Developing Collaboration Efforts Between Management and Labor within the
Richardson Fire Department

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE

BY: Robert Fite
Richardson Fire Dept.
Richardson, Texas

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Appendices Not Included. Please visit the Learning Resource Center on the Web at http://www.lrc.dhs.gov/ to learn how to obtain this report in its entirety through Interlibrary Loan.
ABSTRACT

The problem was the Richardson Fire Department’s management team and the Richardson Firefighters Association was unable to solve problems by collaboration and this prevented the fire department from completing its mission statement. The purpose of this applied research project was to develop collaboration efforts and map out a plan for management and labor within the Richardson Fire Department to solve problems in order to fulfill the mission of the organization. This applied research project utilized the action research methodology to answer the four following research questions:

1. What are the current collaboration efforts between management and labor within the Richardson Fire Department?
2. What are other organizations doing to successfully collaborate between management and labor?
3. In order to successfully collaborate and fulfill the mission of the organization, what are management’s expectations of Richardson Firefighters Association?
4. In order to successfully collaborate and fulfill the mission of the organization, what are the Richardson Firefighters Association expectations of management?

The procedures used to answer the four research questions included a thorough review of journals, books, and internet research to investigate what other fire departments, as well as governmental agencies and private businesses did to collaborate and solve problems between management and labor. In addition, the researcher conducted personal interviews with the fire department’s management team and the fire department’s labor organization to answer research questions one, three, and four.

The results documented that there is no plan in place for management and labor within the Richardson Fire Department to solve problems by collaboration. The results documented that communication was the key element for success with any management-labor relationship and other measures such as implementing committees,
task forces, joint retreats, and fundraiser should occur in order to build a successful team. In addition, management did not expect much out of the labor organization except to support management and focus on key issues. On the other hand, the labor organization expected management to communicate to them and keep them informed of all issues.

The recommendations of this applied research project included establishing set documented meetings between management and labor, establishing a management-labor committee, improving communications, and participating in team building functions.
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INTRODUCTION

The problem is collaboration efforts between the Richardson Fire Department’s management team and labor organization (Richardson Firefighters Association) have lead the department unable to solve problems by collaboration and complete its mission statement. The purpose of this applied research project is to develop collaboration efforts between management and labor in order to solve problems and successfully complete the mission of the organization (Appendix D).

This applied research project utilizes the action research method to answer the four following research questions:

1. What are the current collaboration efforts between management and labor within the Richardson Fire Department?
2. What are other organizations doing to successfully collaborate between management and labor?
3. In order to successfully collaborate and fulfill the mission of the organization, what are management’s expectations of Richardson Firefighters Association?
4. In order to successfully collaborate and fulfill the mission of the organization, what are the Richardson Firefighters Association expectations of management?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The City of Richardson is a City Manager-City Council form of governmental agency (City of Richardson 2001). The fire department is an all paid department with 153 members and comprised of six fire stations. The city government is a municipal civil service and there are no forms of mandated labor agreements, such as binding arbitration, collective bargaining, or workplace contracts between management and labor within the entire city government.

The Richardson Firefighters Association (RFFA), formed in 1970, has a membership of 95 members, which is approximately 75% of the entire fire department’s membership. The local union number is 1954 and the Richardson Firefighters Association is an
active, local of the International Association of Firefighters. Traditionally, the Richardson Firefighters Association was not politically active within the fire department or within the city governmental processes from 1990 to 1998. However, due to a large number of retirements, new association officers, and a new Fire Chief, the Richardson Firefighters Association are attempting to take a more assertive role in the decision making processes. (R.S. Younger, personal communication, February 15, 2001).

Since the RFFA became more active, the Richardson Fire Department’s management team and the RFFA have not successfully collaborated and solved problems (D. H. Ross personal communication, February 15, 2001). D. H. Ross states for the past three years, labor and management were in disagreement on many issues ranging from professional development to types of fire apparatus purchased. All of this disagreement, prompted the RFFA to request a meeting with the City Manager on September 10, 2000 (Richardson Firefighters Association 2001). According to the minutes of the meeting (Appendix C), there were 5 main concerns and 39 subtopics, which the Richardson Firefighters Association state, affected the morale of their members in a negative manner. The Richardson Firefighters Association requested the meeting with the City Manager because the association Officers wanted the City Manager to be aware of their issues and the RFFA believed management was not sensitive to their concerns (R.S. Younger, personal communication). The current impact to the organization is substantial because according to the minutes of the meeting with the City Manager (Appendix C), morale was at a low level and the members of the fire department were not happy with their employment.

