Merging Fire Departments:
Can the Quincy and Tri-Township Fire Departments Benefit?

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Abstract

The Quincy Fire Department and the Tri-Township Fire Protection District border each other. The City of Quincy wants to provide sustained fire protection to citizens while reducing financial impact on the budget. The research determined if a merger of the two departments would accomplish Quincy’s needs and benefit Tri-Township as well. Descriptive research was used to answer questions regarding operational similarities, organizational cultures, criteria to determine the benefits of a merger, how residents would perceive a merge, and issues that have caused similar efforts to fail. Surveys and interviews were utilized to answer the research questions. The results of the research were favorable toward a merger and the recommendation is that the two departments initiate talks regarding the issue.
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Introduction

The fire service of today has, in many cases, entered a time of unprecedented change. The fire service of the past was in a state of constant growth with new departments forming rapidly as the country continued to develop communities to support the migration of the populous from one area of the country to another. Today, with increasing economic challenges facing almost every fire department, communities are looking at alternative methods for providing much needed fire protection services. While there are many alternative methods for providing fire service, departments that share geographic boundaries are exploring the benefits of merging in an effort to gain efficiencies in both service delivery and funding.

The Quincy Fire Department (QFD) has a history of providing service to the City of Quincy for over 150 years. The department has evolved from one with humble beginnings as an all volunteer department to one that now has 69 career firefighters and three civilian staff. In more recent times, the City of Quincy has seen a decline in revenues thereby prompting a need to reevaluate services and delivery methods for all City departments. The effort began in earnest in the early 1990’s when the department of Central Services was formed. This department consolidated all of the services that were replicated throughout the City into one entity that would provide the same level of service in a more efficient manner. The success of this effort has prompted City leaders to look for ways to further gain efficiencies in the delivery of services in the hope of reducing the financial burden on the taxpayer.

The Tri-Township Fire Protection District (TTFPD) began in the early part of the 20th century and was formed to provide fire service to the three townships that immediately
surround the City of Quincy. The department evolved from a volunteer department to a combination department, utilizing both career and paid-on-call (POC) firefighters. Recent years have found TTFPD experiencing growth at a time when the City of Quincy was not. The recent growth trends have allowed the TTFPD to expand services, upgrade equipment and increase manpower. While each of these is a positive step in the growth of a department the relative size of the department still leaves it with limited response capabilities when compared to QFD.

Understanding the challenges that face both QFD and TTFPD, some members of the Quincy City Council have prompted QFD leadership to explore the potential of merging the two departments. The problem is that City leaders want to continue to provide the current level of fire protection to the citizens of Quincy while at the same time reducing the financial strain the fire department places on City finances. The purpose of this applied research paper is to determine if a potential merger between QFD and TTFPD would address the desires of Quincy City Council, while at the same time proving to be beneficial to the citizens that reside in the TTFPD.

In an effort to address the question at hand a descriptive research method has been employed to provide answers to the following research questions: (a) What operational similarities exist between the QFD and the TTFPD and how can a potential merger reduce the costs to provide these services? (b) Will the cultures that are present in the two existing departments contribute to the success of a potential merger? (c) What criteria have been utilized by other departments to determine if a merger can ultimately be beneficial? (d) How would the residents of the Quincy and Tri-Township areas perceive a potential
merger? (e) Have there been mergers with other departments that have failed, and if so, why?

Background and Significance

The QFD and TTFPD have a long history of working together. Both departments have provided mutual aid to each other over the years although no formal agreement exists between the two. TTFPD firefighters have long attended QFD training sessions and trained along side of their QFD counterparts. On the surface, it would appear as though a merger would have the potential for success.

The City of Quincy is surrounded by the TTFPD on three sides and is bordered by the Mississippi River on the fourth. The TTFPD station house (there is only one) is located within the City limits on the eastern edge of town. The QFD has five station houses that are located throughout the city with two ideally placed for response into two of the TTFPD townships. Figure 1 shows the relationships between the differing district station houses and the respective response districts. Simply looking at the illustration one can see that existing station houses in both districts can service portions of the neighboring district more effectively than the department having jurisdiction.

Figure 1 – QFD and TTFPD Station Locations
The two departments not only work together and compliment each other’s response needs, they have similar needs for apparatus to carry out their missions. Table #1 lists the apparatus that is held by each department.

Table #1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Apparatus Inventories</th>
<th>QFD</th>
<th>TTFPD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pumps</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tankers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rescue</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brush Trucks</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aerial</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Command</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>

This table shows that there is some replication in apparatus, but only in certain areas. The TTFPD is actively pursuing the purchase of some type of aerial apparatus and is also looking to increase its rescue capabilities. QFD on the other hand is looking to reduce the number of pumpers it maintains and has no tankers for rural water supply operations. In theory, if the two departments were to combine efforts and resources they would compliment the current goals and needs that they each have thereby potentially reducing the tax dollars that would need to be spent.

