ENSURING CONTINUED MANAGERIAL SUCCESS
FOR THE CITY OF SEMINOLE FIRE RESCUE DEPARTMENT

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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

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ABSTRACT

The problem was that the City of Seminole Fire Rescue expects a significant number of management personnel to leave the organization within the next 2 – 5 years. There is no formal plan in place to ensure a smooth transition of personnel into the vacated management positions. This leaves a level of uncertainty for the future of the organization.

The purpose was to determine what actions the City of Seminole Fire Rescue Department should employ, with regard to educational requirements, to ensure future managerial effectiveness by asking the following research questions:

1. What are the recognized educational standards for Chief Fire Officers?
2. What are the gaps between the department’s current management profile and the recognized standards?
3. What steps does the City of Seminole Fire Rescue Department need to take to meet the recognized standards?

The procedures were an evaluative process that included a literature review and a survey process conducted through a survey of City of Seminole Fire Rescue officers. This was followed by an evaluation of the results provided by the research to determine what gaps may exist.

The results showed that there were additional educational opportunities including national certifications and a professional designation that could be added to the department’s current Chief Officer requirements. However, there was also recognition that there were some constraining factors involved in achieving additional levels of certification.
The recommendation was to implement an increased level of certification within the organization for Chief Fire Officers at or above the District Chief level. The recommendations were based in part on the current organizational culture, which, to some extent, limits the amount of change that can be successfully achieved. However, there are higher levels of training and education that one can and should aspire to achieve.
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INTRODUCTION

America’s Fire Service is a dynamic compilation of a wide variety of organizations that are tasked with protecting this great Nation. Tasked with defending Americans against everything from weapons of mass destruction to natural and man made disasters, while maintaining a focus on daily fire and emergency medical response. Yet this awe-inspiring organization is often quipped as being slow to evolve. The often-cited adage of “Two hundred years of tradition unimpeded by progress,” cannot help but hint at a deficiency in one of the world’s most respected organizations.

Organizations constantly experience change, often change comes in the form of people entering and leaving the organization. The dynamics of this ebb and flow process can be good for a well prepared organization that has a succession plan in place, and is prepared for the challenges and rewards that personnel change can bring to the organization. However, if the organization has been dormant for an extended period of time, and planning for staff changes has not occurred, the change could present, less than positive results.

The problem is that the City of Seminole Fire Rescue expects a significant number of management personnel to leave the organization within the next 2 – 5 years. Currently, there is no formal plan in place to ensure a smooth transition of personnel into the vacated management positions. Furthermore, training and education requirements for Chief Officer positions have not been evaluated or changed for over 10 years. This lack of preparation leaves a level of uncertainty for the future managerial health of the organization.
The purpose of this research is to determine what actions the City of Seminole Fire Rescue Department should employ, with regard to educational requirements, to ensure future managerial effectiveness by asking the following research questions:

1. What are the recognized educational standards for Chief Fire Officers?
2. What are the gaps between the department’s current management profile and the recognized standards?
3. What steps does the City of Seminole Fire Rescue Department need to take to meet the recognized standards?

These questions were answered through an evaluative research method, which included a literature review, to determine if any previous studies of this type had been conducted and to gain insight into the value of conducting such a study. A survey was conducted to determine the current certifications held, and certification expectations of Chief Fire Officers within the City of Seminole Fire Department. Next, an evaluation of the fire department’s position descriptions was conducted. Finally, the training and educational requirements of the department’s Chief Officers were reviewed, and compared to the research results.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The City of Seminole Fire Rescue Department is a governmental organization that operates under a hierarchical form of management, ultimate authority for the organization lies with the City Manager. As a serviced based organization, the City of Seminole Fire Rescue provides an array of services aimed at reducing the threat of fire to the community. The department also provides emergency response and mitigation
services to include fire and emergency medical Advanced Life Support care. The organization prides itself in being highly skilled, and with providing the highest quality service to the citizens, businesses and visitors of the departments' response district.

All Fire Inspectors and shift personnel, with the exception of District Chiefs, are represented by a labor union. Eighty-five percent of the organization is represented in this category. The department’s official mission statement is: “To protect the Public by reducing or preventing personal injury or property damage due to fire, medical emergency, disaster, or other life hazard by providing public education, incident prevention and emergency response services” (City of Seminole Fire Rescue, 2002, p. 1).

