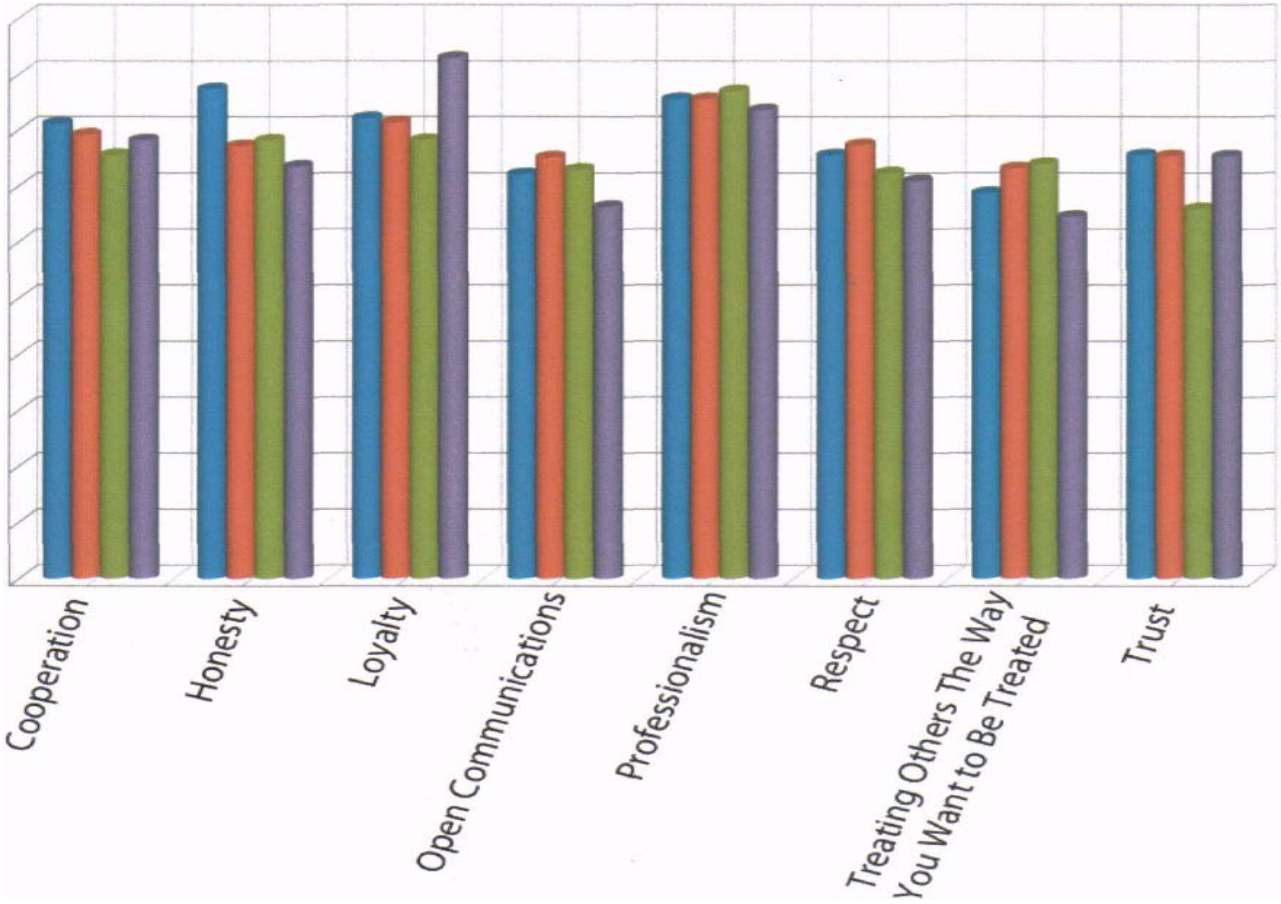
Appendix A

Values-based® Leadership Survey - Southern Platte Fire Protection District

Combined Survey Totals - Historical View

	Nov 2004	Apr 2006	Dec 2007	Dec 2008
Cooperation	4.06	3.96	3.78	3.91
Honesty	4.37	3.86	3.91	3.68
Loyalty	4.11	4.07	3.91	4.65
Open Communication	3.61	3.76	3.65	3.32
Professionalism	4.28	4.28	4.35	4.18
Respect	3.78	3.87	3.62	3.55
Treat Others the Way You Want to Be Treated	3.44	3.66	3.70	3.23
Trust	3.78	3.77	3.30	3.77