In an effort to attempt to address the research questions that have been posed in this project it is important to reflect upon one of the lessons that were taught in the Executive Development course at the National Fire Academy. Specifically, in order to affect change, organizations must remove the potential roadblocks that can block innovation and creativity. Further, it will be essential that the leaders of QFD consider the five stages of
innovation and creativity as they ponder the feasibility of a potential merger (National Fire Academy [NFA], 2006). The stages are:

- **Stage 1:** Recognition of Problem/Opportunity
- **Stage 2:** Gathering Information
- **Stage 3:** Incubation
- **Stage 4:** Insight
- **Stage 5:** Evaluation and Implementation

Being ever mindful of the stages and their relevance to a process that will determine if an attempt at a merger is made is vital to the success of the effort.

This paper will directly relate to the United States Fire Administrations (USFA) operational objective of appropriately responding in a timely manner to an emergent issue (United States Fire Administration [USFA], 2008). The issue of exploring the potential merger of the two departments has been forced upon the leadership of QFD. City administrators have made it clear that they want this option to be evaluated soon so as to determine if there is any way it can have a positive impact on the provision of fire service in the community, and on the bottom line of the City budget.

**Literature Review**

The intent of this research project is to provide a framework for evaluating the potential benefits of a merger between QFD and TTFPD. To assemble a framework that is going to effectively serve this purpose it is prudent to take a look at what has been done in the past by other agencies. Further, there are individuals that have established themselves as experts in the fields of mergers and cultural change that may be able to provide insight that will help to further define the elements that need to be explored. In an effort to
successfully assemble the aforementioned framework, this literature review will draw upon fire service magazines, text books, Internet data and the efforts of other Executive Fire Officer (EFO) students through papers that have been made available through the Learning Resource Center (LRC).

No study of the issue of mergers and consolidations of the fire service can begin without first taking a look at the reasons why organizations consider these options. In the book, “Managing Fire Services” (Coleman & Granito, 1988) the following list of catalysts for changes is presented:

1. Growth in demand for services, especially ambulance and rescues services
2. Municipal budget constraints and/or contractual labor demands
3. Not enough volunteers available during daylight hours
4. Pressures to improve the productive use of paid firefighter “downtime”
5. The complexity of modern firefighting and the length of training volunteers require to meet community fire-safety standards
6. Economics of scale (some cities are served by as many as six fire departments).

The text goes on to further explain that each of these catalysts are further influenced by things such as the communities affected and the types of organizations that are currently providing the services to the communities. It stands to reason that the challenges that confront a volunteer department can be substantially different than those that face a career department. Yet, even with the differences, it is possible that two or more entities may be able to find some common ground and work toward a common goal.
In his Executive Fire Officer (EFO) paper entitled, “Consolidation of Fire Departments in the Traverse City Area: A Theoretical Model” Flynn (2006) states that it is important for the departments that are to potentially be affected by a merger to meet early on for the purpose of goal setting. Both entities need to lay out their expectations for the potential merger and what it is that they hope to achieve. These initial meetings will serve both as fact finding missions, and as tools to soften relationships between the affected parties.

Flynn also goes on to stress the importance of involving political leaders in the planning process (Flynn, 2006). While the leaders of the potentially merging departments may feel as though they have a grasp on the needs and goals of the involved organizations, politicians will have an entirely different set of needs and desires for the merger process. These factors cannot be overlooked as political support for an effort such as a merger will be vital to the success.

To facilitate the objective of goal setting it may be prudent for a strategic planning process to be put in place. When attempting to put together a strategic plan there are many approaches. In some cases, a few key people from within each organization will sit down and determine the direction of the process. In other cases, the process is driven by a much large group of people. The concept of a large group intervention lends itself to helping to develop a strategic plan. In their book Bunker and Allen (1997) describe one type of intervention known as a “search conference”. This is a participative planning process that involves stakeholders, both internal and external, in a process that is used to identify, plan and implement their most desired future. There are many documented cases of success using a large group intervention format within the field of Organization Behavior and
Development. The prevailing attitude within this educational community is that the group intervention format brings all participants to the table and gives them a voice. While it may seem as though this alone should ensure some type of success, it is important that the facilitators of the effort ensure that there is a mechanism for reporting back to the group. Without a method for keeping participants informed, there is a risk that participants may become disenfranchised with the effort and may actually begin to work toward defeating the very effort that they initially participated in.

Within the group intervention process it will be vital that all participants take a strong look at the organizational culture that exists. If it becomes apparent early on that the cultures will not be compatible with the desired outcome then the leadership of the affected parties must take a look at the likelihood for success. The culture of the participating organizations will definitely influence the strategic plan that results from the group intervention effort. Further, it can either significantly hinder or help the implementation plan (Goodstein, Nolan and Pfeiffer, 1993).