The future impact to the organization will be considerable if the Richardson Fire Department’s management team and the Richardson Firefighters Association do not begin to collaborate and work together. This non-collaboration will have a negative impact on the organization and an organization of members with low morale cannot successfully fulfill its mission or achieve personal goals (Mintzberg 1996). Once
employees become unsatisfied with their employment or their employer, then communications will begin to break down, employee retention will become difficult and most important, an employee’s performance will deteriorate (FEMA 1998). The significance of this applied research problem will directly contribute to building a healthy relationship between management and labor within the Richardson Fire Department. This applied research project will map a plan of action to collaborate and solve problems between management and labor.

The applied research project is directly linked to the Executive Fire Officer course, Strategic Management of Change. The primary link is to Chapter two, the Change Management Model because implementing these collaboration efforts will follow the four-step change management model. These four steps are extensive planning, analysis of problems, implementing the change, and institutionalizing the plan.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Current Collaboration Efforts between Management and Labor**

Current collaboration efforts between management and labor within the Richardson Fire Department consist of communicating face to face or via electronic mail. Most of the time, the President of the Richardson Firefighter’s Association will notify the Fire Chief by telephone and arrange a meeting at an agreed place and time (B.Y. Shanklin, personal communication, January 27, 2001). These meetings have a mixed agenda, which ranges from pay and benefit topics to departmental issues such as polices (B.H. Shackelford, personal communication, February 15, 2001). To date, the meetings are the only source of collaboration or communication identified between management and labor. The one change was the meeting with the City Manager on September 10, 2000 (S. A. Marksberry, personal communication, February 15, 2001). Another measure that the Richardson Firefighters Association offers to management in order to build a relationship was an invitation to the Fire Chief to attend a few Richardson Firefighter’s Association functions; yet the Fire Chief never came to any of
these functions (S. A. Marksberry, personal communication). In summary, the only collaboration effort in place is a periodic meeting between management and labor, which influenced the researcher to develop more ways to solve problems between management and labor.

**Collaboration efforts of other organizations between management and labor**

“Since the beginning of civilization, the relationship between those who direct work and those who accomplish tasks has been fraught with conflict and resentment” (Law 1994). Many organizations are attempting to mitigate labor-management problems by forming collaboration efforts (Mintzberg, 1996). In the literature review, there are three main areas that organizations address to improve collaboration efforts. These areas are labor-management communication processes, labor-management committees, and team building functions.

First, communication between management and labor is the building block to achieving a good working relationship (Ouchi 1981). The communication, usually verbal, must be open and honest and sometimes difficult issues must be discussed between management and labor (Heerman 1997). To develop communication, labor and management should have set monthly meetings (Mintzberg 1996). These meetings should have an open agenda and the customer of the organization must be the driving factor to all decisions (Fisher 1995). Another focus during the labor-management communications is personal attacks on any person is not tolerated (McCorrmack 1995). Some successful organizations, like the New York Yankees baseball team, utilize one on one meetings with players to help solve problems between the management and labor teams (Useem 2001). It is incumbent upon the management and labor teams to provide communication to the members of the organization in written form any communication between the two groups ends (Ouchi 1981). In Hoffman, Illinois, the labor-management meeting is televised through citywide cable so all members of the fire department can view the meeting (Bruegman 1995). To make these meeting
successful and to assist in the collaboration process, the two sides should agree to adopt problem-solving techniques such as wide time spans, and must be results oriented (Brown 1997). If problems cannot be resolved from meetings and open communication, then a third party mediator should be utilized for problem solving and resolution (Arcaro 1997). In order to improve the labor-management relationship, each agency must prepare and understand that it will take years to build a healthy relationship between management and labor (FEMA 1998). The key to success is that communication between management and labor is an ongoing process (NLMA 2001). Communication is the absolute key to solving problems between management and labor (Maxwell, 1993).