The department has operated over the past fifteen years with only a single managerial position opening up at a time, and this has only occurred on an occasional basis, through attrition or other means. This low management turnover rate has allowed the organization to adapt to the management changes with a high degree of success. However, now that there is about to be a significant turn over in the upper management in a relatively short period of time, there lies some degree of concern for the future managerial effectiveness of the organization.

The significance of this study is fourfold; first, it will identify what recognized training and educational standards are available to ensure managerial effectiveness and why they are significant; second, it will provide the management with valuable information regarding the department’s gaps from the recognized standards, which will aid in the departments planning process; third, it will determine what steps are
necessary for the department to take to meet the recognized standards; and finally, it
will serve as a catalyst for future studies related to this subject.

This applied research project relates to the National Fire Academy’s Executive
Leadership Course in at least two different areas. First, as outlined in unit two,
Developing Self as a Leader, this project seeks out the characteristics of successful
executive leaders. Second, as suggested in unit six, this research is relates to
Succession/Replacement Planning, by determining what qualities are needed for future
organizational leaders. “Organizations with well-developed employee development and
planning methods are more competitive. Public safety organizations achieve excellence
through a well-trained and competitive workforce” (U.S. Fire Administration, 2000, SM
6-3).

LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review was initiated with an online search of the National Emergency
Training Center’s Learning Resource Center. This research continued in the
researcher’s personal library as well as the St. Petersburg College’s Seminole
Community Library. The purpose of the research was to determine if any previous
research had occurred to determine what type of national standards were
recommended for fire department managers. Further, the review was to determine the
value of conducting research designed to determine the recommended qualifications of
fire service managers.

According to Robert Fleming (2002b), in his article entitled Rising Above the
Pack:
The effectiveness and efficiency of a fire department is dependent on having an adequate number of personnel with the necessary skills to perform a variety of tasks both on and off the incident scene. The strategies and tactics developed by an incident commander are only as effective as the human resource capabilities of the units to which functional responsibilities are assigned under the incident command system. (p. 50)

When preparing to fulfill future positions, many organizations conduct some form of promotional assessment process to assist in choosing what they hope to be the most qualified individual for the position. The areas assessed can be as varied as the departments conducting the assessments. Organizations often require a certain level of training be achieved prior to qualifying for the assessment process. (Fleming, 2002b)

According to research conducted by Walter S. Booth (1999), training required for those at lower rank levels, was more likely to be for practical fireground operations, but as the rank being assessed increased there was a tendency to include administrative and managerial type training requirements. Furthermore, the higher the rank, the higher the minimum level of formal education required. Organizations have set educational requirements to include no formal education for some lower ranks, to an Associates or even a Bachelor’s degree for upper level positions.

As one reaches the upper levels of the organization, he is given more authority and responsibilities. Therefore, there is often a requirement for a broad array of training and abilities. Robert Fleming (2002a) describes this challenge in the following manner. “Those who hope to attain to chief officer positions must develop necessary knowledge and skills in planning, organizing, directing, controlling, communicating and decision-
making. They should prepare to successfully manage and lead their departments” (p. 40). This is a great deal to ask of anyone, and requires planning to be prepared. “Line officers looking to become successful chief officers should develop the knowledge, skills and attitude necessary to manage and lead. This preparation must consider the roles and responsibilities that a chief officer is likely to perform both on and off the incident scene” (Fleming, 2002a, p. 38).

When searching for the most appropriate training and education to prepare for Chief Officer positions, there are several options that may be approached. When searching the formal education arena, the significance of a Masters of Business Administration (MBA) degree comes to question. This level of education is often looked highly upon in the corporate world, but how significant is it in the fire service arena? According to Robert Mittelstaedt (2000), one can expect to learn how to be productively competitive, function in teams, and accelerate the acquisition of skills, while expanding their prospective and building critical thinking skills. Maybe more importantly, it teaches that learning is a lifelong endeavor. And regardless of anything else learned, the most important skill that can be acquired is learning how to learn continually.

Another educational opportunity for aspiring fire department managers is the National Fire Academy’s Executive Fire Office Program (EFOP). This is an executive level program designed to prepare the participant to lead an organization. According to the EFOP program overview, it is designed to provide an understanding of the need for emergency services organizations to change from being reactive to proactive, placing an emphasis on leadership development, prevention, and risk-reduction. The program identifies the importance of diversity in America's communities and how it should be
reflected within the emergency services organizations. Furthermore, it stresses the value of research and its application to the profession along with the value of life-long learning. The program consists of four two-week graduate level courses that are conducted over a four-year period. Participants must submit an associated, applied research project to complete each course. (U.S. Fire Administration, 2003)