Another technique for managing the change effort will be to “control the temperature”. In their book, “Leadership on the Line” Heifetz and Linsky (2002) speak of the tension that is generated by changing the status quo and challenging organizational culture. The concept of controlling the temperature requires two things. First, one must raise the heat enough to get stakeholders to take notice of the challenges that face the organizations. Second, one must be able to lower the temperature when necessary to counteract any negative tensions before they begin to adversely affect the effort of the organizations. The key with this concept is to be able to manage the temperature in such a
way that people stay engaged with the process yet are not lulled into a sense of complacency.

To better understand the goals of the departments involved in a potential merger it may be wise to take a look at the mission statements that define them as an organization. According to Mark Wallace (2006) an organization’s mission statement should reflect its, “attainable goals, beliefs, and philosophy. It should identify the distinctive competencies of the organization.” By simply taking a look at the stated missions of the affected parties, it can quickly become apparent whether or not the organizations have compatible beliefs that would support the continuation of the merger effort. If two organizations are so fundamentally different the likelihood of a successful merger reduces significantly.

In many cases it would be advisable that the involved parties look to a third party to act as a consultant in the potential merger process. There is value in bringing in a third party that is not emotionally tied to the issue and has the ability to look at things objectively. While there is a time and a place for subjective opinions, merger talks should initially be as objective as possible. Most consultants will approach the challenge of working with the departments by staging the involvement of both departments. Block (2000) has outlined the steps for involving clients in the consultation process. The steps are:

Step 1  Defining the Initial Problem
Step 2  Deciding to Proceed with the Project
Step 3  Selecting Dimensions to be studied
Step 4  Deciding Who Will Be Involved in the Project
Step 5  Selecting the Method
Step 6  Data Collection
Step 7  Funneling the Data
Step 8  Data Summary
Step 9  Data Analysis
Step 10 Feedback of Results
Step 11 Making Recommendations
Step 12 Decision on Actions

By understanding the steps in the consulting process, and by having some understanding of what to expect, participants in the merger process that is facilitated by a consultant will be better prepared to participate actively in the process. By understanding the stages of a successful consulting process participants are more likely to contribute to the successes of the effort.

The first part of the literature review has focused on the processes that may be utilized by organizations that are considering a potential merger. The next part of this review will take a look at cases that have been successful and that have failed. Further, the literature will provide some insight as to what factors may have contributed to the stated outcomes.

One common theme that emerged in reviewing the literature regarding mergers and consolidations is that in most cases, the affected parties used the rationale that duplication of effort is reason enough to investigate potential mergers. In the book, “Making the Pieces Fit” Snook and Johnson (1997) discuss the fact that there are many situations where specific functions within a department are duplicated. Intent to eliminate duplication is a compelling reason to propose intergovernmental cooperation. When there is a situation
where services are duplicated it most often easy to identify what the services are, therefore it is often times easy to project what the potential cost savings might be if the duplication is eliminated.

Snook and Johnson (1997) further discuss that aside from many of the issues that may seem to obviously support the potential success of a merger, departments should look at their past interactions and successes to determine the potential for future successes. By evaluating past cooperative efforts, leaders may be able to not only predict the potential for success. Leaders will also be able to point at past cooperative efforts as a rationale for future change. The initial shock and sting of a departmental merger may be softened when framed in such a way so as to reflect that it is merely a formalization of past efforts that have proven to be successful.

Dr. Harry Carter (2008a) stated that for the most part, the public and politicians are typically driven by only factor, money, when considering potential mergers. It is this mindset that causes the involved parties to sometimes look past the potential problems that could result from a merger. Dr. Carter argues that, as departments, there is a responsibility to consider much more than just the bottom line when evaluating a potential merger. Departments must ultimately consider the impact a merger will have on the delivery of services to the consumer. In the end, they are they ones that are funding the entire firefighting effort.

Dr. Carter (2008b) goes on to describe the need to provide an assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and strengths (SWOT) that would result from a potential merger. Dr. Carter states that there are six fundamental questions that should be asked during the SWOT analysis and they are:
1. Why are people considering shared services?
2. Are the people within the constituent group looking to share service willing and able to come together?
3. What levels of cooperation currently exist?
4. What areas of your operations lend themselves to being shared?
5. What incentives exist to promote this concept?
6. Who out there among the stakeholders will, battle this concept with all of their heart and soul?

By performing a SWOT analysis and considering the aforementioned questions, participants in a merger process should be able to genuinely determine the likelihood of success for their efforts. If the participants are true to the intent of the process, it will serve as an invaluable tool to aid them in their quest to determine the direction that best represents the needs of the consumers that they serve.