Similar to a labor management meeting is a labor management committee. Labor management committees have a set number of members from both sides and the committee agrees to a set of rules to collaborate and discuss issues. Typically, labor-management committees in the public sector have 6 to 12 members (NLMA 2001). For example, in Wisconsin, a labor management committee between the state employees and management had twelve members (USDL 2001). In this committee, decisions were derived by consensus on all major issues. Not only are the committees driven by consensus but the mission statement directs and guides all decisions within the committee (Alliance for Redesigning Government 2001). These members of the committees are empowered to make decisions that are in the best interest of the organization (Blachard 1996). Yet, more important than making decisions, is using these committees to strengthen relationships between management and labor (Lowe 2001). The United States Department of Labor (USDL) recommends developing a labor management committee and names it a task force (USDL 2001). According to the USDL, these task forces improve morale because employees are encouraged to participate and have a stake in ownership within the organization because of their participation. In addition, there is less conflict among employees and
employers and service to the customer is provided in an efficient and more effective manner. The University of Southern Illinois suggest to construct this task force that management and labor start small, have common goals, commit to leadership, break old habits, provide flexibility, and most important both sides must respect each others opinions (Appendix B). One important point when developing a committee or task force, is the members must have a shared vision and objectives and the customer is the main focus when changing policies or making decisions (NLMA 2001). Another form of committee to solve problems is called a Hot Group. The Hot Group concept was developed in Silicon Valley, California and the focus of this group is to remove all barriers and rules and ask all participating members to think outside their comfort level (Lipman 1999). This form of thinking is the foundation of success for the Apple Corporation when they developed the Macintosh Computer (Lipman 1999).

The final effort to improve collaboration is to initiate team-building exercises. In Phoenix, Arizona, the local fire department initiated annual planning retreats with the local firefighters association (USDL 2001). These retreats build team harmony and encourage participation. Due to this successful efforts, the Phoenix Fire Department has not been in an arbitration hearing between management and labor for the past ten years (USDL 2001). In Los Angeles County, this type of annual retreat was initiated between labor and management. As soon as the Los Angeles County workers felt like they had a voice in the decision making process, sick time decreased by 54% and is continuing to remain low (NLMA 2001). Project teams are another good way to improve collaboration efforts (USDL 2001). The USDL encourages project teams as a form of employee participation and allows organization to empower members to make decisions. Some organizations have fundraisers, community events such as touch football, and walk-a-thons between labor and management in order to build a successful team (Herrmann 1997). Another area to improve team building is to empower
members to make decisions and encourage participation (Zemke 2000). Empowerment is the key to allowing the employees to participate in an organization and have a stake in ownership (Zemke 2000). Empowerment was successful in Hobbs, New Mexico. The Fire Chief empowered employees to set goals and solve problems, which increased employee morale, encouraged participation, and developed future leaders for the fire department (Alliance for Redesigning Government 2001).

In summary, communication is the key to a successful relationship, which must be open, honest, documented, and with no personal attacks. Building a successful relationship between management and labor will take time, must be on-going and committees, task forces or hot groups can aid in the process. Another key to collaboration is to empower people at all levels to assist in solving problems. Finally, team-building exercises like fundraisers, retreats and joint participation in community events aid in the collaboration process. The literature review for this research question two greatly influenced this research project and much of the documentation is recommended for implementation in Appendix A.

**Management’s Expectations of the Labor within the Richardson Fire Department**

Labor should understand and recognize that management must make decisions that will be unpopular and are only to the benefit of the organization; not the labor groups (Sanders 1994). “These unpopular decisions are mainly driven by outside forces or agencies such as city hall, local government restrictions, civil service systems or the federal government”, (M.J. Beeler, personal communication, February 15, 2001). Management expects labor to focus on issues of work safety, pay, benefits, and consistent policymaking and to propose these issues at meetings with management (B.L. Shanklin, personal communication). With all that is expected out of the labor groups, management expects to have conflict between management and labor (M. J. Beeler, personal communication). This conflict is normal because management and labor are dealing with issues at two different levels. Management
deals with issues that effect the entire organization such as legal issues or federal standards, while labor deals with issues that affect the individual unions or firefighters (M. J. Beeler, personal communication). Yet, with all of the conflict, management must be supported by labor in order for the entire organization to win and be successful (D. H. Ross, personal communication).