Appendix B

Heart of America Metro Fire Chiefs Council

Member List

Belton Fire Department

Bonner Springs Fire Department

Camden Point Fire District

Central Cass Fire District

Central Jackson County Fire District

Central Platte Fire District

Claycomo Fire Department

Consolidated Fire District #2

Creighton Fire District

Dearborn Area Fire District

Desoto Fire Department

Dolan-West Dolan Fire District

Drexel Fire District

East Lynne Gun City Fire Department

Gardner Public Safety

Gladstone Public Safety

Grandview Fire Department

Harrisonville Fire Department

Holt Community Fire District

Independence Fire Department

Johnson County ECC

Kansas City, KS. Fire Department

Kansas City, MO. Fire Department

Kearney Fire District

Lake Lotawana Fire District

Lake Quivira Fire Department

Lawrence Fire Department

Lawson Fire Department

Heart of America Metro Fire Chiefs Council

Member List

Leavenworth Fire Department

Leawood Fire Department

Lee's Summit Fire Department

Lenexa Fire Department

Lexington Fire Department

Lexington Fire District

Liberty Fire Department

Lone Jack Fire District

Merriam Fire Department

North Kansas City Fire Department

Northland Regional Ambulance

Olathe Fire Department

Orrick Fire District

Overland Park Fire Department

Pleasant Hill Fire & Rescue

Pleasant Valley Fire Department

Prairie Township Fire District

Raytown Fire District

Richmond Fire Department

Riverside Public Safety

Shawnee Fire Department

Smithville Area Fire District

Sni-Valley Fire District

South Johnson County Fire District

Southern Platte Fire District

St. Joseph Fire Department

Sugar Creek Fire Department

Sugar Lake Fire Association

Tonganoxie Fire Department

Tonganoxie Township Fire District

Heart of America Metro Fire Chiefs Council

Member List

Warrensburg Fire Department

Wellington-Napoleon Fire District

West Peculiar Fire District

West Platte Fire District

Wood Heights Fire District

Appendix C

Human Relations Skills Survey (Internal)

1. Default Section

1. Do you feel human relations skills training is an important part of career development?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

2. Should the Southern Platte Fire Protection District include this training as a part of officer development?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

3. Please rank, in order of importance, with 1 being most important and 11 being least important, the human relations skills training you see as most important in a career development plan.

Self-Awareness Training	
Self-Confidence Training	
Self-Esteem Training	
Communication Skills	
Team Building Skills	
Motivating Skills	
Coaching Skills	
Conflict Management Skills	
Influencing Skills	
Developing Others Training	
Relationship Building Skills	

4. Please list any human relations skills training you feel is important to career development that was not listed in the previous question.

Human Relations Skills Training Survey (External)

1. Default Section

*** 1. Does your department incorporate human relations skills training as a part of career development?**

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

*** 2. For the rank of company officer and above, how does your department measure the human relations skills effectiveness of each officer?**

	Yes	No
From Self Assessment	◯	◯
From Manager Assessment	◯	◯
360 Degree Assessment	◯	◯
Use Other Method	◯	◯
Do Not Measure	◯	◯

3. If you answered "other" in the previous question, please describe the measurement tool used by your department.

*** 4. Which of the following human relations skills listed below are incorporated into your departments career development plan?**

	Yes	No
Self-Awareness Training	◯	◯
Self-Confidence Training	◯	◯
Self-Esteem Training	◯	◯
Communication Skills	◯	◯
Team Building Skills	◯	◯
Motivating Skills	◯	◯
Coaching Skills	◯	◯
Conflict Management Skills	◯	◯
Influencing Skills	◯	◯
Developing Others Training	◯	◯
Relationship Building Skills	◯	◯