There are many examples of successful mergers if one starts looking. Perhaps one of the most notable involves the Tualatin Valley Fire District (TVFD) near Portland, OR (Welch, 2004). This merger between two districts and one department resulted in a reduction of 50 percent in tax rates. Also, the combined department brought about an improvement in the department’s insurance rating and allowed for the development of new services. The department was able to form a regional hazardous materials team. Since the initial merger, six other departments have been brought under the umbrella of the TVFD resulting in a department that serves an area that had been previously been served by nine different entities.
Welch (2004) also discusses a merger that took place in Missouri. Fire Chief Russ Mason describes a situation where two departments were able to come together resulting in better fire protection and a stabilized tax base. He attributed the success of the merger effort to the message that was presented to the taxpayers. Taxpayers were told that by merging the departments the new entity would be able to provide the same level of service and hold the line on taxes, a promise that the department made good on.

There are many challenges that are presented in a merger effort. Peter Sells (1999) took a look at how a merger impacted the training aspects of a fire department. He stated that a merger is an excellent opportunity for departments to take advantage of the successful aspects of their independent operations in an effort to create a successful venture. The newly formed departments need to focus their efforts on their collective interests. Each department brings to the newly formed entity diversity, experience and unique operational and training traditions that can only strengthen the effort.

In, “The Consolations of Consolidations” Robert Giorgio (2000) speaks to the benefits of the merger his department went through. The newly formed department was slow starting but soon became better than the sum of its parts. After about six years SOG’s were formed to standardize operations, training standards were implemented and the department’s apparatus fleet improved as the older pieces were removed and resources were made available to upgrade the necessary pieces. He did also speak of some of the challenges that were faced. Most notably, upon formation of the new department there was little time to develop budgets and there was the issue of trying to consolidate multiple collective bargaining agreements into a document that would be agreeable to all.
According to an article in Fire Chief Magazine (Jensen and Snook, 2000) in the 1990’s it was estimated that there were 20 – 30 mergers taking place nationwide. In the year 2000, it was estimated that the figure was closer to 500 such efforts. At the time of the article, the state of California had approximately 950 departments. Then-California State Fire Marshal Ronnie Coleman estimated that by the year 2015 there would potentially be less than 250 departments in the state. At the time, the state was loosing 25 departments a year to consolidation efforts.

Jensen and Snook (2000) presented four scenarios for the types of mergers that were taking place. The first outlined the move by small volunteer departments to merge due to their inabilities to meet state and federal standards. The second, fire districts that are loosing high value properties through annexation to neighboring cities are looking to join forces with other districts experiencing the same things. The third is city departments that border larger fire protection districts. In these cases the merger begins as contracting for service and ultimately ends in the annexation of the city into the fire protection district. The fourth scenario involves two small to medium sized departments that join forces to maximize efficiencies.

The Miami-Dade County Commission in Florida is actively pursuing a consolidation effort (“Cities Fight to Keep Services”, 2008). There are five cities that make up Miami-Dade County and the County Commission is looking to merge them in an effort to save money, reduce administrators and curb future construction plans. The county has estimated that the new department would save approximately $13.5 million per year. Further, it is estimated that residents would receive an additional $10.5 million per year in improved services as well as save $34 million over the next five years by eliminating
construction and maintenance costs. The plan does have it’s detractors as city heads see it as a financial power play by the county to balance the budget on the backs of their otherwise financially stable departments. This article just reinforces the fact that while a plan may seem to be a good one, there is never going to be 100 percent support and leaders will have to work to get the necessary buy-in.

Mergers don’t always go smoothly. In, “Uneasy Alliance” (Lochard and Olsen, 2006) the authors spoke about their experiences in studying multiple failed mergers. According to their observations there was one central theme that emerged as an issue in every failed merger, a lack of leadership. One example given discussed a department that seemed to start off with a relatively smooth transition. The chiefs of the two departments that had merged both had distinctive talents; one was operational in nature and the other more administrative. In the newly formed department the administrative chief assumed the chief officer role and the other chief became the assistant. On the surface this seemed like an ideal plan. However, as time went on and problems began to surface the two chief officers were reluctant to step in and address issues that they felt were better suited for the other. In the end, so many things were left unattended that the chief eventually resigned and the assistant assumed the position. This example only serves to prove that even when it seems as though a merger can be nothing but successful, departments must plan for the unexpected and be prepared to deal with it.

Another unanticipated result of a merger was discussed in an article by Karen McCowan (2005). In this example two departments had undertaken a merger and the resulting effort had a negative effect on the Insurance Service Organization (ISO) rating. While independently, the departments had respectable ratings, when they merged and
consolidated some station locations it had an adverse impact on items that are rated by the ISO. In the end, it lead to the department receiving a score that was lower than what either of the departments had before the merger. Many residents in the area saw their home insurance rates almost double.