The search for a national consensus standard for fire officer requirements revealed a couple of different sources. The first is the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). The NFPA is an international organization whose mission is to reduce the burden of fire and other hazards on the worldwide community. It accomplishes this mission through scientifically based consensus codes and standards, research, training and education. (National Fire Protection Association [NFPA], 2003)

The NFPA has several standards related to professional training including NFPA 1021, the Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications. The scope of this standard is to identify the performance requirements necessary to perform the duties of a fire officer. The standard specifies minimum job performance requirements, and defines four progressive levels of performance. This standard also incorporates the requirements of other NFPA standards including 1001 Standard on Firefighter Professional Qualifications and 1041 Standard for Fire Instructor Professional Qualifications. (NFPA, 1997)

NFPA 1201 Standard for Development of Fire Protection Services for the Public (2000) states that candidates for promotion “shall have education and experience that meet the requirements for the effective performance of the mandated duties of those positions. Candidates shall meet the professional qualifications in accordance with
This language leaves little room for interpretation as to what minimum level of training the fire officer must possess.

The literature review then uncovered the National Board on Fire Service Professional Qualifications, or Pro Board (2003). This agency seeks to acknowledge professional achievements in the fire service, by accrediting training agencies that use the NFPA’s professional qualification standards. Though this organization accredits training facilities, and provides certificates to those completing training from the accredited agency, the Pro Board does not accredit individuals. However, according to the Pro Board’s website, “certification from a nationally recognized accredited agency is a statement of success, an indisputable mark of performance belonging to individual fire service professionals.”

The next nationally recognized venue identified was the Commission on Chief Fire Officer Designation (CCFOD) (n.d.). According to their Candidate Guide, this organization’s mission is to “assist in the professional development of fire and emergency service personnel by providing guidance for career planning through participation in the Professional Designation Program.” The program recognizes “individuals who can show their excellence in seven measured components including: Experience, Education, Professional Development, Professional Contributions, Association Membership, Community Involvement and Technical Competency” (p. 82). The technical competency portion of the grading accounts for forty-percent of the entire grading process, and is broken down into twenty-five separate competencies that are measured based on the candidates knowledge and application of each competency.
The CCFOD evaluation process appears to be more concerned with the concept of a well-rounded individual that participates in the concept of life-long learning.

A review of the City of Seminole’s job description for the position of District Chief (2001) and above was conducted to determine qualifications required for these positions. Each description required “extensive knowledge” of basic and advanced fire department tactics as well as operations and management techniques. Each required the ability to effectively and efficiently plan, assign and organize, and to have up-to-date knowledge of applicable laws and standards. Regarding formal educational requirements, the position of District Chief requires an Associates degree for eligibility, while the position of Assistant Chief requires a Bachelors degree, as does the position of department Chief.

PROCEDURES

Definition of Terms

Chief Fire Officer – an individual who holds a senior position within a fire service organization and is tasked with managerial and leadership responsibility.

Chief Fire Officer Designation (CFOD) – the designation a person receives upon the completion of the application process, successful scoring of the responses, and conferring of the designation by the Commission on Chief Fire Officer Designation.

Executive Fire Officer Program (EFOP) – a certification granted upon the successful completion of a four-year education program conducted by the National Fire Academy.
Research Methodology

This research project involved an evaluative process that included a literature review and a survey process. The literature review was initiated with an online search of the National Emergency Training Center’s Learning Resource Center. This research continued in the researchers personal library as well as the St. Petersburg College’s Seminole Community Library. The second component of the research was conducted through a survey of City of Seminole Fire Rescue officers. This was followed by an evaluation of the results provided by the research to determine what gaps may exist between the departments current educational requirements and those identified through the research and survey results.

To answer the first question, and to identify recognized national education standards for Chief Fire Officers, a review of literature was conducted. This process served to provide insight into the different recognized bodies that offer standards and recognition for accomplishments related to Chief Fire Officers. Furthermore, this process provided information that was used to create a survey to further assist in this research.

To answer the second research question, and to determine the gaps between the recognized standards and the department’s current management profile, a survey of the department’s officers was initiated. Each participant was provided with an overview of the Chief Fire Officer Designation program and requirements. The survey tool was a questionnaire (see Appendix A) that asked the participant if they were familiar with the CFOD program prior to receiving the survey and they were asked if they currently
possess, or are in the process of obtaining the CFOD. Respondents were also asked for their opinion of the relevance of the CFOD for City of Seminole Chief Fire Officers. Similar questions were posed regarding National Fire Academy’s Executive Fire Officer Program.