5. Please list any human relations skills training your department uses in career development that is not listed above.

Appendix D

Human Relations Skills Training Survey Response Summary

Internal Survey

1. Do you feel human relations skills training is an important part of career development?

	Percent Response	Response Count
Yes	96.3%	26
No	3.7%	1
	Answered:	27
	Skipped:	0

2. Should the Southern Platte Fire Protection District include this training as a part of officer development?

	Percent Response	Response Count
Yes	96.3%	26
No	3.7%	1
	Answered:	27
	Skipped:	0

Human Relations Skills Training Survey Response Summary

Internal Survey

3. Please rank, in order of importance, with 1 being most important and 11 being least important, the human relations skills training you see as most important in a career development plan.

	Response Average	Response Total	Response Count
Self-Awareness Training	6.48	175	27
Self-Confidence Training	5.85	158	27
Self-Esteem Training	7.37	199	27
Communication Skills	2.52	68	27
Team Building Skills	4.74	128	27
Motivating Skills	4.52	122	27
Coaching Skills	5.19	140	27
Conflict Management Skills	6.26	169	27
Influencing Skills	7.59	205	27
Developing Others Training	7.00	189	27
Relationship Building Skills	7.41	200	27

Answered Question: 27

Skipped: 0

4. Please list any human relations skills training you feel is important to career development that was not listed in the previous question.

Comments		Response Count
	Answered:	10
	Skipped:	17

1. Diversity Skills
2. Recognizing personality types and how to deal and motivate the different types of individuals we work with
3. Consensus building, working in a team and not a dictatorship
4. You need a form a feedback from your supervisor & peers on a regular basis
5. Group diversity management
6. None
7. None
8. You need to have good communication skills and good listening skills
9. None
10. Generational differences training

Human Relations Skills Training Survey Response Summary

External Survey

1. Does your department incorporate human relations skills training as a part of career development?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	50%	10
No	50%	10
	Answered:	20
	Skipped:	0

2. For the rank of company officer and above, how does your department measure the human relations skills effectiveness of each officer?

	Yes	No	Response Count
From Self-assessment	50.0% (8)	50.0% (8)	16
From Manager Assessment	83.3% (15)	16.7% (3)	18
360-Degree Assessment	20.0% (3)	80.0% (12)	15
Use Other Method	30.8% (4)	69.2% (9)	13
Do Not Measure	27.2% (3)	72.7% (8)	11
		Answered:	20
		Skipped:	0

Human Relations Skills Training Survey Response Summary

External Survey

3. If you answered "other" in the previous question, please describe the measurement tool used by your department.

Comments

1. N/A
2. Annual Performance Review
3. Supervisory & Officer training courses as well as HR training evaluation
4. Tests administered by psychologist
5. Not a formal tool, the candidate is assessed on a daily basis regarding interactions

Answered: 5

Skipped: 15

4. Which of the following human relations skills listed below are incorporated into your department career development plan?

	Yes	No	Responses
Self-Awareness Training	42.1% (8)	57.9% (11)	19
Self-Confidence Training	38.9% (7)	61.1 %(11)	18
Self-Esteem Training	11.1% (2)	88.9% (16)	18
Communication Skills	70.0% (14)	30.0% (6)	20
Team Building Skills	70.0% (14)	30.0% (6)	20
Motivating Skills	50.0% (10)	50.0% (10)	20
Coaching Skills	65.0% (13)	35.0% (7)	20
Conflict Management Skills	60.0% (12)	40.0% (8)	20
Influencing Skills	45.0% (9)	55.0% (11)	20
Developing Others Training	55.6% (10)	44.4% (8)	18
Relationship Building Skills	47.4% (9)	52.6% (10)	19

Answered: 20

Skipped: 0

Human Relations Skills Training Survey Response Summary

External Survey

5. Please list any human relations skills training your department uses in career development that is not listed above.

1. N/A

2. None

3. NFA class on strategic planning brought in for Captains & Chief Officers

4. Sexual harassment and drug & alcohol awareness training for supervisors /Mgrs

5. Feedback from psychological series of tests

Answered:	5
Skipped:	15