In a merger between an emergency medical provider and a fire department there were problems with the compensation packages that were delivered to the EMS personnel that were assimilated into the fire department (Lowe, 2008). Attempts were made to offer pay adjustments that would put both the paramedics and firefighters on an even playing field. However, even with the best of intentions, the medical personnel ended up still being treated differently. Due to state pension laws, the paramedics began working toward pension benefits they day the started with the department. They received no credit for all of the previous time they had spent as paramedics under the former organization. Firefighters in this state draw pensions based upon twenty years of service. Many of the paramedics that came over to the department were well into their careers and were on track to retire well before the new twenty year benchmark. The problem that resulted from the merger could not be easily addressed, yet it was one that had not received a lot of consideration before the merge took place.

Whether there are perceived advantages or disadvantages in a potential merger it is important to keep all stakeholders informed (Bert, 2002). In an applied research paper written for a command school he was participating in, Bert realized that involvement of stakeholders was essential to ensuring the success of a potential merger. All entities involved need to be kept informed of the potential benefits that will result through the merger and they must also know that the merger committee realizes the potential
shortcomings of the merger and that the committee is working to ensure that they do not have a negative impact on the effort. In the end, it seems as though communication is the key to success.

Procedures

In an effort to explore what some concerns might be for a potential merger between the QFD and the TTFPD there were a variety of methods used to garner information. An informational survey was conducted of thirty school teachers, fifteen residents each from the departments involved in this project. Teachers were chosen because it was assumed that they might have a better understanding of the fire departments and their operations as they are often times involved with taking tours of stations and inviting firefighters into the classroom to speak about the job. The limitation of this sample of the population is that it is possible that the teachers might have such a good understanding of the department operations that it could skew the results of the survey in a fashion that might not mirror the results that might have been garnered from the general public. The results of this survey can be found in Appendix A.

An interview was conducted with Chief Scott Walker of the QFD. The intent of the interview was to gather some information regarding the department that might be relevant to a discussion about a potential merger between QFD an TTFPD. Chief Walker reaffirmed the knowledge base that already existed but did offer some fresh insight into the political feelings behind a potential merger. The results of this interview can be found in Appendix B.

Chief Rick Zaerr of the TTFPD was also interviewed to gain the perspective of the other department involved in this project. TTFPD is the smaller of the two departments
and is typically very defensive of its operations. Remarkably, Chief Zaerr was very open to
the discussion regarding the prospects of merging the two departments. Having been a
Deputy Chief with the QFD prior to taking his current position, he had been aware of the
possibility that some effort might be made to consolidate the departments at some time in
the future. The results of this interview are found in Appendix C.

Both fire chiefs provided information about demographics, apparatus and budget for
their respective departments. This information was sought to provide a snapshot of where
the departments stood regarding their current resources and future growth plans.

Lastly, a literature review was conducted to identify a variety of pertinent
information that would contribute to the research questions. The review revealed concepts
for how to plan for a merger and how to bring in a consultant from outside of the issue to
help ensure greater success. The review also looked at mergers that were both successful
and that had failed. Each of these probes provided valuable insight as to what things were
done, or potentially overlooked, that ultimately impacted the end result of the merger.

Results

The goal of the research was to determine if mergers between departments could be
successful, and more specifically, if a merger between the QFD and The TTFPD might be
successful. Further, does the climate currently exist for the two department to enter into
discussion in earnest about the merger potential? This research project serves only as a
preliminary investigation into the possibilities that exist. The intent is to provide a product
that can provide the decision makers the information they might need to determine if the
climate is right for change.
Research Question #1: What operational similarities exist between the QFD and the TTFPD and how can a potential merger reduce the costs to provide these services?

The interviews with the two fire chiefs was intended to provide the information necessary to sufficiently answer this question. Both chiefs spoke openly about their departments and where they stood financially. Both departments provide essentially the same services but it is apparent that the TTFPD has fewer resources to deliver said services. Also, it would appear that if the two departments were to consider joining forces it would be necessary to bring the POC firefighters up to the same standards as the career firefighters to ensure that service delivery would be consistent throughout the department. There would be definite efficiencies that could be gained by joining the two departments. The reduction in the number of apparatus and the potential reduction of a station would generate almost immediate costs savings.

Research Question #2: Will the cultures that are present in the two existing departments contribute to the success of a potential merger?

The interviews with the two fire chiefs also did a lot to address this question. It is apparent that there seems to be at least some agreement in the leadership of both departments that a merger effort at least warrants consideration. Chief Zaerr did concede that some of his men would be real resistant to the idea. Pointing to the perception that some of his men have that Quincy firefighters have looked down upon them and their abilities. However, he said there are few left on his department that felt this way and that he thought his men might warm to the idea if presented in the right way. Chief Walker would anticipate no problems with his men, other than the concerns that they might have
regarding the rank structure and how people within the department would be impacted in this regard.