Surveys were distributed to twenty-four of the department’s twenty-six officers. Excluded from the survey was one officer that was on extended leave and the researcher. The surveys were distributed to the line personnel through their respective District Chiefs, and to office personnel by the researcher.

Each participant recorded their answers on their individual survey forms which were gathered by their District Chief and returned to the researcher, or were sent directly to the researcher. The survey forms were then reviewed to verify that they had been completed correctly. Of the 24 surveys distributed, 18, or 75 percent of the distributed surveys were returned. A review of the survey forms revealed that all of the forms were completed properly. The 18 responses evaluated represents 69 percent of the department’s officers.

The researcher tabulated the data on the individual survey forms and placed the results in a simple table (See appendix B) to determine how many personnel currently held or were working on either the Chief Fire Officer Designation or the Executive Fire Officer Certification, and how many officers recommended the programs for the City of Seminole Fire Rescue Department.

Limitations

The number of subjects surveyed, and the participant’s understanding of the questions presented limited this research. This study was also limited by the
researcher’s ability to interpret and categorize the answers provided by the survey participants to the survey questions.

Assumptions

Assumptions were made that the information revealed in the Literature Review was accurate, and that the recommendations of the nationally recognized agencies provided a fair representation of traits desirable of Chief Fire Officers. The assumption was also made that all survey respondents understood the questions presented, and were truthful in their response to the survey. Furthermore, it is assumed that the answers provided by those surveyed were representative of the desires of the organization.

RESULTS

The results of this project came from the comprehensive review of literature related to fire service Chief Officer training and leadership qualifications and recommendations, along with the information gleaned from the survey process and its correlation to the department’s management profile.

Question One

What are the recognized educational standards for Chief Fire Officers?

There are several different standards that relate to the Chief Fire Officer. First, there is the National Fire Protection Association’s Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications. This standard sets competencies for each of four levels of Fire Officer training. An individual can obtain certification for each of the recognized levels upon successfully completing a program provided through an agency that has been
accredited by the National Board on Fire Service Professional Qualifications, or Pro Board.

Next, there is the Commission on Chief Fire Officer Designation (CCFOD). The CCFOD provides a professional designation to those individuals who have shown excellence in seven measured components considered important to the well-rounded Chief Fire Officer. The components include, experience, education and training, as well as fire service and community involvement. The Chief Fire Officer Designation signifies that the bearer has demonstrated the capacity to meet the requirements of the Commission.

While not considered a consensus standard, a significant educational opportunity exists for Chief Fire Officers, in the National Fire Academy’s Executive Fire Officer Program (EFOP). While this program alone is not considered to be a National Standard of training for Chief Fire Officers, it is taken into consideration by the CCFOD. Also, according to research conducted by James Hill (2000), completion of the EFOP is becoming increasingly recognized by many fire departments nationwide as a recommended or required certification. Furthermore, based on its curriculum, the EFOP is an excellent program that encourages personal growth and the lifelong learning that is important for any leader.

**Question Two**

What are the gaps between the department’s current management profile and the recognized standards?

Based on the results of the survey, there are currently three employees working toward the National Fire Academy’s Executive Fire Office Certification. However, none
of the department’s officers is either designated, or working toward designation as a Chief Fire Officer. According to City of Seminole position descriptions (2001), to hold the position of Lieutenant or above, one must possess the State of Florida Fire Officer I certification, which currently meets the standard set by NFPA 1021 for Fire Officer I. Regarding Chief Officer positions, there is no educational requirement other than an Associates degree for District Chief and Bachelors degree for the Assistant Chief.

**Question Three**

What steps does the City of Seminole Fire Rescue Department need to take to meet the recognized standards?

Currently the department does not subscribe to the requirement of a recognized standard for any of its Chief Officer positions, other than Fire Officer I, and a college degree. The department would have to initiate a program to inform the organization of the recognized standards, and begin an implementation process. This should include training and assistance to personnel in obtaining the various competencies identified in the standards.

**DISCUSSION**

During times of change, for an organization to have a smooth transition without interruptions, it is important to have a succession plan in place. (Duncan, 2000) When determining what certification should be required for a position, one must evaluate not only the position, but also the organization as a whole. This approach will allow the researcher to determine what is most appropriate for the organization.