In summary, conflict between management and labor is expected. Labor should focus on big issues such as pay, benefits and fair policymaking. Even though management and labor will have conflict, labor should support management’s decisions.

Labor’s Expectations of Management within the Richardson Fire Department

All employees expect consistent and fair policies in order to solve problems (Ouci 1981). It is management’s responsibility to initiate and maintain communication with labor organizations in order to collaborate (Brown 1997). Most problems will be solved if management keeps wage and benefits competitive in their geographic area (Finz 1995).

Management has the responsibility to openly communicate and establish a relationship with labor (Potteiger 1998). Open communications should come from all members of the management team (B. H. Shackelford, personal communication). Management should use the labor organizations as a clearing-house for information and include them in the decision making process (R.S. Younger, personal communication). The Richardson Firefighters Association should be allowed to attend the monthly staff meetings (B.H. Shackelford, personal communication). In addition, management should follow up on meetings held with the Richardson Firefighters Association with information about decision made or not made and this information should be documented and distributed to all personnel (S.M. Marksberry, personal communication).

To answer part of these four research questions, personal interviews were conducted. The management staff of B.Y. Shanklin, J.M. Beeler and D.H. Ross influenced research question one and three because these three individuals are the
administrative team responsible for the majority of all decision made within the Richardson Fire Department. The Richardson Firefighters Officers of R.S Younger, S. M Marksberry, and B.H. Shackelford influenced research question one and four because they are the Richardson Firefighters Officers responsible for organizing meetings and carrying out the bylaws of the association.

In summary, labor expects competitive pay and fair policies. In addition, labor want to be informed of decisions made and consulted before any decisions are implemented that will affect the labor work force. Management has an obligation to effectively keep labor informed and updated on policies and work place practices. Research question four influenced this research project because many of labor’s documented expectations from management were suggested implementations in research question two of the literature review.

**PROCEDURES**

**Definition of Terms**

**Collaboration.** To cooperate or work with another person or group to solve problems (Kaufmann 1989).

**Mission statement.** The capstone of the organization, with supporting goals and objectives, carried out by operational-level tasks (ICMA 1998).

**Morale.** An individual’s state of mind in respect to the task that the individual is expected to perform (Kaufmann 1989).

**Consensus.** A general agreement or collective opinion (Kaufmann 1989).

**Arbitration.** A legal binding agreement where two parties agree to have their disputes or controversies settled by a third-party (Kaufmann 1989).

**Empowerment.** To authorize or to delegate (Kaufmann 1989).

**Assumptions and Limitations**

The limitation to this applied research project will be the reluctance upon management and the officers of the Richardson Firefighter’s Association to implement
Appendix A because this project represents a major change from tradition and current philosophies.

**Research Methodology**

The main objective of this applied research project is to develop collaboration efforts between management and labor within the Richardson Fire Department. To complete this research project, the action research methodology answered the four stated research questions. The action research answered the current collaboration efforts between management and labor within the Richardson Fire Department. To accomplish this, the researcher conducted personal interviews with the management team of the fire department and the officers of the Richardson Firefighters Association. These interviews, done at Central fire station, lasted approximately 20 minutes each and a set of consistent question was asked of each interviewee. These six individuals are the main members responsible for most of the decision-making within the management and labor teams.

To determine what other organizations are doing to successfully collaborate an extensive literature review was conducted. This review included journals and publications from fire departments, governmental agencies, and private businesses. These journals are found in the Learning Resource Center at the National Fire Academy along with the City of Plano, Texas, public library and local retail bookstores. In addition, the Internet assisted in researching governmental agencies and private business to determine what other agencies are doing to solve problems by collaboration.