Research Question #3: What criteria have been utilized by other departments to determine if a merger can ultimately be beneficial?

The literature review revealed that there are many things to consider when pondering a potential merger between departments. The most common criteria was whether or not the potential exists to gain operational efficiencies through merging efforts and eliminating redundant efforts. There was also discussion regarding the need to consider the existing political climate. If there is not at least some type of public, political support it is unlikely that a merger effort will be successful. Consideration must also be given to the existence of collective bargaining agreements in the affected departments. It is essential that the leadership from the unions be involved in merger discussions. Any attempt to merge departments will require cooperation from the labor side of the table.

Research Question #4: How would the residents of the Quincy and Tri-Township areas perceive a potential merger?

Judging from the results of the informational surveys I think that a merger could be successfully presented to the public. In most cases the survey questions revealed that the constituents either perceived no difference between the departments or felt as though they might be a bit underserved. The merger of the departments look as though they would provide the efficiencies that would provide more firefighters, better response times and potentially less operational costs.

Research Questions #5: Have there been mergers with other departments that have failed, and if so, why?
The literature review revealed that there have been merger attempts that have failed. In most cases, a lack of leadership was cited as a primary reason for the failure. If a merger is going to enjoy any type of success it is essential that the leadership be committed to the change, recognize the role that they play in the new organization, and be committed to constantly evaluating the end product and be willing to make revisions when necessary.

It was also noted that to prevent failures, departments might be well served by bringing in outside consultants to assist in the process. If the process does not involve a third party perspective it is likely that emotions and personal loyalties might hinder the efforts of the group. There are many people and organizations that have been involved with fire department mergers and they can bring the experiences necessary to help the involved parties avoid the pitfalls that have plagued previous efforts.

Implications

The research has shown that mergers can be successful if there is careful consideration given to the process. The process needs to be laid out, much like a roadmap, from the beginning. Coleman & Granito (1988) pointed out that there are many catalyst for change. Before two or more entities consider a potential merger, they must consider their motivation. If there is no clear catalyst for the merger, then perhaps the merge is not warranted.

Involvement of a consultant, one that is versed in large group interventions, can help to achieve the desired success (Block, 2000). Consultants receive the training necessary to help people work through the thoughts and emotions that can affect the decisions that must be made in a merger situation. To involve a consultant, is to dedicate
funds early on. The involved parties must recognize the need to invest funds early to ensure success down the road.

It is also apparent that a potential merger cannot happen over night. There must be extensive planning that takes place and stakeholders from both inside and outside of the organization must be involved. Since a process like this requires time, the individuals tasked with managing the process must have the ability to “control the temperature” (Heifetz and Linsky, 2002). Leaders for the merge effort must be individuals that are chosen for their ability to control the tempo of the effort, the anxieties that are sure to arise, and the personalities that are going to push to derail the work. These leaders must be strong, insightful, and thick skinned. The process will not be easy and leaders must be prepared for the challenges that they will face.

It is essential that merger leaders learn from the successes and failures of others. The leaders of the effort must be students of the process. Only through learning what has happened to others can they really understand what it is they have to do to ensure success. Special attention must be paid to the process that selects those that are going to be on the merger team. Also, when the team members are selected they must be assured that they have the full support of the leadership of the departments and they must be granted access to the tools that they will require to be successful. This may mean the ability to speak to people outside of the department, the ability to access financial and statistical data, and the knowledge that there is an open door at the top of the organization for them to bounce ideas and concerns off of.
Recommendations

Through the research that was conducted in relation to this project it has become apparent that there is at least enough background data to support the further exploration of a merger between the QFD and the TTFPD. The surveys that were conducted involving residents of the two affected areas appeared to show that in most cases, both departments are viewed as being similar in their abilities to deliver approximately the same types of services. There is the understanding among the residents that there are some differences in response times due to geographic locations and there does appear to be a real lack of understanding about the actual number of firefighters that may be needed at a scene and the actual number than can realistically be delivered.

The interviews with the two fire chiefs reveal a willingness to sit down and discuss the potential benefits of a merger. Further, at least from the City of Quincy perspective, politicians have revealed a desire to explore the option further. It is my opinion that it is time to start the process of investigating this issue further.

A meeting should be established, first with the chiefs of the two departments, so that a framework for discussion can be developed. This discussion should revolve around identifying the real deficiencies that exists in each department as well as the redundancies that are present. The budgets and the taxing abilities of the two departments must be discussed to determine if there is a sufficient tax base present to support a combined department.

In an effort to be true to the intent of the discussions, there must be consideration given to the possibility that a total merger may not be necessary. It is possible that the discussion about operations may reveal that the two departments can maintain their
individual identities and that they simply may need to look at ways of support each other whether it be through a formalized mutual aid agreement, or through the contracting of services.