One may consider that the Designation of Chief Fire Officer would be a desirable designation for any Chief Officer in the Fire Service. However, when taking into account
the vast differences of various fire departments the impracticality of this goal comes into
light. In some instances it might not only be impractical for the organization, it may be
impossible. One must stop to consider the size and resources of some of America’s
smaller fire service organizations, some of which may not even be properly trained or
equipped to handle the day-to-day emergencies that they face. In these instances, the
idea of Chief Fire Officer Designation would be impractical. However, there are plenty of
departments that are well equipped, staffed, and trained, who do not subscribe to the
concept of any National standards for Chief Fire Officers. In these cases, it may be a
circumstance of complacency, or lack of understanding for the importance of the
education acquired through attaining such standards.

The need for continued education is an important aspect of the fire service
professional. With the concepts of skills degradation, information half-life, and the need
for lifelong learning, it is important for today’s professional to persist with their
education. (Coleman, 2002) Lifelong learning is the only way that today’s Chief Fire
Officer can expect to be prepared for what lies ahead. Even though fire burns the same
way today as it did 50 years ago, much information, and many innovations on how to
battle the fire problem evolve continually.

One of the survey respondents to the questionnaire declared, “not having that
certification] is not going to keep me from providing the service we now provide the
citizens, nor will it improve our [Insurance Services Organization] ISO rating.” This
respondent is partially correct with this statement. A particular certification or
designation may not make a difference in your ability to provide your current level of
service. What it will do is provide a platform of continued learning that will keep the
Chief Fire Officer informed of the most current laws and information related to their field, and develop their ability to provide enhanced or more efficient service for the future. Furthermore, the lifelong learning that comes with such certifications as the Chief Fire Officer Designation will create a more rounded individual that will be better prepared for the future, even when that future extends beyond the fire service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

According to McCormick (2003), the idea that training is complete once the minimum required skills have been learned, is no longer acceptable. “With changes in technology and tactics, constant training is needed to keep the workforce proficient” (p. 32). As one moves up the career ladder, there is a need to continue the learning process. “The skills necessary to transform and empower leaders to succeed include self-awareness, goal setting, listening, managing conflict, and using feedback” (Leiper, 2003, p. 85).

Obtaining the Chief Fire Officer Designation should be an aspiration for all Fire Service Officers. However, the reality is that not everyone can obtain this designation. Based on the City of Seminole’s current management profile, and the results of the survey process, the CFOD is not recommended as a requirement for Chief Officers for the City of Seminole Fire Rescue Department. However, there is a need to improve upon the current minimum qualifications for these positions.

Since the Florida State Fire College now offers the Fire Office II certification, it is recommended that this certification become a requirement for all positions above Lieutenant. Due to the scope of the National Fire Academy’s Executive Fire Officer Program and how it promotes many of the elements noted in the department’s position
descriptions for Chief Officers, once an individual is promoted above the position of Lieutenant, they should enroll in the EFOP. Executive Fire Officer certification should be a requirement for the Assistant Chief and Fire Chief positions. Furthermore, due to the complexity of the demands placed on the Chief administrator, the position of Fire Chief should also consider the requirement of a Masters degree in Public or Business administration.
REFERENCES


City of Seminole. (2001). *City of Seminole Position Descriptions*. Seminole: City of Seminole

Coleman, R. J. (2002). No Place in Fire Service for Lifelong Learning Shortcuts. *Fire Chief*.

Commission on Chief Fire Officer Designation. (n.d.) Candidate Guide and Application (p. 82). Chantilly: Commission on Chief Fire Officer Designation.


APPENDIX A

Chief Fire Officer Survey

Attached, you will find a summary of the Chief Fire Officer Designation program.

1. Were you aware of the Chief Fire Officer designation that is available through the Commission on Chief Fire Officer Designation (CCFOD) prior to receiving this inquiry?

2. Have you received professional designation as a Chief Fire Officer by the CCFOD?

3. Are you currently working toward Chief Fire Officer Designation?

4. Do you believe the CFOD would be an asset to Chief Fire Officers?
   If not, why?

5. Do you believe the CFOD would be an asset to Chief Officers of the City of Seminole Fire Rescue Department?
   If not, why?

6. Are you currently working on or have you completed the National Fire Academy’s Executive Fire Officer Program?

7. Do you believe the EFO would be an asset to Chief Officers of the City of Seminole Fire Rescue Department?
   If not, why?
## Chief Fire Officer Survey

### Results

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<tr>
<td>2. Received CFOD</td>
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<td>3. Working on CFOD</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>4. Believes CFOD an Asset Chief Officers</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Believes CFOD an Asset to dept.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Working on or possess EFO</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Believes EFO an Asset to dept.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
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