To determine what the expectation of management and labor concerning each other, a literature review included journals and publications from fire departments, governmental agencies, and private businesses. These journals are found in the Learning Resource Center at the National Fire Academy along with the City of Plano, Texas, public library and local retail bookstores. In addition, the Internet assisted in researching governmental agencies and private business. Furthermore, personal
interviews were conducted with the management team of the Richardson Fire Department and the officers of the Richardson Firefighters Association. These interviews, done at the fire station, lasted approximately 20 minutes each and a set of consistent question were asked of each interviewee to determine their expectations of each other concerning collaboration.

The intent of this applied research project is to develop collaboration efforts between management and labor within the Richardson Fire Department, which are outlined as Appendix A. Appendix A details goals and collaboration techniques in order for management and labor to successfully collaborate and fulfill the overall mission of the organization. Appendix A is the end product of this action oriented research project.

RESULTS

Research question one: The only documented collaboration effort between management and labor within the Richardson Fire Department is face-to-face or electronic communication between the Fire Chief and the Richardson Firefighter Association Officers.

Research question two: This narrative section detailed three main areas of collaboration, which were communication processes, committees, and team building exercises. The results for improving the communication process focused on labor management meetings. These meetings should be monthly, ongoing, and have an open agenda. The ground rules for this meeting is customer focused, open and honest communication and understanding that personal attack are not tolerated. To effectively convey the outcome to all members, the meeting should be televised or notes to the meeting should be distributed among all involved parties. In the rare occasion that a problem cannot be solved or collaboration is unsuccessful, a third party mediator should be used.

The results for a labor management committee focused on the relationships formed within the committee. The labor management committee, also called a task
force or hot group, should have set rules, common goals, and a commitment to the customer. The rules for establishing a labor-management committee are listed in Appendix B, while the decisions are consensus based and each member of the committee have empowerment powers to assist in the decision making process. One critical outcome of the committee is that the decisions are directly in alignment with the mission and vision of the department.

The results for the team building exercises included annual planning retreats and project teams. Both labor and management worked together on these issues to build a relationship. Management empowers labor to make decision at their level with project teams and annual planning retreats. In addition, large-scale events where labor and management participated together included, fundraisers, walk-a-thons, and other community events should occur.

Research question three: The expectations of management from labor are fairly simple and minimal. Management expects labor to focus on issues such as pay, benefits and safety. Management expect conflict and disagreement from labor because they understand that many times the decisions from management will be unpopular in nature; however, labor should support management regardless of the conflict.

Research question four: The result details that labor expects fair and consistent polices. In addition, pay and benefits should be kept at a competitive level within the geographic area. The results documented that it is management’s responsibility to initiate a collaboration process and management should openly communicate with labor and follow up on all issues.

The final product of the results is listed in Appendix A. Appendix A will establish a collaboration process to begin building a successful relationship between management and labor within the Richardson Fire Department.
DISCUSSION

Research question one. The researcher interpreted the results that there is minimal effort between management and labor to collaborate within the Richardson Fire Department. The primary collaboration effort is a meeting with the Fire Chief and the Richardson Firefighter’s Association officers (B.Y. Shanklin, personal interview). The researcher learned that the Richardson Firefighter’s Association became impatient with management’s lack of information and decided to seek answers and input from the city management’s office. The researcher viewed this decision by the Richardson Firefighters Association created more division between management and labor. The researcher views both management and labor as separate entities that are not working together to solve any problems. In addition, after a series of personal interviews, there is no substantial effort to improve communication and begin collaboration. Furthermore, there is no current team effort in place to fulfill the mission of the organization between management and labor. The implication to the organization is a communication process must begin and continue on a regular basis. Without beginning any communication process, the relationship between management and labor shall negatively affect morale for a long period of time and can damage the organization as a whole because the mission statement of the organization will not succeed.

Research question two. The researcher interpreted the results and divided these results into three main categories, which are communication, committees, and team building functions. The researcher concluded that no matter what process is in place, that there will always be some form of conflict between management and labor (Law 1994). Yet, this conflict can be kept to a minimum if communication and collaboration is attempted (Mintzberg 1996).

The researcher interpreted that communication is the key element for success for any management-labor relationship. In addition, communication is the building block to
a good working relationship (Ouchi 1981). In order to succeed, communication must be open and honest (Heerman 1997). Meetings between management and labor should be held on a regular basis and the customer is the driving factor to solving problems (Fisher 1995). The researcher found two successful examples of how different organizations attempt to communicate to their members, which were the Phoenix Fire Department and the Los Angeles County Labor Union. The researcher determined that not only is communication the key to success, but it will take many years to develop a good process for a successful relationship (FEMA 1998). The literature review concluded that any communication between management and labor shall not include personal attacks on any member (McCormack 1995). On the rare occasion, communication breaks down to the point of failure, a third party arbitrator can solve problems by eliminating the communication barrier (Arcaro 1997).

The literature review for the labor-management committee detailed how to set up a committee, rules to establish, and concepts to implement. The researcher interpreted the results that a labor management committee should be comprised of 6 to 12 members (NLMA 2001). All committee decision are focused around the customer and the mission statement of the organization (Blanchard 1996). The researcher agreed with the University of Southern Illinois’ guidelines for establishing a labor-management committee (Appendix B) because members of the committee are empowered to make decisions and have direct participation within the organization. The researcher also found that other groups such as project teams or hot groups are utilized to solve problems as well. The research documents that empowering people to act and make decisions improves morale and encourages participation (Zempke 2000).

The final area in the literature review detailed team-building exercises. The researcher interpreted the results to find a very successful effort was underway in Phoenix, Arizona, because the firefighters association and management have joint planning retreats (USDL 2001). Other organizations have fundraisers such as touch
football or walk-a-thons with management and labor in order to build a healthy relationship and contribute to the community (Hermann 1997).

The implications to the organization are to establish a communication process between labor and management. If this process is not established, morale will continue to decline and the mission of the organization will not successfully be completed. In addition, it will be incumbent upon management to establish a positive relationship with labor regardless of current organizational conditions or philosophies.

Research question three: The researcher interpreted the results to conclude management did not have many expectations for labor. Management expected conflict from the labor groups when decisions were made that were unpopular in nature by the labor organization (M.J. Beeler, personal communication). Management expects labor to focus on issues of pay, benefits, and consistent policy-making within the organization (B.L. Shanklin, personal interview). Furthermore, regardless of how much conflict exists between management and labor, labor should support all management decisions. The researcher interpreted these results through personal interviews. The personal interviews revealed management expected conflict but stated that labor does not understand management’s position when they are dealing with many outside influences.

Research question four: The literature review revealed that labor expects more out of management than their counterpart. The researcher concluded that management has the responsibility to establish a good working relationship with labor (Brown 1997). Most of management and labors problem will be solved if wages and benefits are kept competitive within their geographic area (Finz 1995). The researcher revealed through personal communications that RFFA’s main concern and complaints were due to the lack of information and communication by the management team.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation one: Create a management-labor committee. The committee should be comprised of eight members, which includes four members from management and four members from the Richardson Firefighters Association. An agreed member within this committee will act as chairperson and manage the committee meeting time, place, and dates. This committee will act as advisory in nature, meaning all decisions or suggestions from this committee will be sent to the Fire Chief for final approval. The rules of the committee are as follows:

1. Open and Honest communication
2. No personal attacks on any member within the organization
3. The Mission and Vision of the fire department shall be the guiding factor for decisions.
4. The decisions made shall be customer focused.
5. All major issues that affect personnel or operations shall be discussed at this committee.
6. All decisions or suggestions will be consensus based. The term consensus will need to be defined by the committee.
7. Appendix B shall be utilized to organize the committee rules and guidelines. All members of the committee will agree to the rules and guidelines by signing a consent of understanding that defines the rules and guidelines.

This is a major change within the organization because there is no communication or committee process in place. This recommendation comes from the literature review that answered research question two. This recommendation combines all the results for this research question.

Recommendation two: The Committee will appoint a secretary to take all notes within the committee. These notes shall be approved by both management and labor within
the committee and distributed to all fire stations. This recommendation is a result of the literature review for research questions two and four.

**Recommendation three**: Management and labor shall join forces to participate in a community or team building exercise at least twice a year. The committee shall define these activities. This recommendation is the results from the literature review for research question two.
REFERENCES