Next, a meeting between the two governing bodies should be facilitated to present the findings of the two fire chiefs. The chiefs must take this opportunity to discuss the rationale as to why they are considering either a potential merger or the prospect of supporting each others operations through other means. The discussion should be an opportunity for the governing bodies to make clear what their desires are for the two organizations. If it becomes apparent that support is present to move forward with the merger process, a framework for moving forward must be established.

The two governing bodies must agree to invest in bringing in an outside organization that is versed in merger opportunities. Both bodies must commit to supporting the efforts of the consulting firm and be willing to work within the recommendations as they may be presented.

Whether a merger appears to be warranted or not, it is important that all parties involved not come to the table with any preconceived notions. Both sides must be open to the process, the discussion, and ultimately, the recommendations of the committee.

In the end, the process must support the overall objective, to provide the same level of service to the constituents of both areas and to gain organizational efficiencies that will reduce the financial burdens on both jurisdictions. If a potential merge can meet the objective as it is laid out, then the two organizations must move forward with an attempt to make the vision a reality.
References


Appendix A

Informational survey of Quincy and Tri-Township Residents (30 respondents).

#1 Which fire department provides fire protection services to your residence?

- Quincy Fire Department – 15 respondents
- Tri-Township Fire Department – 15 respondents

#2 Do you know the response level of the department that provides fire protection services to your residence?

Quincy Responses
- Career – 15
- Paid on Call – 0
- Volunteer – 0
- Unsure – 0

Tri-Township Responses
- Career - 11
- Paid on Call – 2
- Volunteer – 1
- Unsure - 1
#3 What is the average response time to your residence from your fire department (in minutes)?

**Quincy Responses**
- Less than five minutes - 10
- Five to ten minutes - 5
- Greater than ten minutes - 0

**Tri-Township Responses**
- Less than five minutes - 4
- Five to ten minutes - 8
- Greater than ten minutes - 3

#4 If you were to call your fire department for a fire in your residence, how many firefighters would you expect to arrive on scene within the first ten minutes?

**Quincy Responses**
- Less than five - 9
- Five to ten - 6
- Ten to fifteen - 0
- More than fifteen - 0

**Tri-Township Responses**
- Less than five - 9
- Five to ten - 3
- Ten to fifteen - 3
- More than fifteen - 0
#5 Which of the following services do you think a fire department should provide its constituency (Circle all that apply)?

**Quincy**

- Technical Rescue - 13
- Hazardous Materials - 14
- Public Education - 11
- Plan Review and Code Enforcement - 11
- Emergency Medical Services - 13
- Auto Extrication - 15
- Firefighting - 15

**Tri-Township**

- Technical Rescue - 12
- Hazardous Materials - 12
- Public Education - 12
- Plan Review and Code Enforcement - 9
- Emergency Medical Services - 13
- Auto Extrication - 15
- Firefighting - 15
#6 Are you satisfied with the level of service you get from your fire department in relation to the tax dollars that you are spending?

**Quincy Responses**
- Yes - 13
- No - 1
- No Opinion - 1

**Tri-Township Responses**
- Yes - 7
- No - 2
- No Opinion – 6

**Unsolicited Comments:**

**Quincy Respondents:**
- “TRT - probably handled by another part of the department.”
- “Totally disagree with EMS, that is what the EMT’s on the ambulance are for!”

**Tri-Township Respondents:**
- “I think the department is career.”
- “I would hope the fire department would arrive in less than five minutes!”
- “We have too long of a response time!”
- “I was in a car accident two blocks from the station and they did not respond. When I called them and told them I was right around the corner they said they would probably be too busy to respond.”
Appendix B

Interview with Fire Chief Scott Walker, Quincy Fire Department

#1. **What are the requirements to be hired as a Quincy Firefighter?**

The applicant must be no younger than 20 ½ years old or 35 years or older on the day of the testing. The applicant must also have a high school diploma or a G.E.D. and be in generally good health.

#2. **What are your probationary requirements for a Quincy Firefighter?**

The probationary firefighter must pass a recognized firefighter II academy, obtain the State of Illinois Firefighter II certification and obtain licensure as an Emergency Medical Technician – Basic (EMT-B) from the Illinois Department of Public Health. The probationary period is 12 months in length and the probationary firefighter can be dismissed without cause if warranted during this period.

#3. **What are the annual training requirements and certification requirements for a Quincy Firefighter upon completing the probationary period?**

Firefighters must maintain the EMT-B certification, obtain State of Illinois Airport Firefighter certification and participate in an average of 18 hours of month of recurrent training as directed by the training division.

#4. **What services are provided by the Quincy Fire Department?**

Firefighting, auto extrication, EMS dual response with the Adams County Ambulance Service, all hazard risk prevention/public education, plan review and code enforcement, in-service business inspections, issuance of occupancy and liquor permits, hazardous materials response and technical rescue response to name a few.
#5. What is the total staffing of the Quincy Fire Department?

69 sworn, career personnel and three civilian support staff.

#6. What is the average response time to structure fires within the Quincy Fire Department’s response district?

4 minutes and 12 seconds

#7. How many firefighters, on average, can your department deliver to the scene of a structure fire within the first 10 minutes of dispatch?

16

#8. Please provide the following demographic information for your response area:

Coverage area in square miles – 14.7

Population protected – 40,366

Tax rate – 1.01% of assessed valuation of property

Annual budget – $7,546,042.00

#9. Please describe the governing body that has oversight responsibility for your department.

The City of Quincy has a strong mayoral form of government with 14 aldermen.

There is specifically a fire aldermanic committee that has oversight of fire department operations. There is also a board of police and fire commissioners that are appointed by the mayor to handle human resource functions and promotions.

#10. Is your department funded in any other way?

The Quincy Fire Department does rely on some grant money to supplement the operational budget but it is not an overly large amount.
#11. Are there any plans for future growth within the department?

The City of Quincy is growing to the Southeast and there is a need for better coverage in that area. However, there are no current plans in place to address this issue.

#12. Have you, or your governing body, given any thought to the possibility of a merger with a surrounding department?

The Quincy Fire Department held a strategic planning conference in the spring of 2007 and one of the main objectives that came from the effort was to explore the possibility of merging with the Tri-Township Fire Protection District.
Appendix C

Interview with Fire Chief Rick Zaerr, Tri-Township Fire Protection District

#1. What are the requirements to be hired as a Tri-Township Firefighter?

The applicant must be no younger than 20 ½ years old or 35 years or older on the day of the testing. The applicant must also have a high school diploma or a G.E.D., be in generally good health and be free of any felony convictions. These requirements are the same for the career and paid-on-call (POC) firefighters.

#2. What are your probationary requirements for a Tri-Township Firefighter?

The probationary firefighter must obtain the State of Illinois Firefighter II certification and must get a first responder certification through the Illinois Department of Public Health as soon as possible. POC firefighters are only required to eventually obtain the first responder certification.

#3. What are the annual training requirements and certification requirements for a Tri-Township Firefighter upon completing the probationary period?

Both the career and POC firefighters are required to participate in a minimum of 36 hours of training per year (48 hours are provided).

#4. What services are provided by the Tri-Township Fire Department?

Firefighting, auto extrication, EMS response with the Adams County Ambulance Service upon request, limited public education, some site plan reviews and enforcement of the life safety code, pre-fire planning and limited rope rescue, confined space rescue and water response.
#5. **What is the total staffing of the Tri-Township Fire Department?**

17 sworn firefighters, eight which are full time and nine which are POC. There are no civilian positions within the department.

#6. **What is the average response time to structure fires within the Tri-Township Fire Department’s response district?**

Approximately five minutes.

#7. **How many firefighters, on average, can your department deliver to the scene of a structure fire within the first 10 minutes of dispatch?**

This really depends upon the time of day. The department gets a good response in the overnight hours but struggles to get sufficient numbers during the workday due to the nature of utilizing POC firefighters. No definitive number was given.

#8. **Please provide the following demographic information for your response area:**

   Coverage area in square miles – 112
   Population protected – approximately 12,000 to 15,000
   Tax rate – $.30 per $100 of assessed value of property
   Annual budget – $750,000

#9. **Please describe the governing body that has oversight responsibility for your department.**

There is a three person board of trustees that is appointed by the County Board. There is one trustee to represent each of the three townships protected in the jurisdiction of the department. This group makes all financial, human resource and promotional decisions that affect the department.
#10. Is your department funded in any other way?

The Tri-Township Fire Department aggressively pursues any and all grant opportunities and has been very successful in this regard. Funding is also provided through the collection of fees for services rendered to persons that are not residents of the Tri-Township district (i.e. car wreck in jurisdiction).

#11. Are there any plans for future growth within the department?

The department is working toward adding two more full time positions and one more POC position. The eventual goal is to be able to have a three person shift of career firefighters (at full staffing) working a 24 hour on, 48 hour off duty shift.

#12. Have you, or your governing body, given any thought to the possibility of a merger with a surrounding department?

I was previously a Deputy Chief with the Quincy Fire Department and had long thought that eventually the two departments (Quincy and Tri-Township) would have to look at the potential for a merger. I assumed that as Quincy annexed in Tri-Township’s jurisdiction there would eventually be the need for the merger. Now that I work for Tri-Township I can say that the department is financially better off now than it has ever been. While the jurisdiction cannot grow geographically, the assed valuation of the property we protect is growing, allowing our budget to grow in support of further expansion of